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Visual Design and Brand Identity: The Case of University Websites

This paper investigates how British and Hungarian universities construct brand identities in their websites and social media sites by using visual communication alongside linguistic semiosis. Comprising 120 university homepages and social media site opening pages including youtube channels, facebook profiles, twitter channels, among others, in its corpus, the quantitative research focuses on the promotional function of using images and multimodal ensembles to communicate with prospective and current students, the corporate world and the wider public alike. Drawing on a few typical and untypical examples from the larger corpus, the paper concentrates on the interactional and interpersonal meanings construed by the imagery in order to position the given university brand on the market. The findings of the case study as well as those of the broader quantitative research suggest that there has been a major reconfiguration in the conceptualisation of the role of universities and their relationship with their students. Well-integrated in the multimodal semiotic ensemble, the images can be argued to serve promotional and managerialist discourses, resulting in pervasive discourse hybridisation.

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