

Multivariate analysis of FIFA video game covers. How to lead without a strategy.

Análisis multivariable de las carátulas del videojuego FIFA.
Cómo liderar sin estrategia.

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ABSTRACT

The football videogame FIFA is one of the longest-running and most successful sagas in Spain. The official rankings of best-selling titles drawn up in recent decades by the AEVI, place it as a best-selling saga in Spain, with leading positions repeated over time. Based on the data from a multivariate analysis of the cover art since its beginnings in 1994, in which both design and sporting aspects with sales implications will be reviewed, the aim is to demonstrate that the FIFA video game saga is an atypical star product, insofar as over the years it has not taken care of aesthetic aspects and sporting rivalry which, in most sectors, are decisive and condition the sales of the product. The privileged position that the video game occupies in the sales rankings confirms its immunity to factors which, for other brands, are decisive for its survival.

KEYWORDS:

Videogame; FIFA; Covers; Sports rivalry; Football; Identity; Graphic design.

RESUMEN

El videojuego de fútbol FIFA es una de las sagas más longevas y exitosas en España. Los rankings oficiales de títulos más vendidos elaborados en las últimas décadas por la AEVI, la sitúan como una saga best seller en España, con posiciones de liderazgo repetidas a lo largo del tiempo. Partiendo de los datos de un análisis multivariable de las carátulas desde sus inicios en 1994, en el que se revisarán aspectos tanto de diseño como deportivos con implicaciones a nivel de ventas, se pretende demostrar que la saga de videojuegos FIFA es un producto estrella atípico, en la medida en que a lo largo de los años no se ha preocupado de cuidar aspectos estéticos y de rivalidad deportiva que, en la mayoría de sectores, son determinantes y condicionan las ventas del producto. La posición de privilegio que ocupa el videojuego en los rankings de ventas confirma su inmunidad frente a factores que, para otras marcas, son determinantes para su supervivencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Videojuego; FIFA; Carátulas; Rivalidad deportiva; Fútbol; Identidad; Diseño gráfico.

CONTENT

1. Introduction to the FIFA videogame saga. 2. Objective and methodology. 3. Visual language and packaging as a mean of communication. 4. Results of the multivariate analysis. 5. Conclusions. 6. Bibliography. 7. Curriculum Vitae.

CONTENIDO

1. Introducción a la saga de videojuegos FIFA. 2. Objetivo y metodología. 3. Lenguaje visual y packaging como medio de comunicación. 4. Resultados del análisis multivariable. 5. Conclusiones. 6. Bibliografía. 7. Currículum Vitae.

Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. Introduction to the FIFA video game saga

FIFA is a saga of football video games edited and distributed in annual editions by the Electronic Arts company under the EA Sports label. FIFA falls within the Sports & Sports Franchise genre and has a PEGI rating (Pan European Game Information, indicative information on the appropriate age for consumption) of 3 years. This position in the PEGI is important since its position on the lower scale allows it to broaden the spectrum of potential players from the early age of three. In this way, being for all audiences, and compared to a game for adults, the saga gains an additional age bracket of 15 years that considerably expands its base of potential buyers.

It is a sports, football video game that allows you to select players based on criteria such as team, selection, sporting merits, prizes, player profile, etc... The saga began at the end of 1993 and, since then, EA Sports has annually renewed the video game until today in 2022. It was the first saga to have an official license from FIFA (International Federation of Football Association). It serves as an indicative note of the degree of globalization and extension of the football phenomenon that the number of countries affiliated with FIFA, 209, exceeds that of the UN, 193.

One of the key assets of the FIFA video game saga, derived from the relationship with the main world football organization, is that it has exclusive licenses with the teams of the most prominent leagues in the world, such as the Premier League, the Italian Serie A, the German Bundesliga, the First Division League of Spain, or the different national teams of the 209 countries mentioned, among many others. This differential factor allows video game players to use and experience real stadiums, the real names of the football players, nods to their way of playing, and chants from the fans that give it a unique

realism by showing the video game player a recognizable reality and the closest thing to the experience that football players have on the field.

From a commercial point of view, FIFA is one of the most popular video games in the video game sector, both globally and in Spain, the area of analysis of this research, where, as we will see below, it is a true best seller.

After reviewing the sales rankings prepared annually by the AEVI (Spanish Video Game Association by its acronym in Spanish), it is confirmed that the FIFA video game is the best-selling in Spain in the last decade (AEVI, 2021). The position occupied by the FIFA saga in the ranking of best-selling titles in the last decade, the period between 2012 and 2022, is shown below.

- 2012: The 2nd best-selling video game, behind Call of Duty: Black Ops II
- 2013: The 2nd best-selling video game, behind Grand Theft Auto V
- 2014: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2015: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2016: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2017: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2018: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2019: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2020: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2021: The best-selling video game of the year
- 2022: The best-selling video game of the year

In this last year, as can be seen in image 1, FIFA is the best-selling video game on the main platforms: PS4, XboxOne, Switch, PS5, Xbox Series X-S (downloads), and PC (downloads).

Figure 1: *The best-selling video games in Spain in 2021.*



Source: Gfk.

The sales figures confirm the leadership, loyalty, and strength that the FIFA saga enjoys in Spain, maintaining the first position in the ranking uninterrupted since 2014. This is a key starting point to

anchor the hypothesis that is intended to be demonstrated in this research. To the extent that the FIFA saga occupies the top positions in the sales rankings in the last two decades and the first position uninterruptedly since 2014. This privileged position would confirm that there are no factors that put a brake on sales of the video game although, FIFA does not take into account the graphic construction when designing its covers, these being the first point of contact with the brand. The packaging is in charge of the differential function and the emotional connection with the public.

