

An Analysis of Visual Cognitive Differences in the Audi Logo's Century-long Evolution: A Quantitative Study Based on Generational Groups

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Abstract: The Audi logo has evolved over a century. This study investigates consumers' visual perceptions and purchase intentions regarding the 2016 and 2024 logos. Based on a survey of 123 respondents across generations, results reveal cognitive differences in "memorability", "technological sense", "heritage", and "indifference." Younger groups (1990s and 2000s) show more indifference toward the new logo, which emphasizes technology but weakens emotional connection and heritage. Findings suggest that balancing tradition with innovation is key to cross-generational recognition.

Keywords: Audi brand logo; Generational cognitive differences; Visual cognition; Brand impression; Emotional connection; Brand heritage; Cognitive transfer

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1. Introduction

Throughout its century-long development, Audi has consistently been driven by technological innovation, continuously pushing the boundaries of the automotive industry. The logo, as the brand's core visual element, serves as its "face", playing a crucial role in brand communication and image building. A simple, unique, and meaningful logo can leave a deep impression on consumers, evoke emotional resonance, and thus enhance brand recognition and reputation. Audi's four-ring logo, with its simple yet powerful design, has become one of the most recognizable symbols among global automotive brands ^[1-3].

With the passage of time and evolving consumer demands, the Audi logo has undergone numerous evolutions, each reflecting the brand's strategic adjustments and market positioning over different historical periods (**Figure 1**). From its initial complex design to its subsequent simplification and modernization, the evolution of the Audi logo is not only a visual innovation but also a symbol of the brand's pursuit of breakthroughs in products and strategy. In the digital age, Audi has refreshed the four-ring logo, adopting a pure black, flat design to give it a more technological feel, appealing to younger audiences.

In today's diverse society, consumers of different generations differ significantly in their values, lifestyles, and consumer attitudes ^[4]. These differences inevitably influence their visual perception and emotional response to brand logos. Whether the Audi logo's design is sufficiently novel and unique, and whether it satisfies consumers' pursuit of technology and innovation, will directly influence their perception and attitude toward the Audi brand ^[5-6]. This study aims to answer the following questions: How do different age groups perceive the different versions of the Audi logo (2016 and 2024)? Does the new (2024) logo effectively convey brand values such as technology and innovation? What is the relationship between brand experience and logo perception? Through in-depth research on these questions, this study will provide valuable insights for Audi's sustainable development in its electrification transformation and market competition.

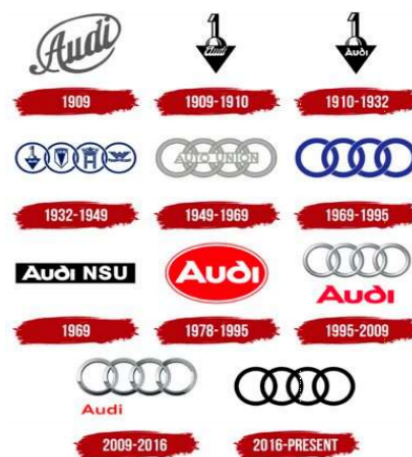


Figure 1. Changes in Audi's logo over the past century

2. Literature review

Brand logos—the brand's “first visual language”—combine identification, symbolism, and emotional projection. In semiotic terms (Barthes, 1967), they operate as sociocultural codes, while Gestalt principles show that recognition privileges wholeness, simplicity, and symmetry ^[1, 7].

Visual memory research identifies salience and uniqueness as the main routes to retention (Nelson, 1979), implying that effective marks are memorable, distinctive, symbolic, and culturally congruent. Yet the contemporary push toward simplification, though beneficial for digital media, can thin cultural depth ^[8]. In automotive branding, visual evolution reflects technology, market demand, and strategy: Tesla's shift from an ornate shield-and-wordmark to a pared-back metallic “T” (**Figure 2**) exemplifies minimalism aligned with a high-tech, future-mobility positioning ^[9].



Figure 2. Tesla logo changes

3. Research methods

This study adopted a quantitative approach, using a questionnaire survey of 123 respondents grouped by birth decade (1960s–2000s). The survey examined perceptions of the Audi logo (e.g., memorability, uniqueness, technological appeal, legacy, monotony, indifference), Audi ownership, purchase intentions, and general evaluations (aesthetics, preference). Data analysis involved cross-tabulations, correlation tests, and symmetry tests. Cross-tabulations compared frequency distributions across generations, correlation tests explored associations between age and logo preference, and symmetry tests assessed links between perceptual dimensions and other variables.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Consistency of logo internal dimensions

