THESIS

SIMPLIFICATION, DEBRANDING, AND NEW MARKETING TECHNIQUES:

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF BRAND LOGO DESIGN

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

SIMPLIFICATION, DEBRANDING, AND NEW MARKETING TECHNIQUES:

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Marketing and advertising trends, like fashion, go in and out of style with the seasons and the years. In decades past, advertisements were once created entirely out of text. But as cameras got better, printers more detailed, and digital marketing came to the forefront, advertising shifted to a visual medium. In a general overview of the top companies in the U.S., there seems to have been a shift towards more simplistic even minimalist design practices. In trying to objectively measure a design, there are many factors to consider if one wishes to categorize simple versus complex. Through the use of a visual content analysis, this study explored the evolution of 20 of the top U.S. companies' logos over the course of four different design iterations. In comparing logo design trends over time, this study examined simplicity as a function of several different design variables, as well as textual elements used with these company logos. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, portions of this particular study were unable to assert with statistical relevance that visual design variables were a factor in this simplification. However, it was discovered that textual elements, as a portion of the logo, were changing in terms of the number of characters used within the design.   Although this study was unable to support several of the initial assumptions the researcher held, it does provide a valuable framework for further research.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Visual logos have historically been used by non-profits, small companies, large corporations, and workers to promote recognition of their services and positive associations within their audiences. Effective logos create correct recognition of the parent company or brand, positive attitude associations, and encourage consumers to spend their dollars on a given product (Henderson & Cote, 1998). Business branding practices generally incorporate five basic elements to create their visual identity: company name, a visual logo element, consistent typography, color scheme, and slogan (Silva-Rojas & Roast, 2006). Logos, as the visual element, typically utilize several of these pieces simultaneously. Logos alone can include color scheme, typography, and the company name. In recent years, however, this makeup has begun to change noticeably. Companies like Nike, Apple, and Starbucks have transitioned into using highly simplified logos, often without the company name attached, and stylistic elements have shifted drastically over the decades. Well-known companies have begun to change the way they market their brands, either by simplifying verbal elements within a logo or by removing them altogether, leaving the visual element to speak for itself. These simple, visual stimuli have the power to create strong responses in an audience, giving them a powerful function in advertising and marketing.

Debranding — the process of removing the company/brand name from a logo altogether—is used for many different reasons, but has been characterized as a subtler form of brand communication. This results in a cleaner label, more simplistic design layouts, and fewer explicitly stated brand names when interacting with a visual logo without corporate labeling. Debranding has also been referred to as a less aggressive method for the same reasons, creating a

less "corporate" atmosphere in advertising practices (Brown, 2016). Despite what may seem to be a counterintuitive practice of removing the company name from its marketing, this trend is evident across many types of brands and is slowly gaining traction. Debranding can be considered, at its most literal, corporate name-dropping. As a result, the traditional name and logo package is being replaced by redesigns featuring sparse textual elements or logos featuring no text whatsoever. Popular design trends shift with the times and there is a lack of academic and peer reviewed literature explaining which design elements are being successfully implemented in a consumer base.

This study breaks down the design elements, both visual and textual, of some of the most popular and successful brands in the United States through a historical analysis of past and current design iterations and rebrands. Companies included in this study have been internally and externally compared by looking at several different versions of their logo designs as they have been adapted over the years. Special attention has been given to logos that are evolving into a "debranded" format, meaning they have disassociated their logo and company name within marketing, relying exclusively on a visual design. In today's consumer economy, brand logos end up on television, in magazines and newspapers, on smart phones, on wearable products, and all over day-to-day interactions. Because logo design pulls from several different disciplines, a broad range of theory and literature is needed to adequately explain the visual process. Semiotics and Gestalt Theory have been used as the theoretical framework for this study. The primary research question is: How have companies adapted their logo design elements and construction as time passes?

1.1 Overviews and Rationales

Branding itself is a broad term referring to any number of company development practices. This study is focused on the visual design portion of that development. To begin, it is necessary to note the distinctions between the three similarly named "rebranding", "unbranding", and "debranding" practices, since they are similarly categorized but unique from each other in subtle ways.

"Rebranding" is a broader marketing practice referring to any changes to a company name, logo, packaging, or marketing style (Perzanowski, 2010). This practice is a fairly common marketing strategy and can include changes to color schemes, changes to a product or product line (name, logo, or otherwise), addition to or modification of a company logo, or alteration to a company/brand slogan (Perzanowski, 2010). Rebranding can be as minor as changing the exact shade of red used for the marketing of a product, or as extreme as renaming an entire corporation including the myriad ramifications such a change requires. When a company rebrands, they may be simplifying their logo design, altering the color scheme, or removing unnecessary text from the visual logo. A successful example of rebranding can be seen when considering Apple Inc., which once relied on the rainbow bars overlaid on their aptly selected apple logo. The technology company has since switched to the flat, chrome or black logo that is still easily recognized on a global scale despite its relative simplicity (Figure 1).
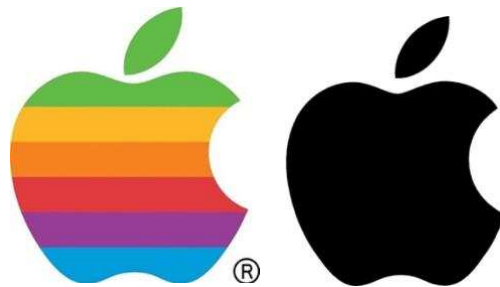

Figure 1. From left to right: Apple's old logo, rebranded to its current design.

"Debranding" refers to the removal of text from a product logo entirely. This retains only the visual elements in a logo that can be recognized by consumers. By removing the textual elements, advertising and branding are less cluttered and less "intrusive" by some standards. Debranding is a relatively new practice that has only recently been adopted on a broader scale. Apple can also serve as an example of debranding, since the company has relied on the Apple logo without the company name on a regular basis since the late 90s launch of the "Think Different" campaign. As a practice, debranding is situated conceptually and in practice somewhere in between rebranding and unbranding, requiring a brief explanation prior to moving forward.

At the extreme ascetic end of the spectrum is "unbranding," which is the complete removal of logo, brand name, and slogan from product or company communication and advertising (Joel, 2013). Unbranding is only possible for extremely well-known brands that can successfully disassociate themselves from their products without losing all recognition by the consumer. This practice is rarely used because of the associated risk of losing visibility in a market. In 2013, the "No Noise Initiative" by the British store Selfridges & Co. made one of the first attempts at unbranding at a broader scale when they unbranded an entire public store space. Iconic brands sold within the "noiseless" space included Levi jeans, Beats by Dre, Marmite, the Selfridges store bags themselves, and other well-known products (Figure 2)— all of which had logo and text removed from all aspects of the product (Kirkova, 2013). These brands self-elected to remove their trademark logos and textual elements to promote a peaceful shopping experience. Despite this removal of recognizable logo branding, iconic product design elements and recognizable color schemes remained (see Figure 2). It seems likely that consumers still

strongly associated with these brands, which would support reasoning that unbranding is not entirely absent of purposeful branded elements in product design.

Figure 2. Examples of unbranded products sold at Selfridges & Co. during their 'No Noise Campaign'.

In returning to debranding, we are left with the less extreme approach of using logo alone within marketing practices. The most relevant modern example of this practice still exists today, proving that, for some companies, the practice has longevity. Since the 1990s, the athletic clothing and shoe manufacturer Nike has successfully marketed their products using the famous "swoosh," which has become synonymous with the sporting giant's name. As early as 1995, Nike began using their slogan "Just Do It" in place of the name Nike. Soon, even this phrase was dropped from clothing brands and marketing as the swoosh became pervasive in American culture. The simple, stylized black checkmark has become synonymous with the name Nike. Their marketing campaigns have relied less on the name and more on the recognition and positive associations connected to the swoosh (Figure 3).

Figure 3. An example of the evolution of the Nike logo into a debranded, image-based marketing model.

Following in Nike's footsteps, Starbucks Coffee more recently pursued similar debranding tactics. "A Starbucks on every corner," is a familiar phrase to many Americans and with over 12,500 stores in the United States alone, this is often a reality for urban dwellers. To prevent overexposure and complete brand saturation in their consumers, the well-known coffee brand adopted new methods to maintain their coveted "local coffee shop" feel. In 2011, Starbucks adopted their current logo and cup design, which left only the siren and a new practice of writing the customer's name on the to-go cup. The logo was effectively simplified by zooming even further in to show the upper torso and face of the siren, rather than full body details. The trial, which began first in the United Kingdom, quickly became common practice. Now a well-known part of the Starbucks experience, the original intent was to appear "more personal and less corporate" (Handley, 2012), playing directly into the practice of corporate debranding. Furthermore, Starbucks has adopted the practice of purchasing local coffee shops, their name, and logo in entirety, and using their name to sell Starbucks products — often unbeknownst to the customers. At these stores, "inspired by Starbucks" may be included in the small print at the very bottom of menu selections.

In recent years, more companies have followed suit in debranding, including MasterCard, PayPal, Coke, Pepsi, and others. Although these highly recognizable companies have a long

history in global consumerism, they often faced the challenges of changing, rebranding, and reconnecting with their consumer base. Some have veered away drastically from their original product lines, for example the gas and oil company Shell Global, which once dealt primarily in the import of oceanic seashells, while continuing to use the shell icon as their iconic logo design (see Figure #6 for examples). Others have retained the original concepts and products of their company, but have altered their logos and marketing drastically to adapt to changing times. Despite these changes and progressive logo redesigns, consumers remembered them, kept buying, and assured their continued success throughout the years.

Logo design aids in keeping these brands relevant as well. Many of these well-known companies suggest their brand or corporation name within the logo design: the PP of PayPal an obvious acronym, the Nike swoosh giving the impression of speed, and the golden arches of McDonalds a stylized letter "M". However, others used far more abstract elements: the red and blue ball of Pepsi, the red and yellow circles of MasterCard, and the siren portrayed on the Starbucks logo. Regardless of the elements of design, previous levels of exposure guaranteed some level of recognition in the marketplace. Companies that survive the test of time are those with a loyal customer base, but as consumers are faced with more and more options to spend their dollars, these corporate giants are still able to rely on their image to drive profits and continue to grow.

