



Graphic Design as a Design Mediation Process: Methodological Axes for Visual Communication through the Celestún Case Study

Diseño gráfico como proceso de mediación proyectual: Ejes metodológicos para la comunicación visual desde el caso Celestún

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Abstract

This article examines graphic design as a process of design mediation and proposes a methodology that moves beyond the logic of linear models. From this perspective, a methodological model is presented to guide the development of graphic communication projects. The objective is to propose and validate a six-axis model—contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, technical, and experiential—that articulates theory and practice. We employ a qualitative–interpretive methodology based on an instrumental case study: the development of identity and packaging for the Celestún personal-care brand. The findings suggest that the use of these axes enables a coherent transition between the product's symbolic content and its technical feasibility across rigid and flexible packaging. The central argument is that design is not merely a cosmetic construction, but a system of mediations that safeguards the cultural relevance of the visual message. Nevertheless, the model should be tested in dynamic digital-media environments in order to assess its scalability.

Keywords: graphic design, design mediation, design methodology, visual communication, case study

Resumen

El presente artículo aborda el diseño gráfico como un proceso de mediación proyectual y propone una metodología que supera la lógica de los modelos lineales. A partir de esta perspectiva, se presenta un modelo metodológico para orientar el desarrollo de proyectos de comunicación gráfica. El objetivo es proporcionar y validar un modelo de seis ejes (contextual, conceptual, simbólico, formal, técnico y experiencial) que articule la teoría con la práctica. Utilizamos una metodología cualitativa-interpretativa basada en un estudio de caso instrumental: desarrollo de identidad y empaque para la marca de cuidado personal: Celestún. Los resultados sugieren que el uso de estos ejes permite una transición coherente entre la carga simbólica del producto y su viabilidad técnica en empaques rígidos y flexibles. El argumento final aquí es que el diseño no es sólo una construcción cosmética, sino un sistema de mediaciones que garantiza la relevancia cultural del mensaje visual. Sin embargo, el modelo debería probarse en entornos de medios digitales dinámicos para evaluar su escalabilidad.

Palabras clave: diseño gráfico, mediación proyectual, metodología del diseño, comunicación visual, estudio de caso

Introduction

Over the past decades, graphic design has undergone substantial expansion in both its fields of application and its theoretical foundations. This expansion calls for a critical reassessment of traditional project approaches which, although central to the consolidation of design as a professional discipline, are insufficient to account for the cultural, symbolic, and communicative complexity characteristic of contemporary graphic communication projects. Design can be understood as more than the formal resolution of a visual problem; it is increasingly conceived as a culturally situated practice embedded in social, economic, technological, and symbolic dimensions. From this perspective, Bonsiepe (1999) and Margolin (2015) emphasize the need to regard mediation—between humans and artificial systems, and among discourses, values, and experiences—as a core dimension of design.

In academic contexts, this shift has encouraged the search for methodologies capable of analyzing and documenting the design process beyond the designer's intuition or empirical experience. Rather than relying solely on traditional linear models such as Munari's (1983), the systematizations discussed by Cross (2006), or Bonsiepe's (1999) conception of design as problem solving and interface management, contemporary practice requires a broader perspective. It is therefore appropriate to develop methodological strategies capable of accommodating the relational, nonlinear, and interpretive characteristics of graphic design.

Design should be understood as a system of mediations (López, 2022). From this standpoint, design does not merely function; it articulates visual communication with the systemic complexity of the contemporary environment. This article therefore seeks to expand and develop a methodology based on design-mediation axes, understood as analytical structures capable of translating contextual and conceptual information into coherent and transferable visual decisions. Rather than a fixed recipe or closed sequence, the proposal constitutes a flexible system applicable to any graphic communication project. Accordingly, the article examines the process through which mediation axes are generated, their internal articulation, and their applicability as derived from the analysis of the Celestún brand case study. The aim is to provide a

robust methodological tool for both professional practice and academic research in graphic design.

◆ Design Mediation in Graphic Communication Design

Graphic Design, Communication, and Visual Culture

Contemporary graphic design operates at the intersection of communication, visual culture, and symbolic production. From an international perspective, scholars such as Frascara (2006) have described graphic design as a deliberate act of communication intended to produce specific effects on a target audience, emphasizing that every visual decision entails ethical, cultural, and strategic considerations.