2. Objective and methodology

The objective of this research is to find out if, in the sale of a video game, the criteria at the sports level and the design of its covers are decisive for its commercialization, through their multivariate analysis.

For this, the covers of the best-selling video game in the last decade, which is none other than the FIFA video game, were taken as elements of analysis. The universe under study has been the covers published between 1994 and 2022, and the identification of certain aspects of content and form of its imaginary, yielding two working hypotheses:

H1: Are the usual sporting rivalry criteria in football that affect the image in front of the rival fans taken into account in the selection of players for the FIFA video game covers?

H2: Are there graphic design guidelines in the visual identity of the FIFA video game covers?

To demonstrate the hypotheses, a descriptive methodology is applied, which studies in detail the situations surrounding a fact without modifying any variable, and the technique used in this research is content analysis from a quantitative perspective. The sample corresponds to the 29 covers published between 1994 and 2022.

Figure 2: 1994-2022 covers of the FIFA video game.



Source: Own elaboration.

The technique used has been the division of the elements that make up the visual messages into evaluable units, that is, linguistic, iconic, and plastic items. Therefore, an analysis template is prepared where the possible variables are collected compared to the selected sample.

For the first hypothesis, analysis criteria are established based on two parameters: the team to which the player who appears on the cover that year belongs and his relationship with the player who won the Ballon d'Or of that edition.

For the second hypothesis, a descriptive iconographic analysis of all the primary attributes that intervene in the design of a piece is established. 18 parameters are defined, divided into 5 large blocks in which we analyze:

General composition: dominant lines, type of composition, color range, and space distribution.

Players: number of players, level of representation, type of shot, movement, and attitude.

Background of the image: contrast, identification, and type of background.

Text: font, use of upper and lower case, use of italics, and color.

Graphic corporate identity: visual hierarchy and number of changes compared to the previous year.

For the elaboration and definition of the parameters that can be studied, the image analysis theories of various authors have been reviewed (Aparici et al., 2006; González, 2000; Arheim, 1999; Acaso, 2006; Chaves, 1989; Raymond, 1998; Villafañe and Mínguez, 2006).

Content analysis as a methodology is based on the principles of objectivity, systematicity, manifest content, and generalization capacity (Puebla-Martínez, 2013), therefore the systematic collection of data allows us to contrast the results with the two proposed hypotheses.

3. Visual language and packaging as a means of communication

The common collective imaginary made up of symbolic and conceptual elements is built through the images of visual culture (Duncum, 2015; Hernández, 2010). Within this culture, the visual identifiers of a product or service help us to create a coherent image of what it represents and favor differentiation by reinforcing its identity. This necessary differentiation begins with an exhaustive definition of the corporate identity, made up of the values and a set of identifying signs (Chaves, 2006).

Costa (2009) states that in our society full of images and symbols, standing out is a necessity in an increasingly competitive environment. If you want to be competitive and a benchmark in the sector, you need to have a defined visual symbology linked to the brand and product (García et al., 2020).

This brand presence is made up of the set of features and attributes that make up its essence, taking into account that some are visible and others are not (Villafañe, 2002). The invisible ones correspond to the corporate identity, which represents the personality of the brand or product and is included in corporate communication. This identity is transmitted through visual signs and corresponds to the visible part, to the physical representation, forming the graphic corporate identity.

The set of both is decisive to transmit and make the consumer feel how it is projected through its values and graphic strategies for the differentiation of its brand. It covers the emotions and feelings that they generate in the consumer, wanting to strengthen the trust bond, trying to create a multisensory brand incorporating all the senses in the process. Álvarez (2011) states that emotional dialogue, imagination,

and vision help create that brand experience. And within all this strategy, the packaging or how the product is presented is as important as the brand itself (Altmann, 2014). The packaging establishes a relationship between the brand and everything that surrounds it, it is a key element when it comes to identifying and differentiating the product. It is a brand tool with its own visual expression that establishes an emotional connection with the consumer.

It is the user's first contact and communication point, it defines its image and essence, and improves the brand. It is the silent seller (Cervera, 1998), a fundamental element for the product and its profitability since it could be considered a permanent means of communication. Packaging can be defined as the "set of elements that allow a product to be presented to its eventual buyer under the most attractive appearance possible" (Fantoni, 2014, p.10).

The packaging makes it possible to make the brand's values tangible, it can generate key positive feelings when it comes to facilitating the choice of one product or another. According to InfoPack (2017), our non-conscious brain is in charge of deciding the value and meaning that packaging has for us and this has a decisive influence at the time of purchase. A good container must materialize under a graphic manifestation that must be formalized in forms and compositions with a presence that favors memory and differentiation. Calver (2004) assures that "product differentiation is something very important, and all packaging solutions should make it easier for consumers to choose the appropriate product" (p.42).

Different studies have analyzed packaging design within marketing strategies (Gelici-Zeko et al., 2012; Ahmed et al., 2014; Mohebbi, 2013; Magnier et al., 2016; Altmann, 2014) assessing greater efficiency than other forms of advertising due to the improvement that the product provides at a sensory and physical level at the point of sale. In fact, on many occasions the packaging is only valued from the point of view of the product within the marketing strategies of a brand, however, Keler and Kotler (2012) state that price, distribution, and communication are also fundamental elements.

Everything said so far is reinforced by the results of the study carried out by Javed in 2015, which revealed that between 60-90% of judgments and opinions about products are based on the design of the packaging. The packaging constitutes the discourse that precedes the consumption of the product and influences its purchase and use experience.

