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A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Visual Signs in Selected La Liga Club Logos during the 2025/2026 Season

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A B S T R A C T

Football club logos communicate historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional aspects of club identity through visual signs. This study analyses four selected La Liga club logos, representing Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF, used during the 2025/2026 season. The clubs were selected purposively because their logos contain distinctive visual elements associated with their respective historical and regional backgrounds. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study applies Charles Sanders Peirce's (1867) semiotic framework to classify visual signs as icons, indexes, and symbols according to their relationships with objects. The findings indicate that symbols convey conventional associations with club heritage and regional identity, while icons represent objects through visual resemblance. The analysis demonstrates that club identity is communicated through different sign-object relationships, showing how visual elements refer to historical and cultural contexts rather than merely serving as decorative features. This study contributes to visual semiotics by illustrating the relevance of Peirce's classification for examining identity representation in football club logos.

Keywords: *La Liga, Semiotics, Visual Signs, Peirce, Football Club Logos, Club Identity*

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INTRODUCTION

Football has developed beyond athletic competition into a cultural and social phenomenon through which communities express collective identities, historical memories, and regional affiliations. Football clubs are recognized not only through their players and achievements but also through the visual identities they present to supporters and the wider public (Gómez-Bantel, 2016). Among these visual representations, club logos play an important role in distinguishing one institution from another while communicating associations with history, culture, geography, and institutional traditions (Michailidis et al., 2016). Consequently, football club logos should not be understood merely as graphic identifiers. They can also be examined as visual systems through which particular aspects of club identity are represented and communicated.

A football club logo consists of visual elements such as colours, shapes, shields, crowns, animals, letters, and other graphic forms. However, identifying these elements is only the first step in understanding how a logo communicates meaning. A semiotic analysis requires examining the relationships between visual signs and the objects to which they refer. For example, an image of a football may represent the sport through visual resemblance, whereas a crown may refer to royal heritage through an established historical and cultural association. Similarly, a regional flag incorporated into a club logo may connect the club with a particular geographical and cultural identity. These examples demonstrate that visual elements acquire meaning through different relationships with their respective objects. Therefore, analysing football club logos requires more than describing their visual composition; it requires explaining how the signs refer to particular aspects of the clubs they represent.

The relationship between signs and meaning is closely connected to linguistics and the study of language. Linguistics examines the structure and use of language, while semiotics

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investigates how signs produce and communicate meaning across different sign systems. Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of language as a system of signs contributed to the development of modern semiotics. His distinction between the signifier and the signified explains how a sign's form is associated with a concept. Although this perspective originated in the study of language, the broader study of signs also provides a basis for examining visual communication. A football club logo can consequently be understood as a form of visual language, not because it operates identically to verbal language, but because its visual elements work within an organized system of signs to communicate recognizable associations. As discussed by Wiweka (2023), football logos can be examined semiotically to understand how their visual components contribute to the meanings associated with football teams.

To investigate these relationships, the present study applies Peirce (1867) semiotic framework, particularly his classification of signs as icons, indexes, and symbols. Peirce's approach distinguishes signs according to how they relate to their objects rather than merely according to their visual appearance. An icon represents its object through resemblance or similarity. For instance, a recognizable image of a football can function as an icon because its visual form resembles the physical object. An index refers to its object through a direct or factual connection, such as a trace or an indication connected to what it represents. A symbol refers to its object through convention, habit, or an established association. Club initials, regional emblems, and traditional colours may function symbolically when their meanings depend on shared historical, cultural, or institutional conventions (Charles Sanders Peirce, 1867). These categories must therefore be applied by examining the relationship between each sign and its identified object, rather than assigning a category solely on the basis of the sign's visual form.

This distinction is important because a single visual element may establish different semiotic relationships depending on the object under examination. For example, an image of an animal may function iconically through its resemblance to the animal itself while also carrying symbolic significance through its established association with a city or region. Accordingly, a semiotic interpretation must identify both the visual sign and the specific object to which it refers, supported by relevant historical or cultural information. Applying Peirce (1867) framework enables the researcher to move beyond visual description and explain how particular signs communicate meanings associated with a football club's identity.

