

Do logo redesigns help or hurt your brand? The role of brand commitment

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Abstract

Purpose – Logos are a critical component of brand aesthetics. Frequently companies redesign their logos, and many redesigns result in more rounded logos. How do such redesigns affect consumers' brand attitudes? The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of brand commitment on consumer response to logo shape redesign.

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a field experiment with 632 respondents and examines two athletic shoe brands: New Balance and Adidas.

Findings – The greater the degree of change in the roundedness of a previously angular logo, the more likely it is that strongly committed consumers will evaluate the redesigned logo more negatively (in terms of brand attitude). Such logo evaluations, in turn, mediate the joint effect of logo redesign and commitment on overall brand attitude. Conversely, weakly committed consumers react positively to such changes.

Research limitations/implications – The literature on aesthetics and brand attitude are combined to show that not all consumers view changes in brand elements such as logos similarly. Strongly committed consumers view these changes negatively; weakly committed consumers view them positively. An information-processing approach provides the underlying theory for this finding. Thus, logo evaluation partially mediates this change in brand attitude, but it does not fully explain the change in brand attitude after exposure to logo redesign.

Practical implications – Strong brands gain strength by developing a base of strongly committed customers. Attempts to change brand elements – such as logo redesigns – can affect customers differently depending on whether they are strongly committed, mildly committed, or not committed at all. Thus firms attempting to change brand elements, particularly their logos, should be fully aware of the potentially negative impact on their most important customers – those having the strongest brand commitment.

Originality/value – To one's knowledge very little research has examined the relationship between logo redesign and brand attitude. Henderson *et al.*'s call to examine consumer responses to changes in design stimuli is followed. Importantly, the study is the first to show that visual elements of a brand (e.g. logo) can differentially impact consumer response based on brand commitment to such an extent that strongly committed customers react more negatively than weakly committed customers to redesigned logos.

Keywords Brand identity, Brand loyalty, Logos

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

In 2003, Apple Computer announced it was recoloring its logo from red to brushed silver. Within hours of Apple's announcement, more than 200 people had signed an online petition demanding Apple's return to the old logo (Kahney, 2003). In contrast, the recent redesigns of Walmart's logo elicited less customer response (*Benton County Daily Record*, 2008; Edwards, 2008). Why might that be? One explanation may be that although Apple has relatively fewer customers, most of their customers have very strong brand commitment,

whereas Walmart customers, although there are many, have lower levels of brand commitment. More intriguingly, how and why does a slight change to a brand's visual elements (e.g. logo color or shape) affect consumers so differently, depending on their levels of brand commitment? What are the implications for brand attitude and consequent branding strategies?

We explore these questions theoretically and empirically. Drawing on the literature in aesthetics and consumer information processing, we hypothesize the impact of logo-redesign on logo evaluation and brand attitude. More importantly, we develop a theory about the moderating role of consumer brand commitment. We then conduct a large-scale experiment to test our theoretical predictions.

Brand aesthetics and logo re-design

As a brand element, a logo can be defined as a graphic representation or image that triggers memory associations of the target brand. Tom Peters (1999, p. 41) recognized the importance of a visually strong logo:

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Humans think visually. A picture is really worth a million words. And great brands have readily identifiable icons – just ask Nike or Apple or Shell – strong simple images that connect with customers.

Logos are a prominent feature of a diverse array of direct and indirect communication vehicles ranging from packaging, promotional materials, and advertising to uniforms, business cards, and letterheads (Bottomly and Doyle, 2006; Henderson and Cote, 1998; Janiszewski and Meyvis, 2001). To this end, firms have also started to pay substantial attention to brand aesthetics, which encompasses an evaluation of the visual elements of a brand such as product, package, and logo designs (Burrows, 2008; *Business Week*, 2007; Scanlon, 2006). Firms such as Perception Research Services reported conducting hundreds of design and aesthetics studies every year for various clients including Kraft, Nestle, Wrigley, Target, and General Mills (Mininni, 2005). Interestingly, among the various brand elements examined, brand logo (apart from product and package design) is the most salient visual brand element for customers (Mininni, 2005). Not surprisingly, one in 50 companies will redesign their logo in a given year (Spaeth, 2002), and at considerable expense. For instance, UPS spent \$20 million to introduce a new logo in 2003 (Griswold, 2003), while Xerox invested multimillions to update its logo (Xerox, 2008). Given the expense involved, firms would benefit by knowing which customers are likely to respond more or less favorably to such changes in their logo. Answers to these questions, though important, have not received systematic scrutiny. This is true despite some research conducted to systematically categorize various logo design elements (see Henderson and Cote, 1998; Henderson *et al.*, 2003, for exceptions).