Although history and company size aid in company relevance and popularity in a consumer base, these veteran companies are not the only ones recognizable just by their logo. Newer, smaller, and startup companies face a different set of challenges in today's economy. In many cases, these brands may lack the history, loyalty, and resources available to multinational corporations. Yet newer companies, such as Snapchat, Spotify, and Twitter, have found ways to

expedite the process of logo association and instant recognition. A new logo takes time to reach the appropriate levels of recognition within the marketplace, but good design with a strong theoretical basis can achieve similar effects at an expedited speed if executed properly.

Acknowledging that a brand must be recognized by the public in some way prior to simplification and debranding, there is also value in limiting brand exposure on an audience. As posited by Cacioppo and Petty (1979), repeated exposure to a message results in an initial increase in positive affect within an audience. A new message is typically viewed without prior judgement or pre-existing opinions and can often garner a different kind of attention. However, as the message is repeated, it is viewed more critically and can become tedious to the audience. Increased exposure leads to a decline in affect and agreement with the message being shown (Cacioppo & Petty). Commonly referred to as "repetition and tedium" or "wear-out effect" in advertising and marketing, this finding has proven relevant for a variety of message formats: over-exposure to the same message/stimulus may result in decreased liking and agreement towards a product. Therefore, having a targeted and purposeful level of exposure towards an audience can lead to a more well-liked message overall.

Larger trends in mobile device-based interactions may be an additional contributing factor in accelerating corporate reliance on visual recognition. Smartphone usage is at an all-time high in the United States; according to the Pew Research Center, as of February 2018, 99% of Americans own a cellphone and 77% of those own a smartphone with mobile internet capabilities. A key feature of mobile phone usage involves the use of smartphone applications, which allow for a variety of services including gameplay, social media access, health applications, GPS, and much more. These applications are represented through small, pictorial icons on the screen of a mobile device, sometimes accompanied by a single word or line of text

to provide further context. Due to the small size of these icons and indeed the small size of smartphone screens themselves, many companies are required to represent a simplified version of their full branding while still being recognizable to the user. Especially when considering mobile browsing on smartphones, branding must be distinguishable at a very small point of reference. Even as smartphone screens increase in size and clarity, these designs must be tailored for the purposes of viewer understanding/recognition and mobile bandwidth speeds as well.

Favicons exist in an even smaller increment of logo branding. Favicons can be seen in any online computer landscape: they are the incredibly tiny logo elements that exist just before a tab or URL address in the top of an internet browser, showing the user who owns the website as a whole (Smith, 2009). These are also present in the bookmarks tab to make the site more readily recognizable to an internet navigator. These sizes are just 16 by 16 pixels and yet they will appear on every page rooted within a single website. Often, these logos are the same ones used in larger marketing efforts by the company, but this small digital space encourages even further simplification and recognition of a logo design.

Mobile operating system developers Google and Apple, have created guidelines for developers/designers reflective of their user experience and interface design data that seem to provide technical reasons brands might pursue more progressive visual recognition practices. In 2014, Google launched a new project called Quantum Paper, meant to create a unifying language and style guide for mobile designers to follow when creating imagery for mobile technology (Spradlin, 2014). This project eventually morphed into Design.Google.com, with a further offshoot called Material.Google.com. As a live document, Material includes a full chapter selection of design principles and suggestions from everything including usability to logo and

icon design. Material further supports the idea of simplistic design, yet emphasizes that product

icons "communicate the core idea and intent of a product" while remaining visually unique.

According to Apple iOS Human Interface Design (2016) specifications, there are several key

design principles for mobile developers to focus on when designing applications. These include:

clarity in icon and text usage, "precise and lucid icons," limited use of gradients and more

intricate design options, and a focus on simplicity (Apple iOS Human Interface Design).

Companies and brands looking to use mobile applications and/or have more usable

content on mobile devices have been pushed towards this simple — yet unique — design frame,

a seemingly impossible task. In many ways, this emphasis on simplicity accelerated logo

simplification and deletion of unnecessary text. The most prevalent applications, including those

built into the iPhone and Android interfaces, often went fully visual or otherwise used a single

letter in their branding for mobile applications (Figure 4). Although most smartphone

applications are also accompanied by a very short label, quick recognition and brevity in detail

have become tantamount in this rapid-fire digital world.

Figure 4. From left to right: Snapchat, YouTube, and Facebook mobile app icons.

Elements of Logo Design and Their Role in Branding and Brand Identity

So how does a simple visual begin to stand out and represent an entire company and its

culture? Answers to at least part of this question can be found in the process of logo design and

the elements required for successful branding. Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) includes all

visual elements of a company or brand. This includes — but is not limited to — name, logo, slogan, color, typography, and other graphic elements used by the company (Silva-Rojas & Roast, 2006; Bosch, Jong, & Elving, 2005). Both name and logo are used by consumers and competition to identify a company and its products. An effective brand can inspire loyalty, create a sense of positive affect associated with the products and their use, and create trust between consumer and company (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Logos, as a smaller element, contribute to recognition, credibility of a brand, and can operate as a symbol of company reputation (Bosch, Jong, & Elvin, 2005).

"Logo" and "name" have been referenced extensively thus far, but are somewhat vague in terminology. These terms can be referred to more specifically as logotype: the company name or textual element, which is typically stylized in some way; and symbol, which has also been referred to as the logo or visual element of the company's design (Bowie, 2012). New companies are more likely to apply for trademark protection of their symbol or symbol/logotype combination than just logotype alone, according to Emblemetric, a site which gathers and analyses data from the United States Patent and Trademark Office (Bowie, 2012). Visuals are on the rise. According to Emblemetric, 2010 saw the highest percentage of new graphic trademark applications recorded in the past 60 years (Figure 5).
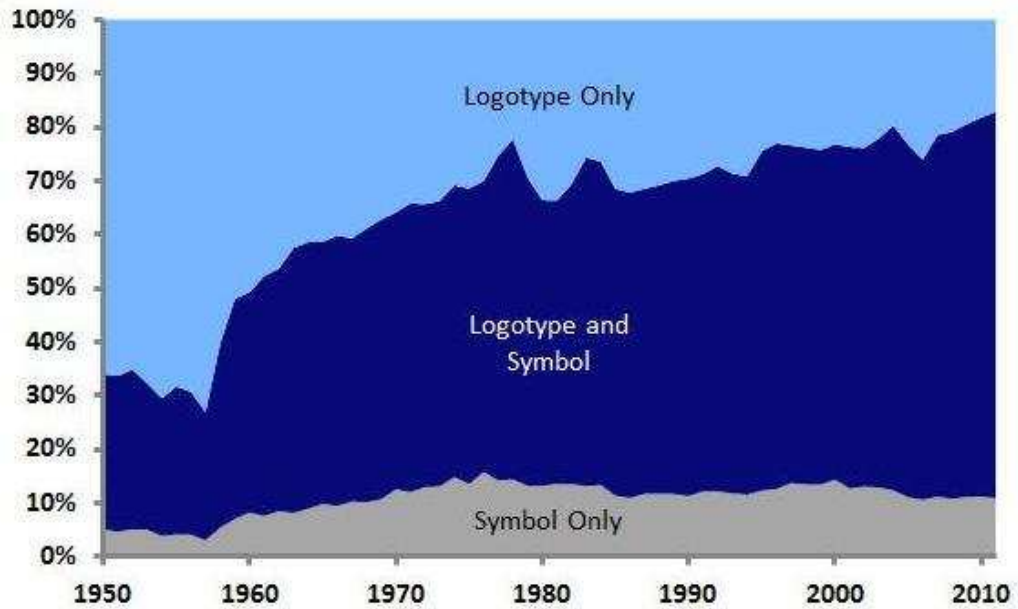
Figure 5. Data from Emblemetric's article "Logotype vs. Symbol" analyzing the percentages of new graphic trademark applications over the past 60 years.

Examples of logotype only, logotype and symbol, and symbol only can be seen below (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Shell Global as an example of the three levels of representation

As previously discussed, a logo must have some sort of recognition within the market if it is to be used as a stand-alone marketing strategy. The name of the product or company must be known so that consumers can actually find and purchase the product or services. However, regardless of recognition, aesthetically pleasing and sound graphic designs are critical elements that can make or break a company logo. A poorly designed, overly complex, or overly generic

logo can hurt a brand just as easily. Yet, "good" design principles are often a highly subjective set of rules that shift culturally and over time.

Gestalt theory and semiotic-based research studies have looked into the descriptive breakdowns of such visuals as works of art and print advertisements, but have rarely concentrated specifically on the use of corporate logos. This study will explore a hybrid combination of design variables, taken primarily from Gestalt theory and previously established research, to analyze 200 of the top brand logos in the United States.

In 1998, Henderson and Cote provided one of the few studies that has looked specifically at logo design. Their research explored looked at seven primary design elements, including: naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, parallel elements, repetition, proportion, and roundness in relation to liking and recognition within an audience. Their findings provided a context for the selection of variables used in the research study at hand, which will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, the analysis of textual elements — meaning the use of a letter or words within the logo design itself — has been added to this list to accommodate for the use of company names and the increased use of letters in logo adaptation.

The effective use of a logo combines the fields of art, graphic design, business, and communication — a complex task for any project — and it is often a costly process when completed at professional standards. According to the BBC, the logo for the 2012 London Olympics cost approximately £400,000, which, at the time, converted to about $625,000 US. In comparison, the average startup business can expect to spend a minimum of $200 on a single logo that is outsourced to a company, not including any of the costs to replicate and implement the design. The cost associated with logo creation can range widely, depending on the attention, intention, and skill invested in the design process. Logos are often selected by a manager or

owner fairly early in the company creation process, as one of several elements of corporate visual identity (Bosch, Jong, & Elving, 2005). Early designs can often become irrelevant as a company grows, changes their target audiences, or shifts their products and messaging. Without a well thought out branding strategy, which includes logo design and relative stasis in logo layout, a company or brand cannot hope to be easily recognized by their consumer base.

Part of the intent of altering branding is to change the perception of a company. In a world inundated with marketing, intrusive advertisements, and products that are artificially overpriced due to the perceived status of the name brand placed upon it, new generations are increasingly turning towards products that are local, personal, and live up to the value their price suggests. Consider, for example, the trivial yet effective use of generic products. In nearly every grocery store chain, consumers can purchase the generic counterparts of their favorite products. Generic brands, without the aid of flashy logos or expensive marketing campaigns, provide a similar product at a fraction of the price. As early as the 1980s, generic brands began to capture significant percentages of product sales (Parasuraman, 1983). Generic products provide a comparable product without the synthetically increased price of a name brand. This effect is similar to what debranded companies are attempting to create — a real sense of value.

