



Re-positioning Mexico:

How Semiotic Analysis Helped Break Through Cultural Clichés and Provide Inspiring Regional Symbolism for Three Campari Brands

The Quirks' Event Los Angeles
February 23, 2023

The Challenge

- Mexico: symbolically rich but many clichéd perceptions around the world
- 3 premium Mexican spirits from 3 very different regions
- How to leverage both “Mexicanicity” and evoke meaningful regional cultural cues without tapping into every cliché?



Our Approach

A Two-Phased Process

Consumer Research

Semiotic Analysis

1

**3-day Online Community with Mexican
“Hipsters” in Jalisco, Oaxaca and Puebla**

Role:

- Explore the symbolic world of Mexico and the relevant regions amongst influential consumers
- Generate emergent content for further semiotic analysis

2

Semiotic Analysis in Mexico, USA and Italy

Role:

- Explore pop culture content to identify established and emerging codes
- Uncover similarities and differences between more and less “knowledgeable” markets

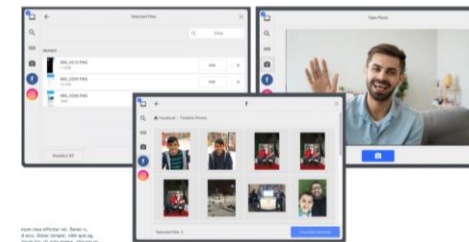


Consumer Research

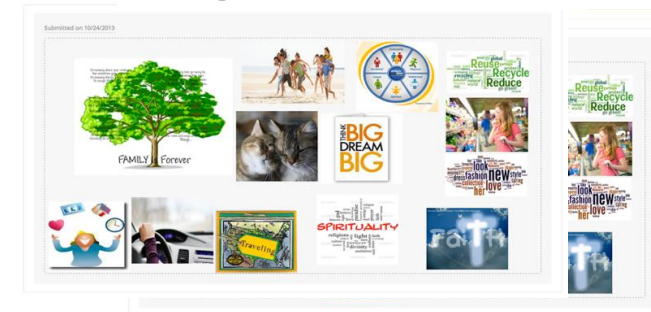
Online Community Activities

Topic	Exercises
Day 1: Introducing Me!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Photo upload: an object that really represents me</i> • <i>My passions and hobbies</i>
Day 2: My Puebla/Jalisco /Oaxaca Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Video Upload: places that really represent my region for me and my peers</i> • <i>Photo collage: images that symbolize the spirit of my region</i>
Day 3: My Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Photo collage: images that symbolize Modern Mexico for me</i> • <i>Perceptual Map: Plot imagery on spectrum from clichéd to fresh</i>

Video Upload



Collage



Perceptual Map



About Semiotics

Semiotics is...

- The study of cultural symbolism; of how meaning is conveyed through all aspects of communication: words, images, sounds, scents, textures, behaviour, etc.
- A form of cultural analysis rooted in linguistics, anthropology, and literary criticism
- A formal process employing specific analytical tools



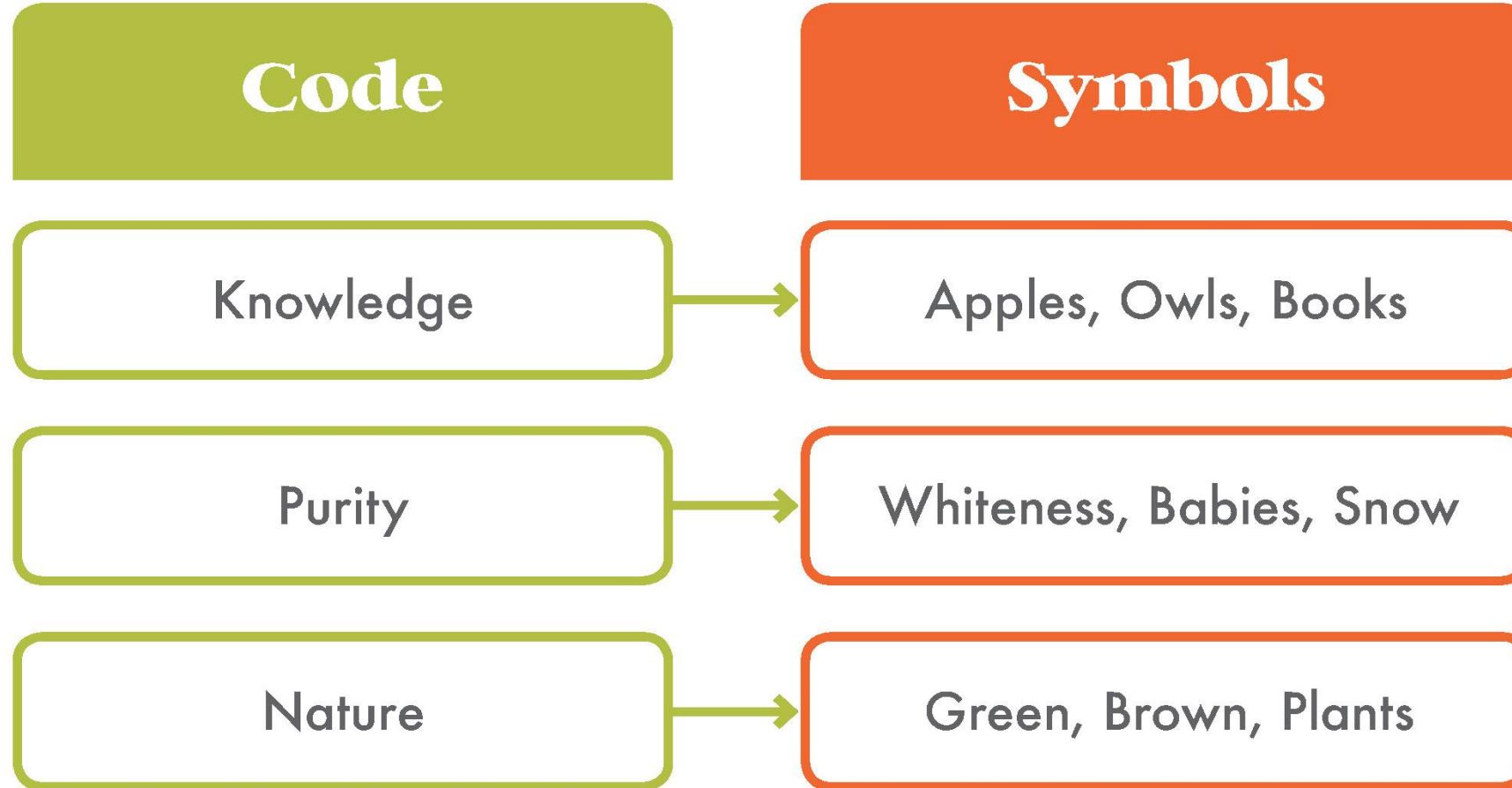
About Semiotics

Semiotics is a qualitative marketing research approach focused on the analysis of symbolic communication

- It looks deeply at the symbols related to a brand or category and their meanings in a culture
- It provides additional insight because it's focussed on those non-verbal elements of communication that we are less conscious of
- It is a great way to make sense of the relationship between consumers, brands, and the cultures they live in

