INTRODUCTION

Hence, we felt the need to refresh our visual identity to better reflect a Mahindra that has evolved over the years and is ready to take on future challenges.

– Anand Mahindra, Chairman, Mahindra Group

On January 18, 2013, farm equipment to aerospace major Mahindra unveiled a new logo representing its pursuit to be “one of the top 50 most admired global brands within a decade”. The new visual identity reflects continuity and change, which have been the hallmark of Mahindras’ growth story. This is a part of the $15.9 bn group new brand positioning initiative “Rise” projecting a singular voice for various entities under its umbrella, launched in January 2011.

The new logo is a contemporary and edgy hand-drawn word mark (Figure 1), in various color combinations, that visually distinguish Mahindras’ various businesses. The new logo builds on Mahindras’ heritage, while bringing in a sense of dynamism and modernity into the brand at the same time. The emblem features a unique ‘Ridge’, which is inspired by Mount Everest’s summit, and symbolizes Mahindra’s pathway towards achieving its potential and aspirations. Extensive research and feedback evaluation has gone into the logo, which reflects Mahindras’ core ethos and work philosophy of progressive management ethics and global image.
An idea, in the highest sense of the word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge

So what exactly is a logo? And what does it really do? A logo is a graphical representation of the business. The logo establishes the visual identity of a company and works as a catalyst for evoking “good” or “bad” feeling towards the company and its products. It builds trust and relationship with the customers, and inspires employees. It builds a psychological connect with the customers with effective use of graphics, colors and images. An explicit logo, which includes fonts, color schemes and symbols, represents implicit values and ideas defining a company. In a highly competitive and cluttered market, logos help companies to rise above the visual clutter.

The word ‘logo’, is probably a short form of the Greek word, logogram or logotype, meaning “sign or character representing a word” that is, logos "word" + gram “what is written.” The purpose of the logo is to provide a competitive edge to the company’s reputation, express its uniqueness, strengths and qualities, and symbolizes the purpose of the firm (Soomro and Shakoor, 2011).

A picture says a thousand words. The logo of a company is a succinct yet comprehensive expression of its brand identity. Logos are external symbols of the corporate culture to the business environment. Logos are a key element of a company’s visual identity. They serve as visual cues to deliver subliminal messages to consumers about a company’s commitment and engagement. The logo reflects what the company is all about. About 99% of the time, logos end up being a component of the corporate reputation. An effectively designed logo brands the company in the minds of the consumers at a subliminal level. The strong, instantly recognizable graphics and color schemes of a logo symbolize the companies’ brand image and promise. Logos help brands to achieve visual distinctiveness, e.g., Nikes’ tick-like swoosh. Research has proved the efficacy of visual stimuli. Visual imagery exercises subconscious power. Thus the combination of colors and images can be perceived as attractive or unattractive and evoke reactions or feelings.
towards different brand identities. Logos have added value if two prerequisites are met: stakeholders remember seeing the logo (brand recognition) and logos must remind stakeholders of the brand or company (brand recall). This familiarity can be maximized by creating a unique, but easily identifiable design (Riel et al., 2001).

Logos have not always been the brand managers of their companies. For e.g., till early seventies, logos on clothes were “hidden from view, discreetly placed on the inside of the collar” (Klein, 2001, p. 28). It was sports wear brands such as Lacoste and Ralph Lauren who flamboyantly displayed their logos as a premium style statement. A brand may be defined as “the summary position in the consumers’ mind stemming from the associative brand knowledge network in the consumers’ memory” (Krishnan et al., 2012). Companies spend enormous amounts of time and money to promote logos to develop brand equity through increased brand recognition and brand loyalty.

Van Reil and Van Den Ban distinguish between the two properties of a logo: Extrinsic – associations with the past behaviors of the company and Intrinsic: representativeness or factual interpretations of the graphical parts and associative or perceptions about what the logo represents (Riel et al., 2001). The various elements of a logo are shape, image, style, size and color (Hynes, 2009). Logos are memorable either because of their unique shape (Nike, Apple, Microsoft) or particular color (Coca Cola, McDonalds). It is believed that “colors may carry emotional and neurophysiological values and may affect levels of excitation and cognitive stimulation” (Hynes, 2009). For e.g., the red of McDonalds is supposed to be appetite-enhancing, an effect known as chromodynamics. Similarly, some colors have a calming effect and are associated with restfulness, peace and nurturing. The cultural context can also affect the meaning of colors.

We have been conditioned to believe that bigger is better – bigger cars, bigger homes, bigger television sets – just about everything. But in the case of logos – particularly mobile apps – big is the enemy! David Huff, Business Development Manager, HitFix, a Los Angeles-based entertainment news company, suggests that the typical logo must measure 16 by 16 pixels.