In this way, product experience and experiential value of usage become the focus of the product. This shifted focus can increase the personalization of a product. When the brand focuses more on customer experience, it feels less corporate, less intrusive, and more progressive. Additionally, brands can base their success on the utility and personal experience of their products rather than building on an existing corporate empire. An article in The Harvard Business Review notably stated: "Many new entrants are producing these customized and personalized — nearly unbranded — products for an ever-growing global consumer-base that is

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interested less in the label and brand experience and much more in something that can be uniquely 'them'" (Joel, 2013).

Need for the Study

The intent of this study is to better understand the elements of successful logo design, which enhance effective corporate visual identity by breaking them down into analyzable components. In an increasingly visual society, purposeful design will become more important in conveying information to an audience. If certain design elements, such as complexity or naturalness, are found more frequently within the most popular U.S. brands, it may indicate that these pieces create a more positively received visual message. Peer reviewed research pertaining to modern logo branding is somewhat limited and often restricted and confounded by external factors. As a descriptive study, the results of this research can serve as a basis for future studies exploring audience reception of visual logos. This study will provide an historical analysis of how certain companies have adapted their logos over the years in order to reflect cultural changes and possible shifts in consumer perception of logo design. Using both within-company comparison and comparison to other company logo constructions, this study aims to explore which design trends are being adopted by successful companies.

Previous research has demonstrated that increased attention to a brand logo package (including both visual and textual elements) increases consideration of other elements within an advertisement. Audience attention considerations have included content-based textual elements, like explanations of the product or service, and pictorial elements, such as models wearing or using a product (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Even when advertising within a store, the inclusion of a recognizable brand can increase consumer cognition and consideration of the product being marketed (Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, & Young; 2009). In short, attention to and reception

of a logo can have large implications in the world of marketing and advertising. By further understanding the visual components of successful logos, it may be possible to increase affect and encourage consumer recognition of the company/product being advertised.

In light of current marketing trends towards simplification and debranding, it is apparent that businesses can benefit from visual recognition and an intentional effort towards logo association. A more comprehensive understanding of the visual, verbal and overall design components of successful logos will aid these efforts. Previous design studies have shown that more elaborate logos can increase general affect and correct recognition and make a logo unique among thousands of other visual designs (Henderson & Cote, 1998). Van Grinsven and Das (2014) more recently noted that complex logos adopted by newly established companies increase brand attitude and association more than simple logos. However, these previous studies contradict the modern trends pushes of logo simplicity, which have been influenced by digital media and advertising inundation. The study presented here has explored the assumption that American businesses are moving towards simplified logo design packages and the increasing trend of reducing or eliminating verbal cues (such as a company name or acronym/foreshortening) through the use of debranding. Debranded logos — while not entirely novel — are becoming more common and more relevant to consumer interests. Yet, it remains to be seen whether these visual-only logos utilize a different formula for design in reflection of these branding changes.

1.2 Goal and Research Question(s)

The purpose of this study is to better understand the elements of successful logo design through an historical analysis of 20 of the United States' most successful brands. For each of the selected companies, four chronological logo designs were sampled from publically popularized

marketing campaigns. Each design iteration was described through the following design elements: naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, repetition, proportion, and textual elements. These design variables have been broken down further and explained at length in the literature review and methods section of this study. Data was then compared within-company and to other respective company logos.

A successful, recognizable, and aesthetically pleasing logo design is a critical element for a company to successfully brand their products and services. If certain design variables are used more often, it may be possible that they are more effectively received by an audience. This study presumes that these variables and audience perception of them are changing as time passes. Incorporating semiotics and Gestalt theory principles, a set of design building blocks can be established and used to code these logo designs. Previously established research in this area has helped to create a reliable set of variables and assumptions to be tested.

- **RQ1:** What design elements are most commonly used in current branding trends?

- **RQ2:** How have the visual elements that relate to elaborateness of brand logos changed over time?

- **RQ3a:** Are companies reducing the amount of logo design space dedicated to slogans, company names, and acronyms/name foreshortening from their visual branding with consequent logo design iterations?

- **RQ3b:** Are logo designs trending towards fewer numeric and alphabetic characters with subsequent design iterations?

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

When studying visual stimuli that rely heavily on design, it is vital to incorporate the study of semiotics, as well as the artistic base of Gestalt Theory. In weaving the two together, it is possible to combine the two realms cohesively. Visual processing and additional theories have also been included to explain additional results of this study.

2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics, simply, can be defined as the study of signs. Semiotics views these sign systems as a relevant part of human communication, in which a symbol can represent a more complex idea. Peircian semiotics references a triangular semiotic foundation consisting of "sign," "object," and "interpretant." (Peirce, 1935). The "object" is the original thing being communicated — a person, a sensation, an image, etc. The "sign" is the idea, manifestation, and attempt to transfer the object to someone else. These signs can include words, sounds, or visuals used in place of the actual object being represented. Signs are transferred though sign systems, also called "codes", which must be learned in order to be interpreted. The more similar the knowledge of codes is between two communicating parties, the more likely the information will be interpreted similarly (Moriarty, 1991; Sebeok, 1994). For example, someone who uses English as a first language would have a much easier time writing a letter to a fellow English speaker because their "codes" (knowledge of the English language and vocabulary) would match up similarly. In a more modern and culturally relevant example, teenagers who frequently use emojis may have an easier time texting their friends, with whom they have established meanings for certain emojis, than they would with perhaps a parent or grandparent.

Semiotics has a long history in various fields of research, including psychology, science, literature, media communication, and art. Although the basics of semiotics, posited in the early 1900s by American academic C.S. Peirce, have not changed drastically, the different fields have molded semiotics to fit their realm of study. In sum, signs are building blocks for complex communications — a sign can be a word, a symbol, a photo, or a logo — and as such, they represent human experiences, both collectively and at a personal level. Sandra Moriarty (1991) noted: "The 'stands for' process is the point where meaning is created both through encoding (by the source) and decoding (by the receiver – or 'reader' in semiotic analysis)." Signs are shaped at their point of origin by the encoder and must go on to be decoded by the receiver in a two-way meaning making process.

Visual semiotics — one brand of semiotics — explores imagery, visual symbols, and how they are understood and interpreted. Semiotic studies have been used in visual analyses for the breakdown of TV commercials (Moriarty & Sayre, 2011), works of art (O'Toole, 1995), print advertisements and images (Harrison, 2003), and photographs (Dunleavy, 2011). Logos, as a visual referent for a brand or company, can therefore be studied in a similar fashion.

Within this study, a "sign" can be interpreted as a blanket term for a visual element standing for something else being represented, either concretely or abstractly, through a visual medium (Moriarty, 1994). Signs can be further broken down into three sub-categories: 1) icons, which are literal representations of a referent (such as a photograph or illustration showing the exact thing being represented); 2) indices, which have factual or causal implications to the represented thing (such as a match implying fire or a lightning bolt implying electricity); and 3) symbols, which are arbitrary and learned connections to the represented object or referent (such as a religious symbol or exclamation point to indicate danger) (Peirce, 1935; Moriarty, 1994).

Visual elements can be composed of any or all of these kinds of signs, but little research has explored whether or not any of the three is more effectively used in company/product marketing.

2.2 Gestalt Theory

Gestalt Theory originated as a study of perception in the field of psychology and philosophy. Brought to academia by German philosophers in the 1920s, Gestalt Theory has since permeated several different fields of study. Gestalt Theory focuses on looking at the "whole" rather than just the parts making up a stimulus (Koffka, 1922). Pioneers of the theory argued that the final product could not be defined as simply as a combination of its pieces. Looking at the "whole" does not mean ignoring the small pieces but rather as a process: "Isolate the elements, discover their laws, then reassemble them, and the problem is solved," (Wertheimer, 1938).

The Gestalt Laws, also called Prägnanz, are a series of principles based on the assumption that human perception organizes and groups chaotic elements accordingly in order to make sense of them (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). These laws include figure-ground perception, similarity, continuity, closure, and symmetry. Figure-ground perception describes a 3-dimensional appearance, where some objects are more pronounced, while others serve as a background. Similarity assumes that when objects are placed near each other, they are perceived as a group. Continuity describes the process in which the brain fills in broken and unharmonious connections, perceiving smoothness over disjointedness. Closure occurs when we artificially fill in objects that are incomplete. Symmetry is rather straightforward, giving preference to objects that are symmetrical, rather than asymmetrical.

The field of Experimental Aesthetics has been referenced in combination with Gestalt Theory through several different research methods, including context analyses. Experimental

aesthetics is a field of psychology intended to scientifically and objectively evaluate notions of beauty (Hetrick, 2011). The field, brought forth by Gustav Fechner in the late 1800s, originally focused on the "Golden Section," also called the golden mean or the Golden Ratio. Fechner's empirical approach stood in opposition of subjective measures of aesthetic enjoyment. Instead, Fechner attempted to advance simplified "laws" of the perception of beauty that were universally applicable to a broad audience (Hetrick, 2011). According to findings within the field, design elements such as the utilization of the Golden Ratio and overall complexity (3-dimensional, 2-dimensional, simple or over-complex) are important moderators of a pleasing visual experience (Phillips et. Al, 2010).

Elements of Gestalt Theory have been applied to previous studies on logo design, albeit in slightly different terminology. Gestalt principles can be applied to more complex imagery, as in instances of art studies, but can also serve well in the application of more simple visuals such as company logos. Specific variables synthesized from Gestalt Theory will be discussed at length in subsequent sections of this study.

2.3 Visual Processing

The recognition of visual stimuli is the first language learned by babies, making it the primary sign system within our minds. Humans are, first and foremost, visual creatures and prone to recognizing familiar images. Visual communication theories suggest that images are made concrete in the memory when they are verbally reinforced, either aloud, on paper, or within the conscious using internal dialogue (Lester, 2006). Therefore, a word or explanation must exist in the memory in order to be recalled when the visual is seen. People connect what they are seeing with verbal expressions in language, such as a specific word, feeling (e.g., discomfort, joy), or lengthier explanation for the stimulus they are exposed to. This is the "interpretant"

section of semiotics. This is a further reason that visual stimuli must be established in some way in the memory in order for proper recognition to occur.

