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Formal and strategic trends in corporate visual identity: a comparative analysis of the corporate logos of organizations listed in the best global brands ranking and the Ibex 35

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The corporate logo is a central strategic element in the construction of corporate visual identity. This article analyses and compares the formal and strategic characteristics of the corporate logos of organisations listed in Interbrand's *Best Global Brands* ranking and the Spanish stock market index Ibex 35, with the aim of identifying the main visual trends shaping contemporary brand identity design. The study adopts a quantitative-comparative design based on visual content analysis of a sample of 135 corporate logos, representing 100% of the target population, and employs an analysis protocol structured around the plastic, iconic and linguistic sign. The results reveal a widespread trend towards formal simplification, two-dimensionality, chromatic reduction and the predominance of logotypes, especially among global brands, which exhibit greater homogeneity and visual standardisation. Ibex 35 brands, while sharing these trends, show greater formal and strategic diversity, conditioned by historical, sectoral and cultural factors. The study is proposed as an exploratory and systematic approach to an object of analysis that has rarely been studied comparatively, and provides an empirical basis for future research on the relationship between international projection, economic value and the visual configuration of corporate identity.

KEYWORDS
branding, contemporary design, corporate logo, corporate visual identity, global brands, graphic design, visual content analysis, visual trends

Introduction

In the contemporary context of the global economy (Melo, 2022), the brand has consolidated itself as the most valuable and strategic asset of organisations, particularly in environments characterised by communicative saturation, symbolic competition and market convergence (Mayorga-Escalada, 2024). Beyond its commercial dimension, the brand operates as a complex system of meanings that articulates values, identity, corporate culture and relational promises with audiences (Aaker, 2023; Kapferer, 2012). Within this system, corporate visual identity plays a fundamental role by acting as the main device for the symbolic translation of brand identity into the visual realm (Chaves, 2016; Costa, 2014).

Corporate visual identity may be defined as the organised set of graphic signs that enable an organisation, product or service to be identified, differentiated and visually represented (Oliveira and Raposo, 2016). These signs, among which the corporate logo, typography, colour and compositional elements stand out, not only fulfil an identifying function, but contribute decisively to the construction of brand personality and the generation of cognitive and emotional associations in audiences (Contreras and San Nicolás, 2001; Salvador-Rivero and Montes-Vozmediano, 2016). Accordingly, the corporate logo stands as the essential core of the visual system, condensing into a synthetic form the main identity traits of the organisation (Olins, 2009; Vieira, 2023).

The scientific literature has shown that corporate logo design does not respond solely to aesthetic decisions, but is conditioned by cultural, technological, economic and strategic factors that influence the evolution of dominant visual languages (Droulers, 2016; Fernández-Ignacio, 2018; Wheeler and Meyerson, 2024). In recent decades, these discourses have been marked by the growing digitalisation of communication, the proliferation of interfaces and the need to adapt visual identities to multiple media, sizes and contexts of use. As a consequence, numerous authors point to visual simplicity as one of the guiding principles of contemporary graphic design and, more specifically, of corporate logo design (Gregersen and Johansen, 2022; Slade-Brooking, 2016; Wang, 2024).

From a cognitive perspective, simplicity has been linked to greater ease of processing, recognition and recall of visual stimuli, in line with the limitations of individuals' attentional resources (Zhao and Meyer, 2007). Empirical studies have shown that simple, geometric and coherent corporate logos tend to generate more positive evaluations, especially in contexts of low involvement or rapid exposure, such as digital environments (Bernal-Torres, 2025; Díaz-Mesa, 2025; Henderson et al., 2004). Likewise, other recent research has shown that preference for simplicity intensifies among younger audiences, accustomed to minimalist and highly standardised visual languages (Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018).

Other previous works have noted that simplicity in brand design does not necessarily imply an absence of meaning, but rather a strategic reorganisation of visual elements aimed at maximising communicative effectiveness (Gamonal-Arroyo and García-García, 2015). Within this framework, chromatic reduction, two-dimensionality, the geometrisation of forms and the predominance of typographic solutions are configured as recurring resources in the processes of creation and redesign of corporate logos (Ortuño, 2025).

Recent literature suggests that visual simplification should not be understood merely as a stylistic trend, but rather as a strategic response to profound transformations in contemporary communication ecosystems. The proliferation of digital interfaces, mobile devices, social media environments and multiscreen consumption has progressively increased the need for brands to operate through highly adaptable visual systems capable of maintaining recognisability across multiple contexts of exposure (Gregersen and Johansen, 2022; Wheeler and Meyerson, 2024).

From this perspective, simplification represents a process of visual optimisation rather than aesthetic reduction. Geometric forms, limited colour palettes, flat design solutions and typographic predominance facilitate scalability, technical reproducibility and rapid cognitive processing (Henderson et al., 2004; Henderson and Cote, 1998). Simplicity therefore functions as a mechanism that reduces visual noise and increases communicative efficiency under conditions of attention scarcity.

This process is particularly relevant in global branding contexts. Brands operating across multiple markets require visual identities capable of transcending linguistic, cultural and contextual barriers while preserving consistency and recognisability. Consequently, simplification may be interpreted not only as a design preference but also as a manifestation of broader processes of visual standardisation associated with globalisation and international brand management (Aaker, 2023; Gregersen and Johansen, 2022).

For the purposes of this research, visual simplification is understood as the progressive reduction of formal complexity in corporate logos through the predominance of two-dimensional representations, geometric forms, reduced colour palettes, limited iconic elements and the minimisation of ornamental or heraldic resources. This conceptualisation is consistent with previous studies that identify simplicity as a multidimensional construct involving structural, chromatic and symbolic dimensions rather than a single formal attribute (Mayorga-Escalada and Suárez-Carballo, 2025; Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018).

Within this field of study, a particularly relevant line of research is the one that analyses the corporate logos of organisations with high economic and symbolic value. Rankings such as the *Best Global Brands*, compiled annually by the consultancy firm Interbrand, offer a precise overview of the world's most valuable brands, evaluated on the basis of financial, strategic and brand value performance criteria. These brands, with a strong international presence and high levels of investment in branding, tend to adopt visual solutions aligned with global standards of coherence, simplicity and adaptability. Alongside this perspective, the Ibex 35 index groups Spain's leading listed companies, many of which have visual identities built in contexts prior to full digitalisation.

