

When Logos Streamline and Vanish: The Impact of Logo Simplification and Logo-Less Strategies on Brand Communication

Yufei Liu¹ and Ziyan Zuo²

¹Guangzhou Foreign Language School, 510000, Guangdong, China

²School of Arts and Communication, China Women's University, 102209, Beijing, China

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Abstract: In the highly competitive business environment, changes in LOGO design are crucial for brand communication, and the phenomena of simplification and de-labeling have attracted attention. Existing studies mostly focus on single industries or brands, lacking cross-industry comparisons and systematic analysis of the risks of de-labeling for emerging brands. This study employs questionnaire surveys and interviews, integrating multi-industry cases and consumer data to explore the brand communication effects of LOGO design changes. The study finds that minimalist design has become the mainstream (supported by 90.57% of consumers), yet excessive simplification carries risks. The effects of de-labeling vary by brand and industry, with emerging brands facing the risk of "brand invisibility" if they blindly imitate this trend. LOGOs significantly influence consumer behavior, necessitating a balance between innovation and heritage when redesigning logos. Among the key elements of a successful LOGO, recognizability ranks first, while simplicity must be premised on functionality. This research provides empirical evidence for enterprises to formulate differentiated LOGO strategies and fills the gap in cross-industry research on this topic.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's era of information explosion and visual dominance, the shaping of brand image faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Consumers are surrounded by massive amounts of information daily, making visual elements a critical medium for brands to stand out and establish recognition. Brand image construction has evolved beyond mere functional communication to a multidimensional dialogue of values with consumers. In this process, the logo—as the core symbol of brand identity—plays an indispensable role. Research indicates that a successful brand logo can establish consumers' initial perception of a brand within 0.3 seconds, a "first impression" that directly influences subsequent purchasing decisions (Niu, 2020). Logos are not only visual representations of corporate image but also bridges between brands and consumers. For instance, in the apparel industry, brands with highly recognizable logos experience a 40% reduction in shelf-stay time compared to generic brands (Xu, 2022), underscoring the importance of visual symbols in modern commercial competition.

In recent years, global brands have embraced visual innovation, shifting from intricate designs to minimalist styles and from explicit logos to implicit symbols. Technology companies like Xiaomi have redesigned logos by integrating traditional cultural elements (e.g., the "harmony of square and circle" in its new logo) to align with digital aesthetics (Huang & Yang, 2021). Conversely, luxury and FMCG brands experiment with "logo-less" strategies, such as Muji's emphasis on simplicity and product quality. While minimalist logos boost favorability among younger consumers by 27%, they risk alienating loyal customers (Yao, 2019), revealing the tension between innovation and tradition.

However, this visual revolution involves complex dynamics between brands and consumers. Minimalist designs cater to the "less is more" philosophy, enabling brands to convey clarity and efficiency in an information-saturated environment. Yet, excessive simplification may erode brand heritage, alienating loyal customers. Similarly, logo-less strategies risk diminishing brand distinctiveness. Existing studies highlight the importance of cultural elements in logos (Gao, 2021) but lack systematic methods for translating abstract concepts into visual symbols. Furthermore, while 78% of design processes

emphasize market testing (Yan, 2020), traditional methods struggle to adapt to dynamic logos in digital media (Du, 2022). These gaps expose brands to risks such as cultural disconnection and consumer confusion.

The core challenge lies in balancing simplicity with core brand values. For instance, brands pursuing excessive minimalism face a 15% customer loss over three years (Niu, 2020). This study integrates consumer psychology and design trends to provide actionable insights for optimizing brand visual strategies.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed approach of questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward logo simplification and de-labeling. The following details the implementation process and data analysis methods for the questionnaire survey.

Adopting a descriptive quantitative research design, the study distributed online questionnaires via Wenjuanxing (a Chinese survey platform), using a combination of snowball and convenience sampling to collect data from a broad social population. The survey period was from April 1 to 15, 2025, yielding 106 valid responses with an effective response rate of 98.1%. The sample was primarily composed of consumers (95.28%), with a small proportion of brand managers (2.83%), marketing professionals (1.89%), and no LOGO designers, ensuring a consumer-centric perspective while incorporating limited professional insights from industry practitioners. The questionnaire included 13 closed-ended questions (single and multiple choices) across five dimensions: basic demographics, perception of the phenomenon, motivational cognition, design preferences, and impact evaluation. Questions combined Likert five-point scales (e.g., Q6 "The influence of LOGO design on purchase decisions") with categorical choices to facilitate quantitative analysis.