Visual perception follows a formula when presented with information: sensing, memory access, and higher-level inference (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). Sensing is the visual input. Memory taps into and prior knowledge and experience. Inference involves the environment and context to logically guess what it might mean. When a brand new stimulus is presented, the memory portion is non-existent, putting more weight on basic sensing and inference. When the stimulus is at least somewhat familiar, all three pieces of visual perception can work in concert to interpret what is being seen (Sternberg & Sternberg).

Logos operate in a similar fashion. Consider the logo for Apple, a home-state football team, or Nike's swoosh, and try not to think of the company name associated with that visual. Exposure to a brand and its products plays into this recollection. Additionally, there are more literal examples, particularly in the world of logos, in which the brand name matches up with the actual image (such as the Apple logo matching up to its name). This association may simplify name recall, but may not align with understanding of the image as a more complex image serving as a product logo. A baseline of understanding must still be established, which is often possible when considering the context and environment in which the image is seen. Other logos are more complex and often more abstract (for example Pepsi's blue ball logo), requiring more concrete coding and interpretation in order to be processed as a marketing object.

2.4 Color Theory

Color theory has a long history of theoretical and practical implications across several different fields, including marketing and advertising. Color utilization and interpretation varies across cultural and historical boundaries and, in fact, each color can be perceived differently due

to genetic and gender factors. Color effects within marketing practices are speculative at best. However, it is clear that certain colors are evocative of established brands (Singh, 2006): consider the specific shade of red used by Coke and the yellow of McDonald's golden arches.

Color is a key element within Corporate Visual Identity and subtle shifts within color selection and placement have the ability to affect brand personality, likability, and familiarity (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). In American culture, red has been found to "excite" an audience, black is considered sophisticated, and blue as "competent." In their 2011 study, Labrecque and Milne found that many highly recognizable brands used only one or two colors within their primary logo elements. However, this was not further expanded for companies that rely on both visual and textual branding elements, leaving a gap in analysis.

It is clear that with the current ease of color variation, manipulation, and personalization through digital media and lower costs associated with creating multiple color variations of a logo, many companies have increased the color spectrum used within their marketing and advertising practices, often adapting to specific needs. Despite this, many companies still rely on their original color branding selection for swift recognition. It has been proposed that color association may have a faster response time than both text and visual recognition (Singh, 2006). Because color can — and does — often stand alone or within various different manipulations within a logo, it was not coded within the initial research of this study.

2.5 Review of Similar Research

Marketing studies that have incorporated visual semiotics and Gestalt Theory have broken down the semiotic basics into slightly different elements in order to inform design practices. In their research from 1998, Henderson and Cote identified several variables that aid in the categorization of logo design in particular. In completing a factor analysis of relevant

variables, they came up with a slightly different list of design elements, drawing upon Gestalt

Theory and logo strategy alike. Their study used the following variables existing on a

dichotomous rating of high or low: naturalness (further broken down to representative vs.

abstract and organic vs. inorganic), harmony (further broken down to balance vs. imbalanced

and symmetrical vs asymmetrical), elaborateness (further broken down to complexity, activity,

and depth), parallel design, repetition of elements, proportion, and roundness (Henderson &

Cote, 1998).

Naturalness is a factor describing "the degree to which the design depicts commonly

experienced objects" (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 16). For example, a maple leaf is far more

natural than concentric geometric shapes because it occurs naturally. Naturalness is further

divided into the subcategories of representative vs. abstract and organic vs. inorganic.

Representative is akin to realism, whereas abstractness exists at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Organic design uses natural curves and arcs, such as those that appear more commonly in nature,

as opposed to inorganic designs, which can include straight lines, perfect angles, and "synthetic"

shapes.

Harmony includes the subcategories of balance vs. imbalance and symmetry vs.

asymmetry. Balance considers the use of a central focal point with equal weights of visual

elements used. Balance can include the use of symmetry. Symmetry is taken directly from the

Gestalt laws and uses an axis point to reflect a perfect mirror of the other half of the image.

Images that do not follow a mirrored axis are considered to be asymmetrical.

Elaborateness includes three subcategories: complexity, activity, and depth. Complexity

can be a result of imbalance or asymmetry, but also includes the combination of many design

elements and arrangements. In a comparison, the KFC Colonel Sanders logo is complex,

whereas the Nike logo is very simple. Activity refers to designs that "give the impression of motion or flow" (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 17). For example, the well-known "recycle" logo using the three arrows has more activity than the logo for Twitter because the eye "flows" with the arrows and moves around the image. The use of lines, both literal and implied, can also create a sense of activity within an image, for example showing the arched lines of a bouncing ball or marking out a route on a map from one location to another. Depth is another self-explanatory feature in which the logo creates a sense of dimension, rather than being entirely two-dimensional and flat in design. The figure-ground law of Gestalt theory is very similarly aligned with depth.

Parallel design and repetition are somewhat similar ideas with just slightly different distinctions. Parallel designs utilize multiple elements or lines that are placed next to or on top of each other. An example of parallel design would be the Cisco logo, which uses several lines to create a wave pattern. Repetitive designs use similar elements throughout a design, but they are not necessarily parallel or organized. An example of a repetitive design would be the NBC peacock logo, in which each feather is the same size and shape and is repeated to create the full span.

Lastly, the study incorporates the variables of proportion and roundness. Proportionate design is "the relationship between the horizontal and vertical dimensions" (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 17) and can be further explained through the use of the Golden Ratio. Although research has proven inconclusive in relation to the Golden Ratio, it is suggested that imagery using this proportion is perceived as more appealing. Roundness is another self-explanatory variable. Round designs use arcs and circles rather than sharp angles and straight lines.

The study involved two phases: one in which graphic designers categorized the logo designs in terms of the variables previously listed and the second in which subjects were tested based on correct/false recognition, affect, and familiar meaning. These findings were cross referenced to discover that naturalness, harmony, and level of elaborateness were the most significant moderators of the dependent variables. Elaborateness was found to be an inverted U-shape relationship: as elaborateness increased, affect increased before peaking and then decreasing with higher levels of complexity. Although this study did not include an experimental phase due to the extent of possible confounding factors, the findings from this research may be incorporated into future experimental design in order to look into audience affect and recognition more directly.

Further studies focused heavily on the topic of complexity as an important factor within visual advertising. In 2010, Pieters, Wedel, and Batra defined two distinct levels of complexity: feature complexity and design complexity. Feature refers to the advertisement visuals as a whole, including color, edges, textures, and number of elements on the page. Design complexity refers to singular object complexity, such as that of logos or other small elements making up the overall design. Their study created six sub-categories of complexity: quantity of objects, irregularity, dissimilarity, detail, asymmetry, and irregularity of arrangement (Pieters, Wedel, & Batra, 2010). The stimuli included full page advertisements, including both text and imagery. The study provided evidence that difficulty in identifying the brand was detrimental to attention and comprehension. Furthermore, cluttered (high feature complexity) advertisements were poorly received, whereas higher design complexity improved performance (Pieters, Wedel, & Batra, 2010).

In an expansion on Pieters et al., a 2016 study by Van Grinsven and Das isolated design complexity in terms of the company logo alone. Their study used the six variables of complexity to test for recognition and attitude towards the brand. Their findings suggested that simple logos were more easily recognized, while more complex logos performed better for repeated exposure (Van Grinsven & Das, 2016). These results followed with ideas of tedium and habituation posited by Cacioppo and Petty (1979): repeated exposure to a stimulus is an inverted U-shape relationship, with liking increasing to a certain point and then decreasing with subsequent exposures. Furthermore, a secondary portion of this study looked into "well-established" and "recently established" visual logos. Simple, lesser-known logos were more positively received, but these levels did not increase over time, whereas complex logos (both well and recently established) were ranked higher in positive affect and liking with subsequent exposure (Van Grinsven & Das, 2016). The findings of this and Pieters et al. (2010) suggest that a certain level of complexity is favored in audiences in order to balance recognition and longer-term positive opinions toward the visual design.

In acknowledging the longevity of this kind of research, it is clear that these studies provide a solid groundwork to build upon. Due to the statistical significance of the variables used in Henderson and Cote's study and the findings of research using similar variables, these design principles were resynthesized, albeit with a few alterations. Several of the variables used were omitted for the sake of simplicity and because there is relatively less literature to support their inclusion, as recognized within the respective studies.

Variables to be included in this study of logo design include: naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, repetition, and proportion. Several of these variables encompass two or more subcategories, which have more specific definitions of what is meant. Naturalness includes two

subcategories: abstractness and organic level. Harmony includes two sub-categories: balance and symmetry. Elaborateness includes three sub-categories: complexity, activity, and depth. Additional visual variables have been omitted due to inconsequential results, resulting in the five overarching variables to be analyzed. The previously established definitions of these variables have been used to create a thorough codebook for the visual content analysis portion of this study.

Additionally, during coding, the variables of text inclusion in the forms of company name, slogan, and/or acronym/foreshortening as well as number of characters present were recorded in order to track simplification and debranding within logo design. Number of characters, when applicable, was recorded for both company name and slogan elements.

Unlike previous studies, this research focuses primarily on the design makeup and visual trends over time of successful companies' logos. It does not include audience perception of said logos as this is beyond the scope of this study. It is inferred that, as a subset of the most fiscally successful companies in the country, these logos are at least moderately well-received by the general population. This research in intended instead to provide insight on design trends, and perhaps to ultimately provide recommendations on best practices for companies looking to update their logo designs.

2.6 Research Questions

- **RQ1:** What design elements are most commonly used in current branding trends?

- **RQ2:** How have the visual elements that relate to elaborateness of brand logos changed over time?

- **RQ3a:** Are companies reducing the amount of logo design space dedicated to slogans, company names, and acronyms/name foreshortening from their visual branding with consequent logo design iterations?

- **RQ3b:** Are logo designs trending towards fewer numeric and alphabetic characters with subsequent design iterations?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

This study is a descriptive visual content analysis of successful U.S. brands' logo designs. For each of the 80 different logo designs, 12 unique variables were coded during visual analysis. Twenty companies were randomly selected from Brand Finance's Brand Directory U.S. 500 most valuable brands of 2017 website. The site, which lists top American brands in terms of brand value, brand growth from the previous year, and brand rating for 2016 and 2017, provided the initial population. The 20 companies were randomly selected from the top 500 brands listed using a random number generator. To be able to describe changes over time, we decided to include the brands' last four iterations of their logo (current logo and three most recent versions that all differed in some way) to reach a sample size of 80 logos, total. Companies that did not have four significantly different logo designs were eliminated from this sample to ensure comparative data availability.