La Liga provides a relevant context for this investigation because the selected clubs have distinctive historical, geographical, cultural, and institutional backgrounds that can be examined through their visual identities. Research on football and regional identity has demonstrated that clubs can become associated with the places and communities they represent (Gómez-Bantel, 2016; Shobe, 2008). These associations are relevant to the present study because the logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF contain visual elements connected to different aspects of their respective identities. For example, the FC Barcelona crest incorporates elements associated with Barcelona and Catalonia, while Valencia CF's crest includes a bat associated with the historical and heraldic identity of Valencia. The selected logos therefore provide a basis for examining how visual signs connect football institutions with historical, regional, cultural, and sporting references. The study focuses on these four clubs rather than attempting to generalize its findings to every club competing in La Liga.

Previous studies have examined football club logos from several theoretical and practical perspectives. Rohmani et al. (2025), for instance, analysed verbal and non-verbal signs in the logos of the Big Six Premier League clubs using Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth. Their study demonstrates how football logos communicate identity through different levels of meaning. Barnes (2023), meanwhile, examined the relationship between club crests, corporate branding, and heritage, highlighting the significance of visual identity in maintaining historical continuity and supporters' relationships with their clubs. Although both studies establish the importance of football logos as meaningful representations, their approaches differ from the present study's focus on the relationships between signs and objects within Peirce's classification.

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Other research has approached football logos through branding and visual communication. Aydın & Aydın (2024) discussed the visual language of football logos and their relationship with branding strategies, while Mayorga Escalada & Suárez Carballo (2025) examined graphic brand redesign among La Liga clubs, particularly the role of simplicity in visual identity. These studies offer relevant perspectives on how logos communicate organizational characteristics and function as visual assets. However, their primary concerns, as presented in the literature reviewed for this study, differ from the specific analytical objective of classifying visual signs according to their relationships with objects. Research on football and regional identity, such as Shobe (2008), further establishes the importance of geographical and cultural context, particularly in the relationship between FC Barcelona and Catalan identity. Nevertheless, examining the relationship between club identity and regional context does not by itself establish whether individual visual elements function as icons, indexes, or symbols.

The existing literature thus provides important foundations for understanding football logos as expressions of identity, heritage, branding, and regional affiliation. However, a more focused analysis is needed to explain how individual visual elements establish different relationships with their respective objects within selected La Liga club logos. The research gap addressed by this study is therefore not the absence of previous research on football logos or identity, but the need for a systematic application of Peirce's icon, index, and symbol categories to examine how specific visual signs refer to historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional objects. By connecting the classification of signs with contextual evidence about their objects, the study seeks to distinguish visual description from semiotic interpretation and to explain how the relationships between signs and objects contribute to the representation of club identity.

Based on this research gap, this study examines the official logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF used during the 2025/2026 season. It aims to identify the visual signs contained in the selected logos, classify these signs as icons, indexes, or symbols according to their relationships with their respective objects, and explain how these relationships represent aspects of club identity. The study contributes to visual semiotics by applying Peirce's classification to football club logos while emphasizing the importance of identifying and substantiating the objects represented by visual signs. In doing so, it offers a focused account of how football club logos communicate identity through visual forms and their historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional associations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive qualitative method. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to identify and interpret visual signs contained in La Liga football club logos rather than measure them quantitatively. Creswell & Poth (2024) explain that qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding meanings and exploring phenomena through contextual interpretation. The descriptive qualitative method is applied to provide a systematic description of the visual signs found in the selected football club logos and explain their relationships with the objects they represent. Sandelowski (2000) states that qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive account of phenomena while remaining close to the data. The analysis is guided by Charles Sanders Peirce (1867) semiotic theory, particularly the classification of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols.

The dataset consists of four official football club logos representing Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF during the 2025/2026 La Liga season. The 2025/2026 season defines the temporal scope of the study. The research does not compare logos from the 2025 and 2026 seasons or investigate changes in logo design across different seasons. Instead, it examines the selected clubs' logos as visual representations used within the specified season.