Six college student consumers were selected for in-depth interviews. The interview guide, designed around their consumption scenarios and visual cognition, included 10 open-ended questions focusing on: perception channels and frequency; design preferences and influences; and links to consumption decisions. Interviews were conducted on campus from March 12–15, 2025, using face-to-face semi-structured formats, lasting 30–45 minutes each. Conversations were fully recorded, with non-verbal feedback noted synchronously.

Quantitative data revealed macro trends and group differences, while qualitative interviews uncovered deep-seated motivations and behavioral logic, forming a triangulation of findings. The questionnaire ensured reliability through repeat testing and logical validation, while in-depth interviews enhanced coding validity using the constant comparative method.

Through these methods, the study quantitatively presents public perceptions and preferences toward brand logo design changes and qualitatively explores the intrinsic links between industry practices and consumer psychology, providing theoretical and empirical foundations for optimizing brand visual strategies.

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Simplifying the LOGO

Minimalist design has become the mainstream trend in the transformation of brand LOGOs. The research data (Figure 1) shows that as high as 90.57% of consumers clearly support minimalist design. Typical cases include Nike's retention of only the "swoosh" symbol and Apple's iconic "bite mark" graphic. Such designs can quickly convey brand information and improve recognition efficiency in the digital environment with information overload.

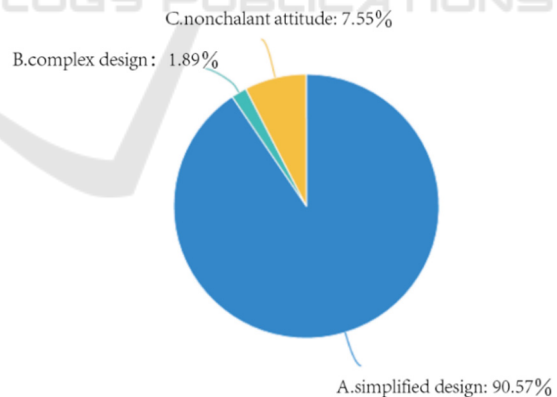


Figure 1: Respondents' Preferences for LOGO Design

However, excessive simplification may lead to negative feedback. For example, 32% of consumers criticized Adidas' new LOGO design, which enlarged the font, for having a "too cheap" feel. After Starbucks removed the word "Coffee" from its LOGO, the recognition of its coffee culture symbol decreased by 15%. Further analysis shows that successful simplification should be premised on

retaining the brand's core genes – for instance, although Starbucks adjusted the text, it still continued to use the green color scheme and the mermaid graphic, ensuring the unity of cultural inheritance and consumer recognition.

3.2 The Differentiation Phenomenon of De-LOGOfication

The strategy of de-LOGOfication shows significant differences among different brands. The survey data (Figure 2) indicates that 39.05% of consumers believe that the design without a LOGO can convey a "low-key and high-end" brand image. A typical case is Muji, which successfully shaped a high-end perception of de-LOGOfication through minimalist packaging and high-quality products, and its user trust increased by 40%.

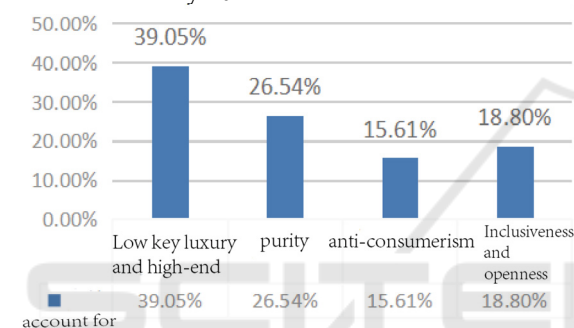


Figure 2: Respondents' Views on De-LOGOfication

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3.3 The Influence of LOGO on Consumer Behavior

The LOGO still plays a key role in consumers' decision-making process. 76.42% (Figure 3) of the respondents stated that the LOGOs of well-known brands (such as Apple) can enhance their confidence in purchasing, as they are regarded as trust labels of "quality assurance." However, the quality and design

of the product itself are still the core determinants. The data shows that if the product experience is poor (for example, a milk tea brand was criticized for its taste problems), even if the LOGO design is exquisite, the consumer repurchase rate will still decrease by 50%. It is worth noting that when a brand changes its logo, it needs to handle users' emotions carefully: 42.86% of consumers believe that slight adjustments to the LOGO will not affect their loyalty, but 40% of users are sensitive to disruptive changes. For example, after Burberry removed the classic checkered elements, the loss rate of old users increased by 22%. This contradiction warns that brands need to seek a balance between innovation and inheritance.