After initial random sampling was completed, the company name and logo were cross-referenced on a broader scale to sample four different logo iterations used prominently in each company's visual media. Effort was taken to pull the very first logo design available for the first iteration and the most recent logo design iteration for the fourth iteration. For the second and third iterations, slight variations were passed over in favor of more drastic logo alterations when possible. Samples were kept in chronological order, although the years in which each logo design was used varied drastically in some cases due to the age of the company and the rapidity in which logos were redesigned. If the company changed their name drastically at any point or started off under an entirely different name, the unrelated company names were not included in the sampling process. However, if a company name was simplified or shortened, the samples

30

were preserved. Color variations were not relevant to this research, but efforts were taken to preserve the most accurate logo package formats for coding purposes. This study was conducted digitally in order to preserve quality and true color of each of the utilized logos. Ultimately, this left 20 companies with four unique logo iterations for each, resulting in 80 logo samples.

As a content analysis, coding was conducted by two trained graphic designers, due to their relative expertise in recognizing subtle design variations and their familiarity with identification of artistic elements. Because the basis of these variables was previously established by Henderson and Cote's study, variable pre-testing was not reestablished. Intercoder reliability was ascertained through a pre-test of 24 sampled logos (30% of the sample) and tested prior to continuation of the coding process. Both coders were trained extensively using a textual and visual-based codebook to ensure proper prior knowledge. Through training, coders rectified differences and added notes to aid coding to the codebook.

Coding for each of the visual variables was dichotomous — either high or low — reducing the likelihood of subjective ranking and increasing the likelihood of objective agreement. Coding for the textual variables was based on an ordinal measure from 0-10, corresponding with a percentage of the design taken up by the name or acronym/name foreshortening. Finally, coders were asked to quantify the number of characters/letters in the design (ignoring basic punctuation, copyright marks, and trademark symbols).

3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Method

As a descriptive study, this content analysis is intended to identify how design trends of successful companies have changed over time. Specifically, visual content analyses attempt to create objective measures of visual stimuli, which are typically seen as a subjective form of media. Because the selected logo designs are static (rather than interactive or animated), use

extensively operationalized variables in an *a priori* system (Henderson & Cote, 1998), and have been coded by trained graphic designers, it is the intent of this study to measure and analyze objectively despite the subjectivity of visual media.

By categorizing design variables that may be unknown or unacknowledged by an audience, this study provides a launch point for further study on audience effects. The findings of this study cannot prove any causal relationship within an audience (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011), but may serve as a basis for future research into consumer/audience recognition, affect, and behavioral implications. Although previous research in this area has included measures of audience effects, the researcher believes that the value of this study lies in its historical analysis of evolving design trends.

In analyzing the changing design components of the top U.S. brands, it is possible to see how successful companies have branded and rebranded to adapt to a changing marketing landscape. Although many components lend to the success of a company, many of the top U.S. brands are physically and visually prevalent in day-to-day life, thereby encouraging well-planned visual identities. Their relative success, while certainly not a direct result of logo design, can be inferred as related to recognition of logo and company name in a day-to-day sphere.

3.2 Sampling

The 20 original companies sampled were randomly selected from a full original population of 500, referenced from Brand Finance's Brand Directory U.S. 500 most valuable brands of 2017. This specific directory listed by *Brand Finance* focuses specifically on U.S. brands, making the findings specific to American design practices (although some of these brands are also marketed globally). In analyzing 20 of the top American brands, it is possible to provide an historical context of the visual design practices of successful companies here in the

United States. Brand values listed on this resource are assessed using the Royalty Relief Method favored by tax authorities and court systems (Haigh, 2017). This method estimates future revenue and royalty rates associated with the brand using publicly available financial reports (Haigh, 2017). As the most recently available full fiscal year, the 2017 table values include measures taken from mid 2016 to mid 2017. Many of these top U.S. brands are parent companies to an extensive network of products and services, each of which have their own logo design and marketing practices. For example, PepsiCo owns Doritos chips, Mountain Dew soda, Lay's chips, Lipton teas, and many other specific product brands with a high stand along brand value. Despite this complication, only the parent companies have been analyzed in this specific study.

Because these samples were taken randomly from a pre-established population, a moderate level of randomization can be assumed. *Brand Finance* was used only as a launch point to select the companies used within this study. Logo sampling occurred with thorough research using many different sources online. For each of the four logo iterations, the company website was visited and general marketing was cross-referenced when available. Historical variations were limited to what information was preserved online. Visual logo samples used for coding were taken directly from these sources to establish visual branding for each company. Significant redesigns were favored over small alterations when selecting the design iterations. Although many companies had a dozen or more logo redesigns, selections were limited to the four designs only. For some, these redesigns were significant and for others, these redesigns were small. Small alterations included color variations and/or small effects such as 3D beveling, addition or removal of stroke lines, shortening of company names, removal of slogan/taglines, etc. When available, original or early logo versions were included within the four iterations

coded. Designs were specifically kept in a chronological order to be represented as a timeline of evolving designs. Therefore, Logo 1 would be the oldest and/or first logo design of a company proceeding by year through Logo 4, which would be the most recent logo design used by the company.

3.2.1 Variables and Codebook Measurement

The coded variables exist in two overarching categories: 1) visual elements and 2) textual elements. Most companies, unless entirely debranded, included both of these categories within the coding scheme. The visual element category included five variables: naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, repetition, and proportion. Naturalness included two subcategories, harmony included two subcategories, and elaborateness included three subcategories. For each subcategory, coding existed on a dichotomous rating of high or low. Naturalness included abstract and organic: high abstraction being one option for coding and low abstraction being the other (see Figure 7), high level of organicness as one option and low level of organicness at the other (see Figure 8). Similarly, harmony included balance (Figure 9) and symmetry (Figure 10), both operating in high or low coding. Elaborateness included complexity (Figure 11), activity (Figure 12), and depth (Figure 13)— all three operating in high or low coding. In using this dichotomous coding scheme, the likelihood of objective analysis and agreement was increased.

Figure 7. High vs. Low Abstraction (high on left, low on right)

Figure 8. Highly Organic vs. Inorganic (high on left, low on right)

Figure 9. High vs. Low Balance (high on left, low on right)

Figure 10. High vs. Low Symmetry (high on left, low on right)

Figure 11. High vs. Low Complexity (high on left, low on right)

Figure 12. High vs. Low Activity (high on left, low on right)

Figure 13. High vs. Low Depth (high on left, low on right)

The textual element category was coded two separate ways. Firstly, for the variables company name and acronym/name foreshortening, coders marked the values as a percentage representing how much of the design space was taken up by the textual elements. A design in which half of the logo was taken up by the company name would be coded as a 5, representing 50%. Furthermore, for the variable of company acronym/foreshortening values were represented as a percentage of company name (due to the fact that company name and acronym/foreshortening are not mutually exclusive). Company acronym/foreshortening was still coded from 0-10, corresponding with percentages 0-100%. In collapsing the percentage values from 0-10 rather than 0-100, relative subjectivity between coders was reduced drastically, although subtle variations were also limited in the process.

For the final coded variable, characters, coders used a simple continuous scheme – counting the number of characters present in the design, resulting in numbers from 0 to 54 (although numbers could have conceivably been much higher depending on the logo). This count did not include basic punctuation marks such as periods, commas or apostrophes and also

disregarded trademark/copyright symbols. Coding was expressed flatly based on the counted number of characters. For example, NBC would be coded as a 3, because it includes three characters.

   In including both textual and visual elements, it is possible to increase the scope of previous research looking into similar breakdowns of design layout and look into simplification on a broader scope. Coders used for this research were selected due to their previous graphic design and marketing experience. Training manuals included extensive verbal explanations of the intricacies of each visual design element as well as visual examples to reduce any potential confusion in semantics. Coders were permitted to ask questions when needed and were given ample time to complete the task to reduce fatigue or possible errors in coding. Coders worked separately to avoid cross-contamination and potential bias in their responses.

Table 1.   Variables

Variable	Sub Categories	Measurement
Naturalness	Abstract	High/Low
	Organic	
Harmony	Balance	High/Low
	Symmetry	
Elaborateness	Complexity	High/Low
	Activity	
	Depth	
Repetition		High/Low
Proportion		High/Low
Company Name		Proportion of design space taken up
Company Acronym/ Foreshortening		Proportion of design space taken up
Characters		Number of characters in design space

3.3 Data Collection

Each randomly selected logo was associated with a number (1-20) representing the company, followed by a dash representing the design iteration (1-4), resulting in 80 total logo selections. Logos were stored as a digital visual file in order to ensure that both coders were exposed to the exact same logo sets. Data collection was completed through the use of a coding sheet. Each logo was assessed separately and thoroughly across the visual and textual variables previously discussed.

Findings were transposed into a spreadsheet for final analysis and dissection. Dichotomous rankings were recorded as either a 0 (low) or a 1 (high) for relative ease in data determination. Company name and acronym/foreshortening were recorded from 0-10 representing a proportion of the design taken up by the company name or acronym respectively. For example: 3 would be read as taking up approximately 30% of the design, whereas 10 would be read as 100% textual design. Finally, number of characters were listed in accurate number reflections, anywhere from one to the upper 50s. Punctuation (such as apostrophes and commas) was disregarded unless it provided a significant alteration to the design, such as an exclamation point or question mark. Additionally, trademark and copyright symbols were disregarded within the character count. When debranded or not present, character numbers were recorded as 0.

3.3.1 Pre-Testing

A subset of 24 visual logos (30% of the full sample) was used to pre-test both intercoder reliability and the completeness of the current coding scheme, ensuring that all variables were complete and necessary. Cohen's Kappa was used to test between all 12 variables measured between each coder, resulting in 12 distinct values for Cohen's Kappa. Because the variables

themselves were previously established in design research, additional pre-testing was not required to test their fundamental relevance.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Proposed Study

Reliability was assessed using inter-rater reliability measures consistent with a content analysis using two coders. Cohen's Kappa was used to assess inter-rater reliability on a subset of 24 logos across all 12 variables coded for each. Extraneous variations in coding were limited by allowing the coders to work separately and over the course of several weeks, allowing time to overcome common problems of fatigue and recording mistakes (Krippendorf, 1980). Because this study is descriptive and exploratory, assumptions have been tested against aforementioned research questions, leaving the results up to additional interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.