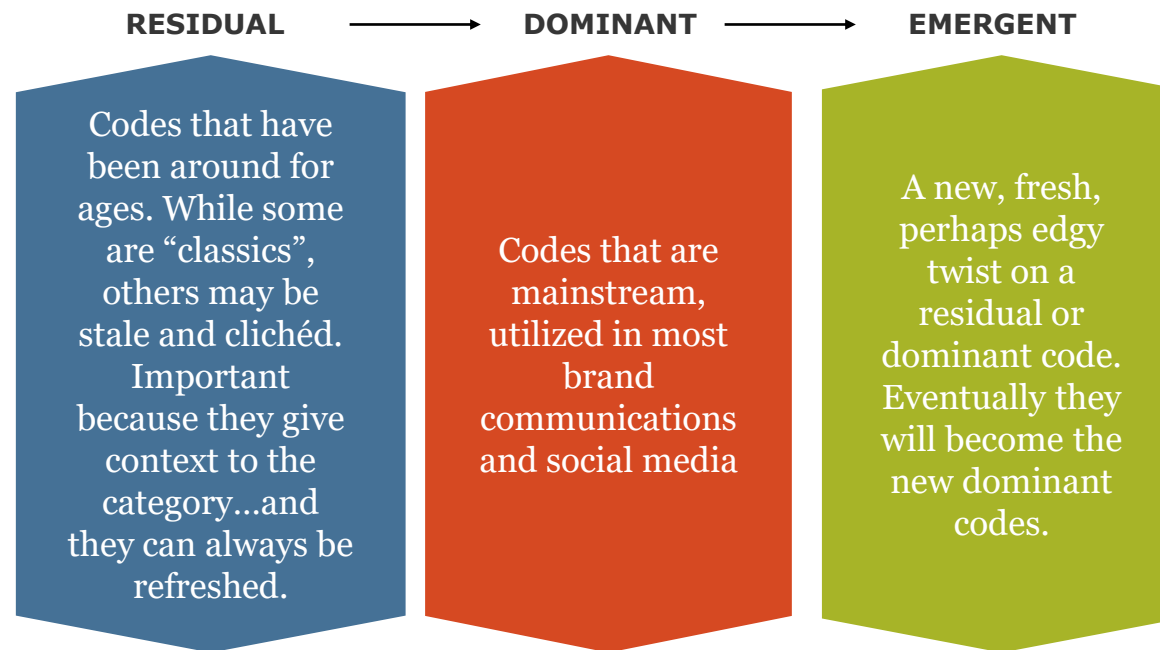


Codes: The Building Blocks of Semiotic Analysis



Approach

Each code identified is designated as **RESIDUAL**, **DOMINANT** or **EMERGENT**.



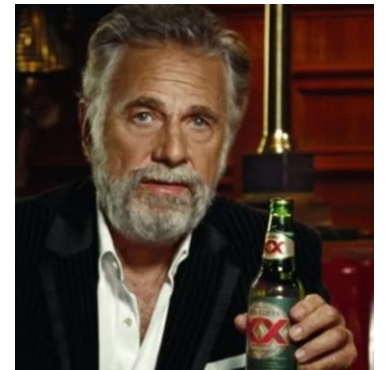
Understanding which codes fall into which category is a necessary step in providing guidance on the issue of which codes are clichéd and which are fresh and contemporary



Semiotic Analysis Process

Mexico, USA and Italy

We explored advertising, packaging, websites, films, books etc. to generate a list of established and emergent codes evoking Mexico in general, and Puebla, Oaxaca and Jalisco in particular



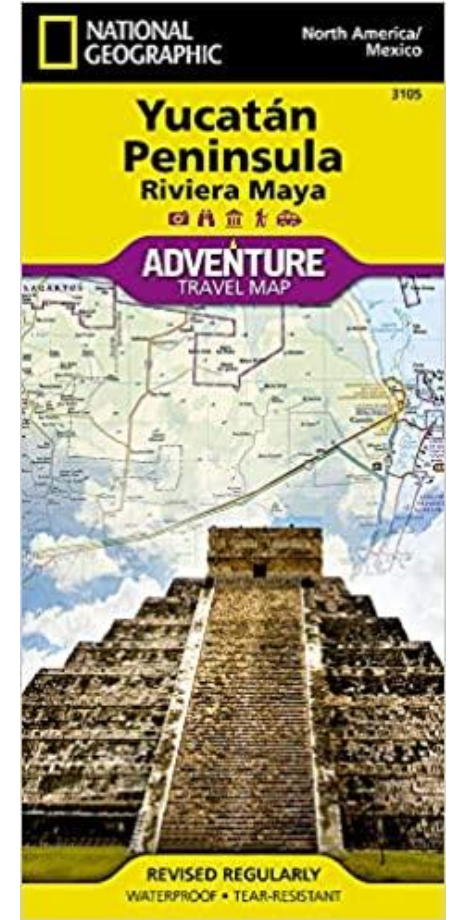
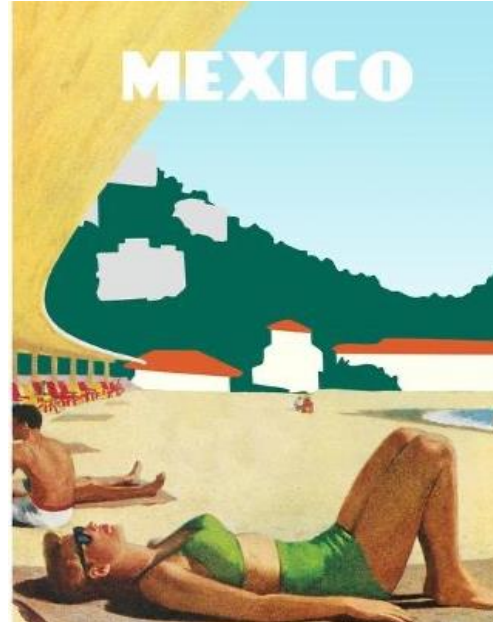
Research Context

General Perceptions of Mexico in all Three Markets

US and Italian Perspectives: Mexico in General



Touristic Hedonism and TV News





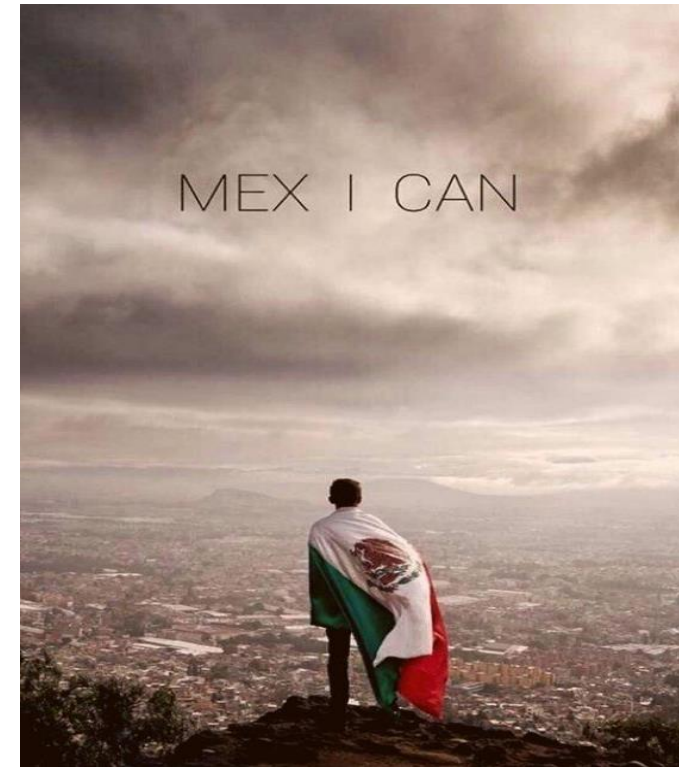
Mexico's Perspective on Itself

Mexicans see themselves in a state of transition.

