

Graphic Design in Destination Branding: A Visual Analysis of Caribbean Country Brand Marks

**Diseño gráfico en el *branding* de destinos turísticos: un análisis visual
de las marcas país en el mar Caribe**

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Recibido / Received: 27/12/2025
Aprobado / Approved: 11/03/2026

Abstract

This article analyses 25 brand marks from countries bordering the Caribbean Sea to identify their visual components, describe their formal characteristics, and detect common patterns in the graphic design used in the branding of tourist destinations. Based on a quantitative, inductive approach, content analysis was employed to analyse the linguistic signs, iconographic symbols, and chromatic elements of these brand marks across four dimensions, 19 variables, and 77 categories. The results revealed a preference for nominal strategies, sans serif typography, and the predominant use of English, at the expense of symbolic or cultural elements. This tendency was interpreted ambivalently: on the one hand, as a lack of renewal in the face of current branding trends that prioritise flexible, narrative graphic systems; on the other hand, as a conscious decision to avoid visual clichés associated with the Caribbean's exotic imagery. In a complementary manner, the limited presence of elements of national identity, such as national colours or cultural symbols, suggested a strategy of visual differentiation in the governmental image, oriented towards a more neutral, versatile, and commercial aesthetic. The study provides a visual analysis model applicable to other brand marks and contributes to assessing the materiality of the territory contained in tourism branding. Furthermore, the results of this analysis can support decision-making by design, marketing, and tourism managers and professionals seeking to advance tourism and economic development in a destination.

Keywords: graphic design; visual identity; visual communication; country branding; destination branding.

Díaz Mesa, H., Roca Vera, D. & Candela Sanjuán, B.A. (2026). Graphic Design in Destination Branding: A Visual Analysis of Caribbean Country Brand Marks. *ArDIn. Arte, Diseño e Ingeniería*, 15, 397-427.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza 25 marcas gráficas de países bañados por el mar Caribe con el objetivo de identificar sus componentes visuales, describir sus características formales y detectar patrones comunes en su diseño. A partir de un enfoque

cuantitativo e inductivo, se empleó el análisis de contenido para examinar los signos lingüísticos, los símbolos iconográficos y los elementos cromáticos de dichas marcas a través de cuatro dimensiones, 19 variables y 77 categorías. Los resultados revelaron una preferencia por las estrategias nominales, las familias tipográficas de palo seco y el predominio del uso de la lengua inglesa, en detrimento de elementos simbólicos o culturales. Esta tendencia se interpretó de forma ambivalente: por un lado, como una falta de renovación frente a las tendencias actuales en la creación de marcas, que priorizan sistemas gráficos flexibles y narrativos; y por otro, como una decisión consciente de evitar los clichés visuales asociados al imaginario exótico del Caribe. De manera complementaria, la escasa presencia de elementos de identidad nacional, como los colores nacionales o los símbolos culturales, sugirió una estrategia de diferenciación visual respecto a la imagen gubernamental, orientada a una estética más neutra, versátil y comercial. El estudio proporciona un modelo de análisis visual aplicable a otras marcas gráficas y contribuye a valorar la materialidad del territorio en el *branding* turístico. Además, los resultados obtenidos en este análisis pueden apoyar el proceso de toma de decisiones de los gestores y profesionales del diseño, *marketing* y turismo que buscan el desarrollo turístico y económico de un destino.

Palabras clave: diseño gráfico; identidad visual; comunicación visual; marca destino; marca-país; destination branding.

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Summary / Sumario: 1. Introduction. 1.1. Research Objectives and Design-Oriented Research Questions. 2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Background. 2.1. Territorial and Tourist Destination Branding. 2.2. Visual Language and Visual Identity Structure. 2.3. Brand Mark. 3. Methodology. 3.1. Method. 3.2. Sample 3.3. Procedure. 4. Results. 4.1. Generic Dimension. 4.2. Linguistic Sign. 4.3. Iconographic Symbol. 4.4. Chromatism. 5. Discussion. 6. Conclusion.

1. Introduction

Graphic design is a discipline that actively intervenes in communication processes by combining text, images, and a specific visual grammar to construct meanings and confer symbolic value to objects (Martín-Sanromán, 2016). In this way, graphic design focuses on creating visual representations. It acts as a mediator in the configuration and transmission of messages, strategically structuring information to facilitate understanding and interaction with the recipient.

Among the fields of action of graphic design is visual identity, a fundamental element in how organisations identify themselves, differentiate themselves, and relate to their audiences (Jimenez-Gómez et al., 2024). According to Costa (2004), the configuration of visual identity integrates different linguistic and visual elements, including the brand name, brand mark, colour palette, typography, photographs, visual patterns and iconography (Wheeler & Meyerson, 2025). Among these components, the brand mark plays a central role in constructing visual identity (Fernández-Iñurritegui, 2007; Olins, 2009).

The construction of a brand mark is based on nominal identifiers—such as logotypes—or symbolic identifiers—such as isotypes—which can be presented individually or together (Raposo, 2008; Chaves, 2022). Beyond their identifying function, these signs operate as vehicles of communication, laden with meaning and capable of expressing corporate, cultural, and social values (Fernández-Iñurritegui, 2007). In this sense, brand design is an exercise in communication design that transcends the visual to become a symbolic conversation between organisations and their audiences (Raposo et al., 2022).

