

A Semiological Analysis of Visual Identity in Sports Communication: The Case of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) Logo

Asma CHEURFA

Laboratory of Communication Studies and Research, Department of Communication and Information, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Badji Mokhtar – Annaba, asma.cheurfa@univ-annaba.dz

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Abstract

This article presents a semiological analysis of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) logo to explore how visual identity is constructed in sports communication. Using Roland Barthes' model, the study examines both denotative and connotative meanings of visual elements such as colors, shapes, and symbols. Results show that the FAF logo functions as a symbolic tool conveying national and institutional identity.

Keywords: *Visual identity, sports communication, semiological analysis, Algerian Football Federation, symbolism, logo design, meaning.*

التحليل السيميولوجي للهوية البصرية في الاتصال الرياضي: حالة شعار الاتحاد الجزائري لكرة القدم (FAF)

ملخص

يتناول هذا المقال تحليلًا سيميولوجيًّا لشعار الاتحادية الجزائرية لكرة القدم (FAF) لفهم كيفية تجسيد الهوية البصرية في الاتصال الرياضي، تم اعتماد نموذج رولان بارث في التحليل، من خلال مستوى الدلالة: المباشرة والثقافية. يركز البحث على تكثيك الرموز البصرية (الألوان، الأشكال، الخطوط، الرموز) وربطها بالهوية الوطنية والمؤسسية، وتكشف النتائج أن شعار (FAF) يحمل دلالات رمزية تعبّر عن الانتماء الوطني والهوية الرياضية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: هوية بصرية، اتصال رياضي، تحليل سيميولوجي، الاتحاد الجزائري لكرة القدم، رمزية، تصميم الشعار، الدلالة.

Corresponding author: Asma CHEURFA, asma.cheurfa@univ-annaba.dz

Introduction:

Semiology is one of the intellectual fields that has opened up broad horizons for analyzing and understanding various forms of expression—from language to image, and from text to symbol. This discipline does not confine itself to the study of signs in linguistic discourse alone, but extends to the deconstruction of meanings embedded in images, logos, and all kinds of visual products. Semiology has significantly enriched numerous academic disciplines, including media and communication sciences, particularly in analyzing visually and culturally loaded communicative content.

Within this framework, sports communication represents a field rich in visual and symbolic meanings. Sports institutions rely on visual identity as a strategic tool to express their values, shape their image, and assert their symbolic uniqueness. Among the key components of this identity is the logo, which conveys symbolic meanings that go beyond its surface appearance to reflect deeper cultural, social, and even ideological layers.

From this perspective, the logo of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) constitutes a rich visual model for semiological analysis. It allows us to explore how a sports institution constructs and communicates its visual identity through symbols, colors, and shapes. This article adopts Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, particularly his two levels of analysis—denotation (signifier/signified) and connotation or myth (cultural meaning)—in order to decode the visual discourse embedded in the logo.

How do visual elements of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) logo contribute to constructing a visual identity with symbolic and cultural meanings, based on Roland Barthes' semiological analysis?

- What are the main visual elements that constitute the FAF logo (colors, shapes, typography, symbols)?
- How does each of these elements convey denotative meanings to the audience (signifier/signified)?
- What myths or cultural/ideological connotations does the logo construct regarding national and sporting identity?

-Objectives of the Study:

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- 1- Conduct a semiotic analysis of the FAF logo using Barthes' denotative and connotative framework.
- 2- Explore the ideological underpinnings embedded in the visual design of the logo.
- 3- Assess how the logo contributes to the construction of national identity and institutional credibility.
- 4- Highlight the communicative power of visual branding in Algerian sports institutions.

-Significance of the Study:

In an era where visual communication plays a dominant role in shaping public perception and cultural narratives, the visual identity of sports organizations has become a powerful tool of representation, branding, and influence. This study focuses on the logo of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) as a key visual element that encapsulates complex messages about national identity, collective memory, and the role of football in Algerian society.

By employing a semiological approach, this research aims to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in the visual components of the FAF logo. It seeks to explore how visual symbols function not only as aesthetic choices but also as communication tools that convey ideological, historical, and cultural messages to a diverse audience. Given the popularity of football in Algeria and the symbolic importance of national teams, the visual identity of the FAF serves as a mirror of societal values and aspirations.

