To Be or Not to Be Consistent in Brand Logo Changes?

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Abstract

This is an investigation into whether and under which conditions consistency between brand name and logo may positively influence consumer attitudes toward brands through three studies. The descriptive design in Study 1 highlights a strong positive correlation between general brand evaluations and brand-logo consistency ratings. Two experiments show that perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo, preference for consistency as well as brand status moderate the effect of brand name-logo consistency on brand attitudes. Taken together, our three studies represent a step toward a comprehensive framework into understanding how integrated brand communications contribute to positive brand attitudes.

To Be or Not to Be Consistent in Brand Logo Changes?

Brand names and logos are prominent means to communicate brand identity to consumers (Aaker 1996; Henderson and Cote 1998; Shimp 2003). Research on brand names has been pursed for over 50 years (Collins 1977; Gardner and Levy 1955; Miller et al. 1971) and has led to a wide body of knowledge. Brand name characteristics and their effects on either memory or attitudes has been of primary importance for researchers for a long time (Boyd 1985; Chen and Paliwoda 2003; Durgee and Stuart 1987; Keller et al. 1998; Kohli and LaBahn 1997; Kohli et al. 2005; Lowrey et al. 2003; Robertson 1989; Sen 1999; Van den Bergh 1990; Van den Bergh et al. 1987; Wänke et al. 2007). Although less prominent, this stream of research has also investigated brand logos as a means of generating positive consumer response to the brand (Henderson and Cote 1998; Henderson et al. 2003; Henderson et al. 2004; Klink 2003; Pieters and Wedel 2004).

Although scholars have begun to investigate reasons and ways to increase consistency between brand names and logos (Bottomley and Doyle 2006; Henderson et al. 2004; Klink 2003), we still know little about the effects of brand-logo consistency on consumer brand attitudes. The lack of research on brand name-logo consistency is somewhat surprising because consistency has been studied in numerous other marketing fields. Such diverse fields as advertising processing (Edell and Staelin 1983; Heckler and Childers 1992; Houston et al. 1987; Kellaris et al. 1993; Lutz and Lutz 1977; Unnava and Burnkrant 1991), brand extensions (Czellar 2003) or integrated marketing communication (Shimp 2003) have been studied through the lens of consistency effects. Since it is processed more deeply, incongruence has been recognized as exerting a positive impact on recall and recognition (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). Concerning brand attitudes, results are mixed. On the one side, consistency has been shown to have a positive impact on attitude. This could be epitomized by integrated marketing communications, where

brand elements "should talk with a single voice" to consumers in order to enhance brand attitudes (Shimp 2003, p. 1). On the other side, moderate incongruity effects have been shown to have a positive impact on attitudes as well (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989).

Extant research suggests four major ways to increase the consistency between brand elements. The first refers to linguistic characteristics, inspired by the seminal work of Sapir (1929) on sound symbolism and research in brand naming (Collins 1977; Klink 2000, 2001; Van den Bergh 1990; Yorkston and Menon 2004). Researchers have suggested that linguistic characteristics are able to confer inherent brand meaning to brand names. Klink (2001) demonstrated that brand name sounds can communicate different information such as size, weight or speed. Therefore, some logos are more suitable than others, depending on specific brand name characteristics.

Figurativeness of logos is the second means of increasing the coherence in communication signs. Logos which visually represent the brand name enhance consistency. For instance, the "Jaguar" brand name and the logo of the company, representing a jaguar in movement, effectively illustrate a figurative brand name-logo dyad.

Third, design characteristics like typefaces can communicate impressions about the brand image (Henderson et al. 2004). More than eighty years ago, Poffenberger and Franken (1923) associated fonts with product categories (automobiles, building materials coffee, jewelry, and perfume) and adjectives (cheapness, dignity, economy, luxury, strength). They concluded that fonts do have different levels of appropriateness. More recently, Doyle and Bottomley (2004) investigated the consistency between fonts and brand name. They found that when brands were in an appropriate font, they were chosen twice as often as when they were not.

