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A Study of Logo Redesign from the Perspective of Brand Ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of science and technology and the Internet, people's lifestyles and mindsets have changed dramatically. As a result, brands have played an increasingly important role in commercial society and people's daily lives. In the unpredictable market environment, enterprises need to adjust and update their brands constantly, and the update of the logo has become a natural and essential element in brand management. From a practical point of view, logo design is the core part of brand design and visual identification system, and logo redesign is an essential visual means for enterprises to convey brand identity changes. In addition, the market demand is significant, and the fierce competition between brands requires the increasingly high ability of designers. But until recently, most designers who do logo redesign still have many deficiencies in the height and breadth of design thinking. From a theoretical point of view, logo redesign has been the focus of many papers. Still, many related research directions focus on logo design, ignoring the brand ecosystem involved in logo redesign.

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance and value of the brand ecosystem in logo redesign from the perspective of its composition and development. In terms of research methods, first of all, the author uses the literature research method to summarize the concepts of logo redesign and brand ecosystem. Next, referring to the statements of many scholars, the author analyzes the necessity of improving the brand logo redesign thinking and the importance of the brand ecosystem in the logo redesign process. Then combined with theories and cases, this paper analyzes and summarizes the particularity of logo redesign under the brand ecosystem theory. Finally, the case study method is used

to analyze the issue of Xiaomi from the perspective of the brand ecosystem, on its design thinking and processes, and explore the practical techniques of a logo redesign.

This study found that the analysis method and structure of the brand ecosystem positively affect the innovation of brand logo redesign. The contribution of this study involves two aspects. First, in theory, it points out the particularity of logo redesign under the brand ecosystem theory; In design practice, it advocates logo redesign from the perspective of the brand ecosystem, which expands a new direction of a logo redesign. However, in exploring design methods, only suggestions are brought up in theory, and lack of empirical case support in practical aspects, which requires further in-depth study and verification of its effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Logo Redesign, Brand Ecosystem, Brand Design, Design Thinking, Design Method

INTRODUCTION

Background and purpose of the study

In 2019, Volkswagen collected car logo ideas from around the globe and planned to change its logo. Brand recognition began in 1937. Spanish fast fashion giant Zara also changed to an entirely new logo when releasing its 2019 spring/summer fashion collection. This was the second change of logo since its foundation. As estimated, about 1 in every 50 enterprises annually redesign their logo (Spaeth, 2002), and the cost is surprisingly high. In the constantly changing market environment, enterprises need to continually adjust and update their brands, and the update of logos has become a natural and essential element in brand management (Aaker, 1991; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006). Logo design is the core part of brand design and visual identification systems, and logo redesign is an essential visual means for enterprises to convey brand identity changes. As a result, the market demand is enormous.

Xiaomi released its new logo, designed by the famous Japanese designer Kenya Hara in 2021. This logo cost 2 million yuan and three years, but it appears to be only a tiny change from the original. It changed the initial straight framework to rounded corners. Many consumers were amazed but thought it was not worthwhile. Even many professional designers had doubts about Kenya

Hara's design. However, after recent years of observation, Xiaomi's new logo brought great benefits to the brand upgrade and has received positive comments. As we can see, many designers have deficiencies in the breadth and depth of design thinking. Without a doubt, this logo shift by Xiaomi was successful, but not all redesigns are. There were failures; for example, GAP released a new logo on October 4th, 2010, and was forced to retrieve it back to the old logo in only seven days. Logo redesigns have been the focus of many papers, but many related research directions focus solely on logo design, ignoring the brand ecosystem involved in logo redesign. It is worth studying more effective logo redesign methods.

This research aims to help designers rethink the meaning of design and explore the importance of the brand ecosystem in logo redesign.

Scope and method of research

The research scope of this paper includes literature and cases, mainly involving theories and methods for logo redesign. In terms of research methods, the author first uses the literature research method to summarize the concepts of logo redesign and brand ecosystem. Then, referring to the views of many scholars and combining the current market situation, the author analyzes the necessity of improving the thinking behind brand logo redesign and the importance of the brand ecosystem in the logo redesign process. Next, the author combines theories and cases to analyze and summarize the particularities of logo redesign under the brand ecosystem theory. Finally, the case study method is used to analyze Xiaomi's case from the perspective of the brand ecosystem, examine its design thinking and processes, and explore the impact and value of brand ecosystems on logo redesign approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition, traits, and organization of brand ecosystem

The ecological system, often known as the environmental system theory, was conceived in the 1960s by the American professor Geoffrey Sacks. Its core premise is that the life cycle of every item is constantly changing. A brand is an organic ecosystem that achieves sustainable growth through interaction with various aspects such as people, technology, the economy, and society. The global research and development of the brand ecosystem reveals that an increasing number of researchers are using this theory to investigate brands.