Margolin (2015) further develops this perspective by positioning design as a social practice situated within broader cultural and political systems. These debates acquire particular significance in relation to the historical, social, and cultural conditions under which visual production takes place in Latin America. Graphic design not only conveys information; it also constructs identities, territories, and local narratives. Consequently, methodological reflection in design must engage both international theoretical frameworks and critical approaches developed in Latin America, where design is understood as an instrument of cultural mediation.

Mediation, Translation, and Interpretation in the Design Process

The notion of mediation has been examined across multiple disciplines, particularly as a means of explaining how meanings are articulated among subjects, objects, and contexts. In design, Bonsiepe (1999) conceptualizes the interface as a space of mediation between the user and the artificial world, with the designer acting as the articulator of that relationship. In this article, design mediation is understood as an interpretive mechanism through which the designer translates contextual, conceptual, and symbolic inputs into visual forms. Mediation differs from literal translation because it entails an active process of interpretation, selection, and synthesis in which decisions are grounded in the cultural and communicative context of the project.

◆ A Critique of Sequential Methodological Models

Classical design methodologies, widely used in education and professional practice, tend to follow sequential structures that move from analysis toward a final product. Munari (1983) proposes a project method based on rational problem solving, whereas Cross (2006) organizes design thinking within an identifiable structured order. Although these models have played an important role in codifying design as an academic discipline, they do not fully capture the multilayered character of contemporary graphic communication processes, in which

formal, conceptual, and technical decisions continuously interact. From a critical perspective, design mediation is introduced as an alternative framework capable of acknowledging the nonlinear, relational, and contextual structure of the design process.

❖ Methodological Approach

The study is qualitative in nature and adopts an analytical–interpretive approach suited to the examination of design processes in graphic design. This approach is grounded in the premise that graphic communication design cannot be reduced to technical or formal procedures, but must instead be conceptualized as a culturally situated process of meaning construction. An instrumental case study (Yin, 2018) is employed with the purpose of developing and validating a transferable methodological proposal. The case is presented not as an object of study in itself, but as an analytical device through which the design-mediation processes involved in graphic design can be observed, documented, and critically examined.

To strengthen the methodological consistency of the proposal and demonstrate that it is not an isolated formulation, the design-mediation axes were previously applied in several academic exercises carried out within the Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design at CUAAD. Their implementation took place across different course groups focused on visual identity, editorial design, and packaging design projects, involving outputs such as brands, packaging systems, editorial compositions, and graphic applications. In these exercises, the axes did not operate as a rigid sequence, but as interrelated fields of analysis that enabled students to articulate contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, technical, and experiential decisions according to the specific communication problem. These prior applications made it possible to observe the model's operational usefulness, its clarity in organizing the design process, and its capacity to adapt to different topics and media, thereby supporting its subsequent systematization through the Celestún case.

❖ Process for Developing the Design-Mediation Axes

The methodological core of the proposal lies in explaining the process through which the design-mediation axes are identified, constructed, and articulated. These axes should therefore not be regarded as stages of progression or step-by-step checklists, but rather as analytical constructs that emerge from the critical exploration of context and from the act of designing itself. In identifying the communication problem, the latter must be defined not merely as a functional need, but as a complex situation that articulates cultural context, strategic objectives, and user expectations. This approach contrasts with methods centered exclusively on the brief and encourages an expanded reading of the problem as a discursive construction.

The design problem is constructed through a set of analytical questions: What is being communicated? To whom? From what cultural context? With what symbolic implications? These questions make it possible to delimit the fields of mediation that are subsequently organized as methodological axes.

The study is qualitative and analytical–interpretive in nature. In addition, the methodological proposal presented here is supported by prior application exercises conducted in academic contexts of graphic-design education, thereby reinforcing its operational relevance and transferable character (see Table 1).

Table 1

Application of the Design-Mediation Axes in Academic Graphic-Design Exercises

Course / subject	Type of project developed	Outputs or topics addressed	Axes applied	Observed contribution
Graphic Design Projects II	Identity and packaging	Brand, labels, rigid and flexible packaging	Contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, technical, and experiential	Enabled the articulation of brand identity, production feasibility, and interpretation in context of use
Design VII / Identity	Identity systems	Logo, color palette, typography, basic applications	Contextual, conceptual, symbolic, and formal	Promoted coherence between brand attributes and visual expression
Design IV / Editorial	Editorial projects	Covers, grids, typographic hierarchies, composition	Conceptual, formal, technical, and experiential	Helped justify compositional decisions and improve legibility
Strategic Design I	Campaigns and graphic pieces	Posters, promotional systems, visual narrative	Contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, and experiential	Facilitated the relationship between sociocultural context and communicative effectiveness

Note: Author's own elaboration.