The choice of both rankings as reference frameworks responds to criteria of availability, representativeness and strategic relevance: Interbrand's *Best Global Brands* constitutes one of the most cited brand valuation indices in the academic literature and offers a stable, internationally recognised and documented sample of organisations with high visibility and global reach; the Ibex 35, for its part, groups together the main listed companies in the Spanish market and allows a significant comparison to be established between two contexts with different degrees of internationalisation. It should be noted, however, that the economic value of an organisation and the value or quality of its corporate logo are analytically distinct dimensions: the former belongs to the field of marketing and financial valuation, while the latter belongs to the field of graphic design and corporate visual identity. The present research does not assume that the most economically valuable brands are necessarily the most relevant from a strictly disciplinary design perspective, but employs them as a sample of organisations with high public exposure, significant resources devoted to branding and a strong presence in global and local communicative environments. This is therefore an exploratory approach that takes economic value as an operational selection criterion, not as an indicator of design excellence, and which aims to provide a systematic and comparable snapshot of the dominant formal trends in a set of highly visible brands.

Beyond their economic relevance, both rankings offer an opportunity to explore whether visual standardisation constitutes a universal trend or whether different degrees of internationalisation are associated with distinct visual identity configurations. While globally dominant brands operate under strong pressures towards coherence, scalability and cross-cultural recognition, nationally embedded corporations may preserve greater levels of formal diversity associated with local histories, sectoral traditions and institutional legacies.

Consequently, the comparison between Best Global Brands and Ibex 35 organisations allows the examination of corporate logo design not only as a graphic phenomenon but also as an expression of different strategic branding logics operating at global and national levels.

Although corporate visual identity and logo design have attracted considerable academic attention, previous research has largely focused on individual redesign processes, sector-specific studies, consumer responses to logo characteristics, or qualitative analyses of particular organisations. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding whether the visual configuration of corporate logos differs systematically according to the degree of internationalisation of the organisation.

Consequently, an important gap remains regarding the relationship between global brand positioning and visual identity standardisation. It is still unclear whether the formal simplification observed in contemporary logo design represents a universal trend affecting all organisations equally, or whether it is particularly associated with globally dominant brands operating in highly internationalised markets.

Addressing this gap is theoretically relevant because it allows visual simplification to be examined not merely as a design trend but as a strategic branding phenomenon linked to internationalisation, corporate visibility and communicative adaptation to digital environments.

This situation informs the research question that structures the present study: to what extent do the corporate logos of companies comprising the Ibex 35 converge with or diverge from the corporate logos of the most highly valued global organisations according to Interbrand's *Best Global Brands* ranking, in terms of their formal and strategic characteristics?

Given the limited comparative evidence regarding the relationship between internationalisation and corporate visual identity design, the following hypotheses are proposed to test whether globally dominant brands and nationally embedded corporations exhibit significantly different visual identity configurations. Based on the literature reviewed, four hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Best Global Brands will exhibit higher levels of visual simplification than Ibex 35 organisations.
H2. Best Global Brands will show a greater predominance of typographic solutions and pure logotypes.
H3. Best Global Brands will employ more restricted colour palettes than Ibex 35 organisations.
H4. Ibex 35 organisations will display greater formal diversity in their visual identity configurations than Best Global Brands.

This article aims to contribute to filling this academic gap. From this reflection, the general research objective is derived:

GO. To identify the main formal and strategic trends shaping contemporary corporate visual identity design, based on a comparative analysis of the corporate logos of organisations listed in Interbrand's *Best Global Brands* ranking and the Ibex 35 stock market index.

With the aim of generating a sufficiently robust body of empirical evidence, the following specific objectives are proposed:

SO1. To identify the predominant typology in the corporate logos under study.
SO2. To study the degree of formal simplification of corporate logos according to previously validated technical variables.
SO3. To examine the use of colour and typography as strategic elements of visual identity.
SO4. To assess the presence of iconic, linguistic and heraldic elements in relation to the symbolic construction of the brand.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides one of the few large-scale comparative analyses of corporate visual identity between globally dominant and nationally embedded organisations. Second, it operationalises visual simplification through a multidimensional analytical framework integrating plastic, iconic and linguistic signs. Third, it advances the discussion on the relationship between internationalisation and visual standardisation by examining whether global visibility is associated with greater formal convergence in logo design.

Materials and methods

Terminological note

In the field of graphic design, the terminology established by Chaves and Espinosa (2022) is adopted: the *logotype* designates a corporate logo composed exclusively of typographic elements; the *isotype* designates logos composed solely of a non-typographic iconic element, without text; the *imagotype* designates the combination of a symbol and a linguistic identifier when both elements can be separated and function autonomously; and the *isologotype* refers to logos in which typography and icon are fused inseparably into a single visual unit. This distinction (Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2025; Chaves and Espinosa, 2022; Costa, 2014) guides the typological categorisation employed in the analysis protocol and should be borne in mind when reading the results.

For the purposes of this study, visual simplification is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct reflected in the reduction of formal complexity within corporate logos. Following previous research on logo design and visual identity (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Mayorga-Escalada and Suárez-Carballo, 2025; Suárez-Carballo, 2022; Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018), simplification was operationalised through five complementary dimensions: (a) dimensional reduction (two-dimensional vs. three-dimensional representation), (b) predominance of geometric forms, (c) chromatic reduction through limited colour palettes, (d) reduction in the number of iconic elements, and (e) absence of heraldic or ornamental resources.

This operationalisation allows visual simplification to be examined as a measurable phenomenon rather than as a purely aesthetic judgement, thereby facilitating systematic comparison between organisations with different levels of internationalisation.

The research is grounded in a quantitative-comparative design based on visual content analysis, a technique widely used in studies of visual communication, branding and graphic design for its capacity to describe systematically and objectively the formal characteristics of visual messages (Bardin, 2002; Krippendorff, 2019). This methodological approach has demonstrated its validity in recent research on corporate visual identity, corporate logos and logo design in various sectors and cultural contexts (Henderson et al., 2004; Sanz-Peralta et al., 2023; Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018).

The study adopts a cross-sectional comparative design aimed at identifying differences in visual identity configurations between globally dominant and nationally embedded organisations. Visual content analysis was selected because it enables the systematic examination of observable graphic characteristics while reducing researcher subjectivity through predefined coding categories (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017).

The validity of the analytical framework is supported by its adaptation from the Logo Design Analysis Protocol (LDAP), a recently validated instrument specifically developed for the systematic study of corporate visual identities (Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2025).

The study sample comprises 135 corporate logos, representing 100% of the target population. Of these, 100 correspond to brands listed in the Interbrand *Best Global Brands* 2024 ranking, and the remaining 35 belong to companies comprising the Ibex 35 stock market index. The choice of both populations responds to criteria of economic value, brand awareness and strategic relevance, allowing a significant comparison to be established between global and national brands.