Finally, brand name-logo consistency can be built over time. As argued by Aaker (1996), brands existing for a long period are perceived as consistent since consumers are used to seeing them together. The mere exposure effect could explain this phenomenon. As argued by Zajonc (1980), when consumers are frequently exposed to particular designs, their attitude will become more positive toward those objects.

Through this literature review, it is noticeable that research has mostly focused on means to build consistency and their subsequent effects. However, we still know relatively little about when consistency really matters to consumers, that is, under which conditions consistency might affect brand attitudes. In this paper, we investigate the conditions under which brand name-logo consistency affects consumer attitudes through the following research strategy. We first propose an exploratory study that shows that brand name-logo consistency perceptions and brand attitudes are indeed positively associated. Then, we advance and experimentally test theoretical propositions about the possible mechanisms at play. Our three studies represent a step toward a future framework that may provide a better understanding of the role of consistent brand elements and their contribution to positive brand attitudes.

STUDY 1

The aim of this preliminary exploratory study was to investigate whether there is a general association between perceptions of brand-name logo consistency and brand attitudes.

Method

We investigated the top ten brands by market share in a European country (Volkswagen, Opel, Toyota, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Audi, Renault, Ford, Subaru, and Peugeot). Ninety-six undergraduate students participated as part of a marketing course requirement and were presented

a booklet containing the study materials. Each page of the booklet featured the brand name and a color picture of the current brand logo, followed by questions about the brand. One part of the sample (N = 66) reported their attitudes toward the brand on a three-item scale after viewing the brand name and logo (α = .90; Aggarwal 2004). Each of these items, as is true for all scale items in this research, was assessed on a 1-7 scale. Averaged attitude responses for each of the ten brands were calculated to form global measures of brand attitude for each of the ten brands. The remaining part of the sample (N = 30) reported their perception of brand name-logo consistency on a one-item scale after viewing the brand name and logo (ranging from *not at all consistent* = 1 to *very consistent* = 7). Averaged consistency ratings for each of the ten brands were calculated to form global measures of brand name-logo consistency for each of the ten brands.

Results and Discussion

Pearson's correlation coefficient between brand attitude and brand name-logo consistency measures was r = .66, p < .05. This result suggests the presence of a fairly strong association between perceptions of brand-name logo consistency and brand attitudes. The purpose of the following studies is to better understand the nature of this relationship through experimental designs. We are specifically interested in uncovering which brand-related and consumer-specific variables may moderate this relationship.

STUDY 2

The second study was designed to assess the impact of a brand-related variable (perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo) and a consumer trait (preference for consistency) on the link between brand name-logo consistency and brand attitudes. Our rationale is that brands may have different levels of perceived global fit between their brand elements and that these differences may affect consumers' brand attitudes. This perceived global fit will reflect

what we term *perceived initial consistency* between brand name and logo at the brand logo level. However, the importance of perceived initial consistency may depend on individual differences between consumers in their general tendency to attach importance to consistency in their life and environment. In this respect, the individual difference investigated in this study is preference for consistency (PFC; Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom 1995). Cialdini et al. (1995, p. 325) define PFC as a measure of "the tendency to respond to incoming stimuli in a way that integrates those stimuli with existing variables". They also argue that individuals with a high tendency for PFC generally like to be seen as consistent by others and also prefer consistency in their environment. It is likely that consumers with a high PFC should pay attention to and prefer consistent brand elements because they communicate a sense of general consistency. By contrast, consumers with a low PFC should care less about whether the brand's different elements are consistent with each other.

A brand characterized by a high perceived initial consistency with its logo will be able to increase this already high consistency only marginally. By contrast, brands with a low perceived initial consistency would have much more potential to increase the consistency between their name and logo. Consumers with a high PFC may prefer brand actions of the latter type as these actions may have a strong impact on perceived brand consistency. However, if a brand already has a high perceived initial consistency, even consumers with a high PFC are expected to react little to an action that would have only little effect to further increase this consistency. With respect to low PFC consumers, we do not expect perceived initial consistency between brand and logo to have such a differential effect, as they plausibly are less sensitive to it than high PFC consumers. We, therefore, suggest that brand attitudes resulting from brand logo actions will be conditional on the interaction between perceived initial consistency between brand and logo and consumers' PFC level. Hence:

H1: If perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo is low (vs. high), consumers with a high PFC will have more positive brand attitudes after a brand action that increases consistency between brand name and logo than consumers with a low PFC.