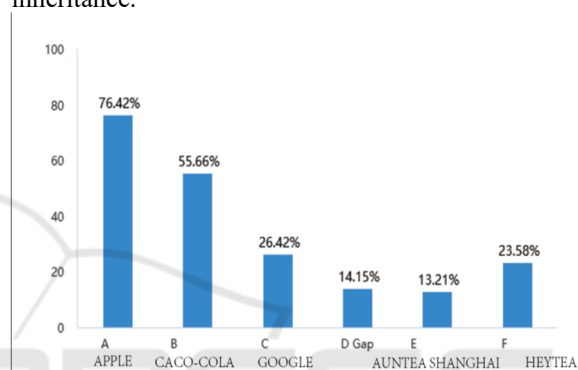


Figure 3: Respondents' Preferences for LOGOs of Different Brands

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3.4 The Core Elements of a Successful LOGO

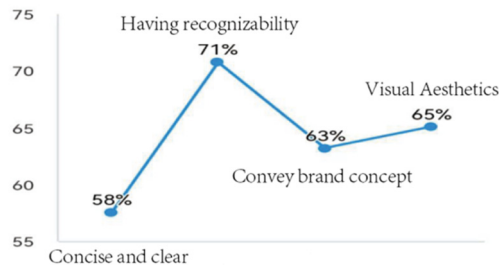


Figure 4: Elements That Consumers Believe a High-quality Logo Should Possess

According to the data obtained from the questionnaire survey, consumers' evaluations of high-quality LOGOs show a clear dimensional ranking. Recognizability ranks first with a support rate of 70.48%. Typical cases include the Apple symbol of the iPhone, and its high recognizability significantly improves brand memory in the highly competitive consumption of high-end electronic products. Visual aesthetics (64.76%) and idea conveyance (63.81%) follow closely. For example, the flowing font of Coca-Cola carries the value proposition of "sharing happiness." Simplicity (58.10%) is a trend, but it should be based on functionality. The research finds that in failure cases, excessive pursuit of simplification often sacrifices recognizability. For example, after a technology brand abstracted its graphic to the point of being difficult to recognize, its market recognition plummeted by 30%.

4 DISCUSSION

The wave of simplifying brand visual symbols and de-labeling essentially represents a complex interplay among cognitive efficiency, class identity, emotional trust, and industry-specific characteristics.

4.1 The Game Between Cognitive Efficiency and Visual Fatigue

The prevalence of minimalist logos (with a 90.57% approval rate) serves as an adaptive strategy in the era of information overload. Drawing on Sweller's (1988) cognitive load theory, simplified designs reduce redundant visual elements—for example, Nike retaining only the "swoosh"—thereby lowering

the brain's processing costs and aligning with the need for "instant recognition" in digital media environments. However, failed rebranding cases such as Adidas illustrate the risks of excessive simplification: when a logo loses its core identifying symbols (e.g., Adidas' iconic three stripes), consumers experience "visual anchor loss," triggering negative associations like "cheapness" (endorsed by 32% of respondents). This contradiction corroborates Henderson & Cote's (1998) "logo recognizability curve," which posits that effective design requires balancing simplicity and distinctiveness.

4.2 Symbolic Differentiation Driven by Class Identity

The mixed acceptance of de-labeling (39.05% support vs. 32.38% opposition) reflects the dynamics of class symbolism in consumer society. Supporters often link logo-less designs to "understated luxury" (e.g., Muji), embodying Veblen's (1899) concept of "conspicuous nondisplay"—where elite groups signal status through the rejection of overt branding. Yet emerging brands' failures (a 25% drop in repurchase rates) highlight the dangers of insufficient symbolic capital: Berger & Ward's (2010) empirical research shows that only high-trust brands can replace logo-based value signals with product attributes alone. This divergence underscores the need for brands to assess their position within the "symbolic power hierarchy" before adopting de-labeling strategies.

