

Evolution of Starbucks's Logo – A Sign of Corporate Culture Development

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Abstract: Based on the changes of Starbucks's logo, this paper explores its role in the evolution of brand culture and the development of corporate culture, concluding that the change of the logo has further enhanced its brand culture without changes to its brand DNA. In addition, the change of the logo has promoted the development of the unique corporate culture of Starbucks.

Keywords: Starbucks; Culture; Logo

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1. Introduction

A logo is a commodity identified as a specific individual or enterprise. As a mark of products or services, the judgment of the trademark value is usually determined by the degree of recognition, which is evaluated by the estimated value that the trademark can bring to the enterprise. Words, graphics, letters, numbers, sounds, three-dimensional signs, and their combination of colors are the elements that constitute a trademark; thus, the success of a trademark depends on whether the combination of these elements can achieve high recognition and bring the expected effect.

As a tycoon in the coffee industry, Starbucks has changed its logo three times, and the overall trend of the changes is that the logo is more abstract and concise. "The mermaid has been on our logo for the past 40 years and the changes are designed to ensure that the brand continues to embrace the heritage of people," said Howard Schultz, the president and CEO of Starbucks, on the company's website. Based on the three changes of Starbucks's logo, this paper explores its role in the evolution of brand culture and the development of corporate culture, concluding that the change of the logo has further enhanced its brand culture without changes to its brand DNA. In addition, the change of the logo has promoted the development of the unique corporate culture of Starbucks.

2. Corporate background of Starbucks

Founded in 1971, Starbucks Coffee Company is the world's leading retailer and specialty coffee roaster. The highly acclaimed Starbucks has been rated as the "Most Admired Company" by the American magazine, *Fortune*, for many consecutive years. As an internationally famous coffee chain, Starbucks has its own unique corporate culture: the experiential cultural atmosphere that leads consumers; the cultural orientation of self-value realization, winning the trust of employees; the cultural pursuit of innovation.

In order to further understand Starbucks's corporate culture, the following are some of the world's most famous people's ideas about the company: Scott Robinette mentioned in his book, *Emotional Marketing*, "Experience is the collection of sensory stimuli, information, and emotional points that enterprises communicate with their consumers" ^[1]. Starbucks coffee is a vehicle for delivering a unique

experience to customers. “Experience design emphasizes the use and experience of human beings, which brings positive emotions, such as anticipation, joy, and excitement, and all the processes are smooth and harmonious so we can expect more and more design experiences to be integrated into it,” mentioned in a paper, *Focusing on Experience and Design*.

3. Evolution of Starbucks’s logo

Starbucks’s logo has undergone major changes for three times. The following diagram shows the evolution of the logo:



Figure 1. Evolution of Starbucks’s logo

Seattle-based designer, Terry Heckler, designed the first logo in 1971, inspired by a 16th-century wooden carving of a two-tailed mermaid from Scandinavia. The logo is round, having a tan background and a rough white visual texture in the center, wearing a crown with bare upper body and clearly visible double fishtail. The words around the logo states, “STARBUCKS COFFEE TEA SPICES”.

The twin-tailed mermaid represented a siren, a goddess of the sea, who sang to seamen and subdued them. The designer intended to convey that the aroma in any Starbucks cup is just like the song of a mermaid, which attracts people. A mermaid is a typical mythological figure in Europe and America, representing the culture in these countries, carrying ancient as well as mysterious connotations, and has the effect of attracting customers [2].



Over the next four decades, the logo has changed three times, and **Table 1** summarizes the changes.

Table 1. Summary of the changes

Year	Logo	Changes of the logo
1971		
1987		<p>The background color has changed to green.</p> <p>The lines of the mermaid are more simplified and neater.</p> <p>The mermaid’s chest is hidden by her hair (but her navel can still be seen).</p> <p>The number of letters in the outer ring have been reduced.</p>

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Year	Logo	Changes of the logo
1992		<p>The lines of the mermaid are neater.</p> <p>The mermaid's tail has two branches each instead of three.</p> <p>The lower part of the mermaid is hidden (navel is removed).</p> <p>The green background becomes brighter.</p>
2011		<p>The frame around the mermaid and the letters ("STARBUCKS COFFEE") inside the frame have been removed, leaving only the upper half of the mermaid.</p> <p>The whole logo is only in green and white.</p> <p>The green becomes even brighter.</p>

4. Relationship between the evolution of Starbucks's logo and brand culture

(1) Interpretation of product connotation in brand re-promotion

Logo changes: The word "coffee" has been dropped from the logo (a change in 2011) and the green color is more pronounced.

Impact: It is a hint that Starbucks is expanding beyond coffee into tea, snacks, mugs, plush toys, and more. The development of new products, driven by the initial brand image, is the embodiment of the growing brand of the enterprise. The change of the logo indicated that Starbucks is developing in a multidimensional and diversified direction, which makes the brand more malleable and has more development possibilities. It is a change of strategic significance.