4. Results of the multivariate analysis

4.1. Analysis from a sporting point of view with business implications: FIFA cover player's team and his relationship with the Ballon d'Or

We begin the analysis of the FIFA video game covers by reviewing the following parameters: the team to which the player belongs that year and whether or not he is the winner of the Ballon d'Or.

In the player's team parameter, the player or players that appear on the cover of each edition of the FIFA video game are analyzed, indicating the football team or national team in which the player played in that edition. Belonging to one team or another is a key factor since football is more than a sport, it is one of the most widespread social practices of collective identification, a phenomenon that transcends its status as a game and becomes a polyhedral reality, which combines social, cultural, political, and economic characteristics and that goes beyond a moment of leisure connecting with aspects that link with identity, territory, and belonging. Football as a social phenomenon beyond sports is a system of relationships and representations, which produces a symbolic integration of its followers and the population of the territory to which its team belongs. Football generates an identification to the extent

that members of a social group identify with each other as followers of a club, opposing others, rival teams with different degrees of rivalry.

Then, based on the previous information of the team in which each player featured on the cover plays each year, the following parameter will be taken into account, if the player that appears (or one of them, if more than one player appears) coincides with the winner of the Ballon d'Or of that same year. The Ballon d'Or is an award given every year by the French magazine France Football. In the world of football, it is considered the highest award that a football player can receive on an individual level. It is an objective criterion to the extent that 96 sports journalists from all over the world participate in its vote.

Awarded uninterruptedly since 1956, from 2009 it was merged with the FIFA World Player award to designate the best football player until both awards were separated again in 2016. It can be considered an objective recognition of the best football player of the moment, which becomes a key reference to take into account for a product clearly linked to football, such as the FIFA video game. This parameter is included to determine whether or not FIFA takes it into account as a criterion for selecting players on their covers.

Firstly, Table 1 lists the different players who have appeared in the different editions of the video game.

Table 1: *Players that appear on the covers of the FIFA video game and the team in which they played.*

Year	Player on cover	Player's team(s)
1994	David Platt, Pat Bonner and Ruud Gullit	Arsenal / Celtic / Chelsea
1995	Erik Thorstvedt	Tottenham
1996	Frank de Boer and Jason Mc Ateer	Ajax & Liverpool
1997	David Ginola	Newcastle
1998	Raúl González	Selección / Real Madrid
1999	Fernando Morientes	Real Madrid
2000	Pep Guardiola	FC Barcelona
2001	Gaizka Mendieta	Valencia and Lazio
2002	Iker Casillas	Real Madrid
2003	Roberto Carlos, Ryan Giggs and Edgar Davids	Real Madrid, Manchester United y Juventus
2004	Alessandro Del Piero, Thierry Henry and Ronaldinho	Juventus, Arsenal and FC Barcelona
2005	Patrick Vieira, Fernando Morientes, Andriy Shevchenko	Arsenal, Real Madrid and Liverpool, AC Milán
2006	Wayne Rooney and Ronaldinho	Manchester United and FC Barcelona
2007	Ronaldinho and David Villa	FC Barcelona and Valencia
2008	Ronaldinho and Sergio Ramos	FC Barcelona and Real Madrid
2009	Wayne Rooney and Gonzalo Higuain	Manchester United and Real Madrid
2010	Xavi Hernández and Karim Benzema	FC Barcelona and Real Madrid
2011	Kaká and Andrés Iniesta	Real Madrid and FC Barcelona
2012	Gerard Piqué and Xabi Alonso	FC Barcelona and Real Madrid
2013	Leo Messi and Roberto Soldado	FC Barcelona and Valencia
2014	Leo Messi	FC Barcelona
2015	Leo Messi	FC Barcelona
2016	Leo Messi	FC Barcelona
2017	Marco Reus	Borussia Dortmund
2018	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid
2019	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid y Juventus

2020	Edén Hazard	Real Madrid
2021	Kylian Mbappé	Paris Saint Germain
2022	Kylian Mbappé	Paris Saint Germain

Source: Own elaboration.

Of the covers reviewed in the period between 1994 and 2021, the following patterns are detected:

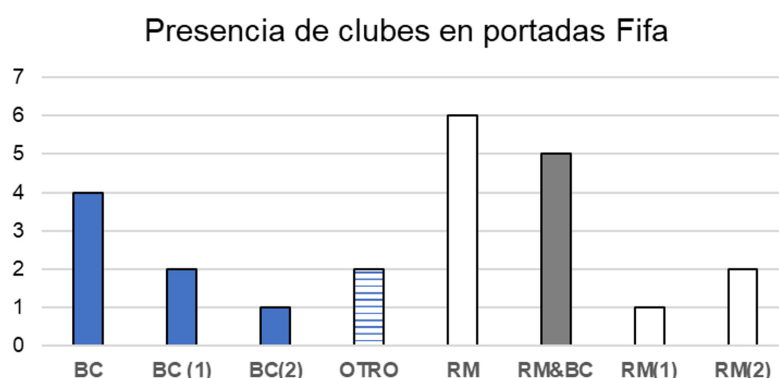
- Only Real Madrid players appear in the 1998, 1999, 2002, 2018, 2019, and 2020 editions.
- Only FC Barcelona players appear in the 2000, 2014, 2015, and 2016 editions.
- Players from both teams appear in the 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012 editions.
- Real Madrid players appear with players from other teams in the 2003, 2005, and 2009 editions.
- FC Barcelona players appear with players from other teams in the 2004, 2006, 2007, and 2013 editions.
- No player from Real Madrid or FC Barcelona appears in the 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2017, 2021, and 2022 editions.