David A. Aaker (1999) explicitly articulated the notion of a "brand group" based on a single company's brand system and brought the concept of the ecological group into the study of brand theory for the first time, indicating that this is a definition of a brand group. In 2000, a new management paradigm called "brand leadership" was introduced from a fresh perspective. Agnieszka Winkler (1999) made a significant contribution to the concept of brand ecology, and she later expanded on this idea in her book "Building Brands Quickly." She placed the brand within an ecological environment and believed that the brand existed within the environmental setting as a continually evolving organization with lifelike qualities. David Acker's brand ecological community theory incorporates the brand into the overall environmental environment, focusing on the interaction between individual brands. It highlights the relationship between brands and stakeholders, including synergy and other brand development difficulties. Wang Xingyuan believes that "the brand ecosystem is an artificial ecosystem centered around a brand enterprise. It consists of the brand and its products, the enterprise that owns the brand, the public, related enterprises, and the brand's ecological environment. This includes political, economic, legal, social, technological, natural, and other environmental factors." Regarding the development of the brand ecosystem, Guo Wei believes that "the brand ecosystem takes the brand value as the core development driving force. The brand owner (or operator) is the organizational core, and the brand and brand products are the core carriers of the brand value chain. Based on the value flow and value management of material flow, energy flow, information flow, capital flow, etc., in the brand value chain, it attracts suppliers, middlemen, sellers, customers, and the public, creating a dynamic brand organization system that grows and evolves within a distinct development environment."

Based on the perspectives of the academics mentioned earlier and the demands of this paper's study, the following definitions are summarized: The brand ecosystem comprises the brand spirit as its core, the increase of brand value as its driving force, and the many stakeholder groups participating in the brand value chain. Its primary features are the complexity of the environment and the interdependence of numerous aspects, the ecological nature of the brand's growth process and the process of adapting to the environment, and the rivalry and collaboration between the brand and other stakeholders.

According to Winkler's (1999) and Mackalski et al.'s (2015) definitions, the brand ecosystem is a dynamic and ever-changing system made up of the brand and internal and external environmental variables, with extraordinarily com-

plex layers and structures. The brand ecosystem consists of internal and external parts, and the overall structure can be divided into three levels: brand characteristics, resource status, and environmental relationships, as shown in Figure 1.
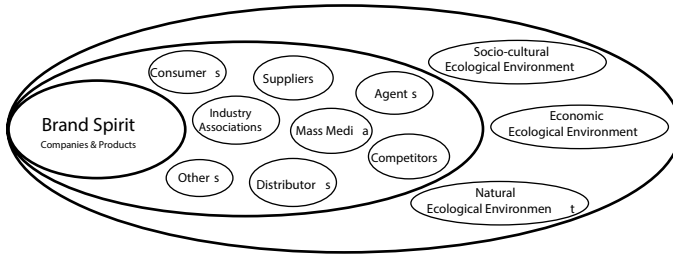

Figure 1. The Ecosystem of Brands Structural Diagram

The first layer consists of the brand's essential features that form part of its internal ecosystem. It encompasses the brand's spirit, where the enterprise and the product serve as its primary carriers. The brand's operation is based on the enterprise; hence the brand cannot survive without it. Additionally, customers' awareness of brands primarily relies on product recognition; therefore, high-quality products are essential to the survival of brands.

The second layer consists of the state of resources, also known as the stakeholders of the business brand. This layer comprises direct stakeholders, such as customers, vendors, distributors, and rivals, and additional stakeholders, such as trade organizations and the media, among others. These factors have distinct effects on brand creation in various ways.

The third layer is the environmental connection layer, which relates to the company and industry-related macro-environmental elements such as the economy, social culture, and natural ecology.

Discussing the brand ecosystem is significant because it helps brands better adapt to environmental changes (Philip et al., 2002), innovate brand innovation mechanisms (Wang Xingyuan, 2000), establish new competition networks (Singer, 2006), integrate value chain resources (Pinar, 2011), conduct brand eco-assessment (Elias, 2014), and rebuild competitive advantage (Mackalski, 2015).