Analytical Construction of the Axes

Once the communication problem has been delimited, mediation axes are constructed through comparative and conceptual analysis. This process requires the examination of visual, discursive, and cultural references, as well as the identification of patterns across similar graphic communication projects. The axes respond to the need to structure complexity within the design process without reducing or oversimplifying it. Each axis is defined as a specific field of mediation—contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, technical, and experiential—through which design decisions can be analyzed from different yet interrelated dimensions. These fields are then framed as methodological axes.

◆ Theoretical Validation of the Axes

The design-mediation axes are validated by confronting them with theoretical models of design and visual communication. Contextual–strategic mediation draws on approaches that understand design as a cultural practice (Margolin, 2015), whereas conceptual–discursive mediation incorporates theories of intentional communication (Frascara, 2006). Semantic–symbolic mediation, in turn, is grounded in the understanding of design as a system of signs, while formal–configurational mediation is informed by theories of design thinking (Cross, 2006). Finally, technical–production and communicative–experiential mediation are linked to contemporary approaches to material production and user experience.

The design-mediation axes are validated through critical comparison with theoretical models of design and visual communication. This validation consists of contrasting each axis with conceptual contributions capable of explaining, justifying, and verifying design decisions.

The semantic–symbolic mediation axis in the Celestún case provides an illustrative example of this process of theoretical validation. Its validation does not merely rest on the assertion that the project employs territorial symbols; rather, it is grounded in specific conceptual frameworks.

Following Barthes (1986), the image can be understood at denotative and connotative levels, making it possible to analyze how elements such as the flamingo, the pink color palette, and references to the natural environment do more than represent a place of origin: they activate cultural associations related to identity, nature, and authenticity. Hall (1997) further clarifies that these meanings are not universal, but socially constructed within shared systems of representation. The axis is therefore validated by demonstrating that the visual decisions were neither arbitrary nor merely decorative, but grounded in a theoretical basis capable of explaining the relationship among symbol, culture, and visual communication. The same procedure can be replicated for each axis by contrasting design decisions with relevant authors and concepts in order to verify their disciplinary coherence.

◆ Nonlinear Articulation of the Axes

A key characteristic of the proposed model is its recognition of the nonlinear articulation of the mediation axes. Unlike sequential approaches, the axes operate simultaneously and continuously inform one another throughout the design process. This articulation provides a way of understanding graphic design as a dynamic system of interdependent decisions in which an adjustment to the formal domain may affect symbolic meaning or user experience. In this sense, design mediation functions as an interpretive framework that accompanies the entire design process.

❖ **Transferability of the Methodological Model**

The proposed set of design-mediation axes constitutes a model applicable to any graphic communication project. Its methodological value lies in its flexibility and its capacity to operate across diverse contexts, scales, and media, ranging from editorial projects and visual identities to complex digital communication systems and interactive environments.

This transferability does not imply the homogenization of design practices. Rather, the model provides a flexible analytical framework through which the designer can interpret each project situation according to a critical and context-sensitive logic. The axes therefore serve as instruments for interpretation and decision making, rather than as a closed set of instructions.

❖ **Theoretical Development of the Design-Mediation Axes**

Contextual–Strategic Mediation Axis

The contextual–strategic mediation axis constitutes a central component of the proposed model. It is structured to recognize context as a dynamic network of cultural, social, economic, and symbolic interactions within which the graphic communication design process is produced and informed.

From a theoretical standpoint, this axis draws on Margolin's (2015) conception of design as a cultural practice, according to which every designed object is embedded within specific social and political structures. Bonsiepe (1999), for his part, describes the interface as a space of mediation between the user and the artificial world, reinforcing the idea that context is not external to design but constitutive of its meaning.

Contextual–strategic mediation engages cultural studies of representation, particularly Hall's (1997) argument that meanings are not inherent in objects but socially constructed. From this perspective, the designer reconstructs and transforms cultural narratives, thereby producing situated visual messages.

In contrast to linear approaches that reduce context to data gathered before design begins, contextual–strategic mediation proposes a continuous and reflexive reading of the environment throughout the project life cycle. Context remains in permanent dialogue with conceptual and formal choices over the course of the project, in accordance with Schön's (1983) notion of reflective practice.

As a methodological concept, this axis is applicable to graphic communication projects across corporate, editorial, cultural, and digital formats. Its principal function is to ensure that design outcomes respond coherently to their environment and maintain both cultural and communicative relevance.