Since the late 20th century, branding has played a fundamental role in the construction and consolidation of territorial brands. This practice is no longer linked to the purely commercial sphere but has become a key strategy for territorial positioning (Díaz-Mesa & Ruiz-Rallo, 2025). In a globalised and interconnected world, many countries, regions, and cities have adopted large-scale territorial branding

policies to reinforce their identities, generate a sense of belonging, attract investment, and promote tourism (Dopico-Castro, 2021). As a result, many territories have brand marks designed for their external projection and promotion.

Within territorial branding, destination branding is a complex, strategic process that aims to communicate authentic experiences and differentiate a destination from competing global offerings (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). Although it is a relatively new concept in academic research (Blain et al., 2005; Schaar, 2013), destination branding addresses the need to articulate coherent tourism identities, developed from a multidisciplinary perspective and involving multiple actors within the territory (Marzano & Scott, 2006). Thus, destination branding goes beyond tourism promotion and encompasses all perceptions of a country held by international agents (Mocanu, 2014). Although it shares some similarities with product branding, it presents unique challenges and dimensions that require specific theoretical and methodological frameworks (Schaar, 2013).

In this scenario, Caribbean tourist destinations face the challenge of differentiating themselves in a market of stereotypical images—such as beaches, palm trees, and tropical landscapes—that are repeated with slight visual variations (Daye, 2008; Daye, 2010). This homogenisation limits the development of unique value propositions and hinders the construction of distinctive visual identities and brand marks. Recent research highlights the importance of designing strong brand marks as part of a comprehensive branding strategy to generate differentiated value and establish credibility in the tourist experience (Almeyda & George, 2020).

Therefore, there is a clear need to focus on symbolic, distinctive, and culturally resonant brand images that leverage the possibilities for mass customisation offered by information and communication technologies (Daye, 2010; Henthorne et al., 2016). As a result, graphic design for tourist destination branding is an important area of study, as it helps explain how visual elements communicate a place's identity and enhance a destination's competitiveness in a globalised market.

This research contributes to the field of graphic design and visual communication by proposing a replicable model for the formal analysis of destination brand marks, centred on their linguistic sign, iconographic symbol and chromatism. Unlike previous studies that approach destination branding predominantly from marketing or tourism management perspectives, this study places graphic design at the core of the analysis, examining how visual signs construct meaning, identity and differentiation at a territorial level.

1.1. Research Objectives and Design-Oriented Research Questions

The main objective of this research is to analyse the brand marks of the countries bordering the Caribbean Sea, focusing on the visual identity signs that comprise them. Based on this general objective, the following specific objectives are proposed: (1) to identify the brand marks used by Caribbean countries in their tourism promotion strategies; (2) to describe the visual characteristics of the brand marks, considering formal aspects; (3) to detect possible common patterns and recurring strategies in the design of these destination brands.

The research is structured in two complementary phases. First, an analysis tool is developed by identifying and categorising variables. Second, the analysis tool is applied to a representative sample of target brands, allowing for empirical and comparative observation of the graphic signs.

To guide the analysis and ensure a systematic approach, the following research questions are formulated: (1) Is there a specific typology for the graphic identifiers used in Caribbean destination brands? (2) What visual strategies are used to identify and position tourist destinations in this region? (3) Are there standard graphic, chromatic or typographic patterns in the brand marks that represent territorial tourism products? If so, what are they?

These questions served as the basis for developing a matrix of categories and variables to describe, classify, and compare brand marks in formal terms, thereby

providing an analytical model applicable to the study of visual language in the branding of tourist destinations.

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Background

2.1. Territorial and Tourist Destination Branding

Chaves (2018), in his book *La marca-país en América Latina*, argues that brand building has transcended the marketing sphere and that many territories already have brands to promote them. Along the same lines, Cassisi (2020), in his article *Cómo crear una marca-lugar*, explains that place branding programmes are conscious, long-term operations that promote a territory—whether a city, country or region—in domestic and international public opinion, to secure a specific place in people's minds to encourage and boost the flow of capital to that place.

Thus, place branding is the application of branding principles, generally reserved for consumer products and services, to geographical areas, including municipalities, provinces/states, regions, and nations (Briciu, 2013; Briciu & Briciu, 2016). Therefore, territorial brands are not limited to tourism; they can also include branding aimed at promoting foreign direct investment, immigration, exports, or other geopolitical objectives.

Like all brands, a place brand's purpose is to establish a unique identity that communicates information to its target audience. These identity markers convey messages that distinguish the brand (place) from others and project desirable characteristics intended to attract key audiences (Graham, 2020).

Within territorial brands, the destination brand typology is recognised. The *Destination Branding Manual*, published by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the European Tourism Commission (ETC) in 2011, defines destination branding as a vision focused on the virtues and unique features of a place that make it attractive to visitors and differentiate it from competitors. It focuses on the tourism

dimension, communicating the area's image and values, fostering an emotional bond with the public, and telling the place's story.