Method

Two brands of sport shoes, *Reebok* and *Puma*, were selected as stimuli for this experiment for three reasons. First, exploratory results from pretests suggested a great majority of students know these brands. Second, most of them own at least one of these brands. Finally, the pretest also suggested that these two brands are characterized by different levels of perceived initial consistency, whereby *Puma*'s logo seemed to cohere more with the brand than *Reebok*'s.

Sixty-five undergraduate students aged between 20 and 24 participated in the study, which comprised two booklets presented to participants as ostensibly unrelated surveys. In the first booklet, the 18-item PFC scale was collected among filler questions (Cialdini et al. 1995; α = 0.87). In the second booklet, a 2 × 2 mixed design was implemented (logo consistency with the brand: inconsistent vs. consistent; initial brand name-logo consistency: *Reebok* = low vs. *Puma* = high). The first was a between-participant factor and the second was a within-participant factor. Participants were presented successively the current brand logos (*Reebok* and *Puma*); the order of the brands was randomized across participants. Participants then answered a question about their perception of brand name-logo coherence on a one-item scale identical to the one used in the previous study. This measure served as a measure of perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo. We then used consumer mental imagery to induce conditions of incoherent vs. coherent logos because research suggests that experiences resulting from mental images can be as strong as real experiences (Dadds, Bovbjerg, Redd, and Cutmore 1997; Kosslyn 1994). Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario in which the brand's management

was considering revising their brand logo in a way that would make it more consistent/inconsistent with the name of the brand. After several minutes of reflection, they were asked to write down the characteristics of such a logo. Finally, they were asked how they would rate their attitudes toward the brand (three items, Aggarwal 2004; $\alpha_{Reebok} = 0.94$ and $\alpha_{Puma} = 0.96$) if the brand's management decided to implement the logo they had proposed. All scaled items in this study used a seven-point scale.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks indicated that brand name-logo consistency was judged higher in the consistent than in the inconsistent condition for both *Puma* ($M = 5.46$ vs. $M = 3.23$, $F(1, 62) = 44.13$, $p < .01$) and *Reebok* ($M = 4.85$ and $M = 3.60$, $F(1, 62) = 16.50$, $p < .01$). In addition, the initial consistency of *Puma*'s logo with the brand was perceived as higher than *Reebok*'s ($M_{Puma} = 6.12$ vs. $M_{Reebok} = 3.55$, $F(1, 128) = 142.22$, $p < .01$).

A MANOVA was then conducted with brand attitude toward *Reebok* and *Puma* action as dependent variables, logo consistency and PFC as between-participant factors, and perceived initial consistency as a within-participant factor. Low/high groups on the PFC scale were constituted using a conventional median split. The between-participant effect of logo consistency was significant, whereby participants reported more favorable brand attitudes after a consistent logo action ($M_{Puma} = 4.73$ and $M_{Reebok}=4.68$) than an inconsistent logo action ($M_{Puma} = 3.10$ and $M_{Reebok} = 3.72$, $F(1, 61) = 21.49$, $p < .01$). The three-way interaction between logo consistency, PFC and perceived initial consistency was significant by Hotelling's criterion ($F(1, 61) = 4.17$, $p < .05$). A planned contrast revealed that if perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo was low, participants with a high PFC had more positive attitudes after brand action that increased consistency between brand name and logo ($M_{Reebok} = 5.28$) than participants with a low

PFC (M_{Reebok} = 4.26, $F(1, 62) = 4.63$, $p < .05$). In contrast, if perceived initial consistency was high, participants with a high PFC had similar attitudes after a brand action that increased consistency between brand name and logo (M_{Puma} = 4.13) as participants with a low PFC (M_{Puma} = 4.73, $F(1, 62) = .99$, *ns*). These results support hypothesis 1 and suggest that the impact of brand-logo consistency is conditional on the interaction between perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo and preference for consistency.

