Is it possible to evaluate rebranding and debranding strategies applied in sports club logos with eye tracking?

É possível avaliar as estratégias de rebranding e debranding aplicadas em