Except in the 2001 edition, in which Gaizka Mendieta appears, as a former Valencia CF player and star signing that year for Italian Lazio, and in the 2017 edition, which starred the German Borussia Dortmund player, Marco Reus, in all editions a player from Real Madrid and/or FC Barcelona has appeared indistinctly, either individually or, as in the 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012 editions, together with players from both teams. Even in those cases in which the player appears with a different shirt than that of these clubs, there is a very close link with them, referring both to the past, for having played for one of these clubs, and to the future, for being a possible signing. This is the case, for example, of Cristiano Ronaldo, who in the 2019 edition appears with the Juventus shirt, but his connection and fame at that time was closely linked to the club in which he played for 10 years, Real Madrid; or referring to the future, in the last edition analyzed (2022), in which the French PSG player, Kylian Mbappé, appears, with a future link with Real Madrid, to the extent that he is a player that the sports press usually indicates as an imminent signing of this club.

Charts 1 and 2 show in more detail the presence distribution by club. Chart 1 shows the different cases commented on in a disaggregated way: only Real Madrid (RM), only FC Barcelona (BC), both teams (RM&BC), Real Madrid with players from other teams RM(1) or RM(2), where the number indicates how many players from other teams appear, FC Barcelona with players from other teams BC(1) or BC(2), where the number indicates how many players from other teams appear, and no player neither from Real Madrid nor from FC Barcelona appear (OTHER).

Chart 2 focuses on the clubs whose most prominent players are on the front pages, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. The total of individual and shared presences is shown, either with a player from the rival club or other teams. In this way, in the accumulated total, both for Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, the cases in which players from both clubs appear are doubled.

Figure 3: *Presence of clubs on FIFA covers.*



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 4: *Prominence of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona on FIFA covers.*



Source: Own elaboration.

The FIFA saga shows a very marked link with Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. From a sociological point of view, the data confirms that they are the teams with the largest fan base. The CIS Barometer of June 2014, in its 22nd question, asked the sample of interviewees the following question: Could you tell me which team you feel the most sympathy for? The data confirmed that most Spaniards are followers of either Real Madrid (38%) or FC Barcelona (25%). Together they account for two-thirds of the fans at the national level (CIS, 2014). But it is key to understand that, although Real Madrid and FC Barcelona have the largest fan base, there are other fan bases, third teams that also have a very marked representation at a territorial level, in some cases, as we will see below, well above Real Madrid or FC Barcelona.

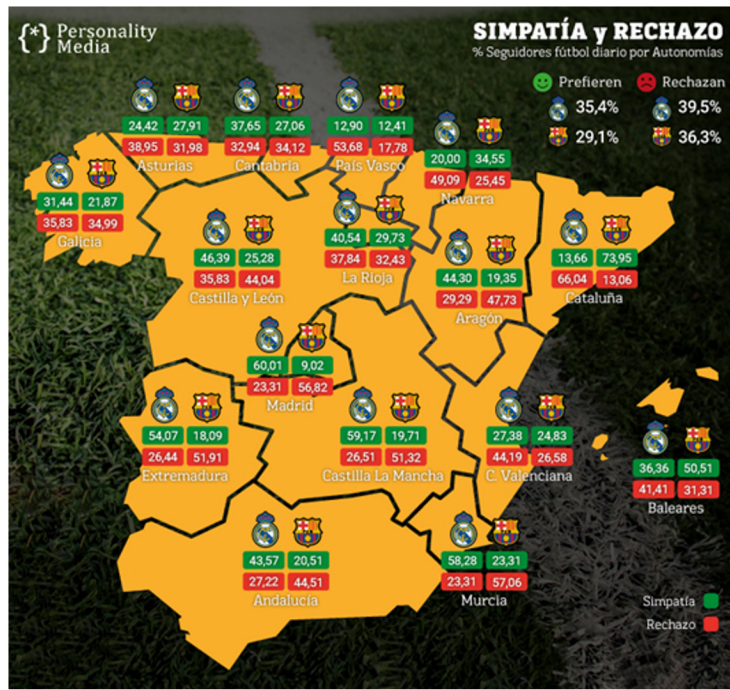
To this, we must add that in the same city, although in the total calculation there is a greater number of fans of Real Madrid or FC Barcelona, in certain neighborhoods there are more fans of teams such as Español in Barcelona or Atlético de Madrid and Rayo Vallecano in Madrid.

This excess of representativeness of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona on the covers of FIFA could be problematic for any brand at two levels of analysis of sports rivalry.

The first level referred to the direct rivalry between followers of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, the sports rivalry par excellence in Spain in terms of the number of fans. In Image 3, based on a study

by the consulting firm Personality Media (2016), we see the degree of sympathy or preference and rejection that Real Madrid and FC Barcelona arouse in each Spanish province. In the Basque Country and Catalonia, the percentage of rejection of Real Madrid is very high, as is the case with FC Barcelona in Murcia, Castilla la Mancha, or Extremadura.

Figure 5: *Sympathy or rejection of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona by provinces.*



Source: Personality Media.

Following the usual logic and codes among fans of the world of football, the Real Madrid fan would show rejection of the presence of FC Barcelona players on the cover of FIFA, exactly as the FC Barcelona fan would when whoever was present was a Real Madrid player.

A brand that is expressly linked to a team, risks being boycotted by rival fans. This was the case, for example, in 1985 when the Zanussi appliance brand suffered a sales boycott in Catalonia for being a sponsor of the rival team (González, 1985).

The second level referred to the little or no representation of players from third teams on the covers of FIFA. The omnipresence of players from Real Madrid and FC Barcelona does not take into account the different fan bases of third teams.