The study employed a census sampling strategy, incorporating the totality of organisations included in both rankings. This decision eliminates sampling error and allows the findings to be interpreted as representative of the populations under study. Although economic value does not necessarily imply superior graphic design quality, the selected organisations constitute highly visible brands characterised by significant investment in branding activities and extensive public exposure.

For data collection, an *ad hoc* analysis protocol was designed, structured under the parameters of the Logo Design Analysis Protocol (LDAP) (Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2025), through four major dimensions: basic data, plastic sign, iconic sign and linguistic sign. These dimensions are theoretically grounded in the distinction between plastic, iconic and linguistic signs (Groupe, 1993; Joly, 1999). All logos were coded according to the categories established in the analysis protocol. Prior to the definitive coding phase, coders participated in a calibration process designed to standardise interpretation criteria and minimise subjective discrepancies. Operational definitions and visual examples were employed to ensure consistency in the classification of variables such as iconicity, formal complexity and logo typology.

Particular attention was devoted to differentiating between visual abstraction and visual simplification. While abstraction refers to the degree of representational distance from recognisable reality, simplification refers to the reduction of formal complexity regardless of representational content. Consequently, a logo could simultaneously be abstract and visually complex, or figurative and visually simple.

Variables were included relating to the type of corporate logo, dimensionality, form, proportion, compositional balance, iconicity, colour and typography (Dondis, 1998; Henderson and Cote, 1998; Mayorga-Escalada and Suárez-Carballo, 2025). The full analysis protocol is presented in Supplementary Appendix 1.

The analytical instrument was structured around four major dimensions: basic data, plastic sign, iconic sign and linguistic sign. These dimensions were operationalised through a set of predefined and mutually exclusive coding categories adapted from the Logo Design Analysis Protocol (LDAP) (Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2025). This structure enabled a systematic, replicable and objective assessment of the formal, symbolic and linguistic components of corporate visual identity.

To enhance the reliability of the coding instrument, a pilot coding procedure was conducted on the first 20 cases analysed, representing 29.62% of the total sample. Two researchers independently reviewed the selected logos using the categories established in the analysis protocol. The coding process was subsequently discussed jointly in order to identify potential ambiguities, refine category definitions and standardise interpretation criteria. Any discrepancies detected were resolved through discussion and consensus before proceeding to the definitive coding of the full sample (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). This calibration stage contributed to improving the consistency of the coding process and reducing potential interpretative biases in the application of the analytical categories.

Data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were initially employed to identify frequencies, percentages and dominant visual trends. Subsequently, chi-square tests of independence were conducted to examine associations between brand type (Best Global Brands vs. Ibex 35) and the principal visual variables analysed. Cramér's V coefficients were calculated to assess the strength of statistically significant associations. This combination of descriptive and inferential procedures allowed both the identification of dominant trends and the evaluation of whether observed differences between the two groups were statistically meaningful.

Only official and currently active versions of the corporate logos were analysed. Logos were obtained directly from corporate websites, investor relations documentation and official brand resources, thereby ensuring the use of authorised visual identities and avoiding inconsistencies derived from secondary sources.

Although visual content analysis enables systematic examination of corporate logos, it does not provide direct evidence regarding audience perception, brand recognition or communicative effectiveness. Consequently, the study focuses exclusively on observable visual characteristics and should not be interpreted as an assessment of the strategic performance of the analysed identities. Future studies combining content analysis with experimental or perception-based approaches would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between visual design and brand effectiveness.

Results

The comparative analysis of corporate logos enabled the identification of significant formal, structural and chromatic trends reflecting strategic patterns of visual identity. A total of

135 cases were studied, representing 100% of the population: 100 brands from Interbrand's *Best Global Brands* ranking (74.1%) and 35 brands from the Spanish Ibex 35 index (25.9%).

The sample includes brands from different economic sectors according to CNAE 2025. Technology brands account for 25 cases (18.5%), comprising 22 global brands (22%) and 3 Spanish brands (8.6%). This distribution reflects the different sectoral composition of both rankings: while the *Best Global Brands* concentrates a significant number of technology organisations with a strong international presence, the Ibex 35 reflects the economic structure of the Spanish stock market, historically oriented towards sectors such as banking, energy and infrastructure, with lower representation of the technology sector. Banking, with 16 cases (11.9%), presents a relative balance between global brands (10 cases, 10%) and Spanish brands (6 cases, 17.1%). These results show a clear sectoral divergence between both rankings (Figure 1).

This sectoral divergence is relevant because previous studies have shown that visual identity systems are often conditioned by industry-specific communicative conventions and competitive environments. Consequently, differences observed throughout the analysis should be interpreted not only in relation to internationalisation, but also in light of the sectoral composition of each ranking.

Regarding the year of founding, the majority of the analysed brands were created in the 20th century (68.9% of the total). Ibex 35 brands show a greater presence of younger organisations (22.9% founded in the 21st century), while the *Best Global Brands* include a larger number of brands with longer trajectories, with 17% founded in the 19th century.

Plastic sign

The analysis of the plastic sign reveals that two-dimensional forms predominate widely: 98.5% of the total, 99% in global brands and 97.1% in Spanish brands. Only two brands display three-dimensionality, indicating a clear trend towards visual simplification to favour digital adaptability and legibility in multi-channel environments.

Regarding the type of corporate logo, the most frequent option is the logotype, that is, a corporate logo composed exclusively of typographic elements, as exemplified by brands such as Google, accounting for 35.6% of the total sample. It is followed by the imagotype (28.1%), in which the typographic and graphic elements remain visually separate but operate together as a unified identity, as illustrated by Santander. The isotype represents 11.1% of the sample and consists exclusively of a graphic symbol without accompanying text, with Nike being one of the best-known examples. The isologotype is recorded in 7.4% of cases. Among Best Global Brands, the logotype reaches 37%, and the exclusive use of the isotype is relatively high (15%), reflecting the capacity of these brands to dispense with the textual name. In the Ibex 35, the predominant type is the imagotype (45.7%), followed by the logotype (31.4%), with no exclusive use of the isotype (Figure 2).