Anger and Resistance



A New Hope



Consumer Research

Mexican “Hipsters” in Jalisco, Oaxaca and Puebla

Consumer Research: Rejecting and Recreating

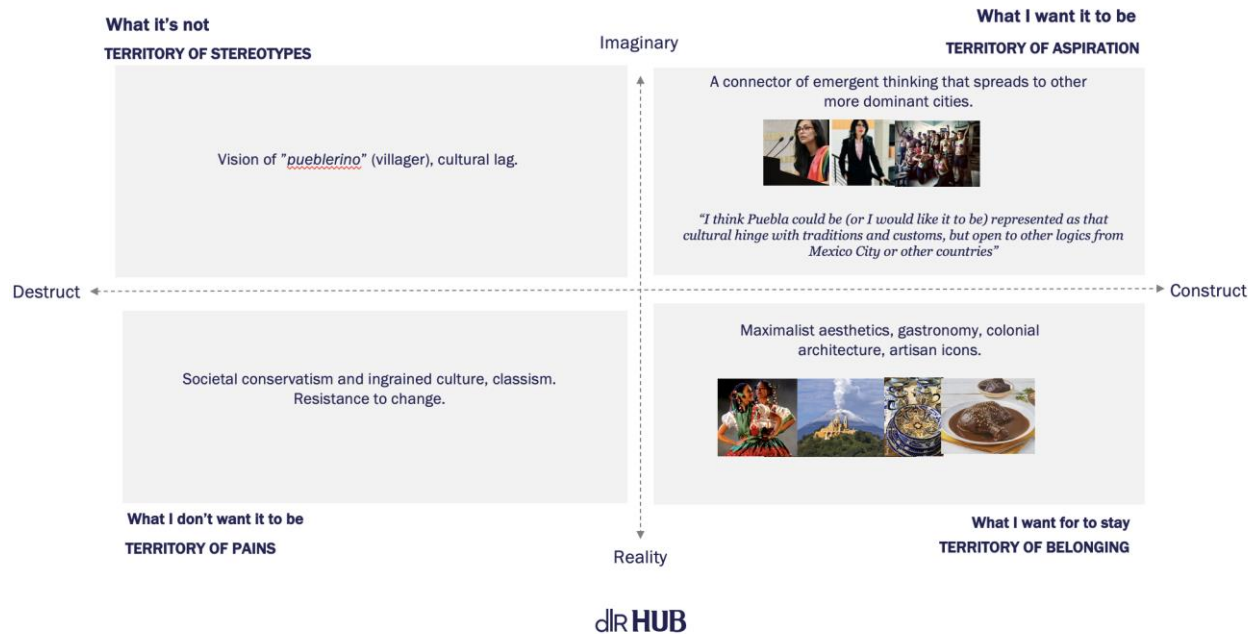
The online communities revealed 4 territories regarding internal perceptions of Mexico



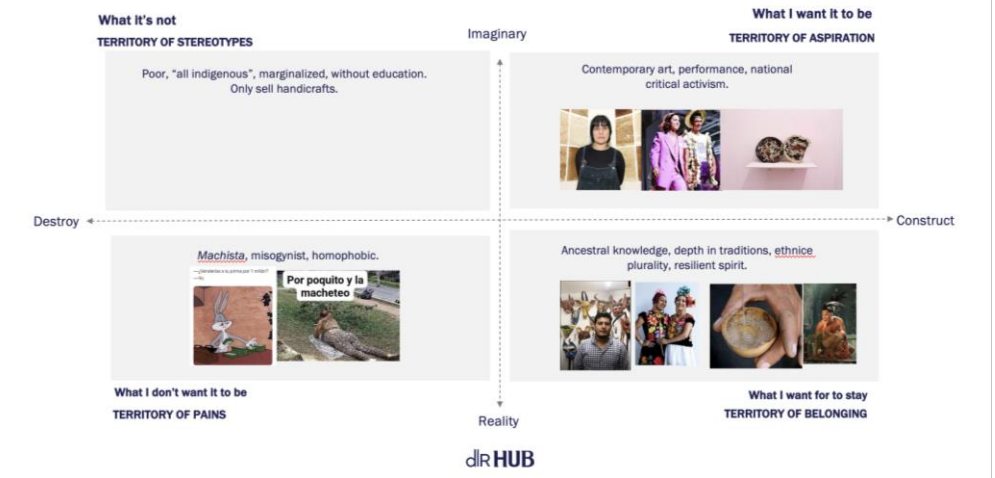
Consumer Research: Regional Expressions

Each region had their own distinct territories.

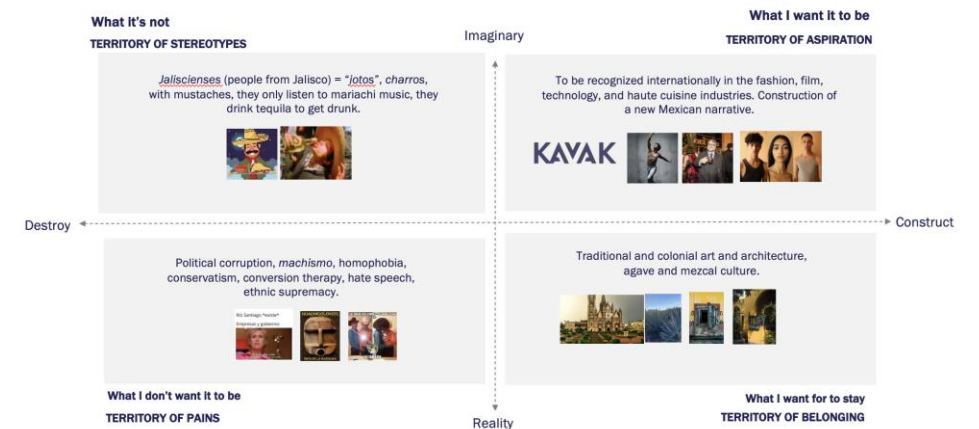
Puebla: Keeping Rich Tradition Relevant



Oaxaca: Fusing Old and New Creativity



Jalisco: Mexico of the Future



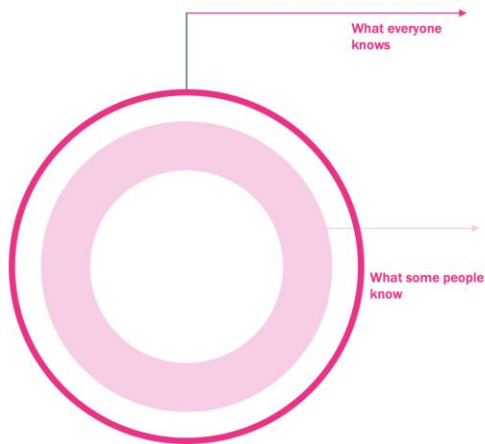
Consumer Research: Symbolic Associations

We asked participants what symbols they themselves associate with their regions to find out what they considered to be clichés vs. deeper connections.

Puebla: Gastronomy and Traditional Architecture

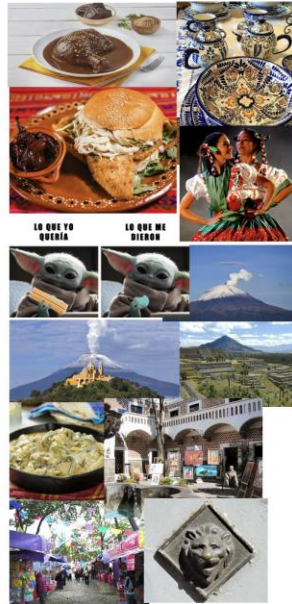
SÍMBOLOS POBLANOS

Dominant codes of "passive pride" prevail, anchored to what is recognized outside the region. In this sense, there is minimal insider vision.