Henderson and Cote (1998) provided a systematic typology to classify and study the visual elements of a logo, including the concepts of naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, parallelism, repetition, proportion, and shape. Madden *et al.* (2000) found that colors such as blue and white, when included in a logo, share similar meaning across countries, while colors such as black and red have considerably different meanings and associations. Klink (2003) found that brand names with front vowels and fricatives (the letters *s*, *f*, *v*, and *c*) were more closely related to lighter-colored brand names and angular brand logos. Later, Henderson *et al.* (2003) examined how customers from different cultures perceive different logo elements. A cross-sectional survey showed that consumers in China and Singapore perceived natural and harmonious logo designs more positively, whereas consumers in Western cultures perceived abstract and asymmetric logo designs more positively. The role of elaborateness as a primary driver of consumer perceptions of logos, followed by naturalness and harmony, was verified in another study as well (Henderson *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, it was found that the roundedness of a logo was a canonical feature of perceptions of logo harmony and naturalness. In particular, the more rounded the elements of a logo (as opposed to angular or sharp), the more it was viewed as being harmonious and natural. Thus, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, the roundedness of a logo is a key design element.

Interestingly, practitioners also view the roundedness of logo elements (as opposed to angular and sharp elements) as an emergent trend that is likely to endure. We interviewed 12

leading logo designers from multiple firms. The firms included the four largest corporate-identity firms as identified by the American Institute of Graphic Artists (AIGA):

- 1 Interbrand;
- 2 Landor and Associates;
- 3 Lippencott and Margulies; and
- 4 Siegel and Gale.

We also included six design firms from the mid-Atlantic area and a northeastern art institute. All interviewees (100 percent) indicated a trend toward increased use of rounded shapes for logos. One designer commented, “[The tendency is toward] the use of more round-like shape. I see logos having a more bulbous design.” Another designer stated, “There is a movement toward traditional design. I think this is a response to the ‘go-go’ craziness of the dot-com era.” The designers also discussed brand globalization and explained that more brands are moving into Asian countries where roundedness is preferred to angularity in shapes (Zhang *et al.*, 2006).

Finally, to verify that roundedness was indeed a logo-design element worth investigating, we analyzed *Logos Redesigned* (Carter, 2005), a collection of 192 recent logo redesigns. Two coders classified each redesigned logo as:

- 1 no shape change;
- 2 more angular shape from being initially rounded; or
- 3 more rounded shape from being initially angular (87 percent initial agreement, differences resolved through discussion).

Results indicated that 50 percent of all logos had changed shape. Among logos that had changed shape, 68 percent were more rounded; only the remaining 32 percent became more angular ($p < 0.05$).

Thus, from a design perspective, we decided to examine this particular logo element – rounded shape – as our measure of the extent of logo redesign. In other words, in our empirical study we varied the extent of roundness of the logo to study its impact on logo evaluations and brand attitude among consumers.

Changes in logo shape: theory

Berlyne’s (1960) seminal work identified the psychological processes relating the aesthetic dimensions of stimuli to the perceiver’s responses. Empirical research in aesthetics (Arnheim, 1974; Aronoff *et al.*, 1992; Berlyne, 1976) has shown that shape plays an important role in perceptions. Applying those ideas to marketing, research has examined how visual elements of the marketing mix such as advertising (Bloch, 1995) and new-product design (Page and Herr, 2002; Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998) affect customer reactions. More recently, Zhang *et al.* (2006) examined the effect of product shape on product evaluations among collectivist and individualistic cultures. Despite the descriptive research on logos and attempts to classify logo-design elements, little if any research has systematically examined how changes in logos affect consumer attitudes.