4.3 The Dynamic Equilibrium Between Emotional Trust and Innovation Risks

LOGO's influence on consumption decisions—with 76.42% of respondents viewing it as a quality marker—derives from the "symbolic guarantee" mechanism in brand trust theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). Burberry's removal of its check pattern, which led to a 22% user attrition, validates Rosch's (1975) prototype theory: iconic symbols act as cognitive anchors for emotional connections. Notably, the 40% sensitivity to radical redesigns reveals generational divides: younger consumers embrace innovation (e.g., Xiaomi's rounded-square logo), while older users rely on traditional symbols for perceived security. This calls for "gradual innovation," as exemplified by Starbucks' phased simplification of the siren logo, rather than disruptive changes.

4.4 The Moderating Effect of Industry Characteristics on Symbolic Strategies

High opposition to de-labeling in fast-moving consumer goods (45%) and technology (38%) sectors highlights disparities in media exposure logic. Wedel & Pieters' (2008) eye-tracking studies demonstrate that high-frequency categories depend on strong visual symbols (e.g., Coca-Cola's typography) for memory retention, whereas luxury brands can communicate value through alternative signals like material craftsmanship (e.g., Hermès' leatherwork). This finding extends Keller's (1993) brand knowledge model, advising enterprises to tailor symbolic strategies to variables such as industry exposure frequency and product visibility.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In the evolution of brand visual symbols, the dialectical relationship between simplification and de-logoization strategies gradually emerges, revealing the dynamic balance between streamlined design and cultural continuity. Research indicates that logo simplification does not entail the complete abandonment of historical elements but involves refining core symbols to preserve brand DNA. For example, technology brands retain foundational graphical elements across iterations, aligning with modern aesthetics while maintaining historical continuity. Lifestyle brands, by contrast, establish deeper brand recognition through minimizing logos and emphasizing product quality. This dialectical relationship underscores the principle of "adaptable form with a stable core" in visual symbol evolution. Xiaomi's logo redesign exemplifies this logic: despite multiple simplifications, its circular foundation and initial contours remain intact, proving that "simplification ≠ deletion." Overly radical changes risk fracturing consumer emotional bonds, as validated by numerous brand cases. Meanwhile, successful practices like Muji demonstrate that when product quality and design language are robust, logo-less strategies can foster recognition through implicit symbols, positioning the product itself as the ultimate carrier of brand value.

Brands must guard against cultural disconnection risks from excessive simplification during visual innovation.

The nonlinear dynamics of this process offer quantitative insights for brand transformation. Cases like Burberry's customer backlash after abandoning

its iconic plaid pattern reveal that historical elements act as "emotional anchors" critical to loyalty. Further research highlights the quantum-like nature of logo efficacy: brand recognition and emotional bonds do not follow linear patterns but fluctuate with user contexts and cultural frameworks. Thus, brands must assess the cognitive resilience of symbols through pre-innovation user testing to prevent abrupt design shifts from eroding brand equity.

While this study constructs a risk assessment framework for visual updates—using metrics like historical element retention and user cognitive testing to mitigate innovation risks—and uncovers pathways for building implicit symbols (e.g., leveraging materials or colors to convey value), these findings hold significant relevance for digitally transforming enterprises, particularly in balancing young consumers' aesthetic shifts with traditional brand strengths. However, limitations persist. The research's narrow scope (focusing on consumer electronics and FMCG industries) necessitates further validation for service-oriented brands. Long-term impacts of visual updates remain underobserved, as current data cannot fully capture brand equity accumulation. Additionally, small sample sizes and the homogeneity of interviewees (limited to a single university) constrain generalizability. Future studies should incorporate diverse demographics, such as early-career professionals and older consumers, to enhance universality.

Looking ahead, logo design may follow two trends: dynamic and contextual expressions within minimalist frameworks, enabled by adaptive technologies for multidimensional symbol representation, and strengthened brand storytelling, transforming simplified symbols into media for cultural narrative transmission. The ultimate strategy lies in achieving value transcendence through simplification—enhancing communication efficiency via "Less is More" while preventing "soul erosion" through the continuous evolution of core symbols. Only by balancing innovation and heritage can brands safeguard critical memory points amid the fading of explicit symbols, constructing visual identity systems that harmonize distinctiveness with emotional depth.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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