RESEARCH/INVESTIGACIÓN

ICONOGRAPHIES IN DIGITAL NEWSPAPERS ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CULTURAL PORTRAIT OF THE CORONAVIRUS IN SPAIN IN APRIL 2020

Iconografías en prensa digital sobre la pandemia de COVID-19: un retrato cultural del coronavirus en España en abril de 2020

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic that has affected a globalized world like the contemporary one in 2020 has a communicative aspect that is, fundamentally, graphic, of representation or illustration, which is the object of analysis from the digital headlines of Spanish newspapers. In these, the importance of the "app" type links, the use of the "isotype" and a visual concept that adapts to the classic iconography of the Medusa gorgon are shown. Such characterizations provide keys not only to aesthetics but also to socio-politics and their exposure or public communication, in two directions: threat and protection.

KEYWORDS: Journalism; Iconography; Digital logos; Isotypes; Mythological tradition

RESUMEN

La pandemia que ha afectado en el año 2020 a un mundo globalizado como el contemporáneo posee una vertiente comunicativa que es, fundamentalmente, gráfica, de representación o ilustración, la cual es objeto de análisis a partir de las cabeceras digitales de periódicos españoles. En estos, se muestra la importancia de los vínculos tipo "app", del recurso al "isotipo" y de una concepción visual que se adapta a la iconografía clásica de la gorgona Medusa. Tales caracterizaciones aportan claves no

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PALABRAS CLAVE: Periodismo; Iconografía; Logotipos digitales; Isotipos; Tradición Mitológica

ICONOGRAFIAS NA MÍDIA DIGITAL SOBRE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19: UM RETRATO CULTURAL DO CORONAVÍRUS NA ESPANHA EM ABRIL DE 2020

RESUMO

A pandemia que tem afetado o ano de 2020 ao mundo globalizado como o contemporâneo possui uma vertente comunicativa que é, fundamentalmente, gráfica,de representação ou ilustração, a qual é objeto de análise das manchetes das mídias digitais de jornais da Espanha. Nestes, se mostra a importância dos vínculos tipo "app", do recurso ao "isotipo" e de uma concepção visual que se adapta a iconografia clássica da górgona Medusa. Tais caracterizações aportam fatos não somente estéticos, mas também sociopolíticos e da sua exposição ou comunicação pública, em duas direções: a ameaça e a proteção.

PALAVRAS CHAVE
Jornalismo; Iconografía; Logotipos digitais; Isotipos; Tradição Mitológica

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1. INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION AND PANDEMIC

Besides its health implications, the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which causes the disease known as COVID-19 (from the acronym in English accompanied by the figure of the year of detection of its morbidity in humans), has also revealed how there is a planetary system of interactions that, as a result of globalized culture, shares not only the contagion of the virus, but also the representation of the epidemic that it causes and, of course, its forms of communication.

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It is a representation that is simultaneously alphabetic and iconic. Thus, concerning the lexical deixis, the term "coronavirus" enjoys linguistic success from its acceptance in Western languages, since as cultism it has its origins in the Latin language in both parts of the word, both in the separate terms ("corona" and "virus") and in their compound formation. English, as a globalized vehicular language, has perfectly adapted its pronunciation (/kəˈrəʊnəˌvʌɪrəs/, in phonetic transcription, with a weak vowel sound that, even in the English language, allows a versatile pronunciation perfectly understandable at any linguistic level), at the same time which, as a neologism, has been imposed in the remaining languages, of Indo-European origin or not, with alphabets of all kinds: such as koronaawirus in Polish or коронавирус in Russian, to give two examples.

In a different order of things, the idea of "virus" became generalized with a cultist and scientific use with the development of modern medicine, thereby distancing the more common concept of "plague", which acquires semantic connotations of another nature, other than those intrinsically related to health. On the other hand, the biological discovery of the uniqueness of the SARS-Cov-2 virus with molecules arranged in tips provided the also noble idea of "*corona*" ("crown" in Spanish). In short, the origin of the epidemic in exotic animals and, in general, in bats causes the immediate association with a modern myth related to pestiferous diseases, the literary myth of Dracula, which confers the origin of its protagonist in some atavistic Slavic territories, emphatically eastern –even if they are from eastern Europe and not from China, the origin of the current pandemic– and, furthermore, it links the figure of the vampire with the idea of transformation into chiropterans.