Research has shown that viewers clearly differentiate between two versions – rounded and angular – of the same stimulus. They interpret the rounded version of a stimulus to be a compromise between the focal stimulus and its surroundings (Arnheim, 1974; Hogg, 1969). Typically, roundedness is associated with approachableness,

friendliness, and harmony (Berlyne, 1960; 1976). In contrast, angularity is associated with energy, toughness, and strength. Based on the visual aesthetics literature, we argue that consumers will clearly differentiate and perceive a change based on differences in the angularity and roundedness of a logo.

Note, we do not argue that one shape is better than the other. We simply argue that if an original logo was more angular and became more rounded, consumers would see that the logo was different. Our main goal, therefore, is to examine how the magnitude of change in logo affects subsequent consumer evaluations. Next, we theoretically examine whether the magnitude of change in logo will similarly affect consumers based on their level of brand commitment.

Brand commitment: a moderator of consumer response to logo redesign

Brand commitment can be viewed as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” with the brand (Moorman and Zaltman, 1992, p. 316). Brand commitment develops over time (Keller, 2005). Consumers having strong levels of commitment, who have nurtured strong relationships with their brand, tend to see strong connections between themselves and the brand (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and consider the brands to be an integral part of their lives (Fournier, 1998). Visually, brand logos convey a very different meaning to consumers with strong brand commitment than to consumers with moderate or no brand commitment. This is particularly true because, as a visual cue, brand logos can become the basis for triggering brand-related associations and thoughts in consumer memory (Keller, 2005). To the extent that the brand associations and their strength emerging from the brand logo vary based on commitment, we expect a change in logo to differentially affect consumers based on their commitment to the brand.

We argue that strongly committed consumers are likely to view logo changes as threatening their relationship with the brand (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000). Those with strong brand commitment will see the original brand logo – and the associations – as representing themselves (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and the integral relationship they have with the brand (Fournier, 1998). They are likely to view a change in the logo, which affects these associations, as threatening their self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and relationships (Fournier, 1998). Consequently, such consumers will be negatively disposed to the logo change and likely to evaluate the logo negatively. This logic is consistent with an information-processing perspective (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000). Accordingly, information that is inconsistent (i.e. the redesigned logo with rounded shape) with the original brand-self concept motivates consumers to defend the relationship by evaluating the new information (i.e. redesigned logos) negatively. We argue that the effect should be greater for the strongly committed based on the degree of change.

Conversely, for consumers with weak brand commitment, a changed logo would not be as meaningful. Such customers are unlikely to see the brand as an integral part of their being and should have little or no personal relationship with the brand. They are likely to perceive a change in the logo’s shape as novel, which will lead them to evaluate the logo more positively (Kohli and Suri, 2002). Thus the redesign will generate positive attitudes about the brand. In particular, the

greater the change in brand logo shape, the more positive the attitude toward the brand for consumers with weak brand commitment. Therefore:

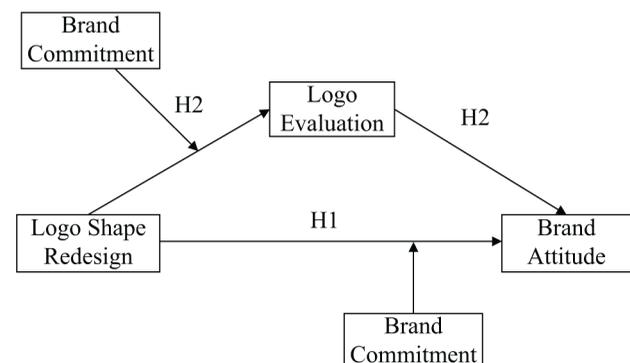
- H1.* Brand commitment will moderate the influence of change in the roundedness of a logo shape on brand attitude. Specifically, for consumers with strong brand commitment, brand attitude will decline as the degree of change in logo shape increases. Conversely, for consumers with weak brand commitment, brand attitude will increase as the degree of change in logo shape increases.