Although Real Madrid and FC Barcelona are the teams with the most followers at a national level, the reality changes radically in certain provinces, in which the percentage of fans of the local team is much higher. According to the CIS, the territorial representativeness of the third teams, that is, the provinces in which the third team has a greater number of fans than Real Madrid or FC Barcelona, indicating the province and, in parentheses, the football team and its percentage of followers, are: Las Palmas (UD Las Palmas 35%), Asturias (Real Sporting 39%), Valladolid (Real Valladolid CF 36%), Pontevedra (Celta de Vigo 42%), Cantabria (Racing de Santander 48%), Zaragoza (Real Zaragoza), Valencia (Valencia CF), A Coruña (Deportivo), Seville (Real Betis), Navarra (Osasuna), Gipuzkoa (Rea Sociedad), and Bizkaia (Athletic de Bilbao). In all these provinces, the local team is the first in percentage of fans, above Real Madrid or FC Barcelona.

It is confirmed that at both analysis levels of sports rivalry:

- Express link with the main rival team (Real Madrid or FC Barcelona)
- Nula representation of third teams (neither Real Madrid nor FC Barcelona)

They are not a brake that limits the sales of the video game, since it holds a leadership position in sales in a sustained manner over time. This would confirm that the FIFA saga is immune to the real threat of a sales boycott derived from the existing sporting rivalry between the fans of the football teams.

Below, in table 2, a comparison is attached between the different players who have appeared in the different editions of the video game and the winner of that year's Ballon d'Or edition.

Table 2. *Ballon d'Or winning players and players featured on FIFA video game covers.*

Año	Jugador en carátula	Ganador Balón de oro (país, jugador, equipo)
1994	David Platt, Pat Bonner and Ruud Gullit	Bulgaria Hristo Stoichkov (FC Barcelona)
1995	Erik Thorstvedt	Liberia George Weah (AC Milan)
1996	Frank de Boer and Jason Mc Ateer	Alemania Matthias Sammer (BV Borussia)
1997	David Ginola	Brasil Ronaldo Nazário (FC Internazionale)
1998	Raúl González	Francia Zinedine Zidane (Juventus FC)
1999	Fernando Morientes	Brasil Rivaldo (FC Barcelona)
2000	Pep Guardiola	Portugal Luís Figo (Real Madrid CF)
2001	Gaizka Mendietta	Inglaterra Michael Owen (Liverpool FC)
2002	Iker Casillas	Brasil Ronaldo Nazário (Real Madrid CF)
2003	Roberto Carlos, Ryan Giggs and Edgar Davids	República Checa Pavel Nedvěd (Juventus FC)
2004	Alessandro Del Piero, Thierry Henry and Ronaldinho	Ucrania Andriy Shevchenko (AC Milan)
2005	Patrick Vieira, Fernando Morientes, Andriy Shevchenko	Brasil Ronaldinho (FC Barcelona)
2006	Wayne Rooney and Ronaldinho	Italia Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid CF)
2007	Ronaldinho and David Villa	Brasil Kaká (AC Milán)
2008	Ronaldinho and Sergio Ramos	Portugal Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United FC)
2009	Wayne Rooney and Gonzalo Higuaín	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2010	Xavi Hernández and Karim Benzema	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2011	Kaká and Andrés Iniesta	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2012	Gerard Piqué and Xabi Alonso	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2013	Leo Messi and Roberto Soldado	Portugal Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid CF)
2014	Leo Messi	Portugal Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid CF)
2015	Leo Messi	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2016	Leo Messi	Portugal Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid CF)
2017	Marco Reus	Portugal Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid CF)
2018	Cristiano Ronaldo	Croacia Luka Modrić (Real Madrid CF)
2019	Cristiano Ronaldo	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
2020	Edén Hazard	Not delivered by Covid 19
2021	Kylian Mbappé	Argentina Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)

Source: Own elaboration.

To everything seen above concerning the express link with specific teams, and regarding the data in table 2, is added the fact that the FIFA saga does not take into account the best player in the selection of the player on the cover in each year's edition. Only in the 2015 edition does the player who appears on the cover of FIFA, Lionel Messi, coincide with the winner of the Ballon d'Or. This data is very relevant to the extent that the editions between 2008 and 2021, except for the 2018 edition, have only had two winners: Cristiano Ronaldo (5 editions) and Lionel Messi (7).

We can conclude that the FIFA saga in Spain selects the player who stars on the cover of each edition for his membership, connection, or relationship with the Real Madrid and FC Barcelona teams. That he is, has been, or could be a player of these teams is the main selection criterion.

4.2. Analysis from a graphic design point

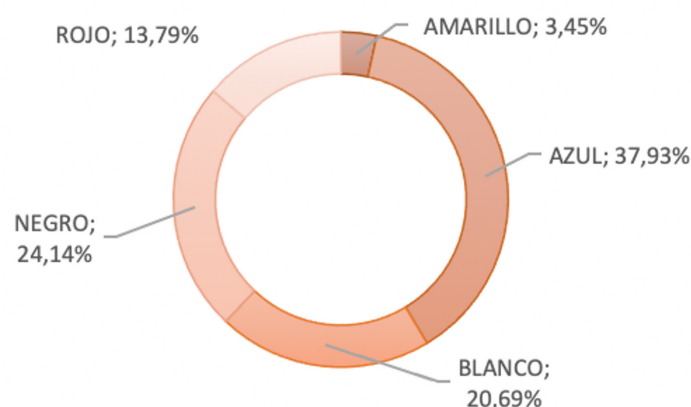
Once the database has been prepared with the registration of all the items, the most statistically significant results are shown in the charts.