Ultimately, all variables were found to have significant agreement between the two coders. For all of the dichotomously coded variables (abstraction, organicness, balance, symmetry, complexity, activity, depth, repetition, and proportion) Cohen's κ was run to determine if there was agreement between the two coders' visual analysis. There was perfect agreement between the two coders, $\kappa = 1$, $p < .001$. For the last three variables, Kappa varied slightly due to more complex coding schemes. However, each was found to have high levels of reliability nonetheless. Cohen's κ was run to determine if there was agreement between the two coders' visual analysis of what proportion of the design was taken up by the company name. There was high agreement between the two coder's judgements, $\kappa = .951$, CI [.857, 1] $p < .001$. Cohen's κ was run to determine if there was agreement between the two coders' visual analysis of what proportion of the design was taken up by an acronym/foreshortening. There was high agreement between the two coder's judgements, $\kappa = .902$, CI [.728, 1] $p < .001$. Cohen's κ was

run to determine if there was agreement between the two coders' visual analysis of number of characters in the design. There was high agreement between the two coder's judgements, κ = .952, CI [.86, 1] p <.001. Due to the high reliability between all variables in the pre-test, the coding scheme and instructions were not revisited and coders were instructed to proceed accordingly.

Overall limitations of this content analysis include several factors. Content analyses must be systematic, objective, and quantitative (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). With thorough training and appropriate numerical coding, these factors are easily met. However, as with all visual interpretations, it is possible that full objectivity may not have been attained in this study. Additionally, the timeliness of this study is relevant since logos are constantly changing and experiencing redesigns, adapting to current trends. In analyzing logos that change over time, it is the intent of this study to show design evolution. In limiting the sample to four design iterations, certain trends may be overlooked due to sampling, however it is the goal of this study to show a specific shift towards simplicity, as the driving research question and assumption of this work. This study provides a snapshot of design practices up till this point in time, but results may shift significantly for future design iterations. This challenges the stability and exact reproduction of the study, as the most modern logo selections would shift over time. However, these results are reproducible, given attention to detail and designs used at this point in company history.

In scope, the sample of this study includes national brands and international brands by default of the company status. It is clearly focused on American brands, many of which are incidentally internationally marketed, making it less relevant in terms of analyzing foreign nations' design selections specifically. Additionally, well-known brands may vary significantly in terms of layout and design from their lesser-known counterparts. These popular, successful

brands are the most visible within a saturated market, making them highly relevant to a consumer

audience and the companies looking to target these consumers, but their historical context may

present a confounding factor that differs from newly established logo designs. Because literally

millions of logos exist within the American business landscape, paring down the sample

restricted the results in terms of overall scope.

Coders for this study were intentionally selected due to their artistic and graphic design

backgrounds. Because many of these variables would be unfamiliar to the average viewer and

have been pre-determined by previous studies, it is possible that additional factors may have

been overlooked. Coding in a high/low ranking system has also limited the possibility of subtler

variations in results.

3.5 Concluding Summary

The results of this study provide a historical analytical context for logo design evolution

and changing design trends within the market. In understanding how design trends are shifting

in reflection of the digital age and new marketing techniques, it is possible to suggest promising

formulas to companies looking for effective visual recognition. The media landscape of today

asks for a "simple uniqueness" that can be extremely difficult to achieve. As simplification and

debranding continue to take hold in marketing and advertising practices, it will be increasingly

important for companies to create a visual identity with intention and full consideration of the

long-term implications.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Data Analysis

A total of 20 companies and 80 different logos were coded for 12 separate variables within this study. Data was input by two separate coders to ensure internal reliability before being collapsed for final analysis. Statistical analysis and comparison was achieved through SPSS using several different testing methods according to the corresponding research question.

Research Question 1: What design elements are most commonly used in current branding trends?

A basic descriptive test for frequencies was run across the dichotomous variables in order to assess what specific design trends were seen the most across the entire sample. Overall, logo designs in the sample trended towards low complexity, low repetition, low organicness, and lacked proportion (usage of the golden ratio). Logos tended to be balanced, but not necessarily symmetrical. See Table 2 for a full breakdown on each variable.

To hone in on current logo design trends, we singled out the brands' current logos in a simple frequency analysis. It was inferred that brands would score lower on abstraction, organicness, complexity, and depth, reflecting the digital push for simple visual stimuli. Logos were almost unanimously non-complex for these most recent design iterations and were more likely to use flat designs (i.e. depth was low, leading to a two-dimensional effect), fewer repetitive elements, and less activity. Despite the small sample size, this data seems to support the idea that brands' logos are currently simplistic, given more lacked organicness, complexity, activity, depth, repetition, or use of proportion. See Table 3 for the full breakdown of design variables.

Table 2.

Frequency of Design Elements Across the Sample

	Low Presence		High Presence	
Design Variable	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Abstraction [c]	50	62.5	30	37.5
Organicness [b]	64	80	16	20
Balance [a]	29	36.3	51	63.7
Symmetry [a]	64	80	16	20
Complexity [b]	64	80	16	20
Activity [b]	52	65	28	35
Depth [b]	62	77.5	18	22.5
Repetition [b]	68	85	12	15
Proportion [c]	66	82.5	14	17.5

Note. N = 80 logos (20 companies, 4 different designs each).

[a] : Refers to variables that, when present, indicate simplicity.

[b] : Refers to variables that, when present, indicate high elaboration.

[c] : Refers to variables that are not necessarily elaborate or simple on their own.

Table 3.

Design Elements in Modern Logos

	Low Presence		High Presence	
Design Variable	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Abstraction [c]	10	50	10	50
Organicness [b]	14	70	6	30
Balance [a]	6	30	14	70
Symmetry [a]	14	70	6	30
Complexity [b]	19	95	1	5
Activity [b]	15	75	5	25
Depth [b]	16	80	4	30
Repetition [b]	17	85	3	15
Proportion [c]	14	70	6	30

Note. N = 20 current brand logos from 2017

[a] : Refers to variables that, when present, indicate simplicity.

[b] : Refers to variables that, when present, indicate high elaboration.

<superscript>c</superscript>: Refers to variables that are not necessarily elaborate or simple on their own.

Research Question 2: How have the visual elements that relate to elaborateness of brand logos changed over time?

To assess changes over time, Cochran's Q Test was run to assess logo evolution over the four design iterations to examine changes in their use of the coded visual elements. Specifically, the overarching category of elaborateness - which included the variables complexity, activity, and depth - was analyzed as a function over time due to its importance to the overall outcome of this study. The 20 companies' logo designs were analyzed over four different design iterations for the three aforementioned design variables, resulting in three different test results.

Complexity: Twenty companies' logos were assed in four different chronological iterations, from logo inception to the most recent logo design used in visual media. Cochran's Q test was run to determine if the percentage of designs utilizing complexity was different at different time points. The sample size was adequate to use the χ2-distribution approximation. The initial logo iterations were 50% complex ($n = 10$), the second logo iterations were 20% complex ($n = 4$), the third logo iterations were 5% complex ($n = 1$), and the most recent logo iterations held at 5% complexity ($n = 1$). The percentage of logo designs that trended towards less complexity was statistically significant at the different time points, $\chi^2(3) = 15.429$, $p = .001$.

Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons with adjusted p-values represented. There was a statistically significant decrease in complexity between the original logo iterations and the third logo iterations ($p = .004$) and between the initial logo iterations and the most recent logo designs ($p = .004$). There was no statistically significant difference between the original logos and second logos ($p = .140$), the second logos and third logo ($p = 1.00$), the second logos and current logos

($p = 1.00$), or between the third logo iteration and current logos ($p = 1.00$). In other words, the

main differences in the logos' use of complexity are detectable between the most recent two

versions and the first one.

Activity: Finally, the 20 logo iterations were assessed again for the variable of activity.

Cochran's Q test was run to determine if the percentage of designs utilizing activity was different

at different time points. The sample size was to use the χ^2-distribution. The initial logo

iterations were 50% active ($n = 10$), second iterations were 30% active ($n = 6$), third iterations

were 35% active ($n = 7$), and final design iterations were 25% active ($n = 5$). The percentage of

logo designs that trended towards less activity was not statistically significant at the different

time points, $\chi^2(3) = 3.652$, $p = .302$.

Depth: The twenty logo iterations were assessed finally for the variable of depth.

Cochran's Q test was run to determine if the percentage of designs utilizing depth was different

at different time points. The sample size was adequate to use the χ^2-distribution approximation.

Initial logo iterations were 30% designed with depth, second iterations were 20%, third iterations

were 20%, and modern iterations were 20% designed with depth. The percentage of logo

designs that trended towards flatter design was not statistically significant at the different time

points, $\chi^2(3) = 1.125$, $p = .771$.

Research Question 3a: Are companies reducing the amount of logo design space dedicated

to slogans, company names, and acronyms/name foreshortening from their visual branding

with consequent logo design iterations?

Initial testing for regularity showed that outliers existed in both variables' sets of data,

leading to the use of a Friedman test of association rather than a one-way repeated measures

ANOVA analysis. Due to the relatively small sample sizes within each set being compared ($n = $

20) irregular data points and outliers could not be justifiably removed from the data sets. Additionally, the variable of acronym/foreshortening had an especially high number of outliers, making the data extremely irregular to analyze and ultimately leading to the use of the Friedman test of association.

Name/Slogan: A Friedman test was run to determine if there were differences in proportion of design dedicated to a name or company slogan between the four different logo design iterations. Proportions remained the same between all four design iterations (Mdn = .75) and the differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 1.920$, $p = .589$.

Acronym/Foreshortening: A Friedman test was run to determine if there were differences in proportion of design dedicated to an acronym or name foreshortening between the four different logo design iterations. Proportions remained the same from iteration one to iteration four (Mdn = .0) and the differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 3.941$, $p = .268$.

Research Question 3b: Are logo designs trending towards fewer numeric and alphabetic characters with subsequent design iterations?