The study of forms shows that the majority of brands employ geometric forms (81.5%), followed by organic (13.3%) and mixed (5.2%). The *Best Global Brands* show greater use of geometric forms (83%), while in the Ibex 35 this percentage falls to 77.1%, with greater presence of organic forms (20%). Horizontal compositions are the most frequent (77.8%),

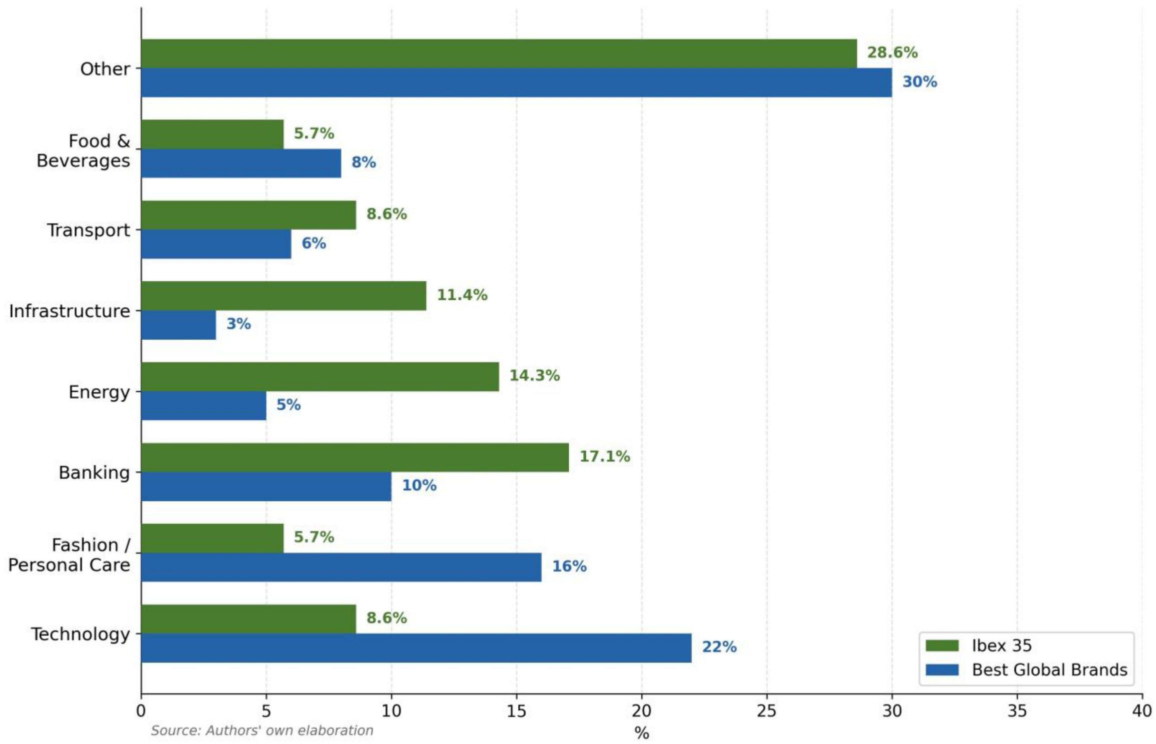

FIGURE 1
Sectoral distribution of analysed brands (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

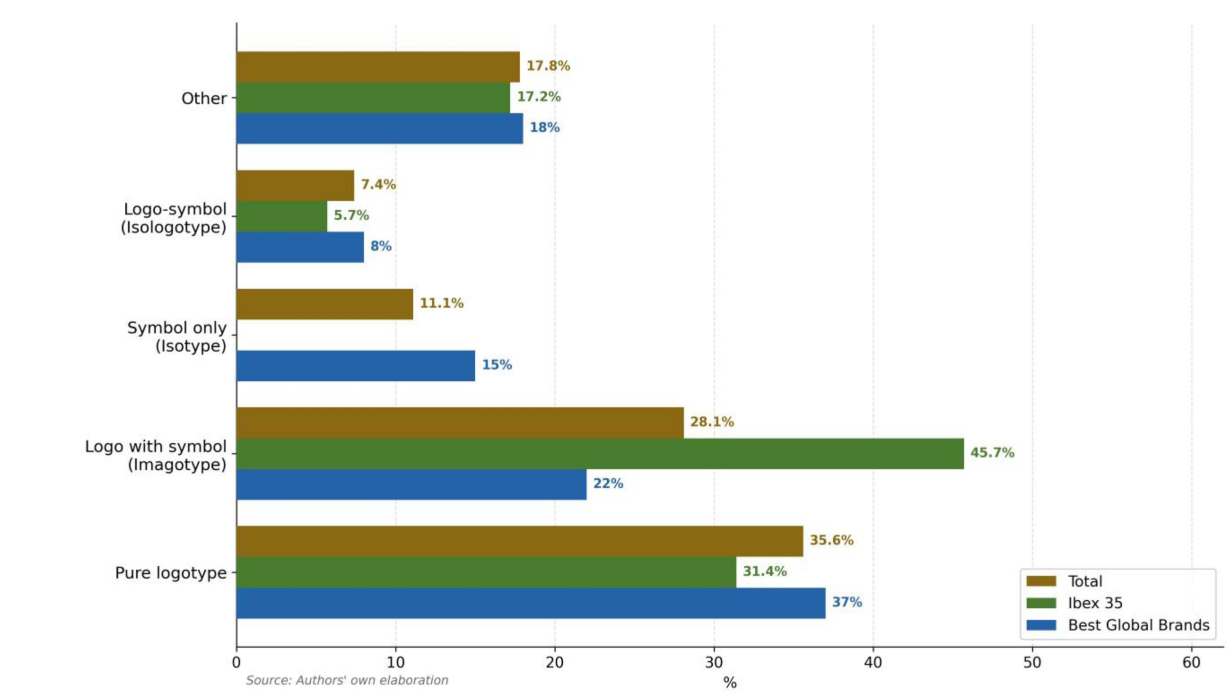

FIGURE 2
Type of corporate logo (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

especially among Spanish brands (88.6% compared to 74% globally). Symmetry predominates in 79.3% of cases, with a greater presence in global brands (86%) than Spanish brands (60%). 74.1% of brands do not use a container, this absence being more notable in the Ibex 35 (94.3%) compared to 67% of *Best Global Brands*.

This contrast suggests the existence of two differentiated identity strategies. While global brands appear to prioritise symbolic concentration through a limited number of visual elements, Spanish brands tend to rely on a more articulated visual narrative incorporating multiple graphic resources.

Iconic sign

The analysis of iconicity reveals that brands tend to employ typographic elements as their main graphic resource (45.9%), followed by intermediate figurative representations (31.9%) and abstract ones (22.2%). In the Spanish context, the use of abstract forms predominates (45.7%), contrasting with the global trend towards figurative (38%) and typographic (48%) elements (Figure 3). This finding indicates a differentiated use of abstraction between both groups of organisations, suggesting that iconicity is one of the variables that most clearly distinguishes global and national visual identity configurations.