STUDY 3

The second experiment was designed to test the effect of another brand-related factor, brand status, on the link between brand name-logo consistency and brand attitudes. Thus, this study aims at investigating the impact of a brand's social visibility on the relationship between brand names and logos. The rationale for this experiment is as follows. Name brands such as Chanel, Mercedes, or Rolex carry a brand identity imbued with social-symbolic meaning (Aaker 1996). The equity of these brands rests mostly on their stable, sometimes even conservative upmarket image that has been developed over many years. Stability for high status brands can be more important than for other types of brand positioning; a general recommendation is to preserve this status image through market shielding strategies (Park, Jaworski, and McInnis 1986). If a high status brand initiates changes in marketing strategy, be they even changes consistent with their current strategy, these will probably not be met with enthusiasm on the consumers' side. Changes in a logo could be a highly sensitive case in this respect because of their high visibility in social interactions. However, such a reactance effect is not expected for low status brands, which plausibly have more freedom in their positioning strategies and tactics than high status brands. We therefore propose that:

H2: If brand status is low (vs. high), consumers will have more positive brand attitudes after a brand action that increases consistency between brand name and logo than after a brand action that decreases consistency between brand name and logo.

Method

Two automobile industry brands, *Mercedes* (car brand) and *Michelin* (tire brand), were selected as stimuli for this experiment for three main reasons. First, these brands are known by most respondents. Second, exploratory results from a pretest suggested that the two brands could have different levels of perceived brand status, whereby *Mercedes* seemed to be higher in status than *Michelin*. Third, the pretest showed both brands to have an equally high level of perceived initial consistency, an important criterion as we wished to identify brand status effects independently of potential interactions with consistency effects.

Two hundred undergraduate students aged between 19 and 24 participated in the study as part of a course requirement. The design was a 2 × 2 (logo consistency with the brand: inconsistent vs. consistent; brand status: *Michelin* = low vs. *Mercedes* = high) between-subjects design. Participants were given two booklets, presented as ostensibly unrelated studies. In the first booklet, participants completed a manipulation check question mixed among a series of filler questions. For the brand status manipulation check, participants rated their perception toward the status of the brand on a one-item scale (ranging from *low social status of the brand* = 1 to *high social status of the brand* = 7). The second booklet presented the current brand logo. Participants then answered a question about their perception of brand name-logo coherence on a one-item scale, as in the previous studies. This measured perceived initial consistency between brand name and logo. As in the previous experiment, we used consumer mental imagery to induce conditions of inconsistent vs. consistent logos with the brand. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario in which the brand's management is considering revising their brand logo in a way

that would make it more consistent/inconsistent with the name of the brand. After several minutes of reflection, they were asked to write down the characteristics of such a logo. Finally, they were asked to rate their attitudes toward the brand (three items, Aggarwal 2004; $\alpha_{Mercedes} = 0.96$ and $\alpha_{Michelin} = 0.95$) in the case where the brand's management decided to implement the logo they had provided. The average of these three items served as a measure of the dependent variable.

Results and Discussion

Three manipulation checks were performed. The first one indicated that brand name-logo consistency was judged higher in the consistent than in the inconsistent logo condition for both *Mercedes* ($M = 5.30$ vs. $M = 2.50$, $F(1, 88) = 81.43$, $p < .01$) and *Michelin* ($M = 5.12$ vs. $M = 3.00$, $F(1, 97) = 46.95$, $p < .01$). The second one indicated that the perceived status of *Mercedes* was higher than *Michelin's* ($M_{Mercedes} = 6.18$ vs. $M_{Michelin} = 4.04$, $F(1, 196) = 245.69$, $p < .01$). Finally, the perceived initial consistency was similar for both brands ($M_{Mercedes} = 5.38$ vs. $M_{Michelin} = 5.25$, $F(1, 196) = 0.56$, *ns*).