The study is significant in that it bridges the gap between visual semiotics and sports communication within an Algerian context—an area that remains underexplored in academic literature. It also contributes to the broader understanding of how national sports institutions construct and project identity through visual strategies, offering insights for scholars in media

studies, communication, and cultural analysis as well as for practitioners in sports branding and design.

Section One: Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework aims to shed light on the key concepts underpinning this study and provide detailed clarifications, which will help define both the study scope and its boundaries.

1- Sports Communication:

Sports communication is defined as “the totality of media processes and symbolic interactions aimed at producing, distributing, receiving, and interpreting messages related to sports practices among various stakeholders (institutions, athletes, fans, sponsors), with the goal of transmitting information, shaping public perception, and reinforcing sporting and social values”⁽¹⁾.

Some scholars argue that sports communication combines features of mass communication—due to its heavy reliance on media platforms—and elements of public relations, given its role in promoting institutional image and attracting sponsorships. It also incorporates sports marketing techniques to strengthen audience loyalty⁽²⁾.

This field includes:

- Coverage of sports competitions and events (journalism, audiovisual broadcasting).
- Digital content management for sports federations or clubs.
- Communication campaigns designed to build visual identity and promote values (such as "fair play" campaigns or social responsibility initiatives).

In this study, sports communication is understood as an integrated communicative system that employs informational, visual, and interactive messages to serve sport-entertainment, marketing-commercial, and cultural-value objectives. It provides the overarching framework within which the visual identity and logo of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) are analyzed.

2- Visual Identity:

Visual identity encompasses the ensemble of visual elements that define and distinguish an organization, forming a cohesive system through which its personality, values, and mission are visually communicated. At its core, visual identity includes components such as the logo, color schemes, typography, layout systems, iconography, and imagery—all of which work together to ensure immediate recognition and create a consistent visual experience across various media and platforms⁽³⁾.

In a broader sense, visual identity functions as the visible manifestation of a brand's core identity, embodying its strategic intent and emotional resonance. It is not merely about aesthetic appeal; rather, it is a deliberate and thoughtful construction that fosters credibility, reinforces professionalism, and builds trust with target audiences⁽⁴⁾. A strong visual identity can trigger emotional associations, influence audience perceptions, and become a key factor in shaping brand loyalty and cultural belonging.

In the realm of sports communication, visual identity holds even more nuanced significance. Sports organizations operate not only as competitive entities but also as powerful cultural and symbolic institutions. Their visual systems, particularly their logos and emblems, often carry layers of historical, national, and emotional meaning. These visual markers serve as unifying symbols for fans, representing shared values, local pride, and collective memory⁽⁵⁾.

For national federations such as the Algerian Football Federation (FAF), the logo is more than a design element—it is a condensed representation of national identity, sporting heritage, and institutional authority. Through colors, shapes, and symbolic references, the visual identity of such organizations reinforces a sense of unity and belonging, especially in societies where football plays a pivotal cultural and social role⁽⁶⁾.

Moreover, in a globalized media environment, a compelling and coherent visual identity allows sports institutions to assert their presence across local and international arenas. It

becomes a communicative bridge between tradition and modernity, national values and global visibility—offering a platform for storytelling, branding, and cultural diplomacy.

3- Logo:

A logo is more than a decorative mark; it is a strategic communication tool that encapsulates the identity, mission, and values of an organization within a compact and recognizable visual form. Defined as “a distinct graphic symbol or wordmark, or a combination of both, that represents an organization and serves as its primary sign of identification”⁽⁷⁾. The logo functions as the cornerstone of an organization’s visual identity system.

At its best, a logo distills the essence of a brand into a single graphic unit that is instantly recognizable, memorable, and emotionally resonant. Through deliberate choices in shape, color, typography, and symbolism, a logo can evoke tradition, authority, innovation, or dynamism, depending on the message the organization seeks to convey⁽⁸⁾. It often includes culturally or nationally significant references, subtly embedding shared meanings and values that resonate with a specific audience.