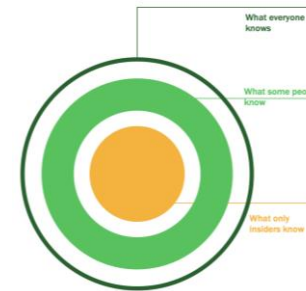
- Mole Poblano
- Talavera
- Cathedral
- Chinas poblanas
- Chiles en nogada
- Rajas poblanas
- Volcán Popocatepetl
- Cemitas
- Cholula
- Cholula's pyramid
- Popocatepetl ashes
- Clock Museum (automaton show*)
- African Safari
- Macarrones
- Tacos árabes
- Torrejas de piloncillo
- Tortitas from Santa Clara
- Amparo Museum
- Zacatlán/Atlixco, Cuetzalan
- Volcán Cuexcomate
- Cantona (archeological ruins)
- Barrio del Artista
- Quarry lions
- Analco

dR HUB



Oaxaca: Mezcal and Indigenous Culture

OAXACAN SYMBOLS



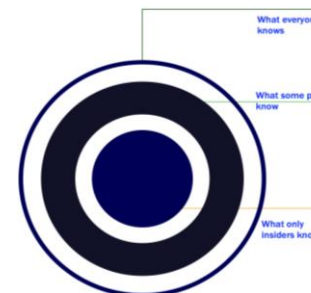
- Monte Albán
- Indigenous culture (Zapotec)
- Mezcal
- Templo de Santo Domingo
- Alebrijes
- Zapotec iconography
- Mitla
- Tlayudas
- Pan de Cazuela
- Black mud
- Chapulines, chicanas
- Francisco Toledo
- Muerteadas from Etla
- Carnaval de Tlaxiarte
- Muxes



dR HUB

Jalisco: Tequila and Progress

SYMBOLS FROM JALISCO



- Tequila
- Mariachi
- Tlaquepaque
- Torta ahogada
- José Clemente Orozco
- Agave Landscape
- El Expiatorio
- Glorietta Minerva
- Paseo Chapultepec
- LGBTQ+ visibility
- Luis Barragán
- Centro joyero
- MUSA (Museum of Arts University of Guadalajara)
- Jericava
- Coffee subculture
- Chef Poncho Cadena



dR HUB



Consumer Research: Local Flavour

And we asked them to share their favourite hangout spots to help identify truly contemporary local flavour.

Puebla: Inviting Archways and Hidden Treasures

SPOTS:

- Amparo Museum: "it has an incredible proposal, what I like the most are its temporary exhibitions"
- Entreacto: "Cultural Center, independent theater company, the one with the best production in Puebla"
- Hormiga Negra: "it's a terrace with delicious drinks, good music and the best view"
- Azotacalles: "it's in Cholula and there are many artists, very soft music, tasty drinks, and a great atmosphere"
- Profética: "Drinks, delicious coffee, and a library. Presentation of books, artistic projects, and activism."
- Galería del Mercado Negro: "interesting exhibitions that are breaking the canon of Puebla's artistic proposals"

Strolling in downtown Puebla... "you always find something to eat and lots of crafts. In addition, there are usually very beautiful murals."

"A city with hidden treasures in the streets"



Oaxaca: Atmosphere and Texture

SPOTS

Independent spaces, art galleries, cultural centers, restaurants, and canteens to drink mezcal and to dance prevail.



Interest for contemporary and independent art and culture

Re-appropriation of traditional spaces (such as canteens)

Festive spirit, bars and clubs to enjoy the rite of drinking mezcal

"OAXACA is one of the most open places to different and innovative contemporary art proposals"

"The Cantina Salón de la Fama is downtown and has a lot of history, it's small and very cozy"

"There must always be drinks, especially mezcal, there are many places to drink it while surrounded by art"

Jalisco: Cocktails and Industrial Style

SPOTS:

They favor gourmet spaces of an international character with a large catalog of cocktails, and spaces with an industrial style and calm and "guapachosa" music.

- "El País" (Pase de pulque): "it's a little bar, a cellar-type club where they play 'electroacoustic' and sell fruit-flavored mezcal"
- "El Gallo Altavoz": "delicious cocktails that are accompanied by 'guapachosa' music"
- "Club Pardo": "for fifty (cocktail) drinks"
- "MATHIAS": "the best coffee in the city, they do megal café de la ciudad, they roast their beans and take care of every step of the process"
- COMALA: "for the coffee-friendly subculture who spend the afternoon studying/ working"
- "DE LA O": "a renovated canteen that brings young people closer to the world of bars (drinks) and snacks"
- "C3": "forum of local artists that are taking off and lesser-known international artists"

"There are thousands of specialty restaurants and several of the best chefs in Mexico"



Semiotic Analysis: Mexican Codes

Mexico Codes: Residual



Stuck in the Past?

Slow and Sleepy



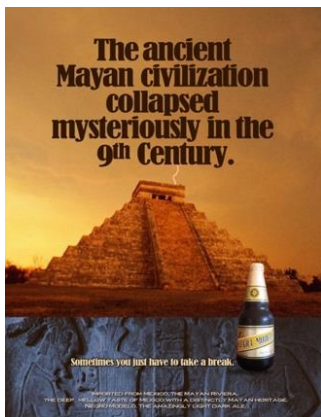
Desolate Desert



Hacienda Life



Stolen Greatness



Unrepentantly Macho



Wealth of Color



Respecting Ritual



Noble Peasant



Mexico Codes: Dominant (US and Italy)



Divided Perceptions: Fun and Colourful vs. Dark and Frightening.

Shed Your Inhibitions



Life is a Beach



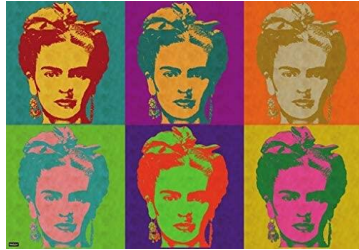
Extra Spicy



The Frida Kahlo Effect



Fiesta Forever



Passion and Drama



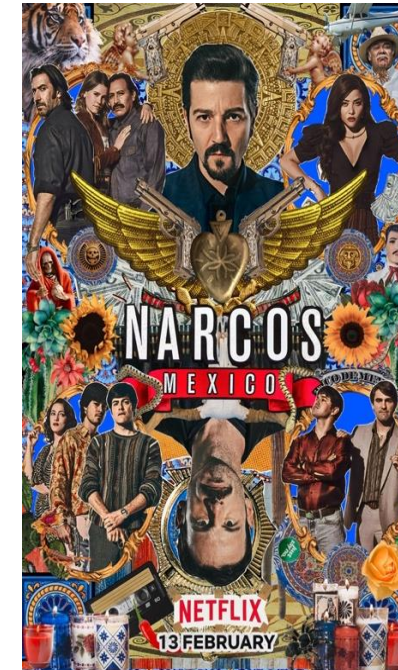
Exotic Mixing



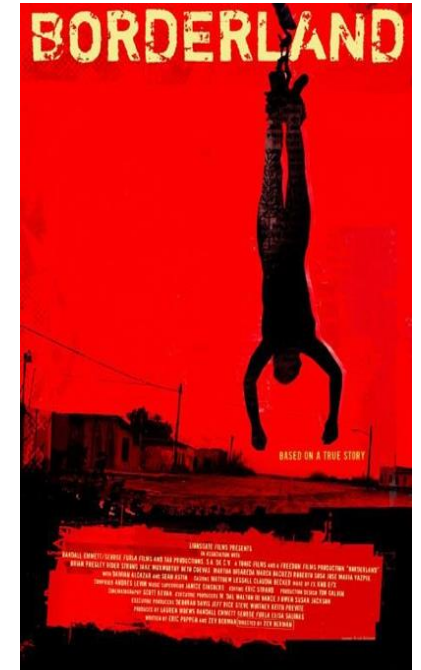
Day of the Dead Chic



Opulent Impunity



Frontier Action



VS.



Mexico Codes: Dominant (Mexico)

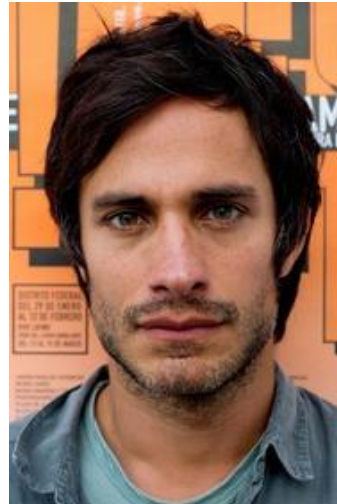


Embracing Change and Modernity

Whitexicans



Internationally Mexican



Social Transformation



Spectacular
Normality



Mexico Codes: Emergent



Evolving Tradition and Creativity.