Regarding the relationship between logo evaluation and brand attitude, we argue that strongly committed consumers will evaluate logo shape changes more negatively, and their reaction will be reflected in lower brand attitudes. This is likely because logos, as a central visual element of the overall brand, will trigger corresponding brand associations. Thus, if consumers evaluate the logo negatively, their evaluation should also trigger similarly valenced (i.e. negative) brand associations and lead to more negative brand attitudes. To the extent that strongly committed consumers are likely to view the redesigned logo negatively, more negative brand associations will be triggered, leading to more negative brand attitude. In contrast, more positive brand associations among those with weak brand commitment should lead to more positive brand attitude in response to a logo redesign. Based on this, we posit that logo evaluation will mediate the joint effect of brand commitment and degree of logo shape change on brand attitude. Thus:

- H2.* Logo evaluation will affect brand evaluations. Consequently, logo evaluation will mediate the effect of brand commitment and logo shape redesign on brand attitude.

The model underlying the two hypotheses is visually represented in Figure 1. To test these hypotheses, we conducted a study using athletic shoe brand logos. We conducted a series of pretests to validate that the selected brands exhibited a wide distribution of consumer commitment and that the survey participants would perceive the degree of change in the experimental stimuli as intended. The research design, measures, and results of these pretests are not presented here, but full results are available from the first author.

Figure 1 Conceptual model: logo redesign and brand attitude



Study

The study design featured a 3 (degree of change: none, moderate, considerable) X 3 (commitment toward the brand: strong, moderate, weak) between-subjects design with commitment as a measured variable. We selected two brands of athletic shoes, Adidas and New Balance, based on past research (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000) showing the brands are highly relevant to our sample of undergraduate students. A professional graphic designer modified the shape of the brand logos using two designs per logo: moderately redesigned and considerably redesigned. Pretests confirmed that respondents perceived the degree of change the designer intended. (Copies of the designs are available upon request from the first author).

A total of 632 undergraduates at a large US university participated in the study for extra credit. Among them, 49 percent were males, and the average age was 21.86 years ($SD = 3.41$). Neither age nor gender were significant covariates in subsequent analyses and will not be discussed further. Measures included scales for brand commitment, brand attitude, and logo evaluation. (See Table I for full details on measures used in the study.) In terms of procedure, students were told they were participating in a study about athletic shoes. Each participant was given a booklet that showed the base logo. After viewing the logo, they completed the brand commitment scale and brand attitude scale (pre-redesigned logo exposure). This study measures brand attitude twice – before and after exposure to the logo design. This was done to measure the change in brand attitude awareness after exposure to the logo design. However, to avoid methodological issues with using difference scores (Edwards, 1995), post-exposure brand attitude was used as the dependent variable and pre-exposure brand attitude was included as a covariate in the model.

Next, participants viewed the redesigned logo. Because this was a between-subjects factor, each participant saw only one version (no change, moderate change, considerable change) of the redesigned logo. Then respondents completed a brand-attitude scale (post-redesigned logo exposure). Finally, they provided demographic and product-ownership data.

Results

An ANCOVA was conducted with brand attitude toward the post-redesigned logo as the dependent variable. The independent variables included brand commitment, degree of change, and their interaction. The covariates were brand, prior brand ownership, gender, age, and pre-exposure brand attitude. Including the brand and prior brand ownership ensured that consumers' past associations were accounted for in the analysis. Similarly, pre-exposure brand attitude was included to ensure that any carryover effect of the brand exposure was accounted for. In other words, the observed effects can be attributed only to the change in the logo and consumer commitment to the brand.

The overall model was significant ($F_{10,621} = 50.73$, $p < 0.05$), as was the effect of commitment ($F_{1,630} = 173.23$, $p < 0.05$) and the effect of degree of change ($F_{2,629} = 25.74$, $p < 0.05$). In support of $H1$, the commitment X degree of change interaction was statistically significant ($F_{2,629} = 42.63$, $p < 0.05$). As expected, pre-exposure brand attitude had a significant effect ($F_{1,630} = 209.04$, $p < 0.05$). No other covariate was statistically significant. Results are shown in Table II.