In the context of sports communication, the logo assumes an even more layered significance. Sports logos are imbued with powerful symbolic and emotional weight. They act as emblems of belonging, rallying points for fans, and visual markers of legacy and pride. These logos are not just signs; they become symbols in the semiotic sense, carrying connotative meanings related to identity, community, and passion⁽⁹⁾.

A sports logo often incorporates visual elements that reflect national identity, cultural heritage, or institutional authority—particularly when the logo belongs to a national federation like the Algerian Football Federation (FAF). In this case, the logo functions as a semiotic site where political, historical, and emotional narratives intersect. For example, colors like green, red, and white may evoke patriotic sentiments while icons like stars, crescents, or eagles may signify national unity, strength, or religious heritage⁽¹⁰⁾.

Moreover, in an increasingly globalized sports ecosystem, logos also serve branding and marketing functions. They help federations and clubs distinguish themselves in international arenas, attract sponsorships, and engage fans across digital platforms. The power of a logo lies not just in how it looks, but in how it is perceived, what it symbolizes, and how effectively it communicates complex values in a glance.

As such, analyzing a logo from a semiological perspective allows researchers to unpack the layers of meaning embedded in its design and to understand how these meanings contribute to constructing a visual narrative of identity, authority, and emotional affiliation in sports.

4- Semiological Analysis:

Semiology, or semiotics, is the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior. It was initially developed by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and later expanded by theorists such as Roland Barthes, who explored how meaning is constructed and interpreted in cultural texts⁽¹¹⁾. In semiology, a sign consists of two components: the signifier (the form a sign takes, such as a logo or image) and the signified (the concept it represents). Meaning arises not from the sign itself, but from the relationship between these components and the broader cultural codes in which they operate.

Barthes introduced the idea of denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associated cultural and emotional meanings), which are essential in decoding how visual signs communicate beyond their surface⁽¹²⁾. When applied to logos, especially in sports, semiology allows us to uncover the deeper ideological, nationalistic, and emotional meanings encoded within seemingly simple graphic designs.

In the context of visual identity, semiology provides a powerful framework for analyzing how sports logos function as cultural signs. They do not merely identify an organization; they mythologize it, embedding layers of meaning that evoke identity, pride, history, and affiliation. A semiological approach; thus, allows researchers to interpret visual elements not

only as aesthetic choices, but also as ideological constructs that reflect and shape public perception.

5- Algerian Football Federation (FAF):

The Algerian Football Federation (Fédération Algérienne de Football - FAF) is the governing body responsible for organizing, regulating, and promoting football activities in Algeria. Founded in 1962, it is affiliated with both FIFA and the Confederation of African Football (CAF). FAF oversees national competitions, youth development programmes, and the management of national teams. It also plays a key role in representing Algerian football on the international stage and reinforcing national identity through sport (FAF, 2024).

As a sports institution, FAF uses various communication tools, including its visual identity—especially its logo—to symbolize its history, values, and national pride (FAF)⁽¹³⁾.

Section Two: Methodological Framework

1- Research Method:

This study adopts a **semiological method** based on the theoretical framework of **Roland Barthes**, who proposed a two-level model of signification:

- **First Level – Denotation:** This level involves the basic relationship between the **signifier** (the visual element or form) and the **signified** (the literal meaning or concept associated with it).
- **Second Level – Connotation / Myth:** This deeper level explores how signs construct broader **cultural, ideological, or symbolic meanings**, referred to by Barthes as "myths"—socially constructed narratives that reinforce dominant ideologies through visual representation⁽¹⁴⁾.

By employing this dual-layered approach, the study seeks to deconstruct the logo of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) in terms of both its **explicit meanings** and its **implicit cultural-symbolic significance**.

2- Research Population and Sample:

The **research population** is limited to the **official logo** of the **Algerian Football Federation (FAF)** as currently used on its **official website** and **digital platforms**.

The **sample** consists of the **current version** of the FAF logo only, analyzed in its **static visual form**, without accounting for dynamic applications (such as animations or campaign visuals). The analysis focuses on the logo's **formal elements**, including:

- **Colors**
- **Shapes**
- **Symbols**
- **Typography/Lines**

This deliberate focus allows for a deep semiotic exploration of the logo as a visual sign that encodes institutional identity.