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To establish the authenticity of the visual data, the source of each logo must be documented using verifiable institutional sources, such as the respective club's official website or the official La Liga website. For each image, the researcher records the club's name, source institution, source URL, and date of access. Where available, the logo is cross-checked against another official source to confirm that it corresponds to the club and the specified period. The original image files are retained for documentation and analysis. Bowen (2009) explains that documents can serve as valuable qualitative data sources and should be examined systematically according to their relevance and authenticity. The specific source and access details for each of the four logos are provided in the data documentation.

The unit of analysis is the individual visual sign within each club logo, rather than the logo as a single undivided image. The signs examined include identifiable graphic elements such as crowns, animals, footballs, shields, initials, colors, and regional emblems. Each element is considered for analysis when it can be identified visually and its relationship with a particular object can be examined using relevant contextual evidence.

This study uses purposive sampling to select four La Liga clubs: Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF. Palinkas et al. (2015) explain that purposeful sampling enables researchers to select information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives. The selection is based on the relevance of their logos to the research objectives and the presence of visual elements that can be examined in relation to historical, cultural, geographical, or institutional contexts. The four clubs provide a focused dataset for investigating how different types of sign-object relationships operate within football club logos.

The inclusion criteria are as follows: (1) the club competed in La Liga during the 2025/2026 season; (2) an official logo corresponding to the specified period could be identified through a verifiable institutional source; and (3) the logo contained identifiable visual elements relevant to the analysis of sign-object relationships. Logos that could not be verified through an official or otherwise reliable institutional source, as well as alternative historical or commemorative versions not used as the selected club logo for the specified season, were excluded. The study does not aim to represent every La Liga club statistically. Instead, it provides a contextual analysis of four purposively selected logos.

The data were analysed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles et al. (2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Peirce's classification of icons, indexes, and symbols served as the analytical framework. The coding procedure involved the following steps.

First, data collection involved gathering the official logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF used during the 2025/2026 season. The researcher documented the sources of the logos and collected supporting information from official club publications and relevant literature to establish the historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional contexts of the identified visual elements.

Second, data condensation involved selecting and organizing visual elements relevant to the research objectives. Each logo was examined to identify distinct elements, such as crowns, animals, footballs, shields, initials, colours, and regional emblems. Each element was then associated with a proposed object or referent based on its visual characteristics and supporting contextual evidence. The identified signs were classified according to Peirce's framework. An element was categorized as an icon when its relationship with the object was based on resemblance, an index when a direct or factual connection with the object could be established, and a symbol when the relationship depended on convention, habit, or an established cultural, historical, or institutional association (C S Peirce & Hoopes, 2010).

Third, data display involved organizing the findings into analytical tables. Each entry included the club's name, visual sign, identified object, semiotic category, supporting evidence, and interpretation in relation to club identity. These tables enabled systematic comparison of the signs identified across the four logos and showed how their relationships with different objects contributed to the representation of club identity.

Fourth, conclusion drawing and verification involved reviewing the classifications against Peirce's definitions and checking whether the interpretations were supported by the

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documented visual and contextual evidence. The findings from the four logos were compared and synthesized to identify patterns in the relationships between signs and objects and to explain how these relationships represented aspects of the selected clubs' identities. The analysis did not assume that all three semiotic categories had to appear in the dataset; each category was reported only when supported by the evidence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified several visual signs in the logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, FC Sevilla, and Valencia CF. The signs were classified as icons, indexes, or symbols based on their relationships with their respective objects. The analysis also considered the historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional associations represented by these signs. The findings show that the selected visual elements primarily function as symbols because their meanings are established through historical, cultural, or institutional conventions. However, the classification depends on the specific relationship between each visual sign and its object rather than on the visual form alone.

Table 1: Frequency of Semiotic Categories

Sign Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Symbols	14	72.22%
Icon	3	22.22%
Indexes	0	0%
Symbols and Icon	1	5.56%
Total	**18**	**100%**

The findings indicate that symbols constitute the largest category in the current coding. Their proportion is 78.9% of the 19 category assignments, while icons account for 21.1%. No indexes were identified. These percentages describe the coded entries in the four selected logos; they do not represent all visual elements in La Liga logos or all clubs competing in the league. The predominance of symbols suggests that the selected crests communicate identity largely through established associations rather than visual resemblance alone. However, this result depends on the consistency and evidential support of the coding. Elements whose symbolic meanings cannot be substantiated should be reconsidered before the final frequency is reported.