2.2. Visual Language and Visual Identity Structure

Visual language, as stated by Tena-Parera (2006), comprises basic elements such as colour, typography, spatial layout, and other graphic resources that directly affect the quality, coherence, and effectiveness of the visual message. Along the same lines, Martín-Sanromán and Suárez-Carballo (2018) emphasise that these components significantly contribute to the construction of meaning in graphic design, giving the message intentionality and symbolic depth.

Raposo (2012) distinguishes three related concepts: visual identity, understood as the graphic expression of an organisation; corporate identity, which defines its conceptual foundations; and corporate image, which refers to the perception that audiences construct about the organisation. Based on this differentiation, Oliveira and Raposo (2016) define visual identity as a structured system of graphic signs that seeks to make the identity of a product, service, institution or territory visible, facilitating its understanding and identification by the public.

This visual system includes elements such as the name, brand mark, institutional colours, typography and slogan (van den Bosch et al., 2006; Wheeler & Mayerson, 2025). For Olins (2009), these elements must function coherently to communicate the organisation's identity effectively. However, he states that the brand mark represents the system's structural core. In Wheeler and Mayerson's (2025) words, it is the 'most visible and frequent reminder of what the brand represents' (p. 35).

2.3. Brand Mark

As part of the place branding process, many territories develop a range of tools to help establish their brand identity. One of the main elements of a destination's identity is the brand mark: a visual symbol intended to be widely recognised, creating a unique brand identity that attracts or targets the target audience (Graham, 2020). As a fundamental component of brand architecture, the brand mark is key to helping distinguish one destination from another (Beritelli & Laesser, 2018).

Thus, the design of an effective destination brand positioning strategy is essential for attracting tourists and influencing their decisions to travel there (Martí-Noguera et al., 2015).

The author Fernández-Iñurritegui (2007) proposes the following diagram, which presents the various signs that constitute the system of meanings of visual identity (see Figure 1). On the one hand, there is the verbal sign—which refers to the brand's name or designation—or verbal text. On the other hand, visual signs constitute graphic text, including typographic, iconographic, and chromatic signs.

Visual signs comprise a variable number of elements, relationships or interactions between them, and laws that, according to the same author, could be called the laws of structure and order (Fernández-Iñurritegui, 2007). In this way, the brand mark can be understood as a set of interrelated elements that form a unified whole. The combination of these elements—typographic, iconographic, and chromatic—enables an immense range of expressive possibilities.

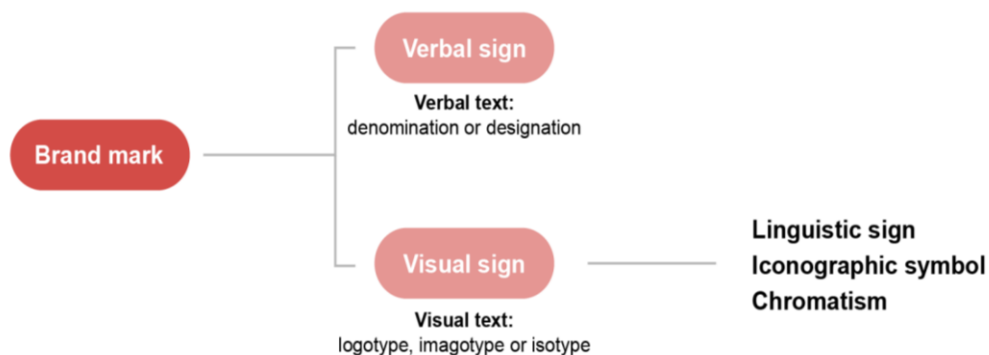


Figure 1. Semiotic system of the brand mark. Source: own work based on Fernández-Iñurritegui (2007).

Based on these theoretical contributions, this research examines the strategic importance of visual identity as a means of communicating intangible values, the territory's personality, and issuers' symbolic narratives, in the context of territorial branding, particularly destination branding. Thus, the article focuses on analysing the visual language that shapes the brand marks of the countries bordering the

Caribbean Sea, understood as coded visual systems that express, represent and project their national identity.

3. Methodology

This research builds on previous studies on visual analysis in graphic design (Martín-Sanromán & Suárez-Carballo, 2018; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2024), which have examined brand marks from a formal and communicative perspective. While sharing the same object of analysis—brand marks—this study adopts a differentiated methodological approach by proposing its own analytical categories and variables and by focusing on a specific sample: the brand marks of countries with coastlines on the Caribbean Sea.

To achieve the research objectives, a quantitative methodological approach was employed, as it allows visual data to be systematically organised, codified, and compared objectively (Tena-Parera, 2023).

3.1. Method

Noble and Bestly (2005), in their book *Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methodologies in Design*, define research methods as approaches to design problems or to investigating contexts in which to work. Systematic research methods encourage designers to develop a personal and critical perspective by recording, documenting, and evaluating visual and verbal structures, languages, and identities within the broader environment.

According to this definition, the method used in this study is content analysis, a set of techniques aimed at systematically describing the semantic and formal components of all types of messages and at drawing valid conclusions from the collected data (Colle, 2014). This method facilitates the structured examination of visual communication through mutually exclusive categories that codify different parts of the visual message (Martín-Sanromán & Suárez-Carballo, 2018).