In relation to heraldry, 86.7% of cases present no heraldic elements, 10.3% incorporate one and barely 3% include two (Figure 4). This finding evidences the abandonment of classical institutional visual codes in favour of more functional graphic languages, in both global and Spanish brands.

The number of iconic elements is predominantly one (58.5%), followed by two (34.8%). Global brands tend to simplify with a single element (66%), while Spanish brands frequently employ two relevant elements (57.1%), reinforcing the visual narrative and differentiation in the national market (Figure 5). The nature of iconic elements is predominantly corporate (97.7%).

Linguistic sign and colour

In terms of number of colours, combinations of two colours predominate (72.6%), followed by three colours (20%). Global brands show a more homogeneous use of two colours (78%), while in Spain the proportion falls to 57.1%, reflecting a more varied use of colour palettes. The predominant colours are white (80.7%), black (36.3%) and blue (33.3%). Monochromatic harmony dominates (46.7%), while achromatic palettes represent 24.4%. Global brands show a greater inclination towards monochromy (47%), while in Spain a greater diversity of tonal ranges (31.4%) and complementary colours is observed.

Representative examples help to illustrate these chromatic tendencies. Best Global Brands frequently employ simplified colour systems based on monochromatic or restrained palettes, as observed in Apple, Nike and Samsung, while multicolour solutions remain characteristic of brands such as Google. By contrast, among Ibex 35 organisations, colours such as blue and green are particularly prominent in brands including BBVA, Iberdrola, CaixaBank and Redeia, reflecting the greater chromatic diversity identified in the quantitative analysis.

The linguistic sign is present in 89.6% of cases (in all Spanish brands, 100%). The use of full corporate names predominates (86%) over acronyms (13.2%). In typographic terms, the majority of brands use *sans serif* typography (65.3%) and bold weights

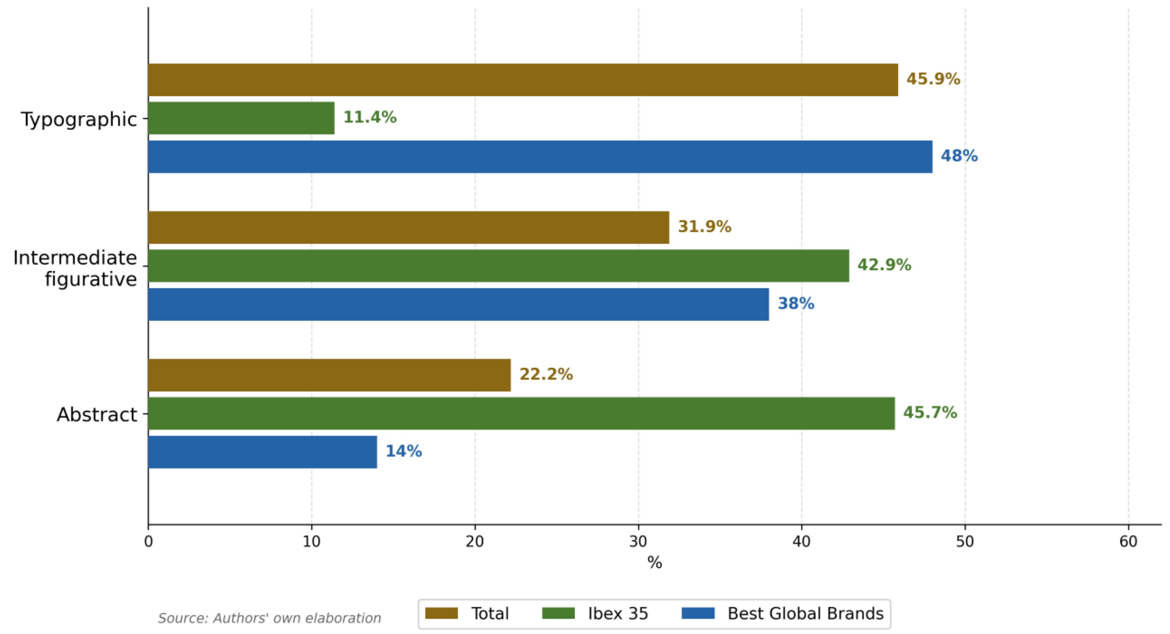

FIGURE 3
Level of iconicity of the corporate logo (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

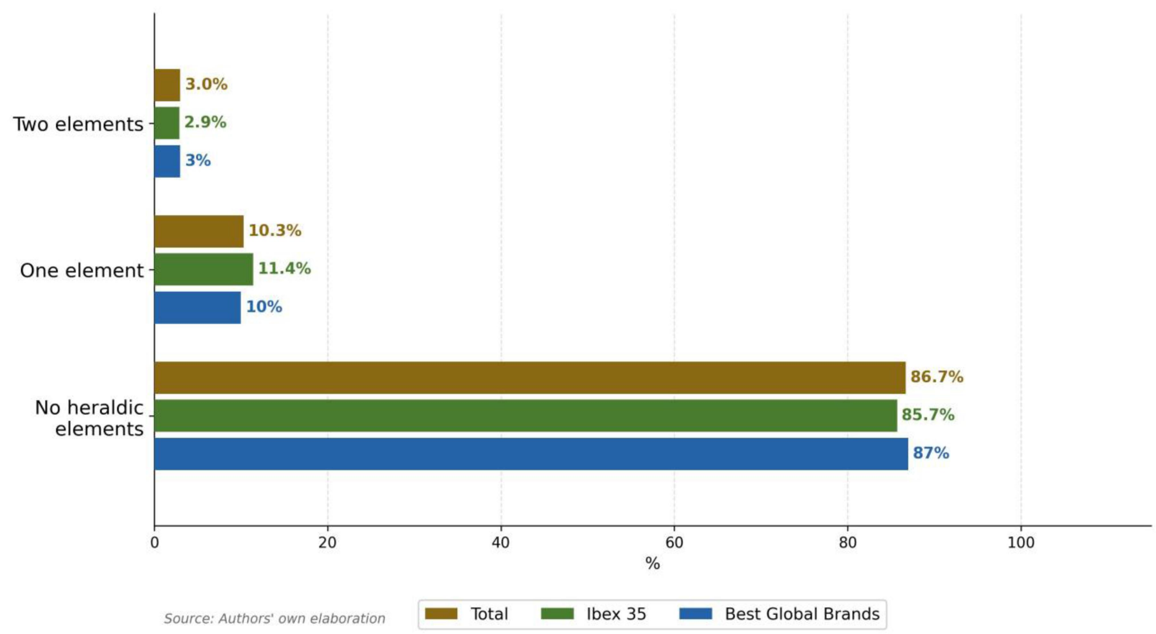

FIGURE 4
Degree of incorporation of heraldic elements (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

(59.5%). Typographic case proportions are distributed predominantly in regular formats (57%), and the text is centred horizontally in 75.2% of cases and vertically in 83.5% (Figure 6).