Respondents were categorized as strongly, moderately, and weakly committed using a tertiary split (see Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000). The mean post-exposure brand attitude for each cell is shown in Figure 2. A *post hoc* test for a linear trend for strongly committed consumers was significant ($F_{1,167} = 81.82$, $p < 0.05$). Results indicated that among

Table I List of measures used in studies

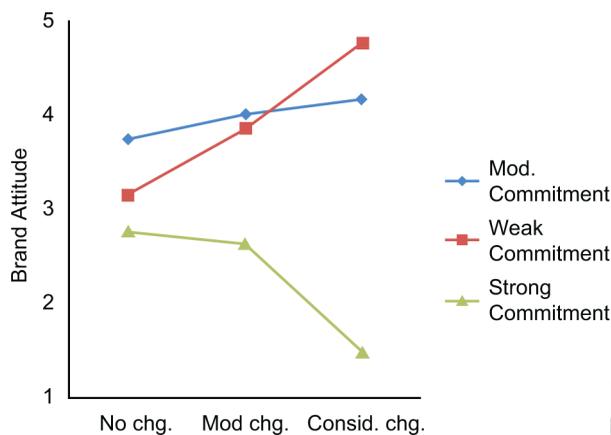
Measure	Description
Brand commitment	Beatty <i>et al.</i> 's (1988) brand commitment scale, comprising the following three items, was used (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree): <i>if (brand) were not available, it would make little difference to me if I had to choose another brand (reverse scored); I consider myself to be highly loyal to (brand); When another brand is on sale, I will generally purchase it rather than (brand) (reverse scored)</i> . The items had adequate internal reliability (Study 1: $\alpha = 0.88$). The items were averaged to create a single measure. On this scale, higher scores indicate stronger brand commitment. We note that brand commitment and brand attitude are significantly, but not highly correlated ($r^2 = 0.0006$, $p < 0.001$)
Brand attitude	Brand attitude was measured using a four-item, semantic differential scale developed by Ahluwalia <i>et al.</i> (2000). Measured on a nine-point scale, the items are good/bad, beneficial/harmful, desirable/undesirable, and nice/awful. The items displayed adequate internal consistency for both the pre- and post-exposure brand attitude in both studies ($\alpha_{pre} = 0.93$; $\alpha_{post} = 0.96$). The items were averaged such that higher scores indicate more favourable brand attitude. To avoid methodological issues with using difference scores (Edwards, 1995), post-exposure brand attitude is used as the dependent variable and pre-exposure brand attitude is included as a covariate in the model
Logo evaluation	Logo evaluation was measured using the five-item rating scale developed by Henderson and Cote (1998). The five items, each measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale, are: like/dislike, good/bad, distinctive/not distinctive, interesting/not interesting, and high/low quality. The items had adequate internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.95$) and were averaged to create a mean logo evaluation score
Brand	The brand is included as a covariate in the model (0 = Adidas, 1 = New Balance) since it is between-subjects variable. We first ran the analysis including brand as an interaction, but no interaction effects were found. It is therefore included as a covariate
Ownership	Respondents indicated their usage of the studied athletic shoes. This variable was coded "1" if owned, "0" if never owned the brand whose logo they evaluated

Table II Moderating impact of brand commitment on the effect of degree of logo-redesign on post-exposure brand attitude

Independent variables	DF	Mean square	F-value	p-value
Brand commitment	1	233.48	173.23	< 0.01
Degree of logo redesign	2	63.86	25.74	< 0.01
Brand commitment × degree of change	2	57.46	42.63	< 0.01
Brand	1	0.00	0.00	0.96
Ownership	1	0.90	0.67	0.41
Gender	1	1.58	1.17	0.28
Age	1	0.44	0.33	0.57
Pre-exposure brand attitude	1	281.74	209.04	< 0.01