(2) Resonating with consumers and enhancing the sense of identity of brand culture in consumers' hearts

Logo changes: The logo became more standard and concise. For example, the lines were simplified, and the outer circle with its letters were removed (a change in 2011). In addition, the mermaid in the logo was more conservative and reserved: the mermaid's chest was covered by hair (a 1987 change), and her exposed navel was removed (a 1992 change).

Impact: These changes catered to the preference of most consumers – a simple logo. Many customers were unsatisfied with the original logo, thinking the old mermaid logo was too exposed, such as the separated mermaid tail and her bare body, which seemed offensive or even seductive and unsightly. In order to cater to the aesthetic taste of consumers, the logo gradually became subtler, indicating that the brand is open and discreet in the context of diverse cultures.

In view of these changes, the status of Starbucks brand image in the minds of most consumers has improved, thus the continuous improvement of Starbucks's brand culture is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. The following figures summarize the views of cyber citizens in regard to the first and fourth logo. The corresponding evaluations reflected that the changes in the logo made consumers have a lot more respect for this brand. The word clouds are shown in **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**, respectively.

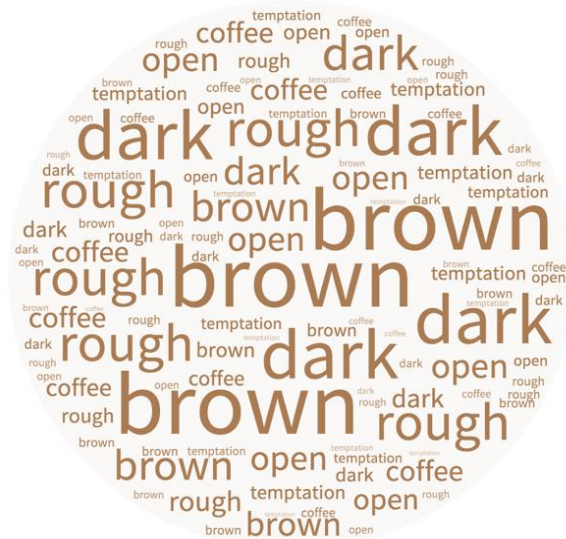


Figure 1. Evaluation of the first logo

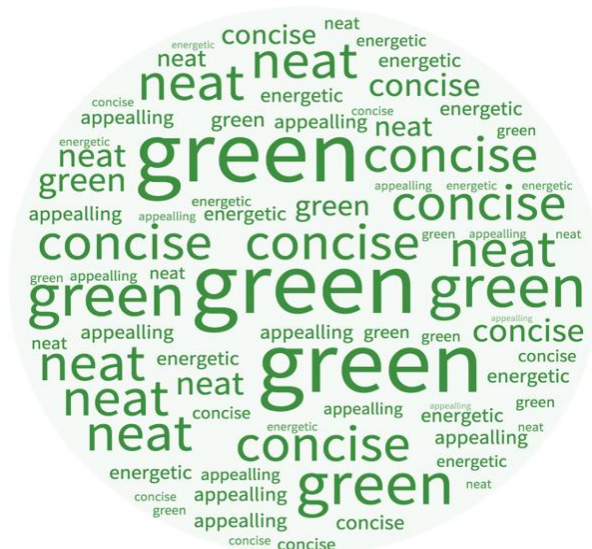


Figure 2. Evaluation of the fourth logo

5. Relationship between the changes of Starbucks’s logo and the development of corporate culture

The changes in Starbucks’s logo are more consistent with the development of corporate culture, which is mainly reflected in its management philosophy and core of corporate culture.

5.1. Evolution of Starbucks’s logo and its business philosophy

5.1.1. Leading consumers with an experiential cultural atmosphere

Unlike the common brown coffee logo, Starbucks’s logo changed into “leisurely green” from the second edition onwards, and the content of the logo has become more concise each time. The removal of the extra letters from the logo showed that the coffee shop is no longer just a place to drink coffee, but also to socialize and talk about the world. The smile of the double-tailed mermaid has gradually become more obvious throughout the years, which would make consumers feel more comfortable as if they are in a relaxed environment, and cleverly integrates experiential marketing with the unique corporate culture of Starbucks.

5.1.2. Green operation

Starbucks's logo gradually became greener each time. In addition to innovation, green also represents environmental protection, thus the changes reflect Starbucks's adherence to the concept of green operation. Recently, Starbucks has also taken actions to reflect its experience and concept of green operation, such as replacing all plastic straws with paper straws. Meanwhile, it has also launched the environmental Starbucks card and gave away environmental shopping bags in appealing the customers to use these shopping bags when buying and reduce the consumption of plastic bags.