A 2 × 2 ANOVA was then conducted with brand attitude as a dependent variable, logo consistency and brand status as between-participant factors. The main effect of logo consistency was significant, whereby participants rated a brand introducing a consistent logo with the brand more favorably than a brand introducing an inconsistent logo ($M = 4.10$ vs. $M = 3.03$, $F(1, 196) = 21.69$, $p < .01$). The main effect of brand status was not significant, $F(1, 196) = 2.62$, *ns*. However, the two-way interaction between logo consistency and brand status was significant, $F(1, 196) = 3.93$, $p < .05$. A planned contrast revealed that when brand status was low, brand attitudes were more positive after imagining a consistent brand logo action ($M_{Michelin} = 4.43$) than after imagining an inconsistent brand logo action ($M_{Michelin} = 2.98$), $F(1, 196) = 23.26$, $p < .01$. By contrast, brand attitudes were not more positive after a brand action that increased consistency

between brand name and logo ($M_{Mercedes}$= 3.65) than after a brand action that decreased this consistency ($M_{Mercedes}$ = 3.07), $F(1, 196) = 3.40$, *ns* even though brand status was high.

These results support hypothesis 2 and suggest that brand status exerts a moderating effect on the relationship between brand-logo consistency and brand attitudes. More specifically, when a brand is a socially visible status brand, consumers may not want the logo to be changed despite whether it enhances or not consistency. They probably wish the brand to be stable in its position of high status and any changes may potentially hinder this position. On the contrary, when the brand does not have this function as a status, consistency effects may matter and may induce attitude shifts toward the brand.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The three studies presented in this paper enhance our knowledge in an emerging new stream of research on brand name-logo relationships (Klink 2003; Pieters and Wedel 2004). All three studies have established a strong positive relationship between brand-logo consistency perceptions and consumer attitudes toward brands. Our results suggest that consumers indeed prefer brand logos that are consistent with the brand. However, as we showed in study 2 and 3, this positive effect of consistency is conditional on several factors. In the second study, the impact of preference for consistency and perceived initial consistency was assessed. The study illustrated that brands may not have the same perceived initial consistency and that preference for consistency altered the way this perceived initial consistency affects brand attitude. This result may be of particular importance for brands willing to increase the consistency between their communication tools as suggested by the principles of integrated marketing communications. According to Keller (1998), marketers can guide how consumers perceive the consistency between brand elements at any stage of brand development. Thus, marketers can decrease,

maintain, or increase the consistency of logos with their brands. On the one hand, if the brand starts from scratch, marketers have to assess which brand name-logo couple would best suit consumer preferences. On the other hand, if the brand has existed for many years, brand managers may still want to adapt the logo over time. In the process of developing or enhancing consistent brand actions, our studies suggest marketers should be aware of individual differences between consumers. Study 2 has shown that brands already possessing a high brand-logo consistency may not enhance consumer's attitude through increased consistency between brand name and logo and this irrespective of the type of consumers (with a low or high preference for consistency). On the other hand, brands having a low perceived initial consistency are encouraged to increase this low consistency, particularly for consumers with a high PFC. Through this shift, they may increase attitude toward the brand, especially for consumers having a high PFC.

Study 3 put emphasis on a brand-specific factor, namely brand status. This study suggests that brand managers should take brand status into account as they implement integrated marketing communications. A change in the logo of a high status brand may hinder the attitude toward the brand. It is therefore very important for managers to think twice before updating or changing their logos. On the other hand, lower status brands may well benefit from increased consistency between brand name and logo.

As far as methodology is concerned, it would be interesting to test our predictions in a different fashion. The studies reported in this paper employed a mental imagery manipulation to create conditions of inconsistent vs. consistent brand logos. Despite the advantages of this established procedure, we would suggest replicating the studies with respect to concrete hypothetical or real brand actions. This method would contrast with the present studies in which respondents had to imagine new logos themselves.

The results would appear to suggest that other potential variables may extend the emerging framework and lead to a more complete picture of how consistent brand elements shape brand attitudes. For example, it would be revealing for future research to study situations in which brand attitudes toward inconsistent brand elements may be more favorable than brand attitudes toward consistent brand elements. Such situations may occur because, in order to introduce a new product in a highly competitive market, a brand may be intended to shock or intrigue a particular audience. It would also be useful to assess attitudes toward consistent brand elements in relation to consumer age. We could speculate that children and elderly consumers may prefer more consistent brand elements (facilitating recognition) while teenagers may prefer inconsistent logos (in order to feel or look different from other consumers).

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