The results reflect significant differences between global and Spanish brands. Global brands tend to favour symmetry, geometric forms, logotypes, reduced colour palettes and *sans serif* typography. In contrast, Spanish brands show greater formal diversity, with more frequent use of imagotypes, organic forms, graphic abstraction and more varied chromatic combinations.

These differences can also be illustrated through representative examples. Among the Best Global Brands, organisations such as Apple, Google, Nike, Amazon and Microsoft display highly simplified visual identities characterised by geometric forms, reduced colour palettes and strong adaptability across digital environments. In contrast, several Ibex 35 organisations, including Mapfre, Sabadell, Acciona, Naturgy and Redeia, preserve more heterogeneous visual configurations, reflecting their different historical trajectories, sectoral contexts and institutional traditions.

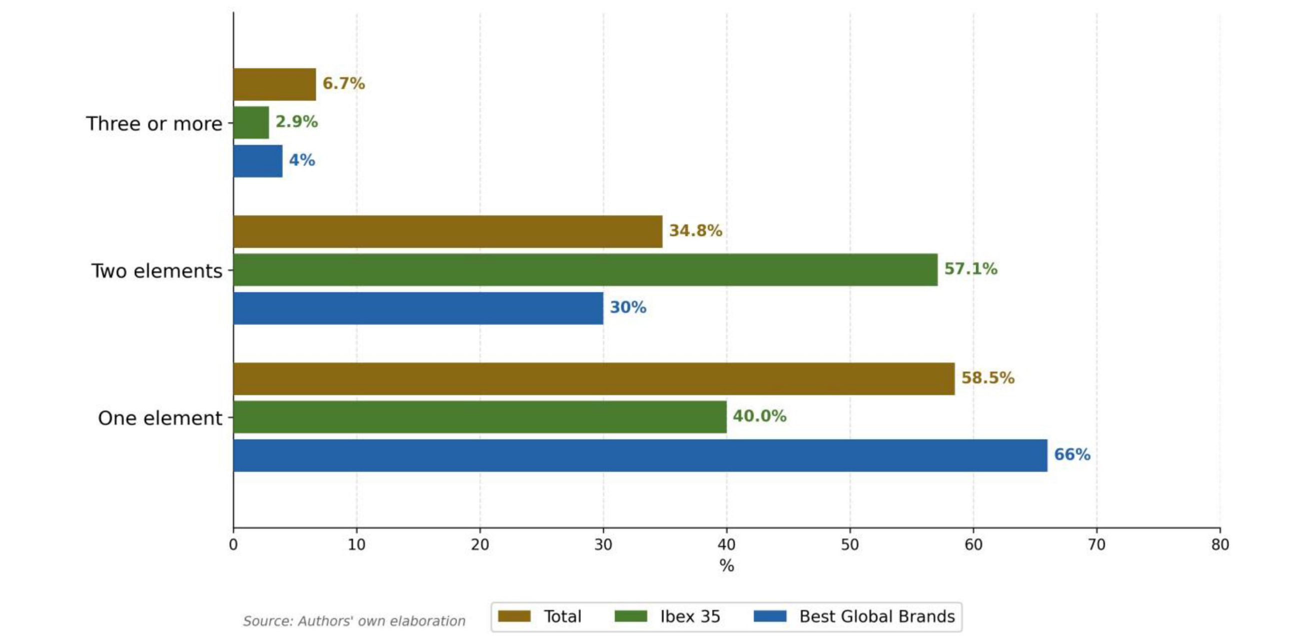

FIGURE 5
Number of relevant iconic elements (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

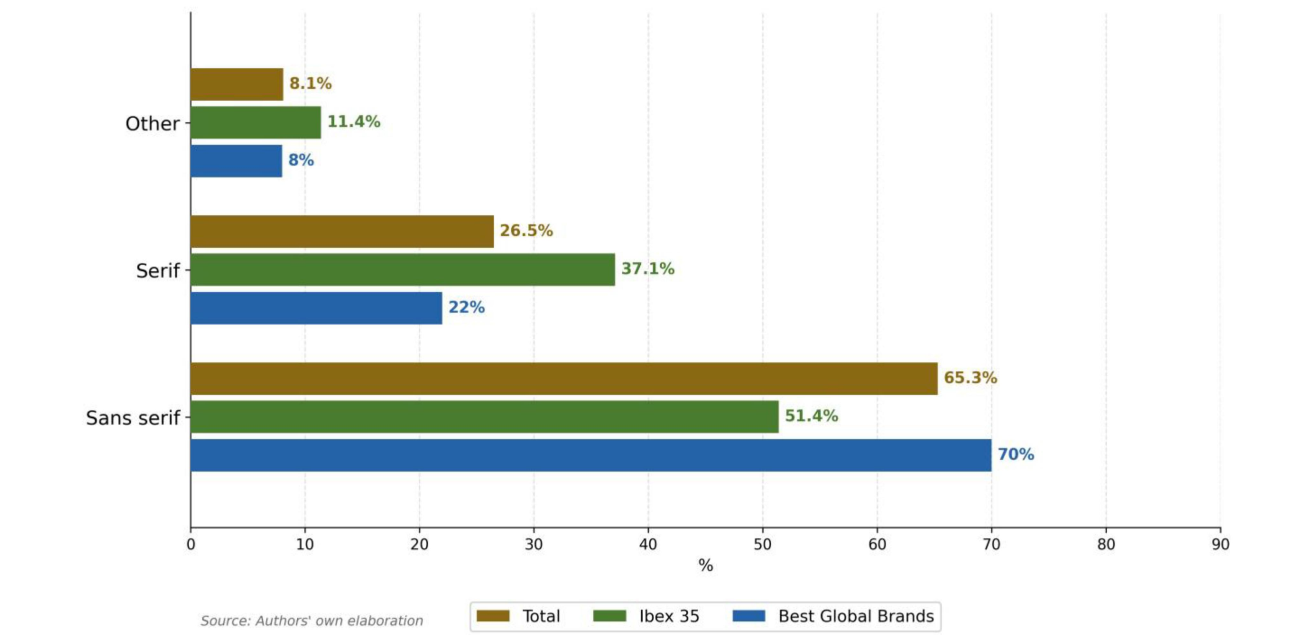

FIGURE 6
Typographic family of the linguistic sign (%). Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Interrelation between contextual variables and visual configuration

In order to provide greater empirical robustness to the descriptive findings, chi-square tests were conducted to examine the existence of statistically significant associations between the type of organisation (*Best Global Brands* vs. Ibex 35) and the main visual variables analysed. To ensure compliance with the assumptions of application, those variables with low-frequency categories were recoded, in line with the methodological recommendations of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). The results of these tests are presented in Supplementary Appendix 2.