5.2. Evolution of Starbucks's logo and the core of its corporate culture

The evolution of Starbucks's logo has further developed the core of its corporate culture, which is mainly reflected in four aspects which are corporate mission, corporate vision, corporate values, and corporate spirit.

5.2.1. Changes of Starbucks's logo and corporate mission

Starbucks's corporate mission is to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

The effect of the changes on the mission: Its logo combines green and white to tune people's feelings (a change in 2011); providing people a natural, fresh, romantic, and refreshing visual experience. The mysterious double-tailed mermaid from ancient Scandinavia in the 16th century is a symbol of a calm, natural mystery and with the vitality of the green as well as the eternal white, she will always glow with youth. Its fluent lines and conciseness do not break the elegant modelling. This shows the consumers that Starbucks today is still upholding a faithful fine service, working hard to brew a perfect cup of coffee for urban people who emphasize on enjoyment, leisure, and knowledge, which reflects the corporate mission of Starbucks.

5.2.2. Changes of Starbucks's logo and corporate vision

Starbucks's corporate vision is to create a moment of inspiration for every customer.

The effect of the changes on the vision: On the whole, Starbucks's logo has become more refined, simple, elegant, and neat in its contour. The continuous flowing lines give people a kind of rhythm, producing a strong sense of repetition, arrangement, and combination. The modeling element of the logo is rich with a strong modern decorative charm, giving people a noble and elegant aesthetic feeling, which not only delivers the form of beauty, but also highlights the inherent charm of the brand. The change in the logo is integrated with the light, luxurious, and comfortable atmosphere of Starbucks, suggesting that Starbucks does not only serves coffee, but also brings experience to its customers which other brands cannot do. In such a graceful environment, the creativity of customers is likely to be inspired. In this way, it can be said the change of the logo also combines with the corporate vision.

5.2.3. Changes of Starbucks's logo and corporate values

The change of Starbucks's logo also reflects corporate values, mainly in two aspects:

- (1) Creating a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcomed.

The effect of the changes on the first value: The siren's smile gradually magnified from 1971 to 1987, whereby the siren changed from having no facial expression to smiling. In the two subsequent logo changes, the siren's face gradually enlarged, and her smile became more obvious. This change makes people feel welcomed and at home.

- (2) Being present, connecting with transparency, dignity, and respect.

The effect of the changes on the second value: In the latest version of the logo, the mermaid was drawn with regular white lines, presenting an elegant, mysterious, and noble image, while the increasingly regular and symmetrical mermaid symbolizes dignity. The elegant and dignified image of the mermaid with the emphasized smile indicate Starbucks's value of respecting everyone.

5.2.4. Changes in Starbucks's logo and corporate spirit

- (1) Openness and inclusiveness

The effect of the changes on openness: The overall design of the logo became more and more abstract, in which the latest version of the logo consists of a number of similar arcs and geometries, which provide a consistent sense of abstraction on visual elements and a sense of stability and demure on the whole. These abstract designs highlight the growing openness of the company.

The effect of the changes on inclusiveness: At the same time, from the first logo to the second, the siren's hands changed from "looking as if holding its tail" to "looking as if her arms were opened" which perfectly reflects the enterprise's tolerance to various cultures.

- (2) Equality and diversity

The effect of the changes on equality: After processing the simple circular design, the logo gradually displays a symmetrical form on the whole. Repetition, symmetry, stability, and change are clearly visible, and the increasingly neat as well as symmetrical design reflects the equality that Starbucks promotes. The equality mentioned here is the equality between employees and customers.

The effect of the changes on diversity: At the same time, the dynamic beauty constructed by abstract geometry also reflects the diversity of Starbucks culture. The double tail of the mermaid has been divided into several small S-shaped curves horizontally. With the radian of the circle, they slowly extend to both sides with a sense of rhythm, just like the keys on the piano. They twist and play a cheerful movement, arranged in order. The gradual use of the form gives the linear double tail a rhythmic beauty, and this change highlights that the enterprise is not for a specific group, but for the whole world.

- (3) Innovation and fashion

The effect of the changes on innovation: Through innovative designs in the evolution of Starbucks's logo, the purpose of integrating new elements (such as the geometry of the mermaid's neat crown and the wavy horizontally two groups of equidistance curl) is to ensure that the brand continues with its traditional legacy, but at the same time to ensure that there is growth and development of the brand. These elements seem to be different from those of coffee, but they have been skillfully integrated with coffee, forming an indelible image in the hearts of consumers and reflecting the bold innovative spirit of Starbucks. In addition, in the logo, green has replaced the brown color, which was synonymous with coffee in the 1970s. In this way, there was a breakthrough in the narrow concept and definition of coffee among people. Green is between a cool color and a warm color, representing the fine traditions of Starbucks in the past and the mellow enjoyment that coffee brings in terms of sight, smell, and taste. The bold use of green as the standard color of the enterprise is undoubtedly an innovation.