Attractiveness, beauty, memorability, and liking were highly correlated within logos from the same year ($r > 0.8$), confirming the internal consistency and scale reliability of logo evaluation (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.94$), as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Reliability statistics for the logo evaluation scale

Reliability statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	N of items
.948	.948	4

4.1.1. Logo perception difference analysis (2016 vs. 2024)

Memorability. For the 2016 logo, younger cohorts reported higher memorability (2000s: 64.7%; 1990s: 63.3%) than the 1980s cohort (52.4%); the 1960s cohort selected none ($n = 2$). This pattern suggests stronger recall among younger respondents, with the 1960s estimate unstable due to the very small sample (**Figure 3**). **Uniqueness.** Perceived uniqueness was highest in the 2000s cohort (49.0%), and lower in the 1990s (26.5%) and 1980s (23.8%), indicating greater sensitivity to the design among younger respondents. **Established brand.** Associations with “established/legacy” were strongest in the 1980s (47.6%) and 1990s (38.8%) cohorts, and weaker in the 2000s (15.7%), suggesting mid-age cohorts weigh heritage more heavily. **High-tech/monotonous/indifferent.** Each of these responses was low overall (~10%), implying limited high-tech associations and few extreme reactions to the 2016 mark. Proportions for the 1960s cohort fluctuate because $n = 2$.

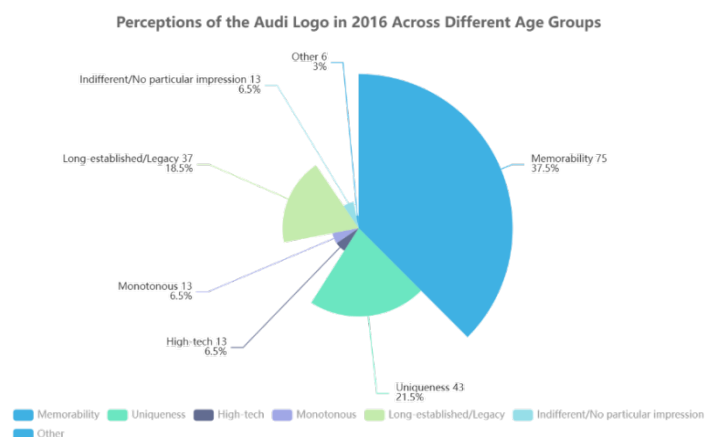


Figure 3. Perceptions of the Audi logo in 2016 across different age groups

4.1.2. Perception of the 2024 logo

Indifference: For the 2024 logo, indifference rose sharply: 49% of the 2000s and 49% of the 1990s cohorts reported being indifferent, versus 14% in the 1980s group (overall 43%). This suggests weaker salience and identity cues in the new mark; estimates for the 1960s cohort are volatile, given the very small *n* (**Figure 4**). Memorability among younger cohorts fell to 8%–14% (2000s: 7.8%; 1990s: 14.3%), whereas the 1980s cohort remained higher (47.6%). The pattern indicates that the 2024 logo has yet to establish lasting recall with its core younger audience. Perceptions of “high-tech” and “monotonous” were broadly similar across cohorts (~17%–23%), implying that while the mark signals technology, its minimalism is read by some as overly plain. “Long-established/legacy” associations declined markedly (~8% overall), indicating a reduced sense of heritage in the 2024 treatment.

In summary, relative to 2016, memorability dropped from ~61% to ~17%, while indifference increased from ~11% to 43%. Younger cohorts (1990s–2000s) are the most indifferent; the 1980s cohort is comparatively more tolerant. Although the 2024 design cues technology (18% agreement), heritage, and emotionality have weakened, creating a brand-equity gap. Implications: Strengthen identity elements and depth cues (e.g., motion/lighting, subtle gradients, restrained 3D) to boost memorability. Use a clean, high-tech system in digital touchpoints (website/app), while retaining tactile four-ring textures in physical media (showrooms/OOH) to balance tech and tradition. For younger cohorts, pair the logo with interactive activations (co-branded drops, AR/social filters). In brand storytelling, foreground the dual narrative of “100 years of Audi” and “future technology” to rebuild emotional linkage.