Ultimately, the word-tracking embodies in itself a cultural history, both that of the globalized world and that of the West itself. Hence, more emphasis is placed on the influence of the ominous figure born from the pen of Bram Stoker, as we have noted, than on those arising from non-European traditions related to lethal contagions. Indeed, among the globalized symbols of the plague is the bat, despite its beneficial role in the control of insect pests, but also, and above all, the disastrous association occurs with rats, an animal that, at present, can be related to laboratory experiments, without, in the framework of biological research and control of diseases such as smallpox, there already being a clear connection between mammals with the cause (these are transmission vectors), and the need to give visibility to an invisible entity such as a molecule is discovered.

All the above, although synthetically, allows us to verify how there are lexical and cultural references that, around the planetary pandemic of 2020, lead to iconic treatments susceptible to a singular analysis. However, it is necessary to understand how contemporary iconography proceeds from two premises: first, design as a key to information and marketing, so that products, brands, or companies are identified through logos in their various developments (also objects and concepts); secondly, the computer interface enhanced since the late 1960s (mainly in the Xerox Parc laboratories) that established the metaphor of the desktop and the identification of processes through identifying figures. With the generalization of the use of

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smartphones practically on the threshold of the 21st century, such procedures merge with the appearance of the so-called "apps", which, given the diversity of platforms, become effective shortcuts to implicit literacy on the web. In this context, applied to the circumstances of the COVID-19 disease and the causative coronavirus, specific iconographic responses emerge.

Indeed, without wanting to be exhaustive, it is our purpose to proceed to the analysis of the iconography associated with the coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 disease in some proximity testimonies. The most widespread vehicle in this regard is the appearance of the icon on the screens, either through web links and links to "apps", whether in the media, social networks, or specific programs, in which it is possible to perceive concomitant elements, and, above all, some shared features, and other particular ones, bearers of more or less explicit, more or less subliminal, conjunctural realities. All this has to be calibrated with the awareness that iconography means the reduction of a complex entity to a conceptual element, that is, that the whole is recognized by the part, the set by the scheme.

The reference methodology is inevitably eclectic. On the one hand, the iconography studies carried out from the perspective of Art History that have their roots in the contributions established by Erwin Panofsky (1955 and 2008) about the iconic allusion are counted, with references to the more specific analyzes carried out by Ernst Gombrich (2003) or Jean Seznec (1983) as well; it is a base that allows the logo to be described. On the other hand, the keys generated from the semantics studies of the Charles Sanders Peirce school carried out between the 19th and 20th centuries on the notion of symbol and that of Roland Barthes (1971 and 1991) on the supralinguistic and cultural character of said symbol, are important, keys on which the interpretation of the logo is based. Finally, the functionality of logos is considered from the synthesis that, regarding the figuration in the journalistic media, is discovered in the reflections made by the essayist Gonzalo Peltzer (1991); this without forgetting the technical aspects of digital communication and its interfaces.

2. OBJECTIVE: RECOGNITION OF FORMS AND MOTIFS OF DIGITAL ICONOGRAPHY ABOUT CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19

Interactivity and usability constitute two of the basic aspects that, according to the human interface guidelines (HIG of each operating system), are required of a tool that is versatile and is integrated into the contemporary technological network media; these are the well-known "apps". In this regard, the process of *iconization* of the "apps" related to coronavirus/COVID-19 has, in principle, the disadvantage of its novelty, which prevents the rapid identification of usual, or widely used, items (a shelf to mark folder of files, for example; or the letter W as a reference to a word processing program or "app", based on the most standardized use mark). The use is, above all, of access, of a link to information, or to specific questionnaires about the pandemic.