Again, due to the relatively small sample sizes, a Friedman test of association was deemed an appropriate option for analyzing the change in number of characters between the four design iterations. Pairwise comparison testing was further implemented to determine where significant changes were the most relevant.

Characters: A Friedman test was run to determine if there were differences between the number of characters used within the four different logo design iterations. Character count was statistically significantly different between the four different iterations, $\chi^2(3) = 18.085$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons were performed with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

Character count was statistically significantly different between the first iteration and the fourth

iteration ($p = .004$).

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Visual and artistic trends are often temporary and fleeting in our swiftly moving society. Like clothing and hair styles, advertising trends and business methods go in and out of fashion in a never-ending cycle. The trend towards simplicity, less noise, and a less "corporate" and "aggressive" feel (Handley, 2012); however, seems to be not only here to stay, but more relevant as our day-to-day lives become awash with advertising and branding. As audiences view cluttered advertising on repeat, their tedium increases, leading to a likelihood of negative reception due to increased exposure (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979).

In recent years, a push towards less noise has led to cleaner and more minimalist marketing attempts, including a reduction of pervasive branding and in-your-face marketing. Companies like Apple, Nike, and Target have even gone so far as to fully debrand their logos for marketing on television, in magazines, and in other print advertisements, relying only on the visual element of their logo designs and removing the company name from the equation all together. Public campaigns such as Selfridge's No Noise initiative, in which brands were entirely removed from a store space selling popular items (Kirkova, 2013) and Starbucks quietly buying up local coffee shops while keeping the old store's name and branding seem to reflect a changing atmosphere of the consumer expectations when looking for in their products and experiences. It is safe to say that at least some of the giant companies we know and love (or love to hate), are adopting a simpler approach within their branding practices when reaching their target audiences.

Although previous research within the field has shown that complexity within logos and advertising design can increase brand attitude, association, and recognition (Van Grinsven &

Das, 2014; Pieters, Wedel, & Batra, 2010; Henderson & Cote, 1998), this study suggests that logos among the elite companies in the U.S. are trending towards less complexity and fewer textual elements. A general overview of these brands suggests that, once established, complexity can be reduced in favor of more simplistic logo usage.

While a unique method, full debranding is still relatively uncommon as a practice. It is seen often due to the nature of the companies that have adopted the practice, but that does not mean that it is widespread. Unfortunately, due to random sampling within this particular study and the relatively few companies that have adopted debranding, these fully debranded logos were only present in very small subset of the entire sample and it was not feasible to explore these logos due to this sample size. This study, therefore evolved into a broader analysis of different methods of simplification, including design variables, space taken up by textual elements, and analysis of numeric/alphabetic characters used within a design. Due to the complexity of visual processing and the subjectivity of art as a method of communication, this research was built on an interdisciplinary framework ranging from psychology to artistic theory in an attempt to create a broader snapshot of understanding.

In returning to the field of Peircian Semiotics (1935), logos can be interpreted as a system of signs intended to communicate with a broader audience (Moriarty, 1994). Signs, as a portion of the semiotic triangle (sign, object, and interpretant), serve as an encoded element meant to represent the original "object," which is "interpreted" by the audience and given a deeper meaning based on context and personal experience (Moriarty, 1991). If a company logo is treated as one of these signs, then it becomes logical that business owners are able to impart more than just visual recognition on an audience. Two-way meaning making can transform a small visual element into a larger experience altogether. In breaking down these signs even

further, it is possible to begin a process of better understanding visual stimuli. Although it is difficult to objectively break down the components of a visual stimulus, Gestalt Theory and Visual Semiotics suggest that it may be possible to categorize certain elements to increase this understanding. Through this framework, this study attempts to lay a groundwork for establishing objective and measurable visual elements of company logos in particular.

As an historical comparative analysis of logo design trends over time, this study purports that simplicity within branding is a growing trend for successful U.S. companies. It is clear that, for many reasons, reliance on an audience's visual recognition of a brand is a desirable goal. In analyzing logo iterations over time and through commonly accepted visual design markers, this study aims to show relevant statistical change towards the aforementioned simplicity. Although this study did not touch on audience effects or attitudes towards logos as a visual stimulus, several significant conclusions can be drawn from the findings presented and used to guide future research in this area.

5.1 Key Findings and Implications

General findings of this study included an overview of design elements used within the 80 sampled logos. Generally, logos tended to be less abstract (63%), inorganic (80%), balanced (64%), symmetrical (80%), less complex (80%), inactive (65%), designed without significant depth (78%), used non-repetitive elements (85%), and did not utilize the golden ratio (80%). Many of these traits dealt indirectly with a more simplistic design, encouraging the original assumptions of this study. However, in looking at the entire sample all four design variations, the snapshot encompasses more than just the most modern design iterations. Within only the fourth iterations the breakdown changes slightly. Current logos were half abstract and half representative (50%), organic (70%), balanced (70%), asymmetrical (70%), noncomplex (90%),

inactive (75%), flatly designed (80%), non-repetitive (85%), and did not utilize the golden ratio (70%).

Several variables stayed relatively the same throughout the four variables, potentially suggesting that it was present only within a few of the companies' corporate visual identity from the start. Utilization of proportion/the golden ratio in particular represents a conscious decision and prior design knowledge, unlike several of the other design variables which can occur incidentally or are otherwise more easily incorporated into design. Notably, Apple was one of the few companies that consistently used the golden ratio throughout their design iterations, whereas with most of the other logos the effect only appeared once or twice.

Elaborateness as an overarching design category encompassed three separate variables: complexity, activity and depth. In looking specifically at these three variables within just the most recent design iterations, 95% were non-complex, 75% were inactive, and 80% were designed without depth, suggesting that elaboration was low within logo designs that are currently in use. Although this final sample size is small, it does propose a shift towards more simplistic designs at least within the demographic of highly successful companies.

Of the three variables specifically related to elaborateness, only complexity showed statistically significant change over time within this sample, whereas activity and depth did not. Although the other two are a significant piece of the puzzle, it can be argued that complexity is the most directly connected to simplicity - or rather a lack thereof. After pairwise comparisons, significant changes were shown between the initial logo iterations and the third logo iterations and between the initial logos and the most recent logo iterations. This suggests that, within the sample, logos were trending towards a less complex design, particularly when comparing early iterations and current iterations.

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Additional significant conclusions were drawn from the research question: Are logo designs trending towards fewer numeric and alphabetic characters with subsequent design iterations? Analyses showed that character counts were decreasing over time through consequent logo iterations. Companies were not necessarily removing their name entirely from the logo packages, as suggested by the debranding trend, but it seemed that extraneous information such as slogans and lengthier name variations were being parsed out of subsequent branding changes. Although significant change was only shown between the first set of design iterations and the most recent set of design iterations, change over time was clearly represented. Again, this could simply indicate a temporary design shift, however with the pervasive nature of marketing and advertising on the rise, there is value to be had in quick processing and recognition of a logo or word. If we consider that text could be a potential moderator of complexity, then the companies represented in this sample are, in that regard, paring down the content of their logo designs and simplifying their logos through textual reduction.

Between the decreasing use of complexity and the reduction of characters within these logos, a clearer picture of simplification was created. In relation to previous research showing that complexity was an important factor for audience attention, retention, and recognition, it would make sense that, early on, these companies utilized a more complex logo to secure the awareness of their audience and promote correct recognition and recall. As these companies increased their success, they were likely able to simplify their original branding without the fear of becoming so simple as to become unremarkable for their consumer base. This simplification also aligns well with current the current marketplace, allowing for more concise design and the ability to adapt easily to new digital marketing.

Although debranding has gained a significant amount of attention in popular media, this more extreme approach may be a method that is limited to an elite few companies who are able to take the chance of relying on a logo alone. There may be certain contexts in which debranding may be a relevant practice, especially when the company has already established its identity, but typically it would seem that having a textual company identifier is still important in branding. It seems that widely adopted use of debranding may simply be an unnecessary risk for many companies. Although a shift towards simplicity and textual reduction seems to be the current trend, there are limits to what can be achieved with less material in general.

5.2 Limitations of Sampling and Analysis

One of the largest shortcomings of this research came from the initial sample size yielding a limited ability for statistical relevance. Given additional resources, it may have been possible to increase this sample drastically. However, as a visual analysis, objectivity was a primary concern during data coding and analysis. Additionally, the dichotomous coding scheme further limited the strength of association needed to compensate for the smaller group. Although creating a scale coding system for the visual design variables may have helped create a more precise measure of change, it would also have negatively affected objective responses, especially if the sample size increased.

As previously mentioned, complexity can increase attention, recognition, and recall of newly established brands, (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Van Grinsven & Das, 2014), and is therefore more likely seen within newer company designs. Because this study focused solely on a population of successful and established brands, it is possible that data responses linked to elaborateness were skewed, particularly when considering that many of the companies within the sample have been around for decades, if not longer. Newly created companies have a degree of

freedom in tailoring their branding to current trends right off the bat, but simultaneously face the challenge of making their logo unique in the current marketing landscape. Although the findings represented within this study may be helpful in suggesting best practices for well-established brands, it may not be as useful for up-and-coming companies looking to make their mark and establish familiarity within their audience.

Another limitation of the study at hand was the lack of experimentation in audience effects. The scope of this research did not include measures of perception, recognition, or recall, which are the ultimate goals of branding. Attitudes towards a brand and speed/correctness of recognition are important factors when considering the value of a redesign or rebrand. Rather than increasing the complexity of the current study, the researcher decided to focus on understanding the visual components, which ultimately limited the scope.

An additional confounding factor to this research was the lack of information available on specifically when each company redesigned their logos. Although several companies provided the date of inception of a rebranded logo, it was unclear when the actual design process may have taken place for the vast majority of the sampled logos. Ideally, every logo sample would have been taken from consistently similar time frames to ensure that visual trends were more likely to be aligned. However, many of the companies do not make this information publicly or readily available. Because designs are subject to the whim of what is currently "popular" or "well-liked" by consumers, the time at which each logo design was in use for marketing becomes a relevant factor. It is possible that with extensive research, these time frames could be uncovered and used to guide future studies more precisely, but it may also require abandoning the use of semi-random sampling, limited by what information can be gathered by the researcher.