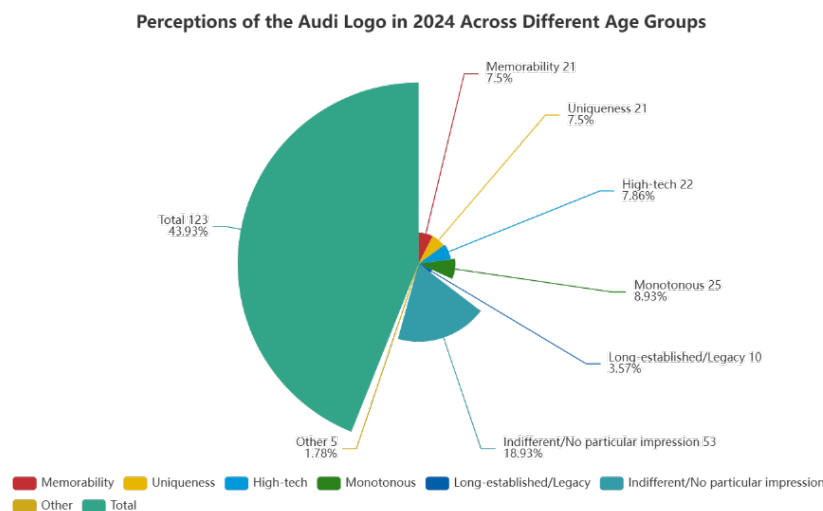


Figure 4. Perceptions of the Audi logo in 2024 across different age groups

4.2. The impact of brand ownership on purchase intention

Ownership experience strongly predicts future purchase. Among Audi owners (current or former), 86.7% reported that they would or would consider buying again, versus 65.2% among those who have never owned an Audi (**Table 4**). Non-owners constitute the majority of the sample (72.4%; ~89/123). Within this group, 47.2% indicated they would consider a future purchase (~42/89), and an additional ~18% indicated they would buy, together matching the 65.2% future-intention rate. For previous owners (15.4%; ~19/123), 57.9% (11/19) expressed repurchase consideration. For current owners (12.2%; ~15/123), 40% (6/15) stated they would buy, and 46.7% (7/15) would

consider buying again, totaling 86.7% positive intent.

These patterns underscore the reinforcing effect of brand experience on loyalty and highlight a sizable opportunity among non-owners. The results offer a quantitative basis for segmentation (owner vs. non-owner), CRM nurturing (leveraging positive prior experience), and targeted trade-in/upgrade incentives.

Table 4. Ownership and purchase intent of Audi brand vehicles by age group

Age cohort	Previously owned, not current	Currently own	Never owned	Row total
2000s	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (15.7%)	8 (15.7%)
1990s	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	6 (12.2%)	8 (16.3%)
1980s	2 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (28.6%)	8 (38.1%)
1960s	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Overall	3 (2.4%)	2 (1.6%)	20 (16.3%)	25 (20.3%)

5. Discussion of results

The findings reveal a clear tension between classicism and innovation in Audi’s visual identity. The 2016 four rings outperform the 2024 treatment on memorability and uniqueness, especially among younger cohorts (1990s–2000s). By contrast, the 2024 minimalist, tech-forward design elicits higher indifference ($\sim 43\%$ overall; 49% in the 1990s–2000s) and more “monotonous” attributions, indicating that salience and identity cues have weakened. This imbalance between technology and heritage aligns with Gestalt principles: effective marks must sustain holistic, culturally anchored associations rather than rely on reduction alone.

Framed within a three-tier brand-cognition model—recognition $\rightarrow$ memory $\rightarrow$ identification—the 2024 logo largely achieves only recognition. Memorability drops from $\sim 61\%$ (2016) to $\sim 17\%$ (2024), and emotional identification lags, particularly among younger audiences. These outcomes suggest that design minimalism needs complementary meaning-making devices (narrative, motion, depth cues) to carry heritage across generations.

Context matters: Although the 2024 system targets China, young consumers prioritize technological expressiveness and interaction over flat minimalism alone. Beyond the static mark, brand communication should therefore integrate interactive activations (e.g., AR filters, launch animations) and a dual narrative of “100 Years of Audi” $\times$ “Future Technology” to rebuild emotional linkage and cultural depth in local markets.

The results also underscore the behavioral role of experience: owners (current/former) show 86.7% positive repurchase intent versus 65.2% for non-owners, confirming that experience amplifies loyalty and should be leveraged in CRM and upgrade/trade-in programs. At the construct level, attractiveness, aesthetics, memorability, and liking move together ($r > 0.8$; $\alpha = 0.948$), indicating a coherent evaluative mechanism: when the logo succeeds on one of these dimensions, others tend to rise in tandem.

Implications: To close the gap, strengthen identity and depth cues (subtle motion/lighting, restrained gradients, tactile or 3D accents) to boost memorability, while keeping a clean digital system for UI contexts. In physical media, retain the textural heritage of the four rings to balance tech and tradition. For younger cohorts, pair the logo with interactive, participatory touchpoints and co-branded cultural moments. Strategically, treat the logo as part of an experience ecosystem where storytelling, channels, and owned experiences collectively deliver heritage and innovation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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