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How to achieve rapid identification, the primary objective of graphic information (Costa, 1998)? Despite the adaptation of the language and its practically universal character, the length of the compound word prevents its effectiveness in this regard. As a result of this, a predominantly figurative characterization is imposed, although, as we will see, with such a number of associated aspects that, inevitably, their specification will be required through expressions in each specific language. Now, the prevailing motive will be, at first glance, the illustration, that is to say, the properly graphic, although other details are necessary. Thus, without going into details about the semiotic tradition and its methodological bases, an ideogram is understood as a symbol in a communication chain (that is, it is not a single symbol but, to take the example of traffic signs, a graphic motif that makes sense in the set of visual indicators for vehicle traffic). Certainly, the field of coronavirus/COVID-19, despite being a biological motif, does not establish interconnections with other symbols, except for the generic symbol of "biohazard"[2]. In this way, only the consideration of forging autonomous logos prevails when dealing with their visual composition.

But the concept of the logo itself has, even by etymological definition, a typographic character, where the alphabetical information complements the figuration or, where, conversely, it is the illustration that gives meaning to the letters. At the other extreme is the form called "isologue", an image that integrates the letters into the design, like a kind of calligram. Between them, the "imagotype" supposes the sum of figure and text but arranged in different planes. Once this typology has been transferred to the environment of "apps", it is understandable that, given the size of the buttons of an "app" on a screen, the development of "imagotypes" is more difficult, so that the "isologue" and the "isotype" models prevail. In the specific case of the coronavirus and the disease derived from it, the "isotype" will constitute the most important visual component (as also happens in architectural design; see Carazo & Galván, 2017), unless the composition of a word is used only with consonants, such as "CNVRS" or the very word "COVID" (which in itself is the acronym in English for "coronavirus disease").

As will be explained, probably the most schematic design of the "isotypes" created around coronavirus/COVID-19 corresponds to the one known in rock art as soliform; It is a radial sun, with short rods, following the most widespread laboratory image of the molecule and which, also, gives it its name: that is, a solar-shaped crown by its radial extensions or spokes.

The graphics are also similar to the usual symbol of the link to the "settings" in operating systems, such as a cogwheel, an image that comes from mechanical clockwork gears (hence the idea of adjustment that used to start with time data and

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[2] It is a symbol with its own Unicode code that was created in 1966 thanks to an engineer from a multinational chemical products company to warn of the danger associated with biological manipulation; the symbol was published since the following year by the journal *Science* (Baldwin & Runkle, 1997). Retouched versions of this symbol are often used in generic allusion to viruses.

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date). For example, regarding "apps" [3], such models are discovered in the button icon that has been drawn up from the Catalan Health Service, an icon that is presented as an isologue composed of an isotype and two complementary texts at different and abbreviated levels, an institutional one recreated from the hierarchy bar of an IT address referring to the responsible link, and another with a more complicit tone that is offered as a web link under the slogan "stop COVID19 cat". Well, it is an elaborate logo, which starts from an idea of displacement of the crown: a white circle on which the described wheel is superimposed slightly off-center, superimposing the soliform motif (although without spokes, which are left for the next motif) with that of the cogwheel, which is given a reddish hue and appears exposed as an eclipse. The sum of two overlapping motifs enriches the polysemic information that is proposed: the topic of the coronavirus and its eclipse or return to the glow after having been superimposed.

Illustration 1: Stop Covid19 Cat "app" link
Source: Catalan Health Service.

The spokes on the described wheel have a slightly trapezoidal shape, being wider outwards than towards the inner crown, with a final appearance like studs, according to a shape that appears in other coronavirus/COVID-19 logo proposals. The color red is usually predominant, either as a positive (with the figure in red) or as a negative (figure on a red background), with different options for tonality, attenuation, contrast, etc. The prevalence of red is associated with the organic physicality of blood and, by obvious association, with medicine. But the nuances are presented in the variations of the elementary scheme just described. The blue color also tends to appear, either as dominant in the whole logo or as part of it (as it happens in the "app" of the Catalan Health Service). In short, the key or immediately recognizable vectors are the soliform/cogwheel and the colors red and, secondarily, blue.