The content analysis applied in this study is based on four fundamental principles: objectivity, through replicable analysis procedures that guarantee the verification of results; systematicity, referring to processes of inclusion or exclusion of categories according to pre-established criteria; manifest content, which examines both the visual elements of the message and its underlying meanings; and generalisability, using quantitative data to confirm or reject hypotheses and draw conclusions (Adamus-Matuszyńska et al., 2021; Prendes-Espinosa, 1996; Rose, 2001).

3.2. Sample

The destination brands analysed are centred on the Caribbean Sea. The brand image of tourist destinations in this region is of great importance, as most countries bordering the Caribbean Sea—especially the islands—rely on tourism for their economies (Clegg et al., 2020). Since the 1950s, the sector has grown considerably, and the Caribbean has become one of the world's most dependent regions on this industry (Griffin, 2016). In 2024, the region received more than 34.2 million international tourists, confirming its strategic role in the Caribbean economy (Caribbean Tourism Organisation, 2025).

Such is its importance that all countries sharing Caribbean waters have joined forces in the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO). This organisation is an international development agency that represents Caribbean countries and provides them with assistance to move towards a sustainable tourism model in the region.

The research analysed the official brand marks of 23¹ independent countries bordering the Caribbean Sea. Based on this geographic criterion, the brand marks corresponding to these countries were compiled to form the study sample. This sample is sufficiently representative to draw initial conclusions regarding the article's objectives. The complete set of analysed marks is presented in Figure 2.

¹ The original sample for the study included 25 countries. However, Guyana and Suriname were excluded due to the absence of official tourism websites and identifiable brand marks. Thus, the sample was reduced to 23 countries. Of these, two—Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago—consist of two main islands, each with its own brand mark. As there was no single representative brand for each country, it was decided to analyse the brands of each island individually. As a result, the final sample for analysis consisted of 23 countries and 25 graphic brands.



Figure 2.

Brand marks in the Caribbean Sea. Note: the graphic marks correspond to those that appeared on the official tourism website of each country on June 12, 2025. Source: own work.

3.3. Procedure

The content analysis of the graphic symbols used to identify Caribbean countries was carried out in four different stages: (1) searching for brand marks; (2) defining coding categories; (3) coding the images; and (4) analysing the results obtained.

In the words of Fernández-Cavia and Castro (2015), 'official websites are crucial tools for disseminating the image, promoting the brand and marketing destinations' (p. 168). For this reason, the official tourism websites of the selected countries were identified through a Google desktop search. To do this, combinations of terms such as 'country name' + 'visit', 'country name' + 'travel', 'country name' +

'tourism website', and 'country name' + 'destination website' were used—only sites identified as official were included.

An analysis of institutional Instagram accounts verified that the brand mark used on the website is consistent with that used on this social network. The list of countries, along with their official tourism websites and Instagram accounts, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Sample of countries analysed with their official tourism websites and institutional Instagram accounts. Source: own work.

| Country | Official Website | Instagram Account |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Antigua and Barbuda | visitantiguabarbuda.com | @antiguaandbarbuda |
| Bahamas | bahamas.com | @visitthebahamas |
| Barbados | visitbarbados.org | @visitbarbados |
| Belize | travelbelize.org | @travelbelize |
| Colombia | colombia.travel | @colombia.travel |
| Costa Rica | visitcostarica.com | @visit_costarica |
| Cuba | mintur.gob.cu | @minturcuba |
| Dominica | discoverdominica.com | @discoverdominica |
| Florida (United States) | visitflorida.com | @visitflorida |
| Grenada | puregrenada.com | @puregrenada |
| Guatemala | visitguatemala.gt | @visitguatemala_ |
| Haití | www.tourisme.gouv.ht | @mtourismehaiti |
| Honduras | visithonduras.iht.hn | @visithonduras |
| Jamaica | visitjamaica.com | @visitjamaica |
| Mexico | visitmexico.com | @visitmexico |
| Nicaragua | visitanicaragua.com | @visitanicaragua |
| Panamá | tourismpanama.com | @visitpanama |
| Dominican Republic | es.godominicanrepublic.com | @godomrep |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Saint Kitts and Nevis | visitstkitts.com nevisland.com | @stkittstourism @nevisnaturally |
| Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | discoversvg.com | @discover.svg |
| Saint Lucia | stlucia.org | @travelsaintlucia |
| Trinidad and Tobago | visittobago.gov.tt visittrinidad.tt | @visittobago @booktrinidad |
| Venezuela | venezuela.com.ve | @marcapaisven |

Once the sample of brand marks was identified from official websites and institutional Instagram accounts, an analysis sheet was designed based on various theoretical variables. For the initial development of this instrument, a review of the scientific and academic literature on graphic design, corporate visual identity (CVI), and tourism destination branding was conducted using reference databases such as Web of Science and Scopus.