Logos also aid in speedy in-store recognition and selection of preferred products. Thus it is critical that consumers perceive logos as appropriate for the specific category. A well designed logo is able to evoke the desired characteristics that it wants to project through the graphical symbols. External perceptions in the minds of the consumers and organizational intentions can be matched if the launch of the new logo is embedded within a nation-wide advertising campaign, explaining the values of the company. Axis Bank changed its name from an established well-known UTI brand to an unknown Axis Bank. The name Axis was chosen after much deliberation by its shareholders, due to its simplicity and universal appeal. The logo depicts a strong base, depicting the bank is growing in strength (Figure 2).

From the consumers point of view, the logo is a symbol of the brand and how they associate with it. From the brands’ point of view, with so much at stake, it may be risky to change the logo because of this association.

Yet, companies often take the risk of rebranding themselves as they evolve and change with the times. However, this exercise
must be embarked on with thorough strategy. Corporate identity specialists are sometimes criticized for spending exorbitant sums on research and rebranding, with a view to develop updated logos, which when unveiled do little to enhance a company's brand image. Gap Inc. learnt the hard way the power of logos when it attempted to redesign its iconic logo to a “more contemporary, modern expression”, signifying the brands’ transition from “classic, American design to modern, sexy, cool”. The intense social media backlash forced them to retract and revert to the original, within a week of its launch. A research by Niels van Quaquebeke and Steffen Giessner of the Rotterdam School of Management suggests that people associate symmetrical logos with ethical and more socially responsible behavior by the company.

However, the important balance to be maintained is the subtle evolution in typography and color projects a contemporary feel while maintaining the familiarity which consumers crave. Many companies have successfully updated their logos to keep up with the times, while retaining the heritage and associations. As Mr. S P Shukla, President, Group Strategy and Chief Brand Officer, Mahindra Group, describes Mahindras’ refreshed logo (Figure 1) “We wanted a word mark which would reflect the evolving nature of our organization, our global outlook and progressive management style. In short, it should reflect the ‘core’ of Mahindra. We also had to ensure that it would have universal appeal across consumer and business segments in urban and rural areas, as well as overseas. We have tried to create a modern futuristic feel, while retaining the dependability, reliability and warmth associated with the Mahindra brand.”

One of the issues to be kept in mind when going in for redesigning the logo for the purpose of rebranding itself is for companies to ensure that customer experience of the brand also changes. The purpose of brands is to make it easier for consumers to distinguish and make purchase decisions, based on expectation and trust. Since unconscious thinking processes play an important role in decision-making, brands cannot afford to disregard unconscious perception. For e.g., when the Chinese razor brand, Rhino, tried to market their product to the West, they were unable to do so despite the competitive prices, as the Westerners associated the logo of a Rhino with blunt and dull. Most companies spend millions in rebranding themselves, with little or no lasting benefits, making the changes superficial and cosmetic.
RESEARCH AND REASONING OF CHANGING BRAND LOGOS

In 2010, Star Plus, one of the leading channels of Indian television, unveiled a new logo with the tagline “Rishta wahi, Soch Nayi” (Figure 3).

Though the aim was to project an image of entertainment with new fresh thinking, it also represented a modern woman, who has evolved in her different roles to bring about a change is society, undeterred by obstacles. The trend was also visible in the way the new programs were promoted: from “Mubarak ho, ladki hui hai” for KBC to “Dil se dekho” for Satyamev Jayate.

In October 2012, Asian Paints also unveiled a new brand identity and logo in order to connect more deeply to the younger consumers, based on a research insight that young professionals and teenagers prefer design and décor companies which offer complete makeover process through color guidance.

There could be various reasons for redesigning the logo – change in company policy, change in vision and mission, new company name, similarity with competitors' logo, technical issues in using the logo on different media, or the logo does not fit the times or trends. Logos sometimes change with time, though the brand name itself must be like Caesar “as constant as the Northern Star”. Logos can sometimes become outdated, and develop “undesirable, old-fashioned, stodgy connotations” (Aaker, 1991, p. 203). Hence, the need for upgrading the logo.

VARIOUS BRAND LOGOS ANALYZED

Symbolising its commitment to being a global brand, British Airways introduced its new visual identity with a red and blue ribbon, “a distant echo of the Speedbird symbol first used by Imperial Airways in 1932 and then by BOAC,” dispensing with the Union Jack motif and heraldic crest. The new design met with disapproval from the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher despite it retaining the red and blue of the Union Jack. The BA ribbon (Figure 4), Speed marque is sleeker and more contemporary. It was introduced in 1997 and in use till date, suggests wings and speed; at the same time the curve creates a warmer feel. The BA plane feels “less like a flying bus and more like a feathery friend, showing off its plumage”. The idea was to refresh the brand using brighter colors and extended color palette. The values symbolized are simplicity, global reach, seamlessness, warmth, thoughtfulness, engagement and confidence.

The refreshed identity was designed to meet the future challenges of the competitive airline industry, and to connect naturally with customers.