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[3] At the time these lines are written, there is no closed repertoire of "apps", given that the current situation of the pandemic imposes initiatives in continuous transformation. Thus, the two cases that are adduced are as an example of the relationship that exists between the icons of the apps and the links of the newspapers, without the intention of compilation.

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Another Spanish "app" that seeks to adapt the disease control model in South Korea known as "Proyecto Open Coronavirus", currently under development and with open source, maintains the ideas of the eclipse and the displacement eloquently but even more schematically, if possible, than the Catalan Health Service one, but above all, it provides a predominant and striking reddish color, like a photographic negative.

Illustration 2: Open Coronavirus "app" link
Source: https://github.com/open-coronavirus/open-coronavirus .

In the same way, it is also checked whether the link model is transferred from "app" to graphic links on the web pages of the digital press[4], as shown, for example, through the soliform icon used as an "isotype" by the different headlines of *El Periódico*[5], such as, among others, *El Periódico Extremadura*. In this, the different thickness of the tassels that close the spokes and the different length of such rays prevent their confusion with the star and draw a negative of the coronavirus in white over intense red:

Illustration 3: Link to the digital cover of the newspaper *El Periódico Extremadura*.
Source: *El Periódico Extremadura*, April, 2020.

However, the *El Periódico* icon does not constitute a pure "isotype", since, as it is not an "app", the image accompanies another series of icons that link different

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[4] In truth, although apart from what is specifically related to the technique of hyperlinks, the importance of the informative graphics in the written press has, in the last half-century, an intimate relationship with the extension of infographics (De Pablos, 1999; Gamonal, 2013), especially with the interactive one (Cairo, 2008). Be that as it may, the history of visual information advocates the creation of a specific visual iconography (Peltzer, 1991).

[5] Grupo Zeta (currently owned by Prensa Ibérica S.A.).

aspects of the information treatment on the pandemic. In the present soliform it is accompanied by the expressions "The keys. Everything you need to know". It is an expression whose statement explicitly declares that the dominant iconic motif in the set is that of the soliform that has just been described, that this constitutes the sum of the aforementioned "keys".

In the next section, we will proceed to describe the characterization that has been made in the Spanish digital press during April 2020 of the "isotypes" referring to coronavirus/COVID-19. In this regard, the *kiosko.net* platform collects the largest corpus of links to journalistic headlines with a digital version or broadcast. Its basic distribution responds to a geographical and thematic grouping. In this regard, it is not difficult to access the "general information" press (local, regional, or national) that is published in Spain. The selection of headlines for the study was based on two premises: those newspapers that resorted to iconic links using buttons were collected, and the uniqueness of such icons depending on the editorial group to which the newspapers belonged (so that it is enough to select a single newspaper of the group, since, indifferently, all the newspapers published tend to repeat the motifs; in fact, the one that offered some type of variation in this regard has been chosen, as is the case of *Comercio de Asturias*).

3. METHODOLOGY: EXAMINATION OF THE "ISOTYPES" IN THE DIGITAL VERSIONS OF THE PRESS IN SPAIN

In the gradual adaptation to the double printed/virtual format of the different headlines of newspapers in Spain, the use of specific digital links is becoming more and more relevant, which, in the case of news or topics of an extraordinary nature (case of the coronavirus pandemic), are presented in a relevant and synoptic place (Otero, López, & González, 2012; Orero and Cebrián, 2019). The use of the "app" button model can be seen in most of the links on the digital covers (with exceptions, of course) with unique proposals within the framework of the variations of an icon that is in a trance of universalization. Among the most relevant icons, the following stand out due to the reading keys they provide.

