
Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

Executive summary of “How exposure to logos and logo varieties fosters brand prominence and freshness”

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.

The number of brands competing in today's marketplace increases the difficulty in getting a particular brand noticed. Consumers face more choices than ever before but can become apathetic in the wake of the sheer volume of advertising that surrounds them.

Keeping a brand fresh is therefore a considerable challenge for marketers. This is especially the case for established brands where familiarity has resulted in some loss of interest among consumers. But freshness has become more important than ever if a brand is going to capture attention and generate the rewards that building successful brands can realize for a firm.

Communication is imperative and can be achieved through various elements associated with a brand. Logos are viewed as especially significant in conveying a brand's identity and establishing a presence in consumer minds. Effective use of such as shape, color and other design characteristics are known to convey a brand's image, enhance recognition and elicit positive affect towards the brand.

Most of the advice offered to companies is to utilize the same logo so that the image of their brand remains consistent. Any modifications, it is argued, might jeopardize recognition or alter how consumers perceive the brand.

However, a growing number of marketers are adopting strategies which incorporate different variations of the main logo. A prime example of a company successfully executing this approach is Google, the website of which combines its “primary brand identifier” with logo varieties that change to reflect particular days or events. This helps to keep the brand fresh and thus sustain the consumer interest that can facilitate a level of identification with the brand which might subsequently lead to commitment.

Despite evidence from such examples, research into the effects of varying a brand's logo is at best minimal. Some scholars argue that any modifications will only have the desired impact if they involve only slight alteration to key logo elements. Their rationale is that consumers will only register changes at a subconscious level, meaning that the impact on such as attitude and behavior will remain positive.

The effects of exposure to brand logos are typically “automatic”. Since consumers are not consciously aware of the exposure, the processes occur without effort or intention on their part. Relevant research using subliminal priming of brands provides confirmation of these effects and their consequence with regard to consumption choice and purchase intention. Studies in this area have focused on exposure to the existing logo though.

Accessible knowledge about particular brands helps them become more prominent in the minds of consumers. Salience is linked with higher levels of commitment and positive attitude, which are important in both the short and longer terms. Equally significant is the fact that these factors increase consumer desire to remain involved with the brand.

Brand logo plays a key role in driving affective commitment as exposure to it recalls the brand to mind more readily than alternatives. It is mooted that the same effect will occur with slight modifications of the core logo as the essential image will still be recalled. Similar sentiments are argued where brand attitude is concerned. The existing logo or slight variants should facilitate positivity assuming that the consumer already holds favorable views of the brand.

Freshness of a brand is linked with responses like excitement and surprise. Researchers claim that the potential for these emotional states to materialize is greater when consumers are presented with slight variations of the brand's logo. Given their familiarity with the current logo, arousal in this scenario would likely be limited. But any exposure should generate more excitement and surprise compared to a non-exposure condition.

These issues are explored by Sääksjärvi *et al.* in two studies involving students. Pretests conducted first resulted in the choice of the McDonald's brand logo and established that it was still recognizable following slight modifications.

Subjects in the first study took part in a computer workshop exercise where subliminal priming was used to expose them to the McDonald's logo. They were randomly assigned to existing logo, changed logos or no logo conditions. In the first two instances, the logo appeared on screen in different inconspicuous positions at intervals during a number pattern task. In the various logos condition, twelve different colors were used instead of the standard yellow. A questionnaire followed based on a scenario in which the respondent was hungry and could visit a fast food restaurant. Questions related to affective commitment, brand attitude, excitement and surprise. Those who mentioned the McDonald's logo were removed from consideration in case they had guessed the purpose of the research.

Different students from the same pool participated in the second study in which the shape of the McDonald's logo was manipulated for the logo varieties condition. This time the original yellow color remained constant. The study mirrored the first one in all other respects. One person guessed the purpose of the research and was eliminated from the analysis.

Data revealed identical results for both studies in that:

- affective commitment, brand attitude, excitement and surprise are greater following exposure to a brand's existing logo or to logo varieties than when no exposure occurs;
- difference in affective commitment is minimal between a brand's existing logo and alternative logos;

- exposure to the existing logo generated stronger brand attitude than exposure to the logo variations; and
- the impact on feelings of excitement and surprise did not differ significantly between logo varieties and the existing logo.

The authors conclude that subconscious processing of logos does not result in sensitivity to slight changes. They also believe that the pre-existing schema consumers hold about the brand explains why the current logo produces stronger brand attitude. Exposure to the logo recalls the schema that includes this attitude.

Findings here counter claims of consumer resistance to logo change. Slight modifications appear to help make the brand more prominent and distinctive. Marketers are, however, advised to carefully consider logo varieties to ensure that both the functional and symbolic benefits of the brands remain effectively communicated.

The unexpected results pertaining to excitement and surprise might be partly down to the fact that the McDonald's logo has already undergone some modifications. Sääksjärvi *et al.* additionally feel that the appearance of the logo on screen during the number exercise might in itself have generated

surprise regardless of which logos emerged. Exposure to logos in “more natural settings” such as magazine advertisements or viewing a sporting event is thus a future study recommendation. Using eye-tracking might help ascertain the amount of attention paid to each logo.

Researchers could ascertain the impact of logo variation on purchase intention and behavior, while marketers would also benefit from work identifying logo changes that optimize the positive impact on brand prominence and its image. Additional suggestions include logo effect on other brand-related outcomes and examining the significance of longitudinal exposure.

The authors advocate an investigation of other brands varying in respect of their familiarity to consumers and to explore scenarios where logos and their modified forms are evaluated consciously.

To read the full article, enter 10.1108/JPBM-06-2014-0648 into your search engine.

(A précis of the article “How exposure to logos and logo varieties fosters brand prominence and freshness”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)