The effect of the changes on fashion: From the evolution of Starbucks's logo, it can be appreciated that the logo closely follows the trend of the times in order to meet modern aesthetics. For example, the mermaid's body which is outlined by two S-shaped abstracts has been derived from the western aesthetic pursuit of a plump female body. The simplified outlines and the omission of the indecent

navel also cater to the public aesthetic; thus, the change of the logo reflects the enterprise's pursuit of fashion.

The above analysis shows that the changes in the logo reflect the development of the core of its corporate culture. **Figure 4** illustrates the reflection of the core of its corporate culture in the changes of the logo, and the evolution of the logo has further developed the core of its corporate culture.

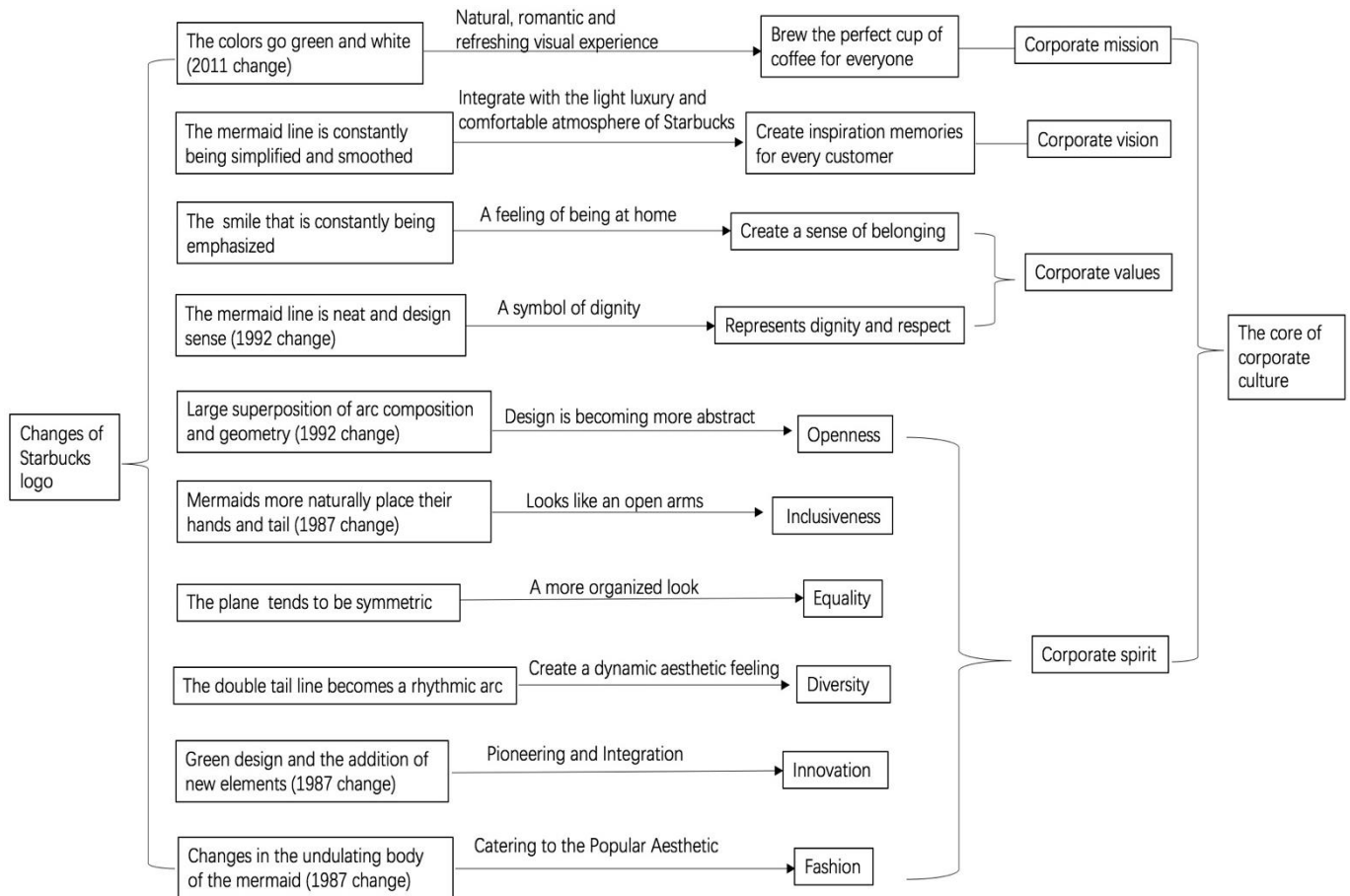


Figure 4. Reflection of the core of Starbucks's corporate culture in the changes of its logo

Disclosure statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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