Thus, *La Vanguardia*[6] offers a circular crown in pinkish tones and a red interior, with a line of coronavirus studs in white, as well as the interior globe, whose continents are delimited in the same white color. It is a button that places its object in a globalized environment as well as an internal soliform, which transforms the planet into a star, and an earthly heart with an eminently geographical content. The pandemic is shown by a round shield as the two faces of contagions: its universality and the need for protection.

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[6] Godó Group.

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Illustration 4: Link to the digital cover of the newspaper *La Vanguardia*.
Source: *La Vanguardia*, April 2020.

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The *Diario de Sevilla*[7], for its part, has a double patinated, studded blue crown and two tiny, although visible, practically vertical, ruptures, that lead to an interior in which the spring of a DNA/RNA chain in negative white can be seen over a dim blue background, which gives the icon a biochemical key, which avoids the biological red present in other logos. The wheel is broken, which brings a strong dramatic sense to the threat posed by the coronavirus.

Illustration 5: Link to the digital cover of the *Diario de Sevilla* newspaper.
Source: *Diario de Sevilla*, April, 2020.

El *Comercio de Asturias*[8] shows three isotypes that respond to the model under analysis (accompanied by text presentations that distinguish them: Live Last Hour, Daily Chronology, and Multimedia Links), referring, respectively, to current affairs on the subject, to a calendar of the crisis, and, finally, to a video link. In all three, an attenuated light blue background dominates over which white reliefs and reddish tones are superimposed. The fundamental "isotype", which is repeated inside the calendar sheet, strongly reduced, shows a pinkish circle studded in a slightly inclined cross with two smaller nails, like thumbtacks, like a distant medieval symbol (of the Templar cross). The motif is repeated, inclined in the opposite direction, as if having rotated slightly, on the icon referring to the chronology and on the inside of a calendar sheet. Finally, the third logo shows a stylized white cogwheel inside which the directional triangle of "advance" or "play", already universally accepted and

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[7] Joly Group.
[8] Vocento Group.

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allusive to multimedia content, stands out in red. The idea of rotation –and, consequently, with the model of the cogwheel as a reference– is, besides the motif of the studded soliform that rotates, the one that allows considering the sequence as a whole, while at the same time denoting the dynamic character of the data referring to infections and their morbidity, the latter reinforced by the symbol of the cross, be it from the Red Cross (a health emblem of planetary recognition, although with central motives that vary according to cultures and religions) or of its specifically Christian reflection, which is also found, although with other shades but on a blue background, on the flag of Asturias[9].

Illustration 6: Links on the digital cover of the newspaper *El Comercio de Asturias.*
Source: *El Comercio de Asturias*, April, 2020.

Other proposals with a single logo are added to the dynamism described[10], such as the one on the Asturian headline of *La Nueva España*[11] in its digital version, in which a montage is proposed where three pinkish soliforms with two more-intense red spots superimpose on a blue-gray background, like infection or age spots, so that the allusion to elderly people is added to the idea of propagation by showing a kind of skin pigmentation macules.
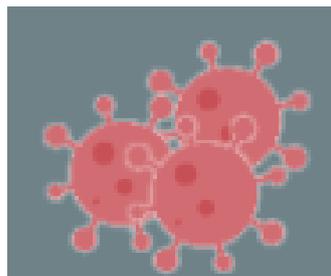

Illustration 7: Link to the digital cover of the newspaper *La Nueva España*.
Source: *La Nueva España*, April, 2020.

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[9] The regional map is changed to a national one in other headlines of the same Vocento Group, it is the case of the newspaper *Hoy*, which is published in Badajoz and Cáceres; visual relevance is given by an image in GIF format (compressed animation) through which the icon of the toothed soliform is slightly expanded. The newspaper *El País* (PRISA Group) also presents concomitant geographical and iconic motifs.

[10] In the links that the digital version of *El Heraldo de Aragón* (Heraldo de Aragón group) dedicates to the coronavirus/Covid-19 crisis, blue tones predominate, without fanfare in this regard.

[11] Prensa Ibérica S.A.