It is likely that previous research relating to similar research questions already exists – however, it is equally likely that this information is proprietary due to its direct relevance to consumer trends and business dividends. As an exploratory study, much can be suggested to alter the design of future studies for more reliable analysis and outcomes, including an increased sample size, potential inclusion of scale rating for the design variables, control for date of logo creation, and additional design iterations if possible.

5.3 Future Research

Many of the analyses within this study were limited by a smaller sample size. Given the resources, future research would benefit from a larger sample in order to overcome these size limitations. If possible, adding additional variegation to the design variables and a broader coding scheme including a scale rather than dichotomous coding could create additional understanding as well. Beyond simply changing the study design features, however, many additional questions could be explored in order to increase understanding of logo design trends. During the process of this research, countless new considerations introduced themselves.

Design variables within this study barely scratched the surface when it came to the role of literal representations within logos. In returning to the study of semiotics, there are three categories within the sign/object/interpretant triangle: icons, indices, and symbols (Peirce, 1935; Moriarty, 1994). Each category has its own layer of complexity and meaning. Although the variable of abstraction touched very lightly on this categorical breakdown, there is much more that can be explored through this avenue. Does, for example, a plumber need to visually show what they do within this/her logo to increase effective branding? Are consumers more likely to recognize and understand the company if the logo includes elements familiar to the business's field? Many companies choose seemingly abstract imagery for their logo designs, but

occasionally the designs simply require context. What would happen to audience understanding if the context and reasoning behind a logo design was fully explained? Testing and coding of these visual categories would require a multi-layered approach, but the implications could provide insight into correct recognition and recall of a company's name and services and even begin to assess cross-cultural divisions when it comes to international marketing practices.

In addition to the consideration of literal representations are considerations on whether the audience finds the design aesthetically pleasing. For wearable items and physical products do customers prefer something that has been branded aesthetically?

Because design and art are often subjective when it comes to personal preference, how can a company design their logo to be universally pleasing to their target audience? In discussing a brand that is well-known within popular culture, it is nearly impossible to objectively separate the purely visual aesthetic from an audience's subconscious and conscious experiences with the product/services being marketed, opinion of the company itself, and other coincidental factors that may have shaped their perceptions and attitudes towards a brand. When Henderson and Cote conducted their research, upon which many of the design variables of this study were based, their study had a secondary, experimental component looking into audience attitudes towards a logo (1994). Their sample came from an obscure and, presumably, unknown selection taken from Asian companies, therefore lowering the possibility of their test subjects holding preconceived opinions on the designs. In many ways, this same testing scenario is nearly impossible for the companies used within this study, but it would be valuable to know if the results found from 1994 still hold today. In the end, is it worth rebranding an entire company to tailor towards a design ideal that might shift within the next season?

As a result of a broad sample population, this particular study served as an overview of companies ranging from technology, to machinery, to aggregated collections of bed and breakfasts. However, it is likely that certain fields have adopted certain design elements and practices as a result of their products and services. Do certain fields, such as technology, have a certain set of design variables that occur more frequently than, say, the field of clothing and accessories? Additionally, previous research has shown that color has the ability to affect brand personality, likability, and familiarity (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). Future research focusing purely on color usage could be assessed simply according to field or type of product, but there's certainly more to it than that. Color theory suggests that certain colors even have the ability to impart specific emotions when used effectively. What effects might certain colors evoke when used within a logo design? Companies like Tiffany & Co. have gone so far as to trademark certain colors, making them proprietary and integral to their marketing techniques. How can companies adopt these methods to create a fully conceived branding strategy that serves their target consumer base?

5.4 Recommendations for Branding Practices

Establishing a corporate visual identity is not a simple undertaking. Many companies just getting off the ground do not have the time or resources to expend on professional branding and marketing techniques. And yet, rebranding and redesigning logos, colors, and signage can be more problematic the longer they are left to settle with unwanted branding. Beyond that, redesigns can be expensive and can provide setbacks with recognition and establishing a "name" for a company.

Current trends and the implications of this study suggest several points for best practices when it comes to branding. First: have a plan. Changing a company name after it has been

established is difficult - it may result in redesigning products, editing online resources, and even creating a new logo. Early establishment of a name, general color scheme, and considerations of a target audience prevent unnecessary changes down the line. Hiring a designer or marketing company, if feasible, can help ensure that a company is getting a well-designed logo that is available in the appropriate formats, build an online presence early on, and create consistency between all of the necessary platforms.

Responding to changing times is a requirement. At one point, having a website was a luxury for the tech savvy, but these days a majority of day-to-day marketing is done in an online sphere. In addition to the value of a well-designed logo that can adapt to mobile applications, favicon sizes, and social media, having high quality product and/or service images can make or break marketing techniques, especially when material goods are part of the deal. Websites can provide online sales, general information, and even build credibility and trust within a consumer base. As was shown within this study, successful companies adapt to change as the years pass. Although not all redesigns/rebrands are successful, there is value in responding to current design trends and the aesthetic tastes of a consumer base. A willingness to change and experiment with new marketing practices often pays off in the end.

5.5 Conclusion

If we accept the socially held view that the generation coming of age is "interested less in the label and brand experience and much more in something that can be uniquely 'them'" (Joel, 2016), then how can designs be tailored to meet the changing opinions of a consumer audience? Logos are a small element when it comes to corporate visual identity and the products and services rendered, but each building is valuable in its own way. The advertising and marketing puzzle becomes a more manageable project when broken down into these smaller pieces.

Early in this study, it was suggested that complexity and elaborateness are important factors when establishing a new and uniquely recognizable visual identity. Because the media landscape is so inundated with noise and branding, it is important to distinguish a company early on in order to successfully establish a visual identity. However, because of this same inundation of branding and advertising, companies are beginning to look for new methods to stand out from the crowd. Rather than the advertisement that screams the loudest, it seems that many advertisers are turning to a less aggressive and more "authentic" method of connecting to their consumer base. Reduction of extraneous text and design variables is one small way that companies can, and are, adopting a less elaborate approach to branding and advertising.

Although it may be temporary trend, this study suggests that simplicity and minimalism are an increasingly visible trend within logo design. While debranding and extreme simplicity may be seen within only an elite few currently, it seems that simplification over time is being adopted by several successful and established companies. There is much work to be done to further define and streamline these kinds of visual analyses and, furthermore, to assess audience effects and reception of these kinds of changes. For now, however, it seems likely that many companies are entering a period of simplification that not only encompasses the visual elements of their logo, but also includes the reduction of textual elements as well.

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Appendix A: Training Manual

<u>CODING TRAINING MANUAL</u>

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read through this training manual fully, with attention to details. A supplemental booklet will be given with visual examples of each design element. If you have any questions initially or need clarification, please contact the researcher, Mariah Wenzel.

Each logo you will be coding will include four different versions, which are to be completed according to the order they have been placed in. For example, 1-1 will be completed before 1-2. Logos are to be coded in chronological order. All items within the one category should be completed before moving on to the items within the two category. There are two overarching sections to this coding process: Visual Design Elements and Textual Design Elements. Each of these sections has a slightly different scheme for coding.

Each of the Visual Design Elements will be coded dichotomously: either high or low. Please decide on an appropriate rating (high/low) for ALL Visual Design Elements. You may write "High" or "Low" or rate it as a one (for high) or a zero (for low). Pick an option that makes this the simplest for your visual analysis. Do not skip a variable unless you absolutely cannot determine its rating.

Within the Textual Design Elements section, you are asked to look for three possible items: an acronym/name foreshortening, company name, and the number of characters within the design. If textual elements are not present, you may record a zero or write "none" for all three of

the textual variables. If, however, the company name and/or acronym/foreshortening are present, please record as a proportion of the design space taken up by the company name/slogan and/or acronym/foreshortening. For characters, please count carefully each letter, number, and significant punctuation mark. You may disregard trademark and copyright symbols as well as insignificant punctuation such as apostrophes and commas.

Visual Design Elements

- **Naturalness:** refers to elements that are commonly and naturally experienced in day-to-day life. Includes items seen in nature and due to cultural constructs. For example: a leaf is seen naturally, whereas geometric shapes are typically not.
    - Abstract: abstract and its opposite, representative, refers more specifically to the shapes of design elements and their likelihood to look like realistic elements.
    - Organic: organic designs are often made up of natural curves and lines, whereas the opposite — inorganic designs often have sharp corners and straight lines that are not typically seen in the natural world.
- **Harmony**: harmony encompasses both balance and symmetry in creating equally weighted axes that horizontally and/or vertically reflect each other
    - Balance: refers to the weights and proportions of a design that center around a focal point. Balanced designs are equally weighted in terms of elements that may or may not be the same design format.
    - Symmetry: refers to the mirroring across vertical or horizontal axis. For example, a butterfly is mirrored across its vertical axis to create two wings that are perfectly matched.
- **Elaborateness:** elaboration includes three variables: complexity, activity, and depth. This does not only include detail, but goes into the richness and thought required to interpret a design.
    - Complexity: refers to the number of elements included, the variation of line weights and angles, and the level of detail included within the design. For

example: an icon showing the digestive tract path of a human has high complexity, whereas a stick figure is relatively simple.

- o Activity: refers to a sense of motion within a design and lines or design elements that move the eye. Activity may be achieved through arrows, lines, or paths created within the design. For example: the recycle symbol has a high level of activity because it encourages the eye to follow the arrows in a circular motion around the design.
- o Depth: refers to a sense of 3D layout within a design. For example: icons showing a foreground, middle ground, and background have high levels of depth, whereas a simple 2D mountain range is relatively flat.
- **Repetition:** repetition refers to the use of similar design elements repeated more than once within a design. For example: the current Windows logo includes four of the same boxes placed 2x2, meaning it is highly repetitive, whereas the Apple logo includes only one apple with a bite taken out of it, meaning it is not repetitive at all.
- **Proportion:** proportion refers to theories of the golden section/golden mean and the relationship between vertical and horizontal sections.

Textual Elements

- **Acronym/foreshortening:** a series of letters used to represent full words. For example: the PP in Pay Pal's logo stands for their company name.
    - o Proportion reported as a fraction of the design space taken up
- **Company Name:** may operate as a single word (ex. Pepsi) or as a more thorough phrase (ex. Pepsi Corporation)
    - o Proportion reported as a fraction of the design space taken up
- **Number of Characters:** number of letter and number characters present within the design space, not including trademark or copyright symbols, or basic punctuation marks.

Appendix B: Sample Logos