Boutique Mexico



Neo-Aztecs, Neo-Mayans



Maximalist Revision



The Dark Fantastic



Vision Quest



Hipster Mexican



MeXico



Tradition Forward

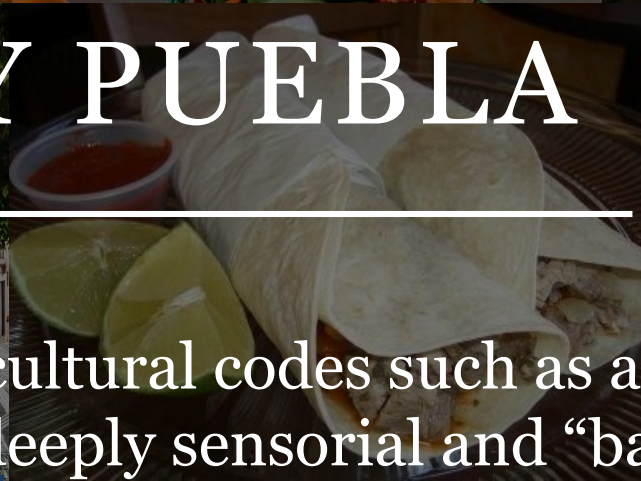


Semiotic Analysis: Regional Codes



SENSORY PUEBLA

A region with residual aesthetic and cultural codes such as architecture and gastronomy. Its symbols are deeply sensorial and “baroque”.



Puebla Codes: Clinging to Tradition

Puebla is the most residual region with a focus on past European dominance and Catholic sensoriality.

Ultra Pious



Historic Grandeur



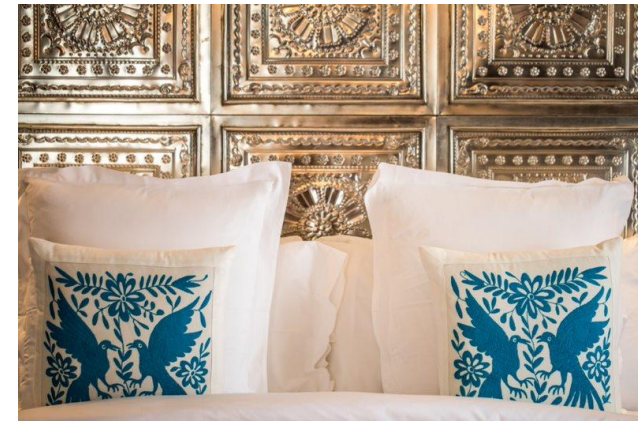
Glorious Technicolour

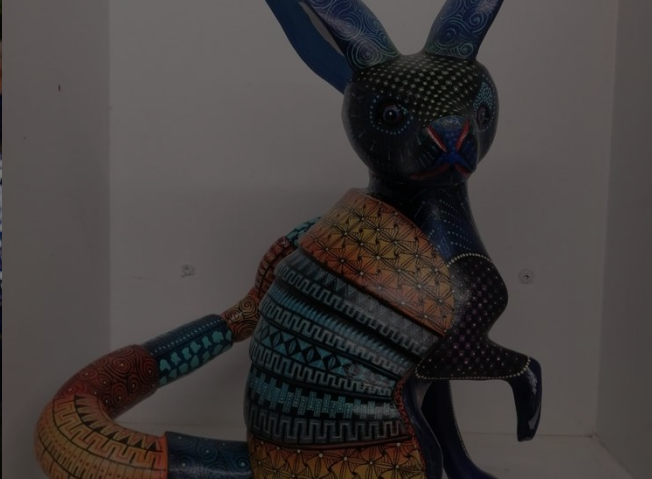


Traditional Gastronomy

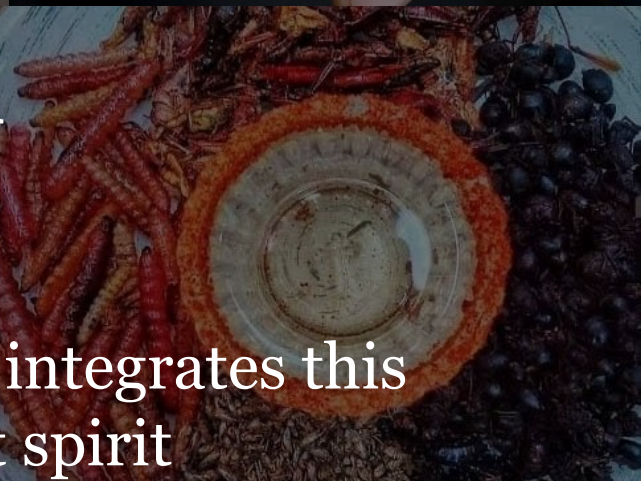


Hyper Sensoriality





PROFOUND OAXACA



Oaxaca retains its historical past and its rich traditions; but integrates this with an openness to contemporary art and a protest spirit



Oaxaca Codes: Profound Heterogeneity

Pre-Hispanic roots, ancestral knowledge, religious syncretism dissident spirit, contemporary art and cultural experimentation are all happening at once.

Indigenous
Heritage



Cultural
Richness



Dark
Vitality



Edgy Art
Scene



Political
Protest



Cocina
Experimental





COSMOPOLITAN GUADALAJARA

It's the city responsible for Mexico's traditional imagery: mariachi, tequila, and *charrería*. But currently, it's characterized by its international openness and the fervent desire of its citizens to modernize and update these symbols in the light of international agendas.



Jalisco Codes: Extremes Brought Together

Some of the most clichéd and Residual codes contrasted with some of the most provocative Emergent ones.