With a more ideologically connoted underlying sense, *La Razón*[12] uses an ascending graph in which, on a bright red background, four cogwheels of as many coronavirus molecules seem to climb. The proposal, apart from the implicit alarmism that it gives off, multiplies the icon of the infectious agent on a statistical table, synonymous with the pandemic nature of the disease and its consequences.
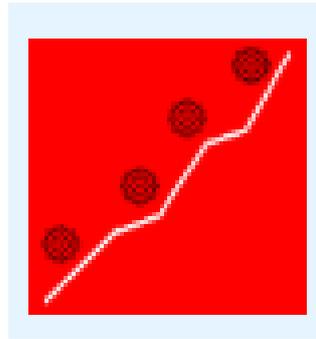

Illustration 8: Link to the digital cover of the newspaper *La Razón*.
Source: *La Razón*, April, 2020.

As already analyzed, the idea of dissemination imposed by the pandemic is graphically deposited in the rays of the soliform icon, which, moreover, reproduce the opposite phenomenon, penetration into the cell through suction cup ends. Furthermore, wave diffusion arises from the circular crown structures that predominate in the proposals for "isotypes" considered in the preceding lines. In this regard, the infographic team of the newspaper *El Mundo*[13] uses an elaborate sequence of icons that take up the two aspects just mentioned: linear rays and singular waves. It consists of five soliform icons, three black on a red background, and two red negatives on a black background (when there are three or more contrasts in play: red-black-red or, as in the last logo, red-black-red-black).

The proposal highlights the drama of the situation, but, above all, it is an indication of the reuse and revision of icons, processes that it successfully achieves. Thus, the circular crown of the "isotype" whose heart is the cogwheel becomes waves in concentric expansion, the cogwheel occupies the geographic center of the country[14] or the place of the brain in a human head, the cogwheel itself transforms in the parallel wave source of the characteristic icon of Wi-Fi wireless technology (which is inspired by the maritime lighthouse and radar format), and, finally, appears inside an open mail envelope.

The identification of each "isotype" with its function is precise in the first three cases (news, symptoms, and map), not so much in what refers to "podcasts" and

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[12] Planeta Group.
[13] Unidad Editorial S.A.
[14] In May 2020, according to the beginning of the so-called "de-scaling" processes, this icon is changed to a horizontal spike geometric design.

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"newsletters" in the last two icons, through the ironic reference which is done over Wi-Fi and with the image of a postal envelope (although breaking news is not only received in the email but on other platforms) as a frame of the cogwheel that represents the virus. Either way, regardless of the sequence, each individual icon is effective, as it enriches the central motif in dialogue with other iconic environments (in the form of waves, maps, silhouettes, Wi-Fi, or envelopes, as described).
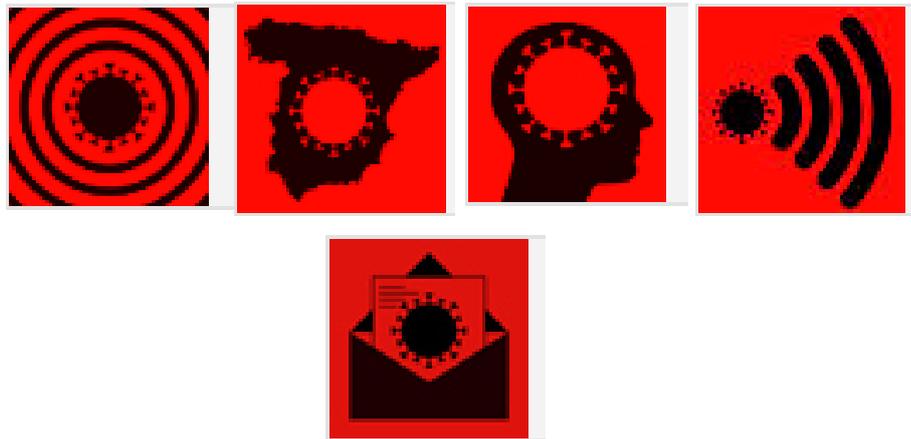

Illustration 9: Links to the digital cover of the newspaper *El Mundo*.
Source: *El Mundo*, April 2020.

