The Importance of Logo Symmetry in Hair Care and Fashion Branding: Theoretical Foundation and Content Analysis

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I. Introduction

- Logos represent the graphic design element of a brand that serve important functions; for example, logos represent a ‘shorthand way of identifying a brand” (p. 195, Shimp, 2007) and serve to communicate the brand’s personality to the target audience (Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013).
- In this study, we examine the concept of logo symmetry as it relates to brands that promote beauty/attractiveness as a core brand promise (the intended meaning for the brand).
- The theoretical foundation for the study is derived from evidence showing that symmetrical designs are closely associated with perceptions of attractiveness and beauty (Enquist and Arak, 1994; Rhodes, Proffitt, Grady, & Sumich, 1998; Rhodes, Sumich, & Byatt, 1999; Berri, Simmons, Van Gilder, & O’Neill, 2011).
- Henderson and Cote (1998) describe symmetric designs as those that appear as “reflections along one or more axis.” (16)
- Applying this evidence to marketing management, it is proposed that symmetrical logo designs would appear to be particularly relevant to brands that promote beauty and attractiveness as part of their core brand promise.
- To address this proposition, we conduct a content analysis of brand logos from the hair care and fashion industry (i.e., sectors where beauty and attractiveness represent a core brand promise) and compare the results to an analysis of logos from charitable organizations (i.e., a sector that does not typically promote beauty and attractiveness as a brand promise).
- The study is intended to test the degree to which brand managers adopt evidence from the scientific literature and incorporated it into their marketing strategy. That is, if the research proposition is supported, it indicates that the market is efficient in using relevant evidence from the literature in branding decisions.

II. Methods

- Three samples were used in the analysis: Charitable organizations (n=44), Hair care brands (n=27), and Fashion clothing brands (n=30). The sample were obtained from online listings of top brands in each category.
- Brands that did not have a graphical logo were omitted from further analysis.
- Based on guidelines by Henderson and Cote (1998) on logo design, two coders were trained to distinguish between symmetrical and asymmetrical designs. Any discrepancies were resolve through consultation with a third coder.
- Data for hair care and fashion were combined as they both represent brand categories that promote beauty and attractiveness.
- A cross-tabulation was developed and evaluated through the use of the Chi-Test statistic in Excel.
- The test statistic is compared to the probability level (p<.05) to determine significance. A test statistic <.05 indicates that the groups differ with regard to their use of symmetric versus asymmetric logos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Data and Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symmetrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion &amp; Hair Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
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- CHI-Test Statistic: 0.036
- P-Level: .05
- Decision: The groups differ with regard to the use of symmetrical versus asymmetrical logos

III. Results

- The data and the results of the analysis are presented in table 1.
- The observed data suggest that fashion and hair care brands have a higher proportion of symmetrical to asymmetric logos, relative to charity logos.
- The test statistic is .036 which is LESS than the benchmark p-level of .05.
- The proposition that brands that promote beauty and attractiveness as part of their brand promise will have a higher proportion of symmetrical logos is supported.

IV. Conclusions and Discussion

- This study examined the use of asymmetric and symmetric logos for brands that promote beauty and attractiveness as part of their brand promise.
- The intent was to test whether evidence from the scientific literature was being adopted by brand managers.
- While the results are encouraging, it is important to note that this was an exploratory study using convenience samples. Additional research is needed to better understand how brands use (and should use) logo designs. This extends beyond the use of symmetric logo designs.
- Specifically, in what ways can we better understand the effective application of other logo design features? For example, does the use of an abstract versus a natural design depend on the characteristics of the market? We propose that natural designs might be most appropriate for brands that promote environmental responsibility as part of their brand promise. Similarly, are there market sectors that might benefit from the use of asymmetrical (versus symmetrical) designs? We would propose that asymmetrical designs might be more appropriate for brands that reflect activity as a core promise, such as sporting goods, because asymmetrical designs tend evoke perceptions of movement.
- Answers to these and other questions can provide insights into how the evidence from the literature can be effectively applied based on a brand’s core promise.

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