The results confirm the existence of statistically significant associations in five variables: type of corporate logo ($\chi^2 \approx 13$; df = 2; $p < .01$; Cramér's V ≈ .30), iconicity ($\chi^2 \approx 15$; df = 1; $p < .001$; V ≈ .32), number of colours ($\chi^2 \approx 9$; df = 2; $p < .05$; V ≈ .25), typographic family ($\chi^2 \approx 7$; df = 1; $p < .05$; V ≈ .22) and number of iconic elements ($\chi^2 \approx 10$; df = 2; $p < .05$; V ≈ .26). Together, these results reinforce the consistency of the trends identified in the descriptive analysis and confirm that the formal differences observed between both sets of brands are not attributable to chance, but rather respond to statistically differentiated visual patterns.

The strongest associations were observed for iconicity (V ≈ .32) and type of corporate logo (V ≈ .30), indicating that these variables contribute most substantially to differentiating global and national brands. By contrast, colour palette and typographic family displayed weaker associations, suggesting that these characteristics are increasingly shared across both groups of organisations.

These findings indicate that the principal differences between global and national brands are not primarily chromatic or typographic, but rather structural and symbolic, particularly in relation to the configuration of graphic elements and the degree of abstraction adopted in logo design.

Overall, the results reveal a pattern of convergence and divergence operating simultaneously. Convergence is evident in the widespread adoption of visual simplification principles, including two-dimensionality, chromatic reduction and typographic predominance. Divergence emerges in the degree of formal standardisation, with Best Global Brands exhibiting greater homogeneity and Ibex 35 organisations displaying higher levels of formal diversity and symbolic complexity.

Discussion

The results provide strong empirical evidence supporting the notion that visual simplification has become a dominant paradigm in contemporary corporate visual identity design. Across both populations analysed, corporate logos are characterised by overwhelming levels of two-dimensionality, geometric construction, chromatic reduction and typographic predominance. These findings reinforce previous research suggesting that logo design has progressively evolved towards simpler and more standardised visual solutions (Henderson et al., 2004; Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018).

Importantly, simplification should not be interpreted as a mere aesthetic preference. Rather, it appears to function as a strategic response to the communicative conditions of contemporary digital ecosystems. The need for logos to operate efficiently across mobile devices, social media platforms, digital interfaces and multiscreen environments favours visual systems capable of maintaining legibility, recognisability and consistency under conditions of reduced size and fragmented attention. In this sense, the results support the argument that simplification constitutes a form of communicative optimisation rather than a reduction of symbolic capacity.

The findings are also consistent with cognitive approaches to visual communication, which associate simpler visual stimuli with easier processing, faster recognition and greater memorability. Consequently, the predominance of simplified visual structures observed in this study may be interpreted as an adaptive mechanism aligned with contemporary patterns of media consumption and information processing.

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the greater formal homogeneity observed among the Best Global Brands. Compared with Ibex 35 organisations, global brands display higher levels of typographic predominance, geometric construction, symmetry and chromatic restraint. This pattern suggests the existence of a process of visual standardisation associated with international brand management.

From a branding perspective, organisations operating across multiple cultural and linguistic contexts face strong pressures to develop visual systems capable of transcending local specificities while maintaining global coherence. Under these conditions, visual identities tend to converge around solutions perceived as culturally neutral, technically adaptable and internationally recognisable. The predominance of simple logotypes and reduced visual structures among global brands may therefore reflect strategic decisions aimed at maximising scalability and consistency across markets.

This interpretation extends previous studies on visual simplification by suggesting that internationalisation may function as an important driver of formal convergence. Rather than representing isolated design choices, many of the visual characteristics identified appear to constitute manifestations of broader organisational strategies linked to global visibility and cross-cultural communication.

In contrast, the greater formal diversity identified among Ibex 35 organisations suggests that processes of visual standardisation coexist with alternative identity logics linked to organisational heritage, sectoral traditions and local corporate cultures. Spanish brands exhibit greater variability in logo typology, abstraction levels, colour palettes and compositional structures, indicating a less homogeneous approach to visual identity construction. This tendency is also reflected in the greater number of iconic elements identified among Ibex 35 organisations. Whereas global brands frequently condense their visual identity into a single dominant graphic resource, Spanish corporations often combine multiple visual elements, suggesting a more articulated symbolic narrative and a less standardised approach to visual identity construction.

These differences should not be interpreted as indicators of lower professionalisation or reduced design quality. Rather, they may reflect distinct strategic priorities. Whereas global brands tend to privilege consistency and international recognisability, nationally embedded corporations often maintain visual characteristics associated with their historical trajectories, institutional identities and sector-specific conventions.

The findings therefore suggest that corporate logo design continues to function as a symbolic expression of organisational identity, even within increasingly standardised digital communication environments. In this regard, visual diversity may be understood as a mechanism through which organisations preserve differentiation and historical continuity in contexts characterised by growing visual convergence.

A particularly relevant implication of the findings concerns what may be described as the paradox of differentiation. Branding theory traditionally assumes that successful brands achieve competitive advantage through distinctive identity configurations. However, the results reveal that many of the world's most valuable brands increasingly converge around similar visual solutions characterised by simplicity, symmetry, reduced colour palettes and typographic dominance.

This apparent contradiction suggests that differentiation may no longer depend exclusively on formal uniqueness. Instead, it may increasingly derive from symbolic associations, brand meanings, consumer experiences and communicative ecosystems that extend beyond the logo itself. Under this interpretation, the corporate logo functions less as a unique visual artefact and more as a gateway to broader brand narratives and identity systems.

Consequently, the study contributes to ongoing debates concerning the evolving role of visual identity in contemporary branding by highlighting the coexistence of differentiation objectives and standardisation pressures within highly competitive communication environments.

The limited presence of heraldic resources further confirms the progressive abandonment of historically institutional visual codes in favour of functional and digitally adaptable graphic languages. Nevertheless, caution is required when interpreting these findings. The study focuses exclusively on observable formal characteristics and does not incorporate audience perception, brand recognition, memorability or communicative effectiveness.