To define the coding categories, the taxonomy proposed by the researcher and graphic designer Mollerup (2013) was adopted. Based on the theoretical dimensions of IVC identified in the literature, the variables were organised into four dimensions: generic variables, linguistic sign, iconographic symbol and chromatism. The theoretical variables were defined based on criteria of similarity and conceptual relevance, covering aspects of linguistic, iconic, and plastic signs. Thus, the analysis taxonomy comprises four dimensions, totalling 19 variables and 77 categories (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Analysis taxonomy: categories, variables, and variable values. Source: own work.

| Dimension | Variables | Categories | Description |
|-----------|------------------------|--|--|
| Generic | Identifier | Nominal/symbolic | The primary graphic element that allows the brand to be recognised, either through a verbal (nominal) or visual (symbolic) sign. |
| | Visual identity format | Pure logotype/ imagotype/ logotype with accessory/ | The appearance or visual form that brand names have, |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | symbol only/ logo-symbol/ logotype with background | the different visual formats, in which they can be represented, |
| | Identification strategy | Heraldic/ abstract/ illustrated nominal/ capitular/ pure nominal/ iconic/ narrative | The brand's visual approach to building its identity is based on formal and conceptual resources. |
| | Layout of elements | Sign below and text above/ sign above and text below/ sign right and text left/ sign left and text right/ sign in the middle of the text/ sign only/ text only/ other | Visual order of the composition as a whole, from the analysis of the arrangement of the elements that form it. |
| Linguistic sign | Text language | English/ Spanish/ other language | The language in which the text in the composition is written. |
| | Additional text | Existing (slogan, descriptive or explanatory text)/ Non- existent | Whether or not a slogan is present, there is an additional textual message accompanying the brand. |
| | Family typology typography | Decorative or fantasy/ Egyptian/ Script/ Incised/ Roman/ Sans serif | Type of typeface family to which the main text of the composition belongs, according to its morphological characteristics. |
| | Representation of the typographic character | Upper case/ lower case/ upper and lower case/ small capitals | Manifestations that characters can take based on their morphological characteristics of size and shape. Applies to the primary and additional text. |
| | Typology | Standard/ retouched/ exclusive | Typographic design style, whether it is a common (standard) typeface, modified (retouched), or created exclusively for the brand (exclusive). |
| | Character style (main text) | Bold/light/regular | Font types that can be used for the main text characters, depending on their thickness. |
| | Iconographic symbol | Number of differentiable forms | 1 form/ 2 forms/ 3 or more forms/ does not exist |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| | Type of shapes | Abstract/ Basic shapes (circle, cross, square, arrow, triangle)/ Figurative (artificial, natural, verbal) | Types of figures and shapes that may be present in the composition. |
| | Type of figures | Calligraphic/ geometric/ organic | |
| | Graphic allusion | Flowers/ species/ sea/ sun/ mountain/ palm tree/ flag/ no graphic allusion | The presence of graphic references to national elements, such as flags or symbols representing the country. |
| Chromatism | Number of colours | 1 colour/ 2 colours/ 3 colours/ 4 or more colours | Total number of colours present in the composition. |
| | Colour location | Graphic elements/ background/ background and graphic elements | The place in the composition where colour is represented. |
| | Colour range | Warm/ cold/ cold and warm/ black and white | Type of colour range used, which can be warm (red, orange, yellow tones), cool (blue, green tones) or mixed. |
| | Colour interaction | Contrast/ harmony | The relationship between the colours of the brand mark, whether contrasting (opposite colours) or harmonious (colours that complement each other). |
| | Colours of the country's flag | Linked to the country's flag/ not linked to the flag | If the colours used in the brand match those of the national flag of the country represented. |

After the analysis tool had been created, it was applied to the sample (n=25) using a manual coding process developed by each of the article's authors—experts in graphic design and visual identity—between 1 and 14 June 2025. To minimise potential interpretative biases and ensure objectivity throughout the process, an application document was developed to standardise coding criteria. Any doubts or disagreements were resolved by consensus among the researchers.

Once the analysis matrix had been completed for each brand mark, the results were compared in a joint session, allowing for collective review, refinement, and validation of the coding's internal consistency and the instrument's accuracy.

4. Results

This section presents the findings from applying the analysis matrix to the countries' graphic marks in the sample.

4.1. Generic Dimension

Broadly speaking, the brands analysed show an apparent preference for the nominal identifier (60%) over the symbolic identifier (40%), reflecting a tendency to prioritise the destination's name as the sole identification strategy (see Figure 3). By brand type, the pure logotype is the most common (44%), followed by the imagotype (36%). In contrast, the use of the logotype with accessory (16%) and the logo-symbol (4%) is significantly lower.

Regarding identification strategies, the predominance of a purely nominal typology (44%) is notable, underscoring the brand's verbal function as its primary focus. This is followed by abstract strategies (16%), illustrated nominal strategies (16%), and iconic strategies (12%). The least frequent strategies are initial capital letter strategies (8%) and heraldic strategies (4%).

In terms of element layout, text-based configurations are the most common (44%), underscoring the importance of typography as the primary vehicle of meaning. In addition, 24% of brands use a symbol inserted or merged with the text, either replacing letters, leaning on them, or forming an integral part of the name. More traditional compositions, such as the symbol on the left and the text on the right (12%), the symbol above and the text below (4%), or the symbol integrated into the centre of the text (4%), are insignificant in the analysed set.

