

# The Signs and the Corporate Identity In Contemporary Society

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## ABSTRACT

We live in a world surrounded by information, structures, services, products, people, buildings, with different kinds of messages and meanings - each one with a specific identity. The evolution of technologies, the economical changes and globalisation, launch the requirement to study organizations needs and the way they communicate: to regard their identity as a resource, and contribution to recognition and clarification of the messages they produce to their internal, external audiences and society in general.

## General Terms

Management, Design.

## Keywords

Corporate Identity, Organizational Identity, Communication Design.

## 1. CORPORATE IDENTITY

The emerging and the mutation of corporate identity nowadays, became more important than ever before, and the graphic designers possess an important role in this subject. The designer's work creates links from the organizations to their audiences (internal and external), and therefore they have an important responsibility in the evolution of the contemporary corporations and consequently society. They have to know how to move in the collective memory of people, their culture, behaviours, emotions and needs, to understand their history, desires and dreams. But it's also important that they understand the culture and the behaviours of the organizations, and the needs of their services or products (see Figure 1).

In that way, designers can produce better and efficiently the messages and the reality of the organizations identity. According to Ollins [8], the corporate identity is the combination of four elements: the product or service, environment, communications and behaviour.



Figure 1. Elements structure which constitute an Organization Corporate Identity.

Words and images are tools that bond humans: they give us support to the relations between physical, intellectual and the social world. These communication tools can differentiate qualitatively the way we communicate, the way the services or products are transmitted to people. So, according to that, these tools should be considered and better analysed by the organizations in order to improve their communications management.

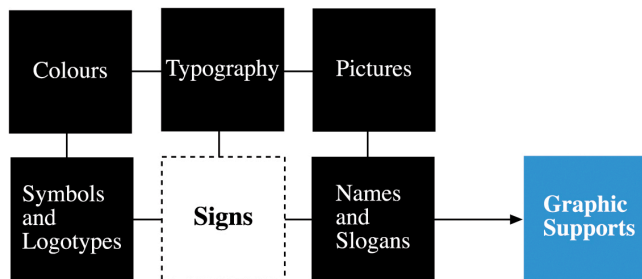
## 2. THE SIGNS

Visual communication is everywhere: in streets, newspapers, magazines, internet, stores, packaging, television, buildings, airports, etc. Nowadays messages have to have impact, brevity and immediacy (Ollins, 2006). When we think in messages we think in the way we communicate them: we communicate through the use of signs. Hurwitz [7] says that each sign comprises a duality: the signifier (the signifier is visible, the explicit aspect of a sign) and the signified (the

signified is invisible but referred to, the tacit element of a sign). The signs are a part of a corporate identity: they are the visual or verbal vocabulary, part of the organization. That is why they are almost always the central point from which the organization is judged.

**“(..) identity is not about making poor organisations look good but about distinguishing organisations from each other”** (Ollins, 2006).

In this context, and as we know that many organisations are not conscious or thoughtful about this matters, predominantly non-profit Institutions, we think that the research of the design and management of signs systems is essential (see Figure 1).



**Figure 2. System of signs in Visual Identity**

The theoretical and practical study of the signs (colours, typography, symbols, etc), their meanings, codes and culture are fundamental to the optimization of the visual communication in organisation. According to Baudrillard (2007), we live in a society surrounded by consume and abundance: artefacts and services produce continuous mutations in the human behaviours, on the messages, in the codes, in the signs and also in the relation of all this aspects. The messages have to be comprehended by their receivers: the artefacts have to serve their users [1].

In a system a part can't "think" by the whole, the parts are always fragments of a structure and the only way to control and comprehend the whole is to operate by him [4]. For a better comprehension and clarification of this, it's important to focus some issues like:

- What's the real psychological value of the signs that exists actually;
- What are their real opportunities and contribute to the organizations and their publics (internal and external);
- What are the things that we can change or had to make them more efficiently;
- How can we control and optimize them;

- Witch conceptual models can we made.

In a world of globalisation, competition and mergers, the way the organisations communicate their identity is fundamental to their success.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

We think that identity as a corporate resource, when efficiently designed and managed, can be a powerful and a potential influence to the success of an organisation, in the same way finance, marketing and technology are. Graphic designers have an important role in this process and should be incorporated and this projects in the beginning and manage them efficiently. The organisations should have design management structures and identity management systems to performance their activities and to improve their communication. We have many examples of companies that develop and think the design in the same way they consider other areas. But there are also many examples of organisations or institutions, that regard Design as an extra cost or a matter of fashion, instead of considering it as an important and powerful management tool, that improve their success (resource for setting and managing organization communication).

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