To clarify the internal logic of the model, Table 2 presents a synthetic overview of the development of each design-mediation axis. This scheme should not be interpreted as a linear sequence, but as an analytical organization of dimensions that interact throughout the design process. Its purpose is to show what each axis analyzes, how it operates methodologically, and what kinds of decisions or outcomes it produces within a graphic communication project.

Table 2
Development Framework for the Design-Mediation Axes

Mediation axis	What does it analyze?	How is it developed?	What does it contribute to the project?
Contextual–strategic	The cultural, social, economic, and communicative environment of the project	Through analysis of context, users, competition, sector, needs, and environmental conditions	Defines the communication problem and guides the strategic relevance of the design
Conceptual–discursive	The communicative intention, guiding concepts, and project discourse	Through the construction of attributes, narratives, values, and meanings that structure the proposal	Provides conceptual coherence and justifies the communicative direction
Semantic–symbolic	The signs, symbols, metaphors, and visual imaginaries involved	Through the selection, analysis, and articulation of visual and cultural references carrying meaning	Translates conceptual discourse into culturally legible visual codes
Formal–configurational	The visual organization of the proposal	Through decisions concerning typography, color, composition, hierarchy, grid, and formal relationships	Visually materializes the concept and ensures graphic coherence
Technical–production	The material and technological conditions of realization	Through evaluation of substrates, formats, printing processes, costs, regulations, and production feasibility	Ensures technical feasibility and production quality
Communicative–experiential	User reception, comprehension, and interaction with the artifact	Through criteria of legibility, accessibility, clarity, use, and experience in real contexts	Evaluates communicative effectiveness and the user experience

Note: Author's own elaboration.

The development of each axis therefore entails a specific analytical operation within the design process. Whereas some axes are oriented toward understanding context and constructing meaning, others focus on translating that meaning visually, making it technically feasible, and verifying its effectiveness through user experience. Taken together, these axes form a mediation system that makes it possible to understand graphic design as a relational, reflective, and nonlinear practice.

Conceptual–Discursive Mediation Axis

The conceptual–discursive mediation axis constitutes the interpretive core of the graphic communication design process. It is within this axis that the conceptual discourse conferring meaning, coherence, and direction on the visual proposal is constructed. Unlike approaches focused exclusively on form or function, this axis emphasizes the need to articulate a clear communicative intention prior to graphic materialization.

From a theoretical standpoint, this axis directly engages Krippendorff's (2006) conception of design as a practice oriented toward the production of meaning. For Krippendorff, design is not limited to giving form to visual objects; it configures interpretive frameworks through which users understand and experience the world. In this sense, conceptual discourse functions as a semantic structure that guides design decisions.

Conceptual–discursive mediation also draws on Barthes's (1986) semiotic and cultural theory of the image, particularly the distinction between denotation and connotation. Conceptual discourse makes it possible to anticipate the levels of meaning that a graphic artifact may activate by considering not only what is explicitly shown, but also the symbolic and cultural values associated with images.

From the perspective of cultural studies, Hall (1997) conceptualizes discourse as a system of representation that organizes the production of meaning within a specific social context. Applied to graphic design, this approach requires acknowledging that every visual proposal is situated within preexisting discourses and may contribute to reinforcing, questioning, or resignifying them.

Methodologically, the conceptual–discursive axis operates as a space of mediation between contextual analysis and formal configuration. Within it, guiding concepts, identity attributes, communicative values, and visual narratives are defined in order to structure the project. This instance should not be understood as an isolated stage, but as a field of continuous reflection that accompanies the entire design process.

The relevance of this axis to graphic communication lies in its capacity to prevent merely aesthetic or intuitive solutions. By constructing an explicit conceptual discourse, the designer can justify formal decisions, assess the coherence of the visual system, and ensure consistency of the message across different media and contexts.

Finally, conceptual–discursive mediation strengthens the transferability of the proposed methodological model. Because it focuses on the construction of meaning rather than on specific solutions, this axis can be applied to projects involving visual identity, editorial design, cultural communication, place branding, or digital design, thereby establishing itself as a fundamental component of contemporary graphic design.

Semantic–Symbolic Mediation Axis

The semantic–symbolic mediation axis examines the relationship between the project’s conceptual discourse and the systems of visual signification that enable its cultural interpretation. This axis analyzes how meanings are constructed, negotiated, and resignified through images, symbols, and graphic metaphors within a specific social context.