In the first of the five blocks, where the general composition of the covers is analyzed, the following observation parameters are established:

Regarding the type of dominant line in the composition, vertical lines predominate, since they are present in 23 of the 29 covers (79.31%). Diagonal lines appear in 5 (17.24%) and horizontal lines have greater weight in only 1 cover. The data on the type of composition shows how rectangular shapes correspond to 58.62% of the sample (17 covers), followed by triangular shapes with 31.03% (9 covers). Circular shapes are present on 3 covers (10.34%).

The review of the color range indicates that up to 8 different colors are used in the design: yellow, blue, white, gold, lilac, black, red, and green. In a more detailed analysis of the dominant colors, it is significant that blue is the most used with 37.93%, followed by black, and white. Up to 5 different dominant colors appear.

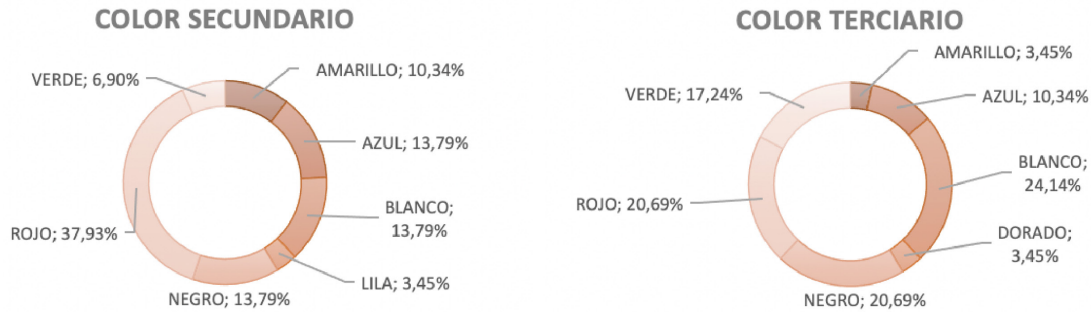
Figure 6: *Dominant colors in FIFA covers.*



Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, it is difficult to establish any kind of criteria on the secondary and tertiary colors present in the design, since in both cases up to 7 different colors are used and with insignificant percentages, except for 37.93% of red as a secondary color and 24.14% of white as tertiary.

Figure 7: *Secondary and tertiary colors in FIFA covers.*



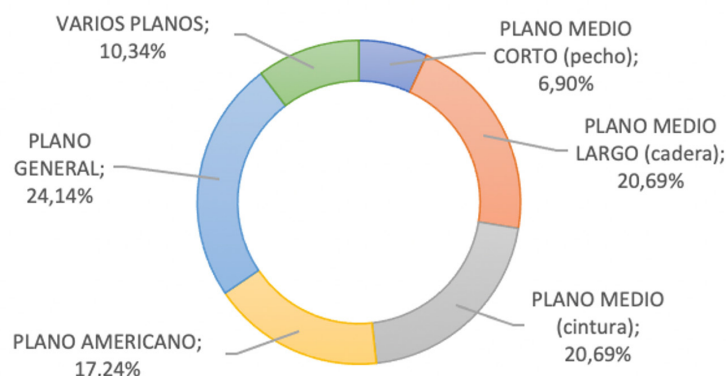
Source: Own elaboration.

In the treatment of space, two analysis parameters are defined, covers with a full-intermediate elements percentage and intermediate-empty covers. 72.41% of the covers choose to leave not many empty spaces, they tend to be quite full of elements. On 8 covers (27.59%), a little more air is allowed in the composition.

The second block analyzes the figure of the players. Regarding the number of players that appear, individuality is the one that presents the greatest frequency since it is manifested in 16 covers (55.17%). Two players in 10 (34.48%) and three players in 3 (10.34%) covers. The level of interpretation in most cases is a realistic figurative interpretation of the figure of the player or players (86.21% - 25 covers), reserving a more interpretive vision for 4 covers (13.79%).

The type of shot used does not present a clear consistency either, the medium shot and the medium long shot are the most used, but all the variants appear on at least 2 covers.

Figure 8: *Type of shot used.*



Source: Own elaboration.

The players show movement in 75.86% (22 covers), are static in 4 (13.79%), and combine dynamic and static positions on 3 occasions (10.34%). If we analyze their expression, we see how we find smiling faces, faces with a competitive, concentrated, or serious attitude, and even covers with different attitudes within the same edition.

Table 3. *Players' attitude.*

	Nº OF TIMES IT APPEARS	
SMILING	1	3,45%
COMPETITIVE	6	20,69%
SERIOUS	4	13,79%
CONCENTRATED	12	41,38%
VARIOUS	6	20,69%
	29	

Source: Own elaboration.

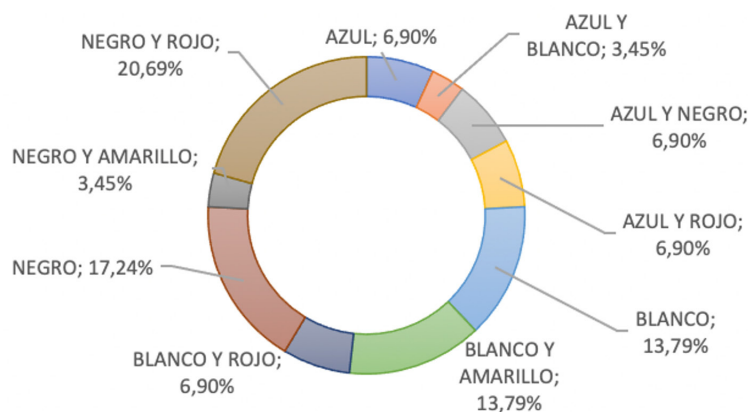
In the third block of the file, the backgrounds presented by the covers are analyzed from three points of view:

Whether or not there is enough contrast. In 82.76% of the cases (24 covers), sufficient contrast is achieved. In 5 covers (17.24%) the minimum contrast is not reached.