4. RESULTS: THE "ISOTYPES" OF CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 AND GRECO-ROMAN ICONOGRAPHY: THE GORGON MEDUSA

The tandem "soliform/radial crown" (or cogwheel) constitutes the basic "isotype" of coronavirus/COVID-19 that is becoming generalized as a link icon for "apps", for computer "links" of digital press related to the pandemic, and, in general, as its visual reference. However, the motif is not isolated in the cultural history of the West, in which the sum "soliform/cogwheel" can also be identified with an astronomical hair, although not exclusively in the shape of a crown (on the iconographic symbolism and its connotations from cultural and artistic perspectives, see the classic study by Gombrich, 2003). The image of the solar hair is, however, positive for the catastrophic context that underlies the pandemic of the year 2020. The same western iconographic tradition, with Greco-Roman roots, contributes a fatal imaginary embodied in the monstrous mythology of the Gorgons, among which the figure of Medusa is the best known. And it is that she, despite being the only mortal among the three Gorgons, occupies the most relevant place from the adventures of the hero Perseus, who managed to defeat her by beheading her. That is, Medusa is, above all, a head, a hair that surrounds a face. Her hair is made up of snakes and her eyes (even dead) have the power to petrify those who contemplate them and see themselves reflected in them; In other words, it is a look that kills. In this regard, the iconographically remarkable thing is the identification of Medusa with tangled hair, whose terrifying capacity justifies its appearance on the warriors' shields, as a way of intimidating the enemy in front of them (Vernant, 1996).

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The iconography of Medusa (and, in general, of the Gorgons) appears in ceramic pieces, bas-reliefs, and, above all, mosaics from the Greco-Roman world. It is striking that, besides the story referring to Perseus, or other lesser-known myths, the usual thing is the appearance as a head, as can perfectly be seen, to give three examples, in the mosaics preserved in the Museo delle Terme ("Head of Medusa", Rome, 1st-2nd century A.D.), the Sousse Museum ("Head of Medusa", Tunisia, 2nd century A.D.), or the National Archaeological Museum ("Medusa of Piraeus", Athens, 2nd century A.D.). The iconography of the head of Medusa is based on a face radially surrounded with a head of snakes; sometimes, especially in more archaic manifestations, this face appears with a grotesque gesture.

Photos 1-3: Mosaic "Head of Medusa" (fragment), Mosaic "Head of Medusa" (fragment), Mosaic "Medusa of Piraeus" (fragment).
Source: Museo delle Terme (Rome), Sousse Museum (Tunisia), National Archaeological Museum (Athens).

The fact that it is also a theme that appears in combat shields reveals its apotropaic character, that is, of conspiracy and defense, whether of the soldier or the house as far as the mosaics are concerned; and it is that, indeed, there was a specific amulet called "gorgoneion" that was worn since ancient times as personal protection (Vázquez and del Hoyo, 1990). On the other hand, already in the Renaissance, the emergence of the genre of emblems, so close in a certain way to iconographic design, the text does not describe the image, but comments on it, so that what is related to the Gorgon Medusa highlights its double look, as discovered, among others, in Andrea Alciato and Cesare Ripa, referring respectively to the mortality of the tomb (emblem 156 of Alciato) and horror (emblem dedicated to the "Spavento" in Ripa), with serpents in both cases (on iconological transformations in the Renaissance, see Seznec, 1983). In fact, snakes provide a double reading in Antiquity and the Renaissance, as carriers of venom and poisons, and antidotes or vaccines; Not in vain do they appear as an iconic element of the rod of Asclepios/Aesculapius, patron of medicine (Anía, Asenjo, and Suárez, 2002).