Semantic–symbolic mediation recognizes that graphic signs do not possess universal or static meanings. Following Hall (1997), processes of signification are mediated by culturally shared systems of representation; consequently, the designer acts as an interpreter who selects and articulates symbols according to specific cultural frameworks.

This axis promotes a critical analysis of existing visual imaginaries and of the dominant iconographic codes within a given context. Such analysis helps prevent the uncritical use of stereotypes and supports the development of culturally relevant and ethically responsible visual proposals.

Contemporary visual-culture studies, particularly the work of Mirzoeff (2015), reinforce the understanding of the image as an active agent in the production of meaning and in the configuration of ways of seeing. From this perspective, semantic–symbolic mediation not only translates conceptual discourse, but also evaluates its cultural and social implications.

Methodologically, this axis functions as a space of verification between intention and reception, allowing the project’s symbolic system to be adjusted in order to ensure coherence, cultural legibility, and communicative relevance. Its applicability is broad and especially important in visual identity, cultural communication, and place-branding projects.

Formal–Configurational Mediation Axis

The formal–configurational mediation axis addresses the visual materialization of conceptual and symbolic discourse through the organization of graphic elements. It understands form not as an isolated aesthetic outcome, but as a site of synthesis in which conceptual, communicative, and perceptual decisions converge.

From the standpoint of design thinking, Cross (2006) argues that formal decisions in design constitute a distinctive form of disciplinary knowledge. Typography, color, composition, rhythm, and visual hierarchy operate as structured systems through which abstract intentions can be translated into comprehensible visual configurations.

Formal–configurational mediation entails the continuous evaluation of coherence between conceptual discourse and visual expression. Every formal decision communicates values, establishes priorities of reading,

and guides user experience, consistent with Frascara's (2006) argument regarding the inseparable relationship among form, content, and context.

This axis also engages Alexander's (1979) notion of systems and patterns, according to which formal configurations acquire meaning when integrated into coherent and adaptable structures. Applied to graphic design, this entails constructing consistent visual systems capable of functioning across different media and formats.

Methodologically, formal–configurational mediation operates as an iterative process of adjustment and refinement in which visual solutions are evaluated and modified according to their communicative effectiveness. This axis is transferable to any graphic communication project and is central to ensuring clarity, coherence, and visual consistency.

Technical–Production Mediation Axis

The technical–production mediation axis focuses on the articulation between the visual proposal and the material, technological, and regulatory conditions that make its realization possible. It recognizes that every graphic design project is materialized through specific media and substrates, and that these conditions directly influence design decisions.

From a methodological perspective, technical–production mediation is not confined to the final production stage; rather, it intervenes from the initial phases of the project. Variables such as materials, printing processes, formats, costs, and regulations are incorporated as active components of the design process.

Bonsiepe (1999) emphasizes that the relationship between form and technology constitutes a fundamental space of mediation in which the designer acts as an intermediary between technical possibilities and communicative intentions. This perspective helps prevent unfeasible visual solutions and fosters a comprehensive understanding of the design process.

Technical–production mediation also incorporates criteria of sustainability and feasibility, issues of increasing relevance in contemporary design. Integrating this axis supports informed decisions that balance conceptual coherence, production efficiency, and material responsibility.

Methodologically, this axis functions as a mechanism for the technical validation of the project, ensuring that graphic decisions can be materialized without compromising communicative meaning. Its application is essential in print, editorial, and packaging–design projects, as well as in digital media.

Communicative–Experiential Mediation Axis

The communicative–experiential mediation axis positions the user as an active component of the graphic communication process. It focuses on the analysis of design perception, interpretation, and experience in real contexts of use, taking into account factors such as legibility, accessibility, and communicative clarity.

From the standpoint of visual communication, Frascara (2006) argues that the effectiveness of graphic design should be evaluated according to the effects it produces on people. Communicative–experiential mediation makes it possible to assess whether the project’s discursive and symbolic intentions are effectively translated into comprehensible and meaningful experiences.

This axis is also related to Schön’s (1983) notion of reflective practice, insofar as it promotes feedback processes based on the observation of use and user experience. Design is thus conceived as an open process that remains subject to adjustment and continuous improvement.

Methodologically, communicative–experiential mediation functions as a criterion for project closure and validation. Through this axis, the designer identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of comprehension, interaction, and visual experience.

The applicability of this axis is transversal to all graphic communication projects, whether print or digital. By incorporating user experience as an analytical dimension, the design-mediation model becomes a comprehensive methodological tool centered on communication.

To ensure the replicability of this model and enable an objective evaluation of each dimension of the design process, Table 3 presents operational indicators that define the scope of each mediation axis.