For a service industry, customer orientation needs to be embedded in its corporate values.
For OOCL, commitment to quality is a part of their quality assurance initiative. The logo (Figure 5), a Red Plum Blossom, signifies strength, endurance and beauty. The five petals of the blossom represent the five components of their quality assurance process: customer satisfaction, management commitment, employee participation, quality partnership and continuous improvement.

For HP it was important that there was flexibility on how it could be used. Thus it has a modular lozenge with ‘hp’ inside, which can be used on packaging to visiting cards.

Figure 5: Change in Logo of Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL) Logistics

![OOCL Logo](image)

**FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS OF RESEARCH**

Companies need to protect their brand image – brand name, logo, colors, packaging, jingles, etc. British Airways has specified colors, dimensions and every other component of its logo. This protects the identity of the brand and the relationship with the customers.

On the one hand, logos need to have two distinct characteristics: simplicity and clarity. As Mathew Hay, author of Laws of Subtraction, says “Understatement is much more effective, much more elegant.” In his interview with Lindon Leader, the designer of the award-winning iconic FedEx logo (Figure 6), Lindon explains his philosophy.

Through his use of negative spaces and emptiness, he is after, what he refers to as, “one plus one equals three”, the punch line. This addition is actually subtractive.

Notice the arrow between the E and E? That’s Lindon’s element of surprise, the ‘Aha’ moment. The “perceptual ambiguity of incomplete typeface logos, such as the blank lines across the characters of IBM logo, is that of interesting and creativity. The flip side is, it may also convey lack of clarity, leading to “diminished perceptions of trustworthiness” (Hagtvedt, 2011).

The challenge is to deliver a logo which simple, clear and explainable, and conveys the meaning the company intends. As a rule, logos are easier to remember and recognize if they convey meaning; however abstract logos may be necessary for a multi-product company. Meaningful logos identify or relate to product or product attributes. E.g., Jaguar logo blends performance and style (Kohli and Leuthesser, 2001).

On the other hand, if a logo is a target of conspiracy theorists, as was the case with Apple, it may well be the stuff legends are made of.

Branding pioneer, Walter Landon, credited with the iconic red and white “batwing” logo on Levi jeans, and the ram’s-head shield of Del Monte, is quoted as saying “Products are made in the

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factory, but brands are created in the mind”. Thus the creation of a brand logo needs some critical questions to be answered: How does the shape influence the brand perception? Zhang et al. found that consumers from collectivist cultures prefer round logos because round shapes are perceived as more harmonious and consistent with consumers’ identities (Walsh et al., 2011). Does color matter? Does green signify “green”? Sometimes, simply changing the color scheme helps in reinventing a brand. For Bisleri, which had enjoyed first movers advantage and major market share in packaged drinking water, competition and declining market share forced the company to reinvent itself. The new logo has been changed from blue to green. Blue is the color of water, but Bisleri is now more than just that. Green is the color of nature. Is Bisleri attempting to project itself as environmentally-friendly?

By changing the color, the company has provided a new product to the consumers; the consumers perceive that they will be getting a new and refreshing product.

The color, design and evoked meaning of the logo share a triadic relationship which helps to establish and maintain a company’s corporate image (Hynes, 2008).

Judith Lynne Zaichkowsky, Professor of Marketing and Communications at Copenhagen Business School, opines that colors must never be mundane or cheap. “Color combinations are superior to single colors for brand identification. Not more than three colors, and two dominant colors are best, otherwise no distinction is created,” she recommends. She also feels that bold font represents strength and reliability.

**CONCLUSION**

Branding is building a trusting and lasting relationship with consumers; and logos are visual symbols of brand recognition. If the logo, which represents the visual identity of the company, is instantly recognizable by the customer, it signifies that the company has built a brand. If the name (Coca Cola) or the logo (Nike’s swoosh) have the ability to stand on their own and enable consumers to identify the products, a brand is established.

According to Banerjee (Banerjee, 2008) a distinct and effective logo must pass through the three stages of conceptualisation, commendation and commercialization. Conceptualization includes seven parameters of Theme, Look, Aesthetics, Complexity, Flexibility, Vulnerability, and Memorability. Commendation stage involves appraisal and approval based degree of fit with the image of the company. Commercialisation includes launching the logo strategically and innovatively.

To conclude, logos should reflect accurately the current identity of the organization, while at the same time be flexible for future development. For example, the three-pointed star of Mercedes Benz, designed in the 1900s to simplistically represent elegance in design has come to signify design elegance and product superiority today. Logos should be memorable and easy to use. Ideally, simple geometric forms are capable of being “reduced 1/16th of an inch to fit on business cards, suitable for screening for black and white newspapers ads, clear for digitalization for television animation, and interesting enough for enlargement for billboard size” (Glastettler and Kleiner, 1989).

No prizes for guessing this one (Figure 7).
Figure 7: Nike Logo – Though the 'Swoosh' Remained More-or-less Similar, Earlier Logo Had The Brand Name 'Nike' and 'Just Do It' Written

SOURCE

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BOOKS