For the rest, the same arrangement of the hair-snakes invites us to develop the mosaics with geometric enlargements, such as waves, besides the fact that, in the

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manner of the round shield, the heads appear framed in one or more concentric circles, through which, in some way, it amplifies its protective influence to the whole of the building and not only to the room where the mosaic is located. Finally, the fact that it is a head reinforced its reading as a mask, that is, as an illustration of an aggressive character outside of its function as guardian.

In sum, the radial arrangement and crown geometry, the threatening and defending function at the same time, and the tendency to schematism as a war shield emblem contribute to establishing parallels with the digital icons considered in relation to the graphic treatment that the coronavirus/COVID-19 is deserving in the digital press of Spain. No face indeed appears, but this is largely done to prevent the link from being perceived as an emoticon, an ironic contemporary system of expressive keys for digital communication; However, this does not prevent its treatment as an emblem, defined as conventional figuration and comment on the image. In fact, the bifid character of snakes' tongues coincides with the suction cup appearance of the radial ends of the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. Such concomitances are cultural in nature and revolve around a monstrous entity in both cases, besides being linked to the atrocity of the disease and potential death.

5. DISCUSSION: THE TWO FACES OF THE MONSTER IN THE SAME ICON

The pandemic implies a generalized contagion, that is, a factor associated with the idea of a group in contact and, consequently, of an exchange that is, redundantly, interpersonal and mutual. But it also implies the story of its dissemination, or, in other words, communication in the form of an exchange of information that goes beyond that which a specific individual can establish. However, while the first notion is expressed as damage, the second constitutes a form of protection; The concrete (the physically transmitted disease) and the abstract (what is expressed around the condition) are also presented as different ways of thinking.

In the analysis that has been carried out in the preceding sections on the graphic treatment of the links related to coronavirus/COVID-19 in the Spanish digital press, the functioning of schematic abstraction that becomes a reference form to the pandemic on two fronts is verified: the threat and the defense or shield. Indeed, from the figurative recreation of the toothed crown that gives its name to the type of virus that causes COVID-19, different graphic features are outlined that allow the immediate identification of each link, as well as its two specific meanings: the encrustation (of the virus) and the spread (of the disease).

Strikingly, the western world has imposed not only the denomination (through Indo-European languages: Latin through English) but also the figuration from the iconography of the Gorgon Medusa in coincidence with the mentioned features. Thus, the pandemic that has struck the planet since the end of 2019, with particular virulence in 2020, has allowed the establishment of global icons, recognized by practically all human beings. These icons are predominantly "isotopic" in nature (that is, illustrations in which there is no express need for alphabetic graphics), although

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complementary textual exposition predominates when the illustrations support digital links on social networks and the Internet. Finally, there are aspects associated with communication and dissemination, such as statistics (the need to control the figures) and how is the separation between disease and contagion (given the importance that asymptomatic carriers of the virus have acquired), which expand the iconic spectrum of the "isotype", as seen regarding the digital edition of the newspaper *El Mundo*.

Beyond the graphic, the shield character that the designs present also constitutes a reflection on human relationships in the face of the threat of something invisible. This does not prevent other readings, such as the one referring to the relationship with a nature that seems to rebel against climate change and human intervention, or an expressly political key: the origins of the pandemic in China would also justify the predominance of the color red in logos, while opening a broader field of reflection, with markedly ethical content.

The analyzed "isotype" therefore contributes, in parallel with the iconography of the gorgon Medusa, a double meaning: on the one hand, a verification or portrait of the threat and, on the other, an image about the expansion of knowledge (a tool that slows the spread of the disease). And it is that, in the absence of a vaccine to cushion the catastrophic effects of the virus, the dissemination of data has become the most effective antidote, and this, perhaps for the first time in the history of human culture and with all the preventions related to the possibility that, as well as effective information, manipulated and biased data will spread.

In short, in some way, reflecting on the characteristics of communication about a molecule whose most obvious feature is its own invisibility and whose biological process is replication, and, therefore, communication, contributes to transcending the disease and contagion, to give them a sense that is both temporary and universal: another way of understanding the contemporary phenomenon and fighting the virus from mechanisms that are both old and new.

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