Table 3
Operational Indicators of the Design-Mediation Axes

Mediation axis	Dimension of analysis	Indicators (measurable/observable variables)
Contextual	Environment and market	Niche identification, direct-competition analysis, local cultural values.
Conceptual	Design strategy	Definition of brand attributes, value proposition, core message.
Symbolic	Visual semantics	Meaning of color, visual metaphors, iconography, and visual rhetoric.
Formal	Composition	Grid structure, typographic hierarchies, visual balance, and contrast.
Technical	Production feasibility	Selection of substrates, printing systems (flexography/offset), ink management.
Experiential	Interaction	Shelf legibility, packaging ergonomics, user emotional response.

Note: Author's own elaboration.

Results The principal results derived from applying the design-mediation-axis model to the Celestún case are presented below. This section explains how each axis—contextual, conceptual, semantic–symbolic, formal–configurational, technical–production, and communicative–experiential—operated as an analytical dimension within the design process, enabling the coherent articulation of contextual research, the construction of visual discourse, the formal materialization of the proposal, its production feasibility, and its evaluation in terms of user experience. Rather than describing a linear workflow, the results demonstrate the interaction of the axes as a mediation system applied to a specific visual communication project.

Methodological Application: The Celestún Project

As shown below, Figure 1 presents the general framework of the design process.

Figure 1
General Framework of the Design Process for Plastic Packaging Design



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Unlike a linear workflow, the first phase of mediation is observed here at the intersection of the contextual and conceptual axes. At this stage, research on the Celestún brand was not limited to data collection; rather, it functioned as a mediation filter through which the needs of the personal-care market (context) defined the communication problem: the absence of an identity capable of balancing an artisanal character with the technical regulations governing plastic packaging.

This framework demonstrates that defining the problem is not simply “step 1”; rather, it results from cross-referencing market indicators with the technical constraints of the medium (rigid and flexible plastic), thereby ensuring from the outset that the proposal is feasible rather than merely aesthetic.

Contextual–Strategic Mediation Axis

This axis establishes the starting point of the methodological process through analysis of the project’s institutional, cultural, and commercial context. Contextual–strategic mediation translates information concerning the umbrella brand, the market, and dominant visual codes into operational design criteria (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Analysis of the Umbrella Brand and Sub-Brands in the Personal-Care Sector



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Figure 2 details the analysis of brand architecture (umbrella brand and sub-brands) and the psychographic characterization of the user. This analysis constitutes the contextual-mediation phase, in which visual gaps within the personal-care sector were identified.

By defining primary and secondary users in terms of age, socioeconomic level, and habits, the model allows the experiential axis to anticipate interaction. The design is not intended for an undifferentiated audience, but for a consumer who values packaging transparency and ease of reading under humid conditions of use, such as in the bathroom. The findings presented here—consumption habits and competition—are not isolated data; rather, they function as parameters that constrain and guide the symbolic and formal decisions developed in subsequent stages.

This axis is transferable to any graphic design project because every visual communication process is situated within a specific strategic context.

Conceptual–Discursive Mediation Axis

The conceptual–discursive mediation axis focuses on the construction of the project's conceptual discourse. Attributes such as “Mexican,” “fun,” and “lively” are structured as operational concepts through semantic and cultural associations (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Conceptualization Based on Guiding Attributes and Semantic Associations



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Figure 3 represents the central node of the methodology: the operationalization of the conceptual and symbolic axes. At this stage, mediation is not a free interpretation but a process of semantic engineering. An in-depth investigation of brand attributes is undertaken, breaking down each concept into a matrix of synonyms and antonyms. This technique of “semantic opposition” makes it possible to define precisely what the brand is and, crucially, what it should not appear to be, thereby reducing ambiguity in visual communication.

A visual analysis of figurative elements is then conducted, culminating in a methodological triangulation. This third analytical axis is crucial because it makes it possible to determine which graphic elements—form, color, and texture—are capable of translating multiple attributes

simultaneously without diluting the essence of any of them. The result is a graphic synthesis in which technical and symbolic mediation converge, ensuring that the final visual proposal constitutes a faithful and efficient translation of the Celestún brand DNA.

Semantic–Symbolic Mediation Axis

This axis translates conceptual discourse into visual meanings through culturally recognizable symbols and graphic metaphors. In the Celestún case, the flamingo functions as both a territorial and identity-related symbol (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Territorial Symbolic References: Celestún



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Figure 4 illustrates the transition from the abstract concept to the brand's formal configuration, grounded in territorial symbolic references. At this point, mediation operates by translating the identity attributes defined through triangulation: "Mexican" and "fun."