Logo redesign

In his book "Design in design," the renowned designer Kenya Hara wrote, "Defamiliarization of known things is a kind of invention," and he recommends "REDESIGN." The purpose of redesign is to reinterpret our daily lives, extract

the essence of current design from these ordinary daily lives, and breathe new life into daily requirements. Redesigning a logo falls under the graphic design category of the current design discipline classification and is typically a subtopic of "Logo Design" or "Visual Identity Design." Objects evolve; therefore, "design" also evolves. The logic of the evolution of design objects is the elimination of flaws and the fulfillment of new needs, which is the quest for excellence. As the designer Aalto stated, "A design is never complete; it can always be improved." From this perspective, logo redesign is both an improvement and an original invention. Based on the past, present, and future use environment of the logo, comprehensively and objectively analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the logo, taking into account the theme of the times and the aesthetic needs of the public, and then recreate the logo graphics to eliminate flaws and incorporate new ideas.

Redesigning logos has been the subject of several academic publications in recent years. Numerous researchers have conducted studies from various angles. Some of these studies have summarized the procedures and criteria for logo redesign by studying its underlying meaning and documenting and assessing outstanding examples of logo redesign (see Figure 2, Xi Jiabin, 2016). Some advocate for simplified redesigns based on the original logo and analyze practical and effective methods of simplifying the logo redesign from graphic, color, text, and other forms of expression (see Figure 3, Zhou Feng, Fu Di, 2017). Others have explored the effect of logo redesign by analyzing the reasons for changing the logo in subdivided industries (Lu Yue, 2019).
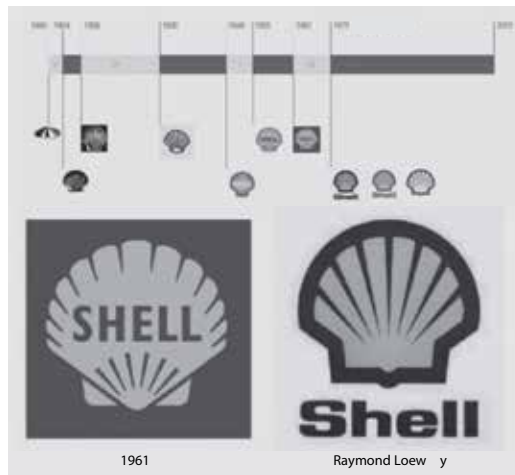

Figure 2. A Case Study of the Shell Logo

Figure 3. Starbucks Logo Iteration Illustration

However, these studies have focused solely on logo design itself, ignoring the brand ecosystem in which logos are redesigned. Each brand has a complete ecosystem, and logos are an important part of this ecosystem. Brand logo design organically combines the visual identity of the enterprise with its brand culture. The brand ecosystem includes stakeholders within the brand's scope of influence, social and cultural environments, and physical material environments. The acceptance of a new brand logo by the brand ecosystem will directly impact the efficiency and completeness of brand image updates.

Redesigning logos from the perspective of the brand ecosystem is an improvement of design thinking. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can guide design thinking, as shown in Figure 4. The process of improving design thinking usually begins with meeting needs, solving problems, and finally creating value. As design thinking improves, the designer's level of thinking and problem-solving approach will also undergo significant changes, and the effects of the designed work will be different. Incorporating the theory of the brand ecosystem into logo redesign can comprehensively consider all aspects of the brand, whether from visual design itself or the direction of brand development. This allows logos to stand on a higher and more comprehensive level to help the brand achieve a more thorough upgrade of its brand image, and enhance the cohesion between the new logo and the complex stakeholders. Through visual design, this can drive the brand's influence in the industry.
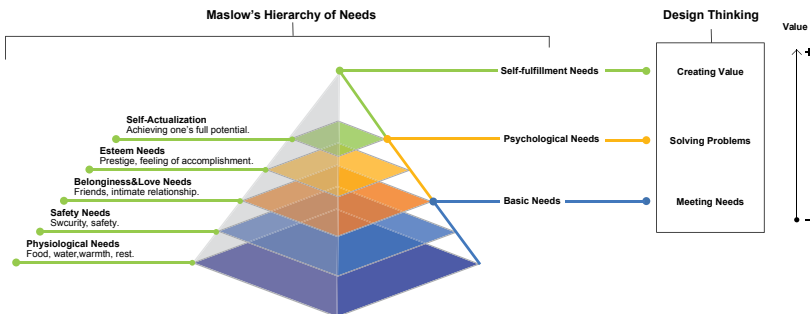

Figure 4. Relationship between Maslow's Needs Theory and Design Thinking

THE UNIQUENESS OF LOGO REDESIGN IN THE CONTEXT OF BRAND ECOSYSTEM

Based on the theory, composition, and evolution of the brand ecosystem, as well as the visual design features, it analyzes and summarizes the brand ecosystem-related peculiarities of a logo redesign.