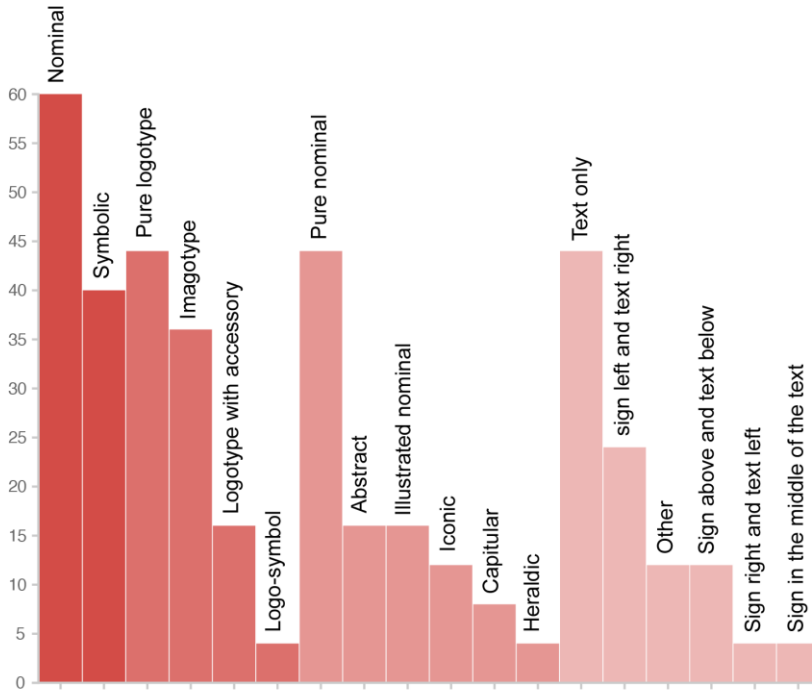


Figure 3. Results of the generic dimension. Source: own work.

4.2. Linguistic Sign

Regarding the language used in the typographic sign, English predominates (60%), followed by Spanish (20%). In 16% of cases, the language cannot be determined due to name coincidences in both languages, whereas French is used secondarily (4%). The incorporation of the slogan into the visual system is significant, as more than half of the brands use it (56%), indicating a commitment to expanded narratives that complement the destination's name (see Figure 4).

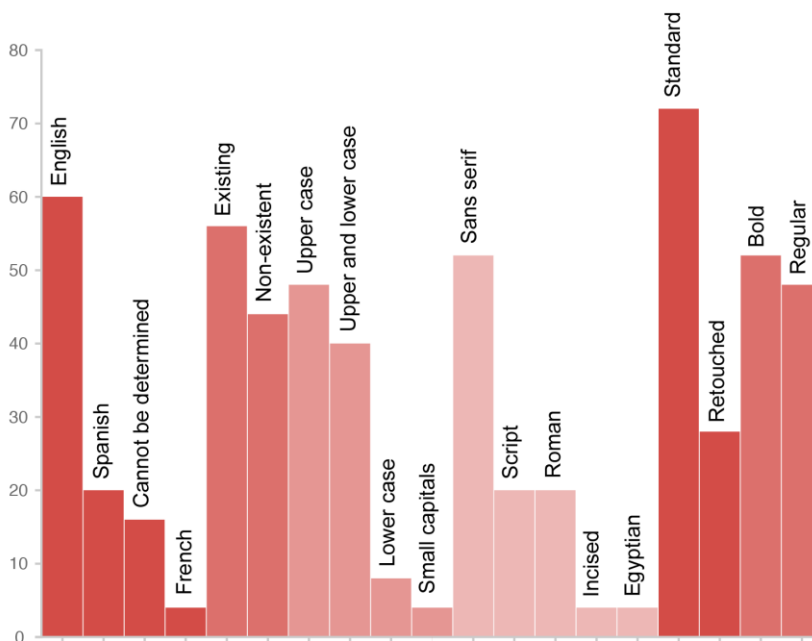


Figure 4. Results of the linguistic sign dimension. Source: own work.

About the representation of the typographic character, there is a balance between the exclusive use of capital letters (40%) and the combination of upper and lower case letters (40%). The presence of compositions using only lowercase letters (8%) or small capitals (4%) is not very representative. In terms of family typology, sans serif fonts are clearly predominant (52%), followed by calligraphic (20%) and Roman (20%), whereas incised and Egyptian families are barely represented (4% each). This pattern suggests a preference for clarity and legibility commonly associated with sans-serif typefaces.

In relation to the degree of customisation, most brands opt for standard fonts (72%), whereas 28% use fonts that have been retouched or modified. Finally, in terms of font weight, bold fonts are most common (46%), followed by regular (44%), with no light or thin styles, suggesting a preference for designs with greater impact and presence.

4.3. Iconographic Symbol

As for iconographic symbols, more than half of the brands (56%) incorporate a symbol, while a considerable percentage (44%) do not use this type of element (see Figure 5). In terms of shape type, figurative (32%) and abstract (20%) figures are preferred, with basic shapes (4%) rare. This trend reveals an effort to generate images with symbolic meaning, without resorting to visual literalism.