Real Madrid CF Logo



The Real Madrid CF logo contains several visual elements, including a royal crown, the initials "MCF," a blue diagonal stripe, and the colours gold, blue, white, and red. These elements form a distinctive visual representation of the club. In the analysis, the crown, initials, blue diagonal stripe, and gold colour are identified as symbols because their meanings depend on established associations with the club's institutional and historical identity.

Table 2: Analysis of Real Madrid CF Logo

Visual Sign	Type of Sign	Object	Meaning in Club Identity
Royal crown	Symbol	Royal patronage associated with the Spanish monarchy	Represents royal status, prestige, and historical legitimacy
"MCF"	Symbol	Madrid Club de Fútbol	Represents the official institutional identity of the club
Blue diagonal stripe	Symbol	Traditional element of the club crest	Represents continuity and historical identity
Gold color	Symbol	Established association with achievement and prestige	Represents the club's distinguished reputation and achievements

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The Real Madrid CF logo contains several visual elements associated with the club's institutional and historical identity. The elements examined in this study include the royal crown, the initials "MCF," the blue diagonal stripe, and the gold colour. Their classifications depend on the specific objects to which they refer rather than on their visual forms alone.

The royal crown is classified as a symbol because its association with royalty depends on an established cultural convention. Although the crown is a recognizable object, the relevant object in this analysis is not merely a physical crown. in 1920, King Alfonso XIII awarded a royal title to the club for the work done to promote the city of Madrid all over the world. From that moment, the club was renamed Real Madrid CF (Source: MARCA).

The initials "MCF" also function as a symbol. The letters refer to Madrid Club de Fútbol through a naming convention. They do not resemble the institution physically; their meaning depends on the relationship between the initials and the club's name. The initials therefore provide institutional identification within the crest. They also demonstrate how verbal elements can function within a visual sign system.

The blue diagonal stripe and gold colour require a more cautious interpretation. The stripe may contribute to visual continuity because it forms part of the club's crest, but repeated appearance alone does not prove that it represents a specific historical value. Similarly, gold may conventionally evoke prestige or distinction, yet this general association should not automatically be treated as an established meaning specific to Real Madrid CF. These elements can be classified as symbols only when their proposed meanings are supported by relevant historical or institutional evidence.

Taken together, the crown and initials provide the clearest symbolic examples in the selected Real Madrid CF analysis. They communicate different dimensions of identity: the crown refers to historical and institutional associations, while the initials identify the organization. This distinction illustrates how a crest can combine signs that refer to heritage with signs that establish institutional recognition. The interpretation is consistent with Barnes (2023), who discusses the relationship between football club crests, heritage, and institutional identity.

FC Barcelona Logo



The FC Barcelona logo also contains several visual signs that represent the club's historical, cultural, geographical, and institutional identity. The major elements identified in the logo include the Cross of Saint George, the Catalan flag or Senyera, the initials "FCB," and the blue and garnet stripes. These elements establish different associations with Barcelona and Catalonia and therefore contribute to the construction of the club's distinctive visual identity.

Table 3: Analysis of FC Barcelona Logo

Visual Sign	Type of Sign	Object	Meaning in Club Identity
Cross of Saint George	Symbol	Saint George and his association with Barcelona	Represents historical and local heritage
Catalan flag (Senyera)	Symbol	Catalonia and Catalan cultural identity	Represents cultural and regional association
"FCB"	Symbol	Futbol Club Barcelona	Represents official institutional identity
Blue and garnet stripes	Symbol	Traditional FC Barcelona colors	Represents continuity and club tradition

The FC Barcelona crest contains visual elements associated with the club, the city of Barcelona, and Catalonia. The signs examined here are the Cross of Saint George, the Catalan flag or Senyera, the initials "FCB," and the blue and garnet stripes. Their significance arises primarily from established historical, cultural, and institutional associations.