Home of
Tequila



Manly Mexico



Agaveland



Tradition +
Modernity



Gastronomic
Fusion

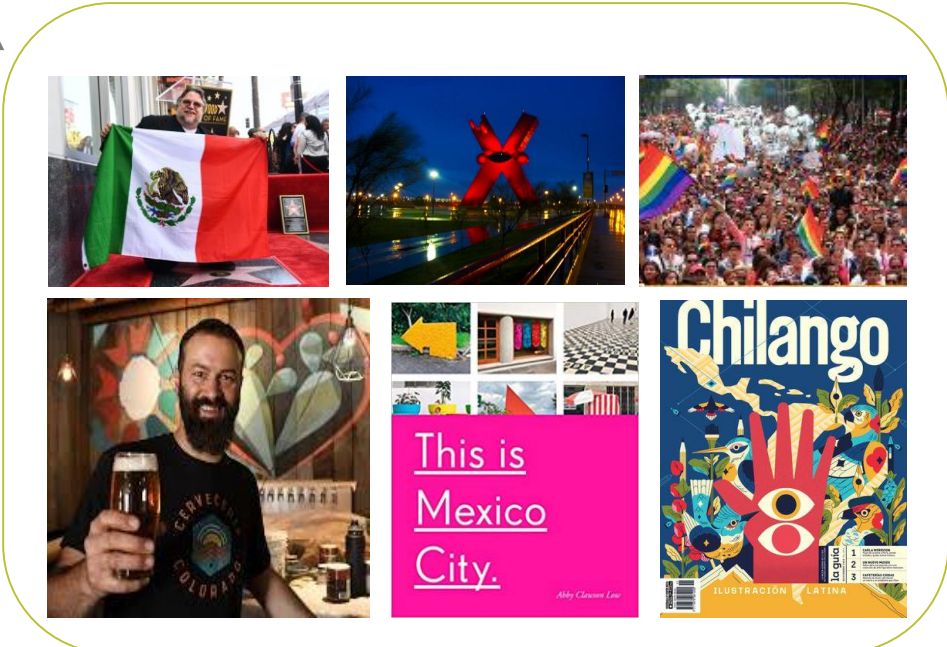


Implications

IGNORE
Clichés



Imagination

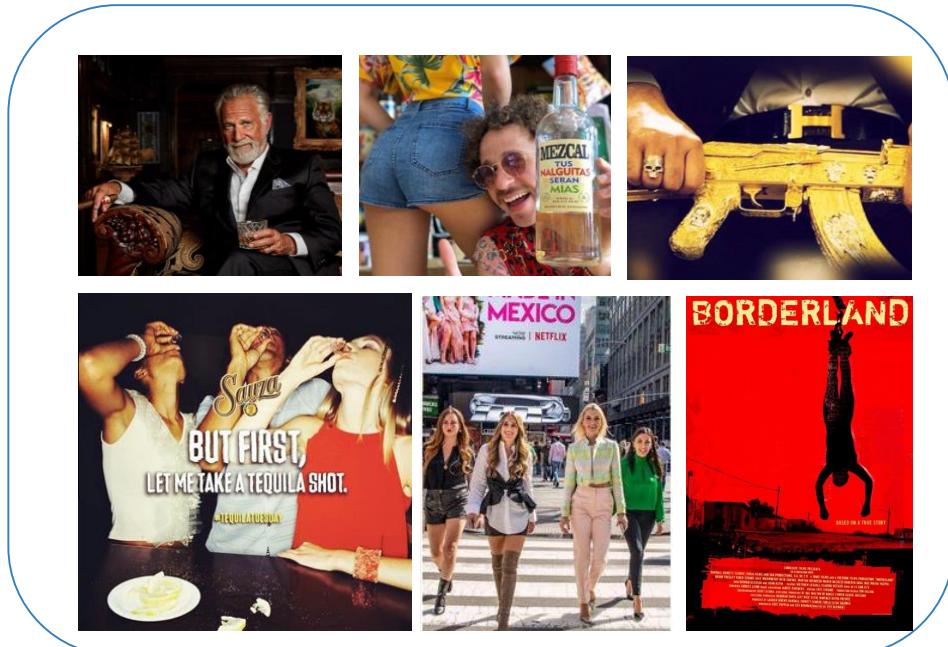


ADOPT
Aspirational
visions

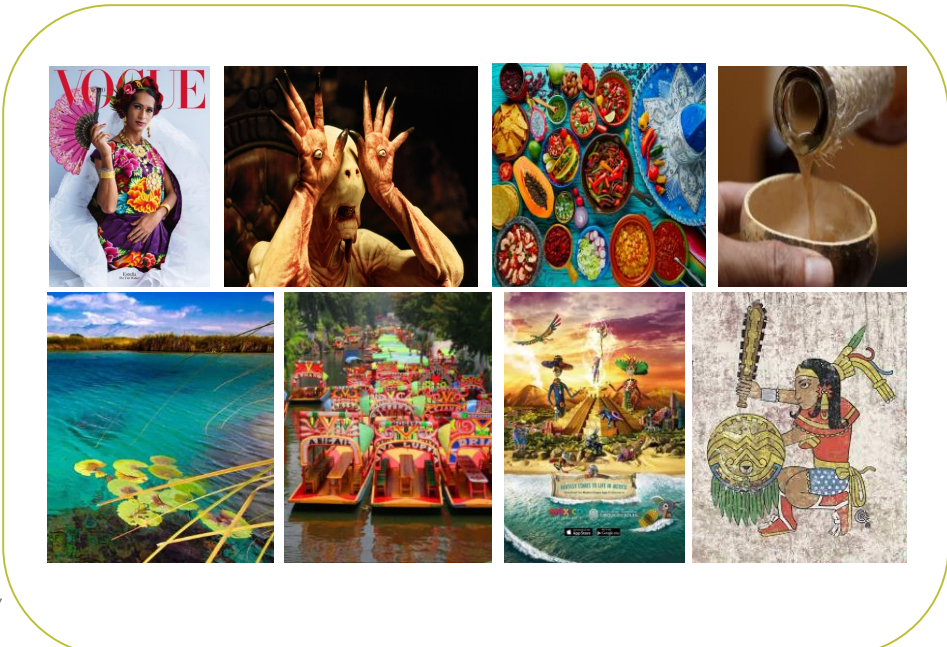
Destroy

Build

LOSE
Painful
Realities



Reality



DEVELOP
/RETAIN
Cultural
Essence

Specific Brands: Codes to Avoid

Codes that are associated with clichés or negative stereotypes regarding either Mexico or the product itself

Ancho Reyes

Hacienda Life



Glorious Technicolor



Espolon

«Manly» Mexico



Shed Your Inhibitions



Day of the Dead Chic



Montelobos

Noble Peasant



Political Protest



Execution

Recommendations: Puebla

While Puebla is more residual, it also has unique connotations of elegance and sophistication that set it apart from other Mexican regions.

- Its residual connotations could be re-spun as romantically retro, a more luxurious and indulgent experience.
- While arches are not unique to Puebla, they are a good symbol of the colonial heritage that makes the city so beautiful.
- Arches also suggest strength, thresholds from one space to another, and ceremonies of renewal, all of which could be a way of connecting the past to the present and conveying a sense of ritual power.

Suggested Codes

Historic
Grandeur

Traditional
Gastronomy

Hyper
Sensoriality

Tradition
Forward

“Boutique”
Mexico



Execution: Ancho Reyes

The brand celebrates the Historic Grandeur of 1920s Puebla, rich in Hyper Sensoriality.

Historic
Grandeur

Hyper
Sensoriality

— CREATED IN THE COLORFUL STREETS OF —

1920'S PUEBLA

Ancho Reyes was born in 1927, a time of revolution that brought independence into Mexico and brought Mexican culture into the modern world. Puebla was a city with a beating cultural heart.

It was out of this spirit of creativity and craft that Ancho Reyes was born. The home-made liqueurs or *menjurjes* created at this time fueled spirited conversations amongst artists and revolutionaries, particularly in the *Barrio del Artista* (Artists' Quarter). This vibrant enclave of Puebla, with its striking and distinctive arches, was the backdrop for the exciting moment.



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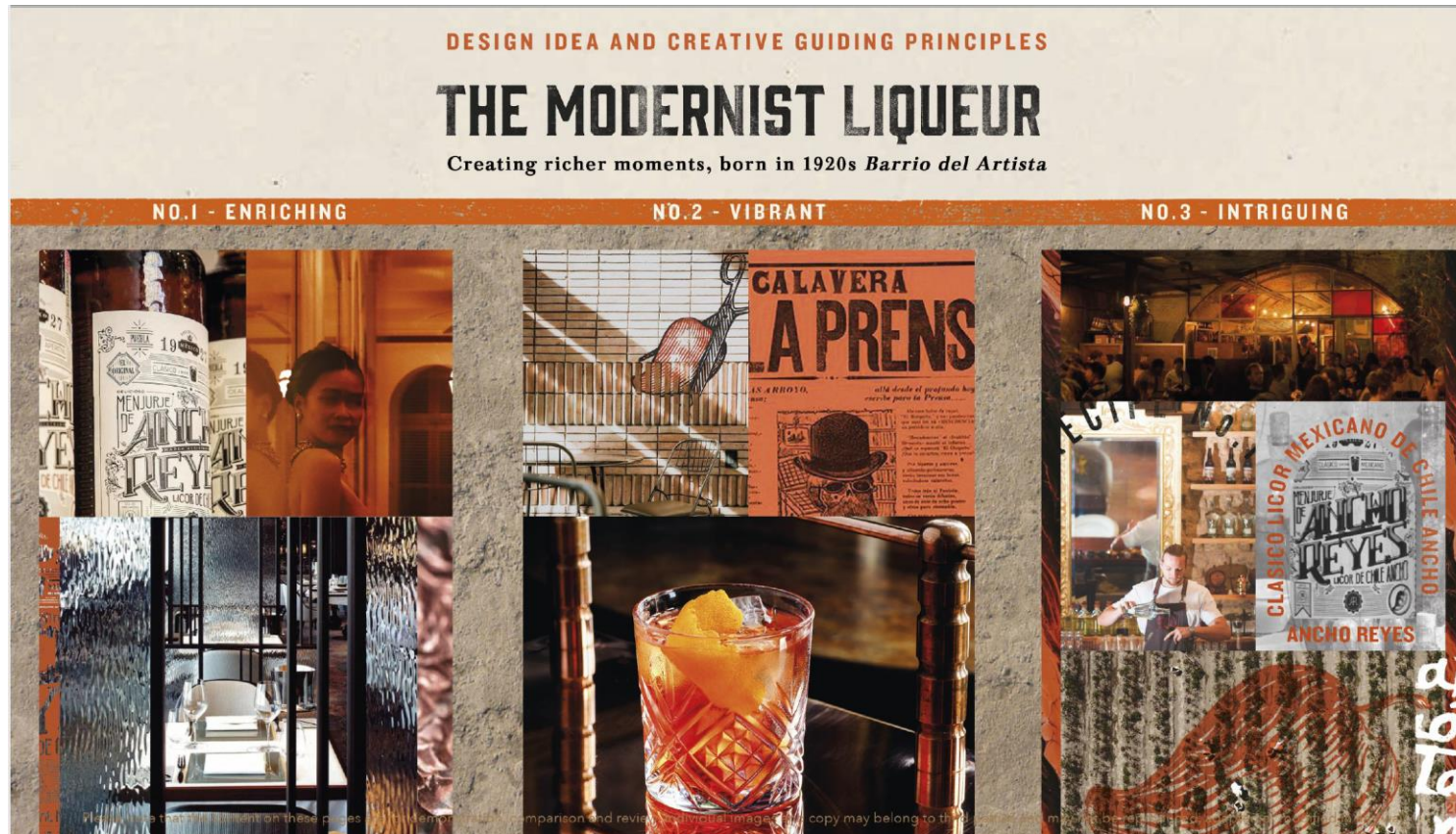