1. "Mexican" attribute: The graphic translation does not rely on folkloric clichés; instead, it is expressed through the name Celestún as a geographic anchor associated with natural purity.

2. Visually, the symbolic axis draws on the color palette of the reserve's biodiversity—the pink tones of flamingos and the greens of mangroves—connecting the brand to its territorial origin in a contemporary manner.

“Fun” attribute: This concept is translated through the formal axis by means of typography with organic terminals and a play of visual weights that breaks with the rigidity of traditional pharmaceutical products. Here, mediation enables the name Celestún to be perceived as dynamic and approachable, satisfying the target user's emotional-response indicator within the experiential axis.

The construction of the Celestún brand draws on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, while being updated through Martínez's (2021) perspective, which positions design as a mediator of territorial identity. Thus, the name and graphic language are not merely signs; they operate as vehicles that transport the essence of the Yucatán port into the consumer imaginary, balancing tradition with a vibrant contemporary aesthetic.

Formal–Configurational Mediation Axis

Formal–configurational mediation corresponds to the visual materialization of the concept. It includes typographic, chromatic, and compositional decisions evaluated according to their discursive coherence (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5

Formal Exploration: Sketches, Typography, Color, and Composition



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Figure 6
Formal Exploration: Sketches, Typography, Color, and Composition



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

The transition from idea to physical realization is evident in Figures 5 and 6, where the mediation model ceases to be purely theoretical and becomes embodied in tangible graphic decisions.

Figure 5 shows the exploration and consolidation of Celestún's visual identity system. The methodological value of this phase lies in testing the consistency of the graphic language through variations in composition, line spacing, punctuation, and typographic treatment. These tests make it possible to assess the stability of the brand before transferring it to different applications and media, linking formal decisions to the conceptual criteria defined previously.

Figure 6, in turn, presents the process of formal exploration through sketching and typographic selection. The methodological value of this phase lies in systematic elimination: different typographic variants were tested in order to identify one capable of conveying dynamism without losing robustness during printing. This exploratory stage is what ensures the systemic character of the design, allowing the project to be approached not as a linear act but as a system of continuous negotiations (López, 2022), and ensuring that the final solution is not an isolated outcome but a scalable visual language.

Technical–Production Mediation Axis

This axis articulates the visual proposal with the material, technical, and regulatory conditions of the project, thereby ensuring production feasibility (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Packaging Typologies, Materials, and Printing Processes



Note: Author's own elaboration. Project developed by Fernanda Lizat Jiménez Gonzáles and Brenda Ali Montes Verastegui, Graphic Design Projects II course, Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Communication Design, CUAAD, University of Guadalajara, 2024.

Figure 7 represents the culmination of the mediation process in its most pragmatic dimension: the definition of packaging typologies and production processes. At this stage, the most significant contribution lies in synchronizing visual creativity with industrial feasibility, with technical mediation ensuring that the graphic proposal maintains its integrity despite the physical constraints of plastic substrates (Ramírez and Silva, 2024).

Here, the technical axis operates as a reality filter. It is not sufficient for the Celestún brand to appear “Mexican” and “fun” on a screen; those qualities must also be preserved on the substrate. Accordingly, the selection of materials—flexible and rigid plastic packaging—directly conditioned the printing process. The decision to use flexography or direct digital printing was made after evaluating dot gain and the resistance of inks to the chemical content of personal-care products.

This technical mediation ensures that gradients and territory-inspired graphic textures are neither lost nor degraded during use. Ultimately, Figure 7 demonstrates that the success of a visual communication project

does not end with aesthetics, but depends on the designer's capacity to mediate between creative vision and actual production possibilities, ensuring that the end user receives a clear, durable message consistent with the brand promise.

It is important to emphasize that although technical mediation is exemplified here through plastic substrates and flexographic printing processes, the model is scalable and applicable to any graphic-design product. Whether in the development of a digital interface (UI), where technical mediation shifts toward programming and scalability, or in an urban wayfinding system, where materials and the physical environment impose constraints, the six axes operate with equal validity. The methodology presented here is therefore not limited to packaging; it constitutes a design-thinking framework for any visual communication problem that requires balancing concept, form, and production.

The transition from design to industrial production draws on Papanek's (1985) principles of feasibility while situating them within contemporary printing technologies. As Ramírez and Silva (2024) point out, technical mediation in plastic substrates is critical: the issue is not simply to print, but to synchronize dot gain and material resistance with the original visual proposal in order to ensure an impeccable final product.