Notes: $F(10, 621) = 50.73$; $R^2 = 44.9$ percent

Figure 2 Interaction of brand commitment and degree of change condition on post-exposure brand attitude



strongly committed consumers, post-exposure brand attitude was not statistically different for the no-change and moderate-change conditions ($M_{\text{nochange}} = 2.77$ vs $M_{\text{moderatechange}} = 2.63$; $t = 0.73$, *ns*). However, post-exposure brand attitude for the moderate-change condition was significantly greater than that of the considerable-change condition ($M_{\text{moderatechange}} = 2.63$ vs $M_{\text{considerablechange}} = 1.48$; $t = 5.34$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that brand attitude declined as the degree of logo shape redesign increased.

Among weakly committed consumers, a test for a linear trend was statistically significant ($F_{1,253} = 144.57$, $p < 0.05$). Specifically, among weakly committed consumers, post-exposure brand attitude for the no-change condition was significantly less than that of the moderate-change condition ($M_{\text{nochange}} = 3.15$ vs $M_{\text{moderatechange}} = 3.86$; $t = -4.30$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, post-exposure brand attitude for the moderate-change condition was significantly less than that of the considerable-change condition ($M_{\text{moderatechange}} = 3.86$ vs $M_{\text{considerablechange}} = 4.77$; $t = -5.16$, $p < 0.05$). These results fully support *H1*.

We also compared cell means for strongly and weakly committed consumers within each degree of change condition. Among those in the no-change condition, the post-exposure brand attitude was relatively similar for weakly and strongly committed consumers ($M_{\text{strong}} = 2.77$ vs $M_{\text{weak}} = 3.15$; $t = -1.71$, $p > 0.05$). The post-exposure brand attitude in the no-change condition for moderately committed consumers was significantly higher than both

strongly ($M_{\text{moderate}} = 3.74$ vs $M_{\text{strong}} = 2.77$; $t = 4.57$, $p < 0.05$) and weakly committed consumers ($M_{\text{moderate}} = 3.74$ vs $M_{\text{weak}} = 3.15$; $t = 3.26$, $p < 0.05$). For those in the moderate-change condition, the post-exposure brand attitude of strongly committed consumers was significantly less than that of weakly committed consumers ($M_{\text{strong}} = 2.63$ vs $M_{\text{weak}} = 3.86$; $t = -6.41$, $p > 0.05$), as well as moderately committed consumers ($M_{\text{strong}} = 2.63$ vs $M_{\text{moderate}} = 4.01$; $t = -6.89$, $p > 0.05$).

For participants in the considerable-change condition, post-exposure brand attitude was significantly lower for strongly than for weakly committed consumers ($M_{\text{strong}} = 1.48$ vs $M_{\text{weak}} = 4.77$; $t = -16.87$, $p > 0.05$), as expected. The post-exposure brand attitude of strongly committed consumers was also lower than that of moderately committed consumers in the considerable-change condition ($M_{\text{strong}} = 1.48$ vs $M_{\text{moderate}} = 4.17$; $t = -13.61$, $p > 0.05$). These means, shown in Figure 2, fully supported the hypothesized moderating effect.

We expected that logo evaluations would mediate the moderating effect of brand commitment on logo redesign on brand attitude. To examine this underlying process of mediated moderation, we conducted the regressions outlined in Muller *et al.* (2005). The interaction of brand commitment and logo condition had a significant effect on brand attitude ($t = -14.31$, $p < 0.01$), as indicated earlier. In the second regression, the interaction had a significant effect on logo evaluation ($t = -17.71$, $p < 0.01$). Importantly, in the third regression, the effect of the interaction on brand attitude was reduced ($t = -3.24$, $p < 0.01$), and the effect of logo evaluation was significant ($t = 6.21$, $p < 0.01$). The interaction of logo evaluation and brand commitment was also significant ($t = -1.97$, $p = 0.05$). These results indicate that logo evaluation mediates the moderating effect of brand commitment on logo redesign on brand attitude, supporting *H2*.