Consequently, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that simplified visual identities are necessarily more effective than more complex alternatives. Rather, they reveal the existence of dominant design tendencies among highly visible organisations operating within contemporary communication environments.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by suggesting that visual simplification, internationalisation and standardisation are interconnected phenomena. The findings also support the usefulness of comparative visual content analysis as a methodological approach for identifying large-scale trends in corporate identity design. Future research should complement these findings through experimental studies examining audience responses, longitudinal analyses of logo evolution and comparative investigations involving additional international rankings and national markets.

Overall, the discussion of the findings provides consistent support for the hypotheses proposed, particularly regarding the association between internationalisation, visual simplification and formal standardisation in corporate logo design.

Conclusion

The present study examined the formal and strategic characteristics of the corporate logos of organisations included in Interbrand's Best Global Brands ranking and the Spanish Ibex 35 index. Through a comparative visual content analysis, the research provides empirical evidence regarding the dominant trends shaping contemporary corporate visual identity and contributes to ongoing debates concerning visual simplification, internationalisation and branding standardisation.

SO1

The results reveal a clear predominance of logotypes and simple hybrid solutions, especially in the case of global brands, which show a significant preference for configurations in which the linguistic sign acquires central prominence. Ibex 35 brands show a greater frequency of imagotypes, evidencing lower typological homogeneity.

SO2

Visual simplification emerges as the dominant trend across both populations, although with differing levels of intensity. Global brands are characterised by a systematic preference for geometric forms, symmetrical compositions and two-dimensional solutions, suggesting a stronger orientation towards visual standardisation and digital adaptability. National brands, while sharing these tendencies, retain greater formal diversity and symbolic complexity.

SO3

A generalised chromatic reduction is evidenced, with a preference for two-colour palettes and monochromatic or achromatic harmonies. Global brands stand out for greater chromatic restraint and typographic homogeneity, with a predominance of *sans serif*. Ibex 35 brands show greater chromatic diversity and a greater presence of *serif* typefaces.

SO4

The linguistic sign occupies a central position in contemporary corporate identity construction, being present in almost all analysed cases. At the same time, the reduced presence of heraldic resources confirms a progressive shift away from historically institutional visual codes towards more functional, flexible and digitally oriented branding systems.

GO

In response to the general objective, the study demonstrates the existence of a dual dynamic of convergence and differentiation within contemporary corporate visual identity. On the one hand, organisations increasingly converge around simplified visual solutions characterised by two-dimensionality, chromatic reduction, geometric construction and typographic predominance. On the other hand, significant differences remain in the degree of formal standardisation adopted by different types of organisations.

The findings suggest that internationalisation plays an important role in shaping corporate visual identity. Best Global Brands exhibit higher levels of visual homogeneity, consistent with the demands of global visibility, cross-cultural communication and digital adaptability. In contrast, Ibex 35 organisations maintain greater formal diversity, reflecting the influence of organisational heritage, sectoral traditions and national corporate contexts.

Consequently, visual simplification should not be understood solely as a contemporary design trend but as a strategic branding phenomenon associated with broader processes of digitalisation, internationalisation and communicative optimisation. Consequently, corporate logo design emerges not merely as a visual expression of brand identity, but as a strategic mechanism through which organisations negotiate the tension between global standardisation and symbolic differentiation.

These findings suggest that corporate logo design functions not merely as a visual expression of brand identity, but also as a strategic mechanism through which organisations negotiate the tension between global standardisation and symbolic differentiation.

The empirical findings provide substantial support for the hypotheses formulated at the outset of the study. **H1**, which proposed that Best Global Brands would exhibit higher levels of visual simplification than Ibex 35 organisations, was supported by the predominance of two-dimensional representations, geometric forms, symmetrical compositions and reduced visual complexity among global brands.

H2 was also supported. Best Global Brands demonstrated a stronger preference for typographic solutions and pure logotypes, confirming the central role of the linguistic sign within globally oriented visual identity systems. Likewise, **H3** received empirical support, as global brands displayed a greater tendency towards restricted colour palettes, particularly two-colour and monochromatic configurations.

Finally, **H4** was confirmed by the greater formal diversity observed among Ibex 35 organisations. Compared with global brands, Spanish companies exhibited higher variability in logo typology, abstraction levels, colour usage and compositional structures. This finding suggests that local corporate contexts continue to favour more heterogeneous visual identity configurations.

Taken together, the results support the proposition that the degree of organisational internationalisation is associated with differentiated visual identity patterns, reinforcing the argument that visual simplification and standardisation are closely linked to contemporary global branding strategies.

The study contributes to the literature in three principal ways. First, it provides one of the few comparative analyses of corporate visual identity based on complete populations of globally dominant and nationally embedded organisations. Second, it operationalises visual simplification as a multidimensional construct encompassing structural, chromatic and symbolic dimensions. Third, it suggests that visual standardisation is associated with internationalisation processes, thereby extending existing discussions on the relationship between branding strategy and visual identity design.

A particularly relevant contribution lies in identifying a tension between differentiation and standardisation. While branding theory traditionally emphasises distinctiveness as a source of competitive advantage, the results reveal a growing convergence around similar visual solutions among the world's most valuable brands. This finding opens new avenues for understanding the evolving role of corporate logos within contemporary branding ecosystems.

The study presents several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on observable visual characteristics and does not incorporate audience perception, brand recognition, memorability or communicative effectiveness. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the superiority of any particular visual configuration. Second, the research adopts a cross-sectional perspective based on the current versions of corporate logos, without considering their historical evolution or redesign trajectories. Third, the sample is defined according to economic visibility criteria rather than design excellence, meaning that the findings reflect dominant tendencies among highly visible organisations rather than normative models of effective visual identity. Fourth, part of the observed differences may be influenced by the unequal sectoral composition of the two rankings. While the Best Global Brands ranking includes a strong representation of technology, consumer and lifestyle brands, the Ibex 35 is characterised by a greater presence of banking, energy and infrastructure organisations. Consequently, some visual differences identified in the analysis may reflect sector-specific identity conventions in addition to differing levels of internationalisation.

Future research should extend the present findings through experimental studies examining audience responses to different levels of visual simplification, longitudinal analyses exploring the evolution of corporate logos over time, and comparative investigations involving additional international rankings and national markets. Such approaches would contribute to clarifying the relationship between visual identity design, branding strategy and communicative effectiveness in increasingly globalised and digital communication environments.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

SM-E: Validation, Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Supervision, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Visualization, Resources, Software. ID-L: Data curation, Validation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Project administration, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Resources, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Software, Funding acquisition, Visualization. FO-D: Resources, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Software, Visualization, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization, Validation, Project administration, Data curation, Investigation, Supervision.

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Supplementary material

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