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The Cross of Saint George is classified as a **symbol** because its relationship with Barcelona's historical identity depends on cultural convention. The cross does not resemble the city or the football club. Instead, its meaning depends on the established association between the emblem, Saint George, and Barcelona. Within the crest, the cross connects the club's visual identity with local historical heritage. This interpretation should be supported by a reliable source documenting the emblem's use and significance in Barcelona.

The Senyera also functions as a **symbol**. Its colours and design refer to Catalonia through a recognized regional emblem. The relationship between the flag and Catalan identity is conventional rather than based on visual resemblance. Its inclusion in the crest consequently communicates regional affiliation alongside the club's institutional identity. This association is significant because football clubs can become prominent representations of regional identities, as discussed by Gómez-Bantel (2016). Shobe (2008) also examines the relationship between FC Barcelona, place, and Catalan identity.

The initials "FCB" function as a symbol because their relationship with Football Club Barcelona depends on linguistic and institutional convention. The initials identify the organization without visually resembling the institution itself. In contrast, the blue and garnet stripes derive their meaning from their established association with the club's visual identity. They function symbolically when understood as the club's traditional colours rather than merely as coloured areas within the design.

These signs communicate complementary dimensions of FC Barcelona's identity. The initials identify the institution, while the Cross of Saint George and the Senyera connect the crest with the historical and regional context of Barcelona and Catalonia. The blue and garnet stripes reinforce the club's visual continuity. The crest therefore operates not simply as a recognizable badge but as a combination of institutional and culturally established signs. Its regional references are particularly relevant to the relationship between football, place, and collective identity discussed by Shobe (2008).

Sevilla FC Logo



The Sevilla FC crest contains several visual signs that represent different aspects of the club's historical, cultural, and institutional identity. The modern crest retains the basic structure introduced in 1922 and consists of a shield divided into three sections. The main visual elements include three historical and religious figures associated with Seville, the interlaced "SFC" initials, a football, and red-and-white vertical stripes. These elements establish different relationships with the objects they represent and can therefore be analyzed through Charles Sanders Peirce's classification of signs as icons, indexes, and symbols.

Table 4: Analysis of FC Sevilla Logo

Visual Sign	Type of Sign	Object	Interpretation
Three historical figures	Icon	Isidore of Seville, Ferdinand III of Castile, and Leander of Seville	Represents the historical, religious, and cultural heritage of the city of Seville
"SFC" initials	Symbol	Sevilla Football Club	Identifies the institutional name and identity of the club
Football	Icon	The sport of football	Represents the sporting activity and the fundamental purpose of the club
Red-and-white vertical stripes	Symbol	Sevilla FC's traditional colors and historical associations with Seville	Represents the club's visual tradition and its connection with the historical identity of Seville

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The Sevilla FC crest combines historical figures, the initials "SFC," a football, and red-and-white vertical stripes. These elements establish different relationships with their respective objects and therefore provide examples of both iconic and symbolic signs.

The three historical figures depicted in the crest are classified as an iconic sign because their visual representations resemble the individuals they depict. The figures are identified in the existing analysis as Isidore of Seville, Ferdinand III of Castile, and Leander of Seville. This classification concerns the relationship between the depictions and the historical individuals. Their significance within the crest, however, extends beyond resemblance: their inclusion also associates the club with Seville's historical and religious heritage. The identity of the figures and their connection with the city should be documented using a reliable source on Sevilla FC's crest or the history of Seville.

The initials "SFC" function as a symbol because their relationship with Sevilla Fútbol Club depends on the convention of using initials to identify an institution. The letters do not resemble the club itself. Their meaning depends on the recognized relationship between the initials and the club's name. Their presence thus reinforces institutional identity within the crest.

The football functions as an icon because its visual form resembles the equipment used in the sport. This relationship does not depend on prior knowledge of the club's history. The sign visually identifies the sporting activity with which the institution is associated. Its iconic function therefore differs from the symbolic function of the initials.

The red-and-white vertical stripes are classified as symbols because their relationship with Sevilla FC is based on established visual tradition. The stripes help identify the club through a recognizable design. However, any further claim that these colors represent a particular historical event, such as the Reconquest of Seville in 1248, requires specific documentary support. A proposed historical origin should not be treated as established solely because it appears in an account of the crest.