Whether or not the background is identified. In 58.62% of the cases (17 covers), it is identified and in 41.38% (12 covers) it is not. Finally, the background types are compared. Three variables are defined, without a background on 6 covers (20.69%), an abstract background also with 6 covers (20.69%), or with a football field, which is the one with the greatest presence. It appears on 17 covers and represents 58.62% of the cases.

In the fourth block, the characteristics of the fonts used are analyzed, and two analysis variables are found where some design strategy can be determined, both in the font used (fonts with a serif or without serif) and in the use of lower and upper case. The study shows that in 100% of the cases in all the covers a sans serif font is used and in capital letters. Of course, if you look at the color of those letters, there is no longer such consistency since there are up to 10 variations throughout the 29 covers.

Figure 9: *Text color.*



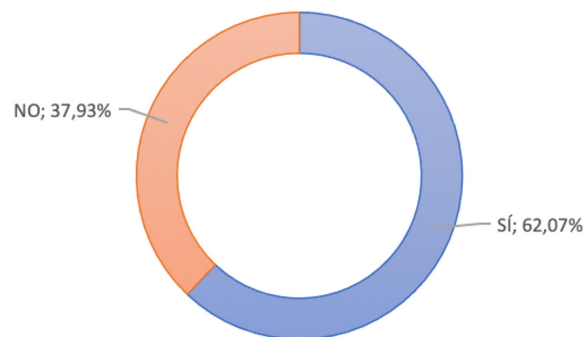
Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the use of the italic variant in typography, it is used in 11 covers (37.93%) and the regular variant is used in 18 (62.07%), although it is quite inconsistent since it changes from one to another on numerous occasions.

In the fifth and last block of the analysis, the presence of the graphic corporate identity is studied and if it varies compared to the previous year. FIFA's graphic corporate identity appears on all covers but not always with the same visual hierarchy and graphic weight. It oscillates between the 9 editions (31.03%) in which it has a lot of prominence and the 14 (48.28%) in which it has little, going through the 6 (20.69%) editions in which it has an intermediate prominence.

Related to this, it is observed how the graphic corporate identity changes 18 times compared to the previous year and remains the same in 11 editions.

Figure 10: *Is there a change in the graphic corporate identity compared to the previous year?.*



Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

The multivariate analysis carried out shows how there are no sports communication or design criteria when considering the covers of the best-selling video game. All possible variations are shown and it does not present any type of unity or link with the brand. The research allows us to conclude that the graphic resources and compositional patterns of the video game covers are scarcely relevant and non-uniform.

It is a completely atypical case where the gaming experience and the sensation of immersion that the user feels prevail. The packaging or presentation of the game is almost irrelevant and neither sports nor design factors are taken into account. The results show that basic premises that condition the sales of any other product, in this case, are non-existent. The creators ignore that the function of the package is to act as an ambassador, which must describe the product and provide it with its own graphic manifestation. It is an invaluable brand tool that every producer should take maximum care of, strengthening its visual components and subtly adapting them to market demands over the years, so as not to lose the communicative performance based on visual strategies consolidated through the configuration of its visual identity.

After observing and compiling the results of the statistical analysis, we can conclude the following regarding the hypotheses:

H1: Are the usual sporting rivalry criteria in football that affect the image in front of the rival fans taken into account in the selection of players for the FIFA video game covers?

The answer is no. In the selection of players, the possibility that the fans of the opposing team (Real Madrid or FC Barcelona) reject the fact that the person who appears on the cover is a player from the rival team is not taken into account. Nor is it taken into account that there is a significant mass of fans who follow teams other than Real Madrid or FC Barcelona. Finally, it is not valued in most cases to include on the cover of that year the player officially recognized as the best in the world, the winner of the Ballon d'Or.

H2: Are there graphic design guidelines in the visual identity of the FIFA video game covers?

The answer is also no, they do not exist. It has been detailed in the results section how criteria and patterns are not established in the graphic language since all the variants are present to a lesser or greater extent in all the items analyzed. However, it is not only the number of variables that are presented and the lack of visual affinity that is relevant but also the number of times that it varies throughout the 29 editions, as shown in the following table.

Table 4. *The number of changes and percentage of variation in the FIFA covers.*

		Nº DE CAMBIOS A LO LARGO DEL PERÍODO ESTUDIADO	Porcentaje de variación	
GENERAL	GENERAL - LÍNEAS DOMINANTES	6	21,43%	
	GENERAL - COMPOSICIÓN	11	39,29%	
	GENERAL - GAMA CROMÁTICA			
	COLOR	COLOR DOMINANTE	15	53,57%
		COLOR SECUNDARIO	14	50,00%
		COLOR TERCIARIO	21	75,00%
	TERNAS COLOR	Nº DE TERNAS	26	92,86%
GENERAL - ESPACIO	4	14,29%		
JUGADORES	JUGADORES - Nº JUGADORES	6	21,43%	
	JUGADORES - NIVEL REPRESENTACIÓN	4	14,29%	
	JUGADORES - TIPO DE PLANO	22	78,57%	
	JUGADORES - ¿HAY MOVIMIENTO?	11	39,29%	
	JUGADORES - ACTITUD	20	71,43%	
FONDO	FONDO - SUFICIENTE CONTRASTE	8	28,57%	
	FONDO - ¿SE IDENTIFICA TODO?	7	25,00%	
	FONDO - TIPO	12	42,86%	
TEXTO	TEXTO - TIPO DE LETRA	0	0,00%	
	TEXTO - MAYÚSCULAS/MINÚSCULAS	0	0,00%	
	TEXTO - COLOR	13	46,43%	
	TEXTO - CURSIVA	7	25,00%	
IDENTIDAD CORPORATIVA GRÁFICA	IDENTIDAD CORPORATIVA GRÁFICA - JERARQUÍA VISUAL	7	25,00%	
	IDENTIDAD CORPORATIVA GRÁFICA - CAMBIA RESPECTO AL AÑO ANTERIOR	14	50,00%	

Source: Own elaboration.