Execution: Ancho Reyes

The Design Idea leveraged 1920s Mexican Modernism to create a highly differentiated aesthetic.

Tradition Forward

“Boutique” Mexico



Execution: Ancho Reyes

In social media we see imagery of traditional architecture, Mexican Modernist illustration, and retro cocktail styling.

Historic Grandeur

“Boutique” Mexico

Hyper Sensoriality



Recommendations: Oaxaca and Mezcal

Oaxaca's rich brew of culture, creativity and mysticism is extremely fertile territory and Mezcal has its own mystique that has yet to be fully leveraged by other brands.

- As befits a spirit of Oaxaca, Mezcal has its own rich brew of culture and mysticism
- Mezcal's long clandestine history and association with the night connects directly with the dark vitality narrative suggested by Montelobos' use of dark hues and moonlit connotations. .
- One might add the almost hallucinatory nature of the drink in association with the fantastic creatures so central to Oaxacan communities (the carnivals mentioned in the report as well as the "alebrijes" (hand crafted fantastic animals))

Suggested Codes

Dark Vitality

Respecting
Rituals

Vision Quest

Cultural
Richness

Edgy Art
Scene

Cocina
Experimental



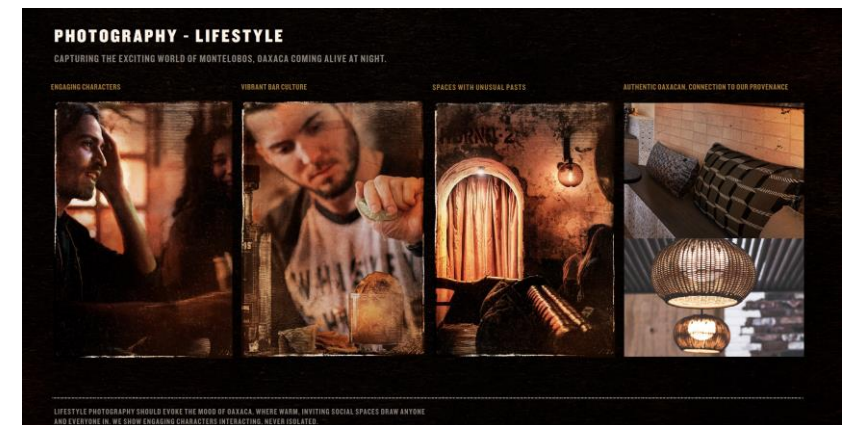
Execution: Montelobos

The Design Idea strongly taps into the codes of darkness, mystery and supernatural spirituality revealed by the Semiotic analysis.

Dark Vitality

Vision Quest

Respecting Rituals



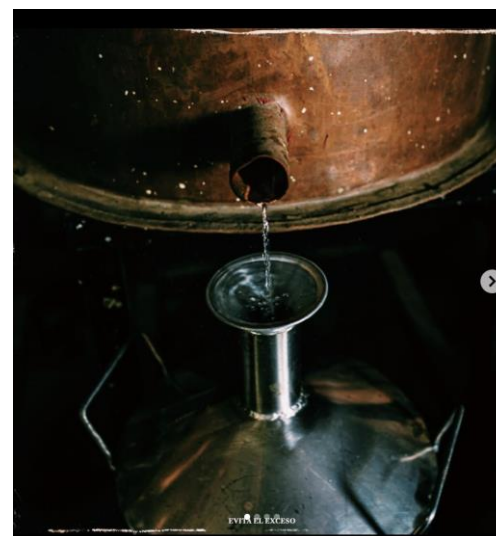
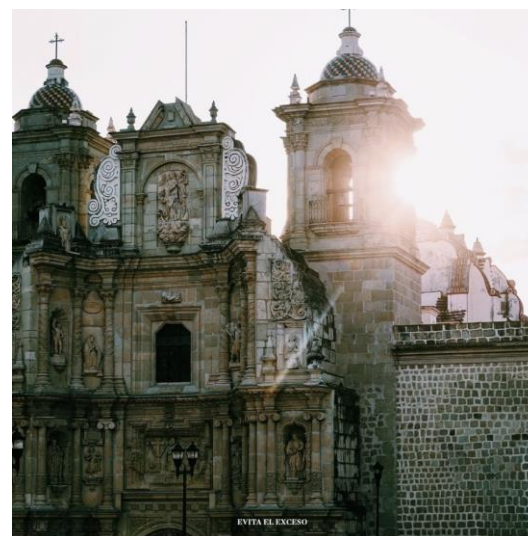
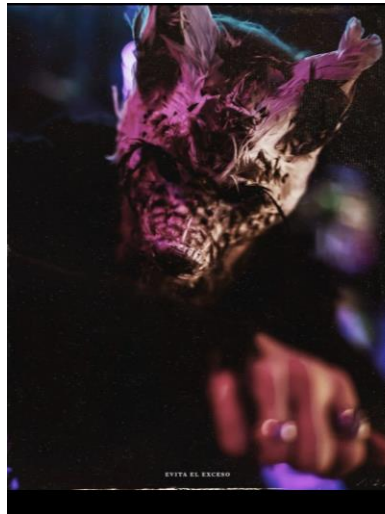
Execution: Montelobos

In Social Media, imagery similarly leverages darkness, mystery, ritual and the supernatural.

Dark Vitality

Vision Quest

Respecting Rituals



Recommendations: Jalisco and Tequila

Jalisco presents the opportunity to represent a more contemporary, cosmopolitan vision of Mexico that challenges cultural stereotypes of Mexico as traditional and backward.