General discussion

Summary of results

Consumers who are strongly committed to a brand evaluate logo shape redesign more negatively and have a lower brand attitude. This effect occurs even after controlling for pre-exposure brand attitude. Thus, the results presented here are a very conservative test of our hypotheses, as we fully control for preexisting brand attitude. Perhaps surprisingly, those with weak brand commitment have more positive brand

attitudes toward the brand after they view a redesigned logo. Strongly committed consumers have significantly lower brand attitude than weakly committed consumers in both the moderate- and considerable-change conditions, but no difference is noticed in brand attitude when strongly committed consumers are exposed to the original, no-change brand logo.

Mediation analysis shows that evaluations of the logo itself partly drive brand attitude changes. The partial mediation through logo evaluation implies that changing the logo has broader consequences that affect brand attitude. In other words, logo evaluation is only one possible mediating mechanism.

Although brand attitude between strong, moderate, and weakly committed respondents moves in the hypothesized direction (i.e. respondents' brand attitude decreases for the strongly committed and increases for the weakly committed), it is counterintuitive for the initial brand attitude scores to be lower for strongly committed respondents compared with weakly committed respondents. Our study shows that brand commitment and brand attitude, while closely related, are separate constructs measuring different phenomena.

Theoretical implications

This research recognizes and demonstrates that changes in visual design elements of a brand (i.e. logo) transfer meaningfully to the brand (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Henderson *et al.*, 2004). Looking at Figure 2, one can see that the effect sizes are considerable and managerially relevant. Furthermore, the impact is mediated not just through logo evaluation, but also through a larger set of associations triggered in response to logo redesign. Identifying these additional mediators would be a useful direction for research. Also useful would be to vary other design elements beyond roundedness to examine whether similar conclusions can be drawn.

Implications for managers

Currently, most companies use a mass approach when they change their logos (Keller, 1998, 2000). Worse yet, most companies presume that their most precious customers – those having strong brand commitment – will be more accommodating to changes (Keller, 1998, 2000). Our results show this is likely a mistaken assumption – one that can alienate the core, the most committed of a brand's customers. In contrast, weakly committed consumers respond positively to logo redesign. Naturally, a more nuanced approach is needed to ensure that logo redesigns appeal to both groups. One strategy may be to manage the reactions and expectations of strongly committed consumers by actively soliciting their input and perhaps prenotifying them before the changes are revealed to the broader public. Giving the strongly committed such a feeling of being an “insider” may strengthen their self-brand connection and mitigate the potentially negative effects of logo redesign. For example, Apple Computer failed to explicitly announce their logo change; the redesign simply appeared on products, packaging, and advertising. Possibly the negative responses were because Apple's new logo surprised and disappointed their strongly committed customers, who would have expected to know of such a change in advance. Investigating this ameliorative strategy in an empirical study would be a useful contribution to managerial practice.

Limitations

The experimental design, used to establish causality, necessitated tradeoffs between internal and external validity. First, respondents were asked to evaluate logos in a vacuum, which does not represent reality. In one sense this may have heightened their awareness of the changed logo. However, they saw the redesigned logo only once, and not repeatedly, which is likely to be the case in real life. Second, only a single design dimension (roundedness) was evaluated, though logos redesigns are more likely to be multidimensional. Third, the changes in our logos were not extreme. Extreme changes to brand logos may elicit strong positive or negative responses from consumers regardless of brand commitment. To alleviate these limitations, additional studies could be designed that address these issues, while also testing additional theoretical issues outlined above. We hope that our paper provides some direction in that regard.

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

That humans tend to respond more to images than to words makes a brand's logo one of its most important elements. Logos have a key function in communicating the brand through a range of channels that include packaging, promotional materials, advertising, uniforms and business stationery. Recognition of its importance has led to a growing number of firms paying greater attention to the design of logos and other visual brand elements.

Issues to consider

Considerable expense is typically involved in redesigning brand logos and each year one in every 50 companies will undertake this process. Such organizations obviously need to ascertain consumer response to this sizeable investment, yet research in this area remains somewhat limited.