Co-evolution

According to anthropologist Gregory Bateson, synergy is a more significant idea than competition or cooperation. According to synergy theory (Haken, 1976), the internal constituents of a system and their mutual interactions play a crucial role in its evolution. Therefore, a biome is considered to evolve as a whole in a concise amount of time due to its synergistic nature.

The same co-evolutionary behavior exists in the brand ecosystem, with intrinsic two-way interaction relationships and overlapping crossings between diverse stakeholder groups, making it very complex. The redesign of the logo is a variable in this system, and when it changes, it affects other stakeholders. In contrast, the success of the redesigned logo may be evaluated from the perspectives of numerous stakeholders. As the great philosopher Nietzsche said in "The Genealogy of Morals," "the more eyes, various eyes, we employ to examine the same object, the more 'complete' our concept of this thing becomes." Additionally, it may be more "objective." The redesign of the logo should also generate linkages with complicated aspects such as time, space, location, and people that the brand might include, and encourage their exchanges, resulting in a co-evolutionary impact. Co-evolution happens in the visual design and its application, as well as in all content-related and stakeholder-related parts of the brand's overall idea.

Capitalize on the circumstance

In the process of logo redesign, instead of developing a new logo, the social and cultural environment, physical and material environment, and psychological image of the brand's audience are built and produced, respectively. According to Hu Yirong's "Brand Design and Symbol Resource Potential Energy Theory," brand redesign must capitalize on the current brand symbol's potential energy for brand communication to obtain benefits in the quickly changing social environment. In other words, if the logo redesign aims to re-stimulate the audience's consensus on the brand in its original context, it must use the initial design to retain and appropriately handle its relationship with the

original design. Redesigning a logo by the brand ecosystem idea may reinforce the link to the original design while attracting fresh attention, communication, and engagement. This efficient utilization of the opportunity enhances brand consensus and generates brand vitality in the original audience's familiar perception. For example, Chen Youjian revised the Chinese font logo of Coca-Cola in 2003, using the ornamental streamer graphics from the English font and designing a curved and smooth Chinese typeface embellished with ribbon graphics to complement the English brand. Different font logos in Chinese and English give consumers a feeling of individuality, making this Chinese font logo a classic. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Coca-Cola English & Chinese typeface logo

Spiritual upgrade

As customers perceive it, brand spirit refers to the complete cultural aspects of a brand, including its meaning, symbol, personality, emotion, and taste. Brand spirit encompasses the career beliefs, values, and business purpose created gradually by the brand or decision-makers throughout its long-term production and operation. It is a crucial component of brand culture. To achieve robust growth quality, we must remain upright and exceptional, infuse the spiritual core into the brand DNA, and create an internal driving force. All brand behaviors are built on the brand's fundamental spiritual core since thought determines conduct. With a solid spiritual core, the brand environment can define its degree and direction of growth. Therefore, enhancing the essence is key to directing redesign. The logo's spiritual core consists of design and brand concepts. A successful logo redesign must effectively understand and communicate the brand's essence.

CASE ANALYSIS

Xiaomi, as a rising star in the development of intelligent hardware and electronic products, has been established for 12 years. At the 2021 Spring New Product Launch Event, Xiaomi unveiled its new logo designed by internationally renowned designer Kenya Hara, which took three years and cost 2 million RMB in design fees. See Figure 6 on the right.

Figure 6. The New Xiaomi Logo (old on the left, new on the right)