3- Research Tool – Semiological Analysis Grid:

The study uses a **semiological analysis grid** specifically tailored to decode the **visual identity system** embodied in the FAF logo. The grid includes the following analytical steps:

1- Identification of visual signifiers: Extracting the fundamental elements of the visual identity (colors, shapes, symbols, lines).

2- Interpretation of denotative meanings: Determining the direct, surface-level meanings (signified) perceived by the viewer.

3- Interpretation of connotative/cultural meanings ("myths"): Analyzing how these elements construct deeper narratives related to national identity, sports culture, and institutional symbolism.

4- Linking signification to institutional identity: Exploring how the FAF logo functions as a **semiotic construct** that articulates values such as **national pride, football heritage, and cultural unity**.

This analytical framework allows for a comprehensive deconstruction of the FAF's visual discourse, aligning with Barthes' vision of images as carriers of culturally loaded "myths" rather than neutral symbols.

Section Three: Semiological Analysis Grid of the FAF Logo (Algerian Football Federation)

Figure n°1: Algerian Football Federation Logo



Source: FAF. (2024). *Fédération Algérienne de Football - Official Website*. <https://www.faf.dz>

Table n°1: Semiological Analysis Grid

Visual Element (Signifier)	Denotative Meaning (Signified)	Connotative / Cultural Meaning (Myth)	Function in Institutional Identity
Crescent and Star	Religious and national symbol	Representation of the Algerian nation, Islam, and the legacy of liberation struggle	Reinforces national and spiritual belonging
Colors (Green, Red, White)	National flag colors	Algerian identity, national pride	Expresses visual national identity
Football Shape	The sport of football	Symbol of global passion and community through sports	Defines the sporting domain
Circular/Flowing Lines	Movement, dynamism	Communication, openness, fluidity	Reflects institutional values and vision

Source: Prepared by the researcher

Interpretive Semiological Analysis of the FAF Logo:

The logo of the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) serves as a rich semiotic artifact that encapsulates multiple layers of meaning—both explicit and implicit—reflecting national, cultural, and institutional identity. Based on Roland Barthes' two-tier model of signification, this analysis explores how the visual elements of the logo contribute to constructing a powerful symbolic narrative.

1- The Crescent and Star

On the denotative level, the crescent and star are immediately recognizable as religious and national symbols, commonly associated with Islamic identity and widely used in the iconography of many Muslim-majority nations.

On the connotative (mythical) level, these elements evoke deeper meanings linked to Algeria's cultural roots, Islamic heritage, and revolutionary struggle for independence. They symbolize unity, sacrifice, and the moral values upon which the nation is built.

Functionally, their inclusion in the logo reinforces a sense of belonging and pride among Algerians, aligning the sporting institution with national and spiritual ideals.

2- Colors: Green, Red, and White:

These are the denotative colors of the Algerian national flag. Their immediate function is to identify the federation as an official national entity.

From a mythical perspective, the colors are not merely decorative; they embody collective memory, national pride, and resistance. Green represents Islam and hope, red signifies the blood of martyrs, and white stands for peace and purity.

These connotations help construct a visual national identity that connects sports with patriotism and emotional loyalty.

3- The Shape of the Football:

At the denotative level, the football icon simply represents the sport itself.

Connotatively, it stands for the global language of football—passion, competition, and unity. Within the Algerian context, it also signals popular culture, national enthusiasm, and international affiliation.

Its presence clearly positions the institution within the sporting domain, establishing the core activity and purpose of the FAF.

4- Circular or Flowing Lines:

These elements suggest motion and dynamism on the surface.

On a deeper level, they connote values such as progress, openness, and connectivity, suggesting that the federation is forward-thinking, adaptable, and inclusive.

These visual dynamics support the institution's values and vision, creating a perception of an active and evolving organization.

5- Typographic Style:

The logo includes textual elements—such as “FAF” or the full name of the federation—the typeface itself becomes semiotically significant.

Denotatively, the typography identifies the organization through its acronym or name.

Connotatively, the font style may communicate qualities such as modernity, strength, or tradition, depending on its visual features (e.g., boldness, curvature, serif vs. sans serif). Typography contributes to brand perception by reinforcing the desired institutional image—whether it is authoritative, innovative, or rooted in heritage.