Communicative–Experiential Mediation Axis

The final axis evaluates the communicative effectiveness of design in real contexts of use, considering legibility, information hierarchy, and user experience (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Final Label Application and Visual Evaluation in Context of Use



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Figure 8 represents the culmination of the design process: the presentation of the Celestún system in its actual context of use and at the point of sale. Beyond a simple display of packaging, the image functions as an empirical validation of the mediation methodology, demonstrating that the attributes “Mexican” and “fun” were successfully materialized through a rigorous User-Centered Design (UCD) approach.

At this stage, UCD ensures that visual identity is not an aesthetic caprice but a facilitator of the consumer experience:

- ❖ “Mexicanness” as a factor of trust: It is expressed through visual clarity and a color palette inspired by the territory, enabling users to identify the product as honest, local, and high quality while generating an immediate emotional connection.
- ❖ “Fun” as a usability strategy: Dynamism in composition and typographic hierarchy reduces cognitive load. Users do not need to make an “effort” to understand which product they are holding; the graphic system guides the eye intuitively, making shelf interaction fluid and pleasant.

Final validation at the point of sale is grounded in Frascara’s (2006) people-centered approach to design and extended toward a UCD framework. From this perspective, Sánchez (2023) argues that mediation should reduce cognitive load; in Celestún, this is achieved through a typographic hierarchy that enables intuitive interaction and reinforces the promise of a Mexican, fun brand.

The most significant contribution emerging from Figure 8 is the universality of the model. The Celestún case demonstrates that by placing the user at the center and mediating user needs with technical possibilities, the designer ensures the relevance of the message. Consequently, this methodology is fully transferable to any area of graphic design—from interface design (UX/UI) to wayfinding and corporate identity—because it proposes a systemic-thinking framework in which symbolic content and technical feasibility remain at the service of the person interacting with the designed object.

Applying the methodological model to the Celestún case made it possible to examine comprehensively the articulation of the different levels that configure the graphic-design process, demonstrating that the proposed mediation axes constitute an operational methodological tool for analyzing, structuring, and justifying design decisions in real contexts. Far from following a sequential or prescriptive logic, the model made it possible to understand the project as a system of dynamic relationships among contextual dimensions, discursive construction, meaning production, visual configuration, technical resolution, and communicative experience. The case study showed that this structure promotes coherence among the proposal’s symbolic identity, its conditions of materialization,

and its effectiveness in user interaction, thereby supporting not only the applicability of the model to the project analyzed but also its relevance and transferability to other fields of contemporary visual communication.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that when graphic design is approached from a design-mediation perspective, it ceases to be merely an aesthetic exercise and becomes a strategic management of meanings and functions. Through the Celestún case study, the simultaneous operation of the six proposed axes—contextual, conceptual, symbolic, formal, technical, and experiential—was validated as a means of enabling a seamless transition between cultural identity and industrial production.

The most significant findings of this study can be summarized in three key points:

1. Effectiveness of graphic translation: The study demonstrated that abstract attributes such as “Mexican” and “fun” can be encoded through semantic triangulation (see Figure 3), thereby reducing designer subjectivity. This ensures that the visual message remains consistent with the brand DNA and resonates with the user’s territorial identity.
2. Primacy of User-Centered Design: Integrating UCD within the experiential axis enabled the final design to be not only visually appealing but also functional and ergonomic. The methodology ensures that technical decisions (see Figure 7) remain subordinate to legibility and ease of use for the final consumer.
3. Universality and replicability: Although this study focused on personal-care plastic packaging, the proposed mediation structure is fully transferable to other branches of graphic design. Whether applied to identity systems, digital interfaces, or editorial design, the model provides a systemic roadmap for reducing design uncertainty and increasing the technical feasibility of proposals.

Drawing on Krippendorff’s (2006) semantic turn, the study concludes that the value of design does not reside in the object itself, but in the meaning attributed to it by users. Nevertheless, in line with Pérez-Montes (2025), this research proposes that the contemporary designer should evolve toward the role of a “mediation manager,” capable of balancing cultural relevance with the rigor of industrial processes.

In conclusion, this article contributes a novel perspective to the field of design by proposing that the designer be understood not as an image maker, but as a manager of mediations. This approach ensures that the symbolic content of a project can withstand the rigor of industrial

processes, resulting in visual communication products that are simultaneously culturally relevant and technically robust. ❸

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