The graphic element abandons right-angled geometry in favor of rounded corners from a design perspective. This modification makes the overall visual language friendlier (See Figure 7). In terms of color, Xiaomi orange has always been the core and most essential brand color, indicating vibrancy and vitality. Thus, it continues to employ the original color symbol in the minds of the general public. Nevertheless, the more technological silver-gray and black are used in additional contexts, the "Xiaomi" wordmark affixed to the product, and some contexts with a more technological tone (See Figure 8). Whether it is the richness and softness of the lines or the word-spacing design, the font design is quite specific and aligned with the logo visual (See Figure 6, right side). This design is built on the co-evolution of the brand environment and strikes a balance between the relationships of various aspects. Design is not restricted to a set place in product application but appears more freely and flexibly (See Figure 9). It embodies the future of Xiaomi's innovative technology, which will continue to evolve in response to environmental and societal developments. Since technology serves humans and humans are living, technology should likewise be alive. Utilizing the benefits of the original design, the new logo employs implicit metaphorical language to increase brand favorability and inspire viewers with the new brand spirit.
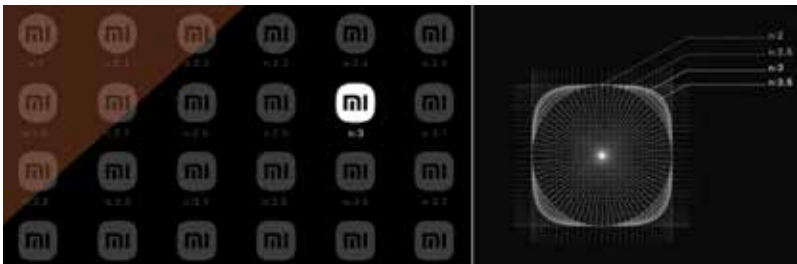

Figure 7. Xiaomi's New Logo Shape

Figure 8. The New Color Scheme of Xiaomi

Figure 9. Millet eco-friendly bag developed by Kenya Hara

Regarding Xiaomi's new logo, designer Kenya Hara stated, "I believe that as technology progresses, it becomes closer to the form of life. Therefore, humans and technology are continually converging. From this perspective, I propose the idea of 'Alive.' The design concept is intended to reflect Xiaomi's design philosophy, with the new logo shape representing not just the external form but also the spirit within. One could say that this practical ideal figure was developed from the term 'Alive' and represents not just a physical transformation, but also a spiritual upgrade." Hara incorporated Eastern philosophical thought into the Xiaomi brand goal with his new design idea. "Alive" is a life-sense design that reflects how life maintains a state of equilibrium through continual environmental motion. This is consistent with one of the objectives of logo redesign within the brand environment: spiritual upliftment. Hara elevated Xiaomi's aim of using technology to build a better life and improved the brand's visual personality from the perspective of "the interaction between technology and life."

Through the analysis of the Xiaomi logo redesign case from the perspective of the brand ecosystem, we can divide the method of logo redesign into four steps:

Firstly, by studying the company's own history and culture, researching consumer behavior characteristics, analyzing industry status and development trends, etc., enhance the core spiritual concept, determine the style positioning and basic elements of the logo redesign.

Secondly, sort out and summarize the existing logo, determine the relationship between the elements of the logo, and rearrange and combine the logo elements, and use symbolic representation to enhance the visual communication effect.

Thirdly, express the company's image, corporate culture, and emotional appeal through color schemes and color matching.

Finally, through overall visual expression and story description, actively accept feedback from stakeholders for review.

At first glance, this does not seem very different from previous logo redesign processes, but as mentioned earlier, redesigning based on the brand ecosystem is an elevation of design thinking, looking at problems and solutions from different levels of thinking to create more value for the brand. In fact, in the design industry, many excellent designers have already recognized the importance of the brand ecosystem and reflected it in their own designs, with many cases to show for it, not just the works of Kenya Hara. These designers have years of work experience and a wealth of cases, and their design thinking is deepened step by step through continuous accumulation.

CONCLUSION

Logo redesign is not an independent entity, and the direction of design should be continuously expanded and innovative. Logo redesign cannot simply start with an analysis of existing cases and blindly imitate them; nor can it just follow style trends and change their appearance; it should not just start with industry segmentation and conduct specific industry enterprise logo redesign analysis to explore its effectiveness. These methods focus on logo design itself, ignoring the brand ecosystem involved in logo redesign.

The brand ecosystem is a more comprehensive system, and logo redesign based on this system can help companies more effectively control the lifeline of their brand. Logo redesign methods guided by the brand ecosystem can help brands achieve the goal of overall brand image renewal; convey information consistent with brand development strategies and the interests of existing brand stakeholders; and directly and comprehensively promote the implementation of

brand redesign plans. This article establishes the connection between the brand ecosystem and logo redesign from the perspective of logo redesign and emphasizes the positive role and important value of the brand ecosystem in enhancing designers' thinking and logo redesign. It is hoped that this will help designers rethink the meaning of design in an increasingly formalized and superficial design market. Finally, looking to the future, collaborative design as a diversified channel is highly likely to be widely used in future brand redesigns.

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