6- Composition and Balance:

The spatial arrangement of the elements in the logo—how the crescent, football, text, and colors are positioned—also has semiotic weight.

On a denotative level, this ensures visual harmony and recognizability.

On a mythical level, a well-balanced composition can signify unity, order, and strategic coherence, echoing ideals of teamwork and organizational discipline within the FAF.

7- National and International Readability:

The logo is designed to be instantly recognizable both locally (inside Algeria) and globally (outside Algeria).

Denotatively, it represents Algeria's identity in a footballing context.

Connotatively, it projects Algeria as an active participant in global football culture, aligning national pride with international relevance.

Study Results:

Based on the semiological analysis using Barthes' model, the study may conclude the following:

- The FAF logo operates as a condensed visual narrative, integrating national, religious, and sporting symbolism to reinforce Algeria's collective identity through sport.
- The use of culturally resonant symbols (crescent, star, national colors) reflects a deliberate semiotic strategy aimed at fostering emotional loyalty and unity among Algerians.
- The logo functions as a tool of soft power, linking football to broader socio-political and historical narratives, such as post-colonial identity and national pride.
- The aesthetic and symbolic coherence of the logo strengthens the FAF's institutional legitimacy, both domestically and in the international sporting arena.

-The logo's design reflects a strategic balance between tradition and modernity, enabling the federation to remain culturally grounded while projecting dynamism and global engagement.

-Through its myth-making capacity, the FAF logo contributes to constructing a shared symbolic universe in which football serves as both entertainment and national expression.

Conclusion:

Through the lens of semiological analysis, the FAF logo emerges not merely as a visual identifier, but as a dense and multilayered system of signs—a cultural artifact that reflects and constructs national consciousness. By applying Roland Barthes' dual-level model of denotation and connotation, we uncover the ways in which the logo communicates meanings that go beyond its surface appearance.

On a denotative level, the FAF logo clearly signifies its institutional affiliation with football through recognizable symbols such as the ball, national colors, and textual references. Yet, it is on the connotative or mythical level where the logo gains its deeper resonance—acting as a vessel for national identity, collective memory, religious heritage, and aspirations for unity and progress. The crescent and star do not simply mark religious affiliation; they evoke Algeria's revolutionary past and Islamic moral grounding. The use of national colors is not merely decorative but narratively charged, evoking the sacrifices of martyrs, the purity of intent, and the hope embedded in the national psyche.

In this sense, the FAF logo operates as a semiotic condensation of Algerian identity, where sports become a stage for articulating deeper socio-cultural narratives. It embodies a form of visual rhetoric that appeals to both the emotional and ideological dimensions of its audience, fostering a sense of belonging and pride that transcends the realm of sports.

Moreover, the logo exemplifies how visual identity functions as a strategic tool of institutional communication. It does not only serve a branding purpose but also becomes a medium through which the federation aligns itself with national values and international recognition. This positions the logo as both a symbol of national sovereignty in the realm of sports and a cultural ambassador that projects Algeria's image to the global sporting community.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the FAF logo is far from a neutral design. It is a semiotic construct loaded with historical, cultural, and ideological significance, revealing the role of sports institutions in shaping and disseminating national discourse through visual means. In the case of FAF, the logo functions not only to identify but also to unify, inspire, and represent—marking it as a compelling example of how symbolic power operates in the domain of sport communication.

Implications for Future Research:

This study opens several avenues for future research in the fields of sports communication, visual semiotics, and institutional branding. First, comparative studies could explore how different national football federations construct their visual identities and the extent to which cultural, political, or historical contexts shape these representations. Additionally, longitudinal analyses could examine how the visual identity of a sports organization evolves over time in response to changing societal values or strategic repositioning.

Another promising direction lies in exploring the audience reception of visual identities. While this study focused on the semiotic encoding of the FAF logo, further research could investigate how various demographic groups—fans, players, or international stakeholders—decode and interpret these symbols differently. Such inquiries could deepen our understanding of visual communication as a dialogic process, shaped not only by design but also by perception, memory, and identity.

Finally, insights from semiological analysis could be applied practically to inform the redesign or strategic development of sports logos, ensuring that they resonate more deeply with their intended audiences while maintaining coherence with national or institutional values.

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