- This does not mean ignoring tradition, but showing how tradition can inform a uniquely Mexican sense of modernity

Suggested Codes

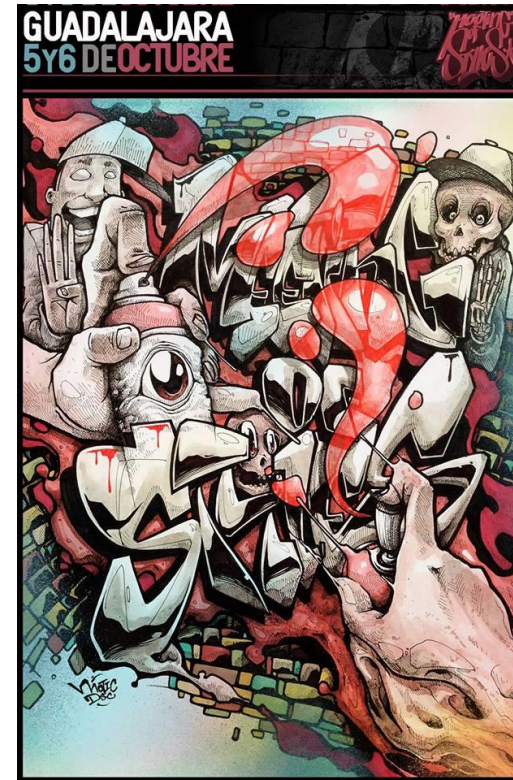
Tradition
+Modernity

Hipster
Mexicano

Maximalistic
Revision

MeXico

Gastronomic
Fusion



Execution: Espolon

Espolon's Brand Identity and visuals really embrace the idea of a contemporary, cosmopolitan Mexican aesthetic.

Tradition
+Modernity

Hipster
Mexicano

Maximalistic
Revision

BRAND VISUAL IDENTITY
BRANDVISUAL IDENTITY PRINCIPLES

THE MOST ENERGIZING EXPRESSION OF OUR CRAFT.
We add an unexpected twist of color to translate the vibrancy, the energy and the unstoppable creative optimism of Mexico. It's a tiny touch, but always powerful. It's the little thing you see from far, to focus the attention. It may be used also to highlight some key words. A solution when you want to promote optimism to the world.

BRAND VISUAL IDENTITY
BRANDVISUAL IDENTITY PRINCIPLES

THE MOST VISCERAL EXPRESSION OF OUR CRAFT.
Feel the making. Be with the makers, the designers, the creators. This is the place where it all happens and we're there to witness it, to be part of it. You are not before or after, you are in the creation. Nothing is static. You can feel the momentum, the pulse of your surroundings, charged with intention. There is no filter, it's a real experience, in real time. It's for real. This is the energy of the artist, the raw creative space where you get to evolve. Own it. Express it. Be it.

BRAND VISUAL IDENTITY
BRANDVISUAL IDENTITY PRINCIPLES

THE MOST MODERN EXPRESSION OF OUR CRAFT.
We live in a world where simplicity is the ultimate key for modernity. Our visual language is rich in culture. The beautiful Posada spirit label needs calmness & confidence. Think about modern museums. Their aesthetics are both minimalist and bold. Minimalist, because every painting needs space to be seen. The walls are immaculately white. Nothing that disturbs or distracts. They promote the things they most value and remove what is not necessary. At the same time, modern art museums are bold, striking, and powerful. They use bold typeface for bold statements. By using those design codes, they perfectly complement the avant-garde spirit of the artists they represent.

Be bold, brave & brilliant.

BRAND EXPERIENCE GUIDANCE
AMBIANCE & DECOR

Mainly use warm pink lights.

Other two colors.

USE OF NEONS

Fluorescent tubes gives the hint of vibes we need to create a more artistic and intriguing environment. Use pink over orange, yellow and silver in order to maintain Espolon brand identity.

Multicolor.



Execution: Espolon

Espolon's social media similarly conveys a sense of an edgy, urban, hyper-modern Mexico.

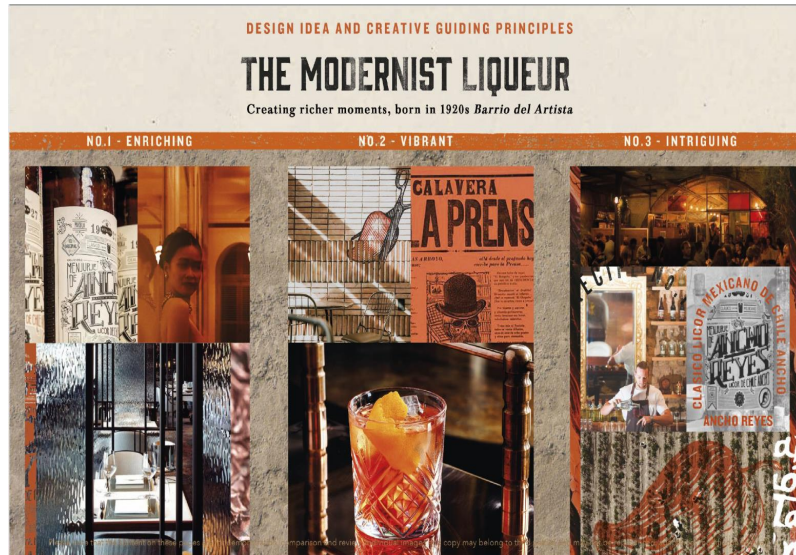
Hipster
Mexicano

MeXico



Conclusions

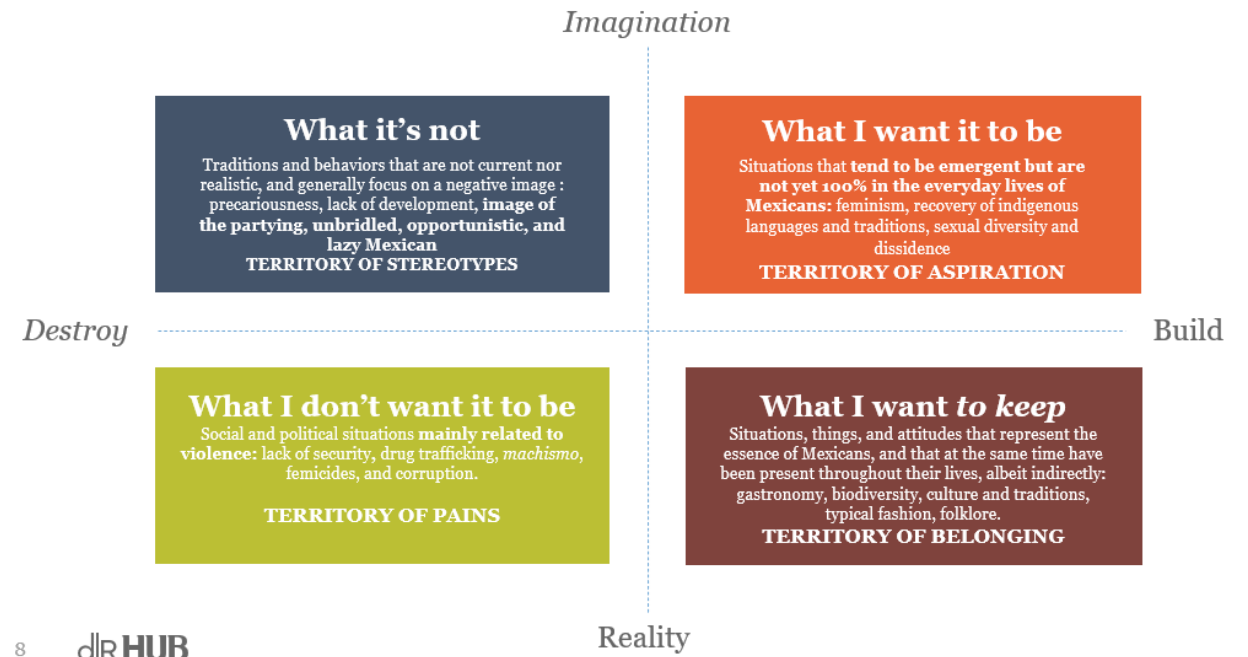
Three visions of Mexico, rooted in the Semiotic Cues of three distinct regions. Three distinctive, authentic and highly relevant brand positionings.



Conclusions

What can we learn from this?

1. Tapping into the voices of Emergent consumers can help provide powerful guidance for where a brand should go
2. Having perspectives from markets both deeply familiar with and less familiar with the topic helps identify common themes, and also fertile territory for exploration
3. Combining Semiotics with traditional qualitative research can provide richer findings that are truly actionable for positioning global brands!





THANK YOU!

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