The combination of these signs connects Sevilla FC with sporting and institutional identity while also incorporating references to the history of Seville. The football identifies the sporting context through resemblance, whereas the initials establish the club's institutional identity through convention. The historical figures provide a visual link to particular individuals and, through their documented context, to the city's heritage. This combination illustrates how a crest can communicate several dimensions of identity through different sign-object relationships.

Valencia CF Logo



The Valencia Club de Fútbol logo contains several visual signs that are closely connected to the historical, geographical, and cultural identity of Valencia. Based on the historical account, the most distinctive element is the bat positioned above the shield. Other important elements include the crown, the red and yellow colors derived from the Senyera flag of the Comunitat de Valencia, the blue color, and the shield itself. These elements were incorporated into the club's logo from its early development and continued to appear in subsequent versions of the crest. The visual elements therefore function not only as identifiers of Valencia CF but also as references to the history and cultural identity of the region.

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Table 5: Analysis of Valencia CF Logo

Visual Sign	Type of Sign	Object	Interpretation / Identity
Bat	Icon / Symbol	Bat and the historical identity of Valencia	Represents Valencia's historical and heraldic identity
Crown	Symbol	James I's royal/historical heritage	Represents historical heritage and royal association
Red and Yellow Colors	Symbol	Senyera of the Comunitat de Valencia	Represents regional and cultural identity
Blue Color	Symbol	Regional and club visual identity	Represents continuity with the regional color tradition
Football	Icon	Football	Represents the club's identity as a football organization
Shield	Symbol	Valencia's heraldic/regional identity	Represents regional heritage and institutional identity

The Valencia CF crest contains a bat, a crown, red and yellow colors, a blue color element, a football, and a shield. Among these elements, the bat is particularly significant because it demonstrates how one visual form can establish more than one semiotic relationship.

The bat functions as an icon when the relationship is considered between its depiction and the physical animal. The image resembles a bat and can therefore be recognized through visual similarity. However, the bat also functions as a symbol within Valencia's historical and heraldic identity. This second interpretation depends on the established cultural association between the bat and the city of Valencia, rather than on resemblance alone.

The historical account discussed in the existing manuscript associates the bat with a legend concerning James I of Aragon during the Reconquista and its subsequent incorporation into Valencia's heraldic identity. This account should be presented as a historical legend or traditional explanation unless reliable evidence establishes the relevant historical details. The distinction matters because the bat's symbolic function can be analyzed through its established cultural association without treating every detail of the legend as a verified historical event. Its presence in the club crest consequently connects the institution with Valencia's recognizable heraldic identity.

The crown functions as a symbol because its association with royal authority and historical heritage depends on cultural convention. The existing analysis connects it with James I of Aragon and the historical imagery associated with Valencia. To substantiate this interpretation, the article should cite a reliable source documenting the crown's origin or role in the club's crest. The crown's appearance alone is insufficient to establish a specific historical relationship.

The red and yellow colors also function as symbols because their association with the Senyera and the regional identity of Valencia depends on established convention. Their meaning does not arise from resemblance to the region itself. Instead, their use in the crest refers to a recognized regional emblem. The blue color may similarly function as a symbol of the club's visual identity, but its particular historical or regional meaning requires supporting evidence. If no reliable source establishes that meaning, the analysis should describe the color as a visual feature rather than assign it a specific historical interpretation.

The football functions as an icon because it visually resembles the object used in the sport. Its meaning is therefore based on resemblance, and it identifies the club's sporting context. The shield, meanwhile, functions as a symbol when interpreted within the conventions of heraldic design and its established association with Valencia's regional or institutional identity. This classification depends on the documented meaning of the particular

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shield, rather than on the assumption that every shield necessarily represents regional heritage.

The Valencia CF crest thus combines signs that communicate sporting identity with signs associated with regional and historical identity. The football represents the sport iconically, while the bat, crown, regional colors, and shield acquire broader meanings through their cultural, historical, and institutional associations. The bat is especially illustrative because its iconic relationship with the animal differs from its symbolic relationship with Valencia. This distinction demonstrates why semiotic classification must specify the object being represented instead of assigning a single category to an element solely on the basis of its appearance.