Of the 28 possible variations that each item can undergo, we observe how in the general composition block, the dominant lines and the type of composition have significant percentages of variation, although where the greatest degree of variation exists is in the chromatic range used in each edition. In 26 of the 29 editions, the chromatic range is changed, that is, there is a 92.86% variation percentage. The range is only repeated in 2010 and 2011 using white, red, and blue, and in 2015 and 2016 using blue, green, and red. A distinctive sign as important as the chromatic factor is not used as a communicative resource for the consolidation of the visual identity.

The most consistent part of this section would be the treatment of the space with a variation of 14.29%, it presents design spaces quite full of elements and with few blank spaces. In any case, the figures that are placed in the background are quite heterogeneous, since they present different rather unconnected formal proposals.

In the block that analyzes the presence of the players, it is striking how the percentage of variation of the type of shot is 78.57% and the attitude shown by the players is modified by 71.43%. Scale and framing are two basic resources when planning any graphic product that are not taken into account. Regarding the background, the contrast also varies above 25% and whether the background is identified. Although the type of background used is a football field on different occasions, it changes up to 12 times.

The text does seem to show a design guideline by always using sans serif letters in capital letters, but this intention to present some kind of visual consistency is diminished by the variation in the use of italics and especially by the chromatic variation of the texts throughout the editions, which corresponds to 46.43%. The style and family remain constant during the studied period, but the typographical variants presented in italics and the color changes do not favor the perception of the brand to be consolidated.

The graphic corporate identity of a brand, a key factor in the identification of a product by the user, is also not a relevant factor in video game covers, since it varies up to 14 times from one year to the next. This high degree of variation places the brand far from giving it the importance that this factor has in shaping the company's public personality. The identity of a brand and what it wants to convey to its audiences corresponds to one of the extremes that make up the act of communication, that of the issuer. What the recipient receives and understands through its corporate identity is what makes up the corporate image. Hence the importance of taking care of this aspect, something that does not happen in the case of FIFA, so that the brand is perceived in a certain way and the user adequately decodes the message and empathizes with it.

If we take the average variation of each of the analyzed blocks, to determine some frequency, impact sequence, or repetition of certain visual stimuli, the following results are obtained that show the lack of guidelines at the graphic level:

- Average variation regarding the general composition: 49.49%
- Average variation regarding the players: 45.00%
- Average variation regarding the background of the image: 32.14%
- Average variation regarding the text: 17.86%
- Average variation regarding the graphic corporate identity: 37.50%

With these percentages, it is almost impossible to establish some type of guideline that allows the user to generate certain mental patterns regarding the product. Even taking into account the technological advances in the field of graphic design and possible temporary changes or trends for more than two decades, this video game is an atypical product that does not take care of basic aspects that would be decisive in any strategic brand plan.

Designing by trends or impulse without direction is not adequate, since the continuity and consistency necessary in a visual message will not be representative. It is obvious that consumers, due to the saturation of messages that they receive daily, try to order the information they collect and create patterns with the tangible elements that allow them to quickly identify the product. In the analyzed covers, there is no defined context, and it is precisely this point that allows the creation of a story or content around a brand. Regarding the plastic elements that the visual language manages, it also presents very deficient percentages. The visual space and the graphic forms do not present any type of structure and are reduced to the display of players. The presence of players should be preceded by the definition of bases that allow textures, spaces, and shapes to be visualized.

Although the text is the one with the lowest percentage of variation, the fact that typography implicitly has language and plastic qualities that give meaning and dimension to words beyond their semantic

meaning is ignored. An adequate treatment of the logo within the graphic corporate identity favors obtaining certain communicative performances and a better global perception of the brand. The more coherent and stable a brand is over time, the more it facilitates the act of communication between sender and receiver.

The theory tells us that a defined visual symbology encourages the development of positive attitudes in the perception of the product, its operation, and continuity over time, developing feelings of loyalty and fidelity. It is a powerful tool to capture interest, give personality, and structure the composition. Hence the relevance and difference of this case, in which besides everything analyzed, the news where the name change for the 2023 edition is collected has already been published, going from being called FIFA to EA Sports FC.

Likewise, it is advisable not to design according to the trends of the season, since it may be successful at the time, but it will not last much longer and its function will not be fully fulfilled.

In short, this study allows us to conclude that the FIFA video game covers do not follow any sporting, color, or composition criteria in their design. The different plastic, iconic, and linguistic signs on which a graphic construction is based are not being used following any criteria nor are optimized. The uniqueness of this case makes it impossible to establish a sporting or graphic strategy given the variety of unconnected visual manifestations it presents. The gaming experience is above the product itself.

As possible lines of research, this analysis could be replicated in the following best-selling video games and even conceive a comparative analysis of the covers of different video games to go deeper into the analysis of the graphic communication of this type of media.

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