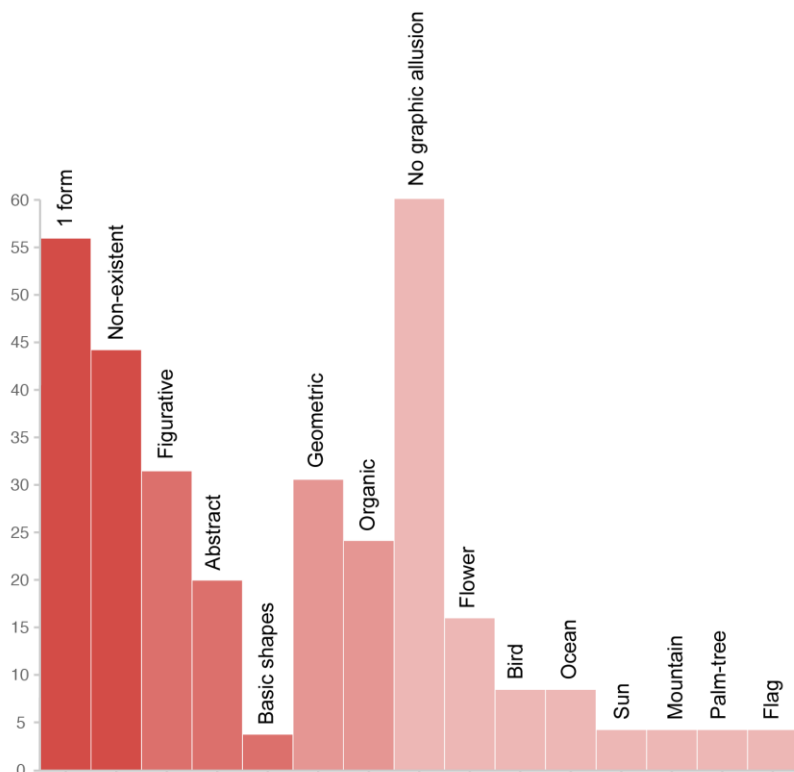


Figure 5. Results of iconographic symbol dimension. Source: own work.

By figure type, geometric shapes (32%) are used more than organic shapes (24%). Concerning graphic referentiality, 60% of brands do not make explicit reference to any specific element, while 40% do establish recognisable visual links to the territory's environment or cultural identity. Among the latter, the most common graphic references include flowers (16%), birds or other species (8%),

natural elements such as the sea (8%), the sun (4%), mountains (4%) and palm trees (4%). Direct references to heraldic symbols, such as the flag (4%), are also identified.

4.4. Chromatism

Finally, analysis of colour symbolism reveals three main trends in the number of colours used: single colour (32%), two-colour combination (32%), and palettes with four or more shades (32%). In contrast, the use of only three colours is rare (3%) (see Figure 6). In terms of colour placement, it is mainly applied to graphic elements (96%), with the graphic mark's background reserved for specific cases only (4%).

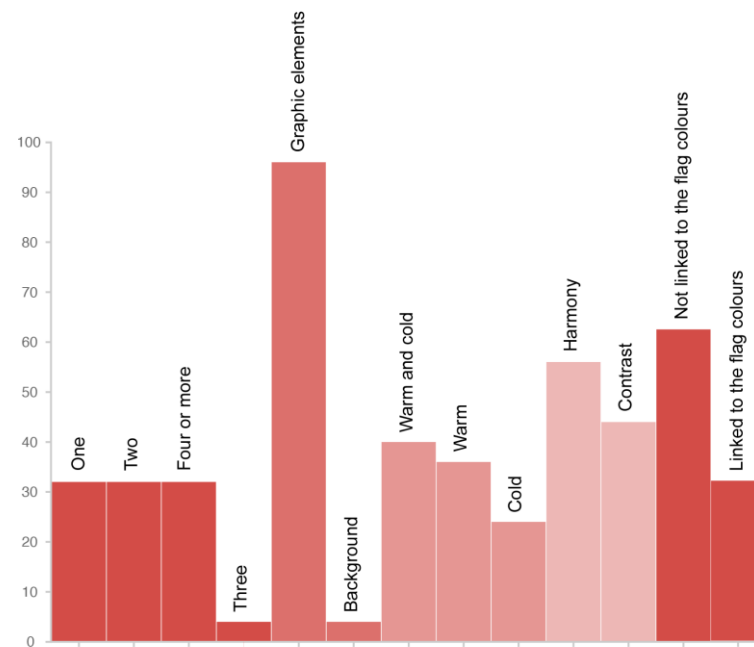


Figure 6. Results of chromatism dimension. Source: own work.

Regarding colour ranges, there is a preference for warm-and-cool tone combinations (40%), followed by warm-only (36%) and cool-only (24%). The relationship between the colours used tends to favour visual harmony (56%) over contrast (44%). In most cases, the colours used do not match those of the national flag (68%), indicating a desire to differentiate themselves from traditional institutional codes. Only 32% of brands use national colours in their colour palette.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research show that the brand marks used by countries bordering the Caribbean Sea reflect a convergence toward typographic and nominal visual solutions rather than elaborate iconographic or symbolic resources. This trend confirms a strategy focused on legibility, immediate verbal recognition and the construction of a tourist image based on the direct naming of the territory, rather than on the figurative representation of cultural or natural attributes.