Across the four selected logos, the findings indicate that club identity is represented through different relationships between visual signs and their objects. Icons establish meaning through resemblance, as illustrated by the footballs in the Sevilla FC and Valencia CF crests and the depictions of historical figures in the Sevilla FC crest. These signs make particular objects or activities visually recognizable. Their iconic function is relatively direct, although further cultural or historical interpretations still require contextual evidence.

Symbols play a broader role in the dataset because many of the identified elements refer to objects through established conventions. Club initials identify institutions, traditional colors support recognition, and regional emblems connect clubs with particular cultural or geographical identities. The Cross of Saint George and the Senyera in the FC Barcelona crest, for example, refer to local and regional contexts through culturally established associations. Similarly, the bat in the Valencia CF crest has a symbolic significance that cannot be explained through visual resemblance alone.

The distinction between symbols and indexes is particularly important in interpreting these findings. A sign does not become an index simply because it refers to a place, historical period, or institution. A symbolic relationship is established when the connection depends on convention or learned cultural associations. An index, by contrast, requires evidence of a direct or factual connection with its object. In the present dataset, the historical and regional associations discussed in the existing analyses are primarily symbolic, while the clearly identified iconic signs rely on resemblance. No index is reported because the current evidence does not establish a distinct indexical relationship.

These patterns also show why the visual content of a crest should be distinguished from its semiotic interpretation. Identifying a crown, flag, animal, or color describes what appears in the logo. Explaining that the crown refers to royal heritage, that the Senyera represents Catalan identity, or that the bat evokes Valencia's heraldic tradition interprets how a sign relates to a particular object. Such interpretations are persuasive only when the proposed relationship is supported by historical or cultural evidence.

The findings are consistent with research that considers football crests as expressions of heritage and identity rather than merely as graphic identifiers (Barnes, 2023; Michailidis et al., 2016). They also complement research on the relationship between football and regional identity (Gómez-Bantel, 2016; Shobe, 2008). The contribution of the present analysis lies in specifying how selected visual signs establish different relationships with their objects under Peirce's framework. Instead of treating all meaningful elements as equivalent, it distinguishes resemblance-based representation from convention-based association and requires direct evidence before identifying an index.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study. The dataset contains four purposively selected logos, not every club competing in La Liga. The reported proportions describe the coding of these selected signs and should not be generalized to the entire league. The analysis also depends on the availability of reliable club-specific historical information. Consequently, interpretations of regional identity, heraldic heritage, and the historical origins of particular colors or graphic elements should be supported by documented sources before definitive conclusions are drawn.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study examined visual signs in the logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF during the 2025/2026 La Liga season using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework. Eighteen visual-sign entries were identified and analyzed based on their relationships with objects and contributions to club identity. The findings revealed that symbols were the most prevalent category (14 entries; 72.22%), followed by icons (3; 22.22%) and one sign functioning as both (5.56%). No indexes were identified because the evidence did not establish sufficiently direct or factual connections. These results indicate that the selected logos primarily represent institutional, historical, cultural, and regional identities through conventional associations and visual resemblance. The study demonstrates the usefulness of Peircean semiotics in distinguishing visual identification from interpretation and examining how signs represent identity. However, the research was limited to four clubs, relied on contextual interpretation, and did not investigate audience reception. Future studies should include more clubs, additional historical sources, and audience perspectives.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions: Fadel Muhamad Mubaroq contributed to conceptualization, research methodology, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the initial manuscript. Dewi Kustanti contributed to research supervision, theoretical guidance, methodological review, and critical revision of the manuscript. Erlan Aditya contributed to data validation, interpretation of findings, and manuscript review. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the research or the publication of this article.

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Ethical Approval: This study analyzed publicly available visual materials, specifically the logos of Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona, Sevilla FC, and Valencia CF. Since the research did not involve human participants or animals, ethical approval was not required.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was not required for this study because it did not involve human participants. The research focused exclusively on the analysis of publicly available football club logos.

Use of Generative AI: Generative AI tools were used exclusively to assist with English language refinement, including grammar checking, vocabulary selection, and sentence structure improvement. These tools were not used to generate research data, conduct the semiotic analysis, or determine research conclusions. The authors reviewed the language suggestions and remain fully responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

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