Scholars have produced a "systematic typology" with which to analyze a logo's visual characteristics that include its proportion, shape, naturalness and sophistication among other things. Investigations into the impact of logo colors found that different countries attach comparable meanings to some combinations, whereas connotations for other colors may be more culturally specific.

How product shape influences perception has been explored within collectivist and individualistic cultures. Research has found positivity among consumers in China and Singapore towards natural and harmonious logo designs. In Western cultures, logos of a more abstract and asymmetrical nature were favored. Evidence also exists that people clearly distinguish between angular and rounded versions of the same shape.

A common finding in several studies is the significance of shape. Specifically, roundedness was a key factor of logos perceived to be natural, friendly and harmonious. The apparent significance of this design feature has prompted numerous firms to opt for more curved styles of logo and practitioners believe this particular trend will persist. For sharp or pointed shapes, vigor, strength and robustness are more common associations.

To date, the impact of logo changes on consumer attitude and evaluation has received little attention from researchers. It is supposed that the degree of change may be significant in this respect. Any impact may likewise depend on the individual's level of commitment to the brand in question. This concept has been widely studied and it is assumed that commitment prompts consumers to perceive strong links between themselves and the brand. A likely consequence of this is that visual stimulants like brand logos will function differently to such consumers than to those whose commitment is significantly lower or non-existent. Strongly committed individuals view the logo as an integral part of their connection to the brand and any changes can be resented. A redesigned logo may conflict with the perceived accord between brand and self and induce some re-evaluation of the partnership. The likelihood is that these consumers will negatively evaluate alterations to the logo shape and this will weaken their attitude towards the brand.

On the other hand, the novelty of a changed shape is more likely to be viewed positively by those with low brand commitment. Such consumers will be more upbeat about the brand when the logo change is greater.

Study and findings

Walsh *et al.* explore these issues in a survey of undergraduates from a large university in the United States. The average age of the 632 respondents was 21.86 years and males and females were almost equally represented. However, neither age nor gender was subsequently found to be a significant factor.

Adidas and Nike training shoes were selected for analysis because of the relevance of these brands to the study sample. Along with the existing logos, two redesigned versions for each brand were produced by a graphic designer. All participants were asked to indicate their level of brand commitment and brand attitude and were shown the base logo. Following this, each was exposed to one of three logos indicating no change of shape, moderate change or considerable change before completing another brand attitude scale.

Results showed:

- exposure to unchanged and moderately changed logos did not significantly impact on brand attitude for strongly committed consumers;
- strongly committed consumers indicated a weakened brand attitude when the logo was changed considerably;
- brand attitude among consumers with low brand commitment became stronger as the extent of logo redesign increased;
- in the no change condition, brand attitude was notably higher for moderately committed consumers than for those with either strong or weak commitment;
- when moderate or considerable logo change occurred, brand attitude was significantly lower among strongly committed respondents than among those with moderate or low commitment; and
- consumer evaluation of the new logo partially moderates the impact of brand commitment and logo shape redesign on brand attitude.

Marketing suggestions and further research

In respect of the latter finding, the authors suggest that factors in addition to logo change may also serve to mediate the effect on brand attitude. Further study to identify these mediators is suggested. The multidimensional nature of logo redesign is pointed out and researchers could investigate whether other design elements have a similar impact to roundness. Analyzing consumer response to extreme logo changes regardless of brand commitment is also worthy of consideration.

Analysts have shown that a “mass approach” to logo redesign is mistakenly adopted by the majority of organizations. Potentially even more damaging is the assumption among many that the changes will be embraced

by customers showing strong commitment to the brand. Based on the evidence here, Walsh *et al.* recommend a “more nuanced approach” to logo redesign in order to maximize the appeal to both strongly and weakly committed groups. Another idea is to seek opinions and input from strongly committed customers prior to revealing the changes more widely. Granting special status to such individuals may alleviate any negative responses to the new logo and could even help reinforce self-brand relations.

(A précis of the article “Do logo redesigns help or hurt your brand? The role of brand commitment”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)

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