In line with place branding as a conscious, long-term programme rather than a single promotional artefact (Cassisi, 2020), the preference for nominal solutions can be read as a stabilising mechanism to sustain recognition across campaigns and political cycles. Yet, if destination branding is expected to articulate a vision and a narrative of place (UNWTO & ETC, 2011), the reliance on naming alone raises questions about how their stories are being encoded, often lacking visual reference.

However, this recurrence of static compositional structures and conventional graphic approaches also suggests a conservative design ecology. Many of these brands rely on low-risk, template-based solutions that remain legible and administratively defensible, but often constrain experimentation, adaptability, storytelling, and iterative renewal.

From a graphic design perspective, this phenomenon reveals a prioritisation of communicative clarity over symbolic expressiveness. The predominance of sans-serif typefaces, purely textual compositional structures, and bold type weights reinforces a logic of visual impact and legibility, especially in international contexts. This approach is further reinforced by the hegemony of English in graphic identifiers. This choice signals an orientation towards globalised tourism markets, but also configures an implied visitor-subject, suggesting English as the default interface through which the territory becomes knowable and marketable.

In this context, the limited use of iconic or referential visual elements can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a deliberate strategy to distance itself from the typical visual clichés of Caribbean tourism—such as the sun, palm trees and the sea—

or, on the other hand, as a conceptual limitation within the design and brand creation processes. Complementarily, the limited presence of graphic elements associated with national identity, such as national colours or cultural symbols, appears to indicate an attempt to dissociate the tourism brand from the government's image in favour of a more neutral, versatile, and commercial aesthetic.

However, the use of diverse colour palettes, with a predominance of harmonious ranges and warm-cool combinations, suggests an aesthetic intention to evoke feelings of hospitality, vitality and exoticism, attributes commonly associated with the tropical imagination and, therefore, with Caribbean destination branding.

Finally, the use of slogans by more than half of the brands analysed underscores the need to extend the identity narrative beyond the country's name. These textual elements generate micro-narratives that reinforce the destination's distinctive attributes and enable a more complex brand discourse. This corroborates the notion that destination branding is not limited to a brand mark but constitutes a comprehensive visual discourse system, in which graphic design functions as a vehicle for cultural, economic, and symbolic significance.

Beyond the formal characteristics identified in the analysis, these visual strategies may also affect how international audiences perceive Caribbean destinations. In destination branding, visual identity not only serves an identificatory function but also helps shape expectations and symbolic associations about the place. In this sense, the predominance of typographic and nominal brand marks may reinforce clarity and recognisability, but it can also limit the visual expression of cultural distinctiveness. When brand marks rely primarily on the territory's name, much of the destination's narrative construction shifts to other communication tools, such as slogans or promotional campaigns. From a strategic perspective, incorporating more culturally grounded visual elements could strengthen the memorability of these brands and enhance their ability to evoke distinctive mental

images in potential visitors' minds, ultimately contributing to more differentiated destination branding.

6. Conclusion

The results led to the conclusion that the brand marks of the countries bordering the Caribbean Sea were designed primarily from a functionalist communication perspective, characterised by the centrality of the country's name as the core of its identity and the selection of graphic resources for typographic clarity. This strategy prioritises recognition and legibility while incorporating limited references to local cultural heritage.

In the face of this visual homogenisation, the study identified clear opportunities for graphic design, particularly to enrich brands by integrating indigenous visual elements, identity symbols, and narrative resources specific to the cultural environment. This could contribute to the development of a more diverse and authentic Caribbean visual language.

In this context, the study also suggests several practical implications for the actors involved in the development and management of destination branding. For graphic designers, the findings highlight the importance of combining communicative clarity with the symbolic capacity of brand marks to represent a territory's cultural identity. For tourism organisations, the findings point to the need to understand destination brands as part of broader communication strategies, in which visual identity helps shape distinctive narratives about place. Likewise, for place-brand managers and public institutions, the study highlights the strategic value of visual identity as a tool for international positioning, capable of reinforcing destination memorability and supporting differentiation in increasingly competitive tourism markets.

Finally, the study met all its objectives. The official graphic marks of Caribbean countries were identified and classified; their visual components were

accurately described; and recurring patterns and strategies were detected. In addition, the research questions were satisfactorily answered, confirming the existence of a standard mark typology, the predominance of standardised visual strategies, and the repetition of specific graphic patterns.

This research provides empirical and methodological evidence for understanding the visual logic of destination branding in Caribbean contexts. It also contributes to broader discussions on the role of graphic design in shaping tourist identities in the global context. As a direction for future research, it would be valuable to extend this analytical approach to other maritime regions to explore similarities and differences in destination branding strategies. In particular, a comparative analysis between the brand marks of Caribbean countries and those of destinations associated with other seas, such as the Mediterranean, could provide further insight into how geographical context, cultural heritage and tourism positioning influence the visual construction of territorial brands.

Funding

This work was supported by the 2022 Predoctoral Training Program for Research Staff in the Canary Islands, under the Ministry of Economy, Knowledge, and Employment, co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) with an 85% co-financing rate within the framework of the ESF Operational Program for the Canary Islands. Reference: TESIS2022010052.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the conceptualisation, design, writing, analysis, or interpretation of the research presented in this manuscript. The primary use of AI was in linguistic editing, where Grammarly was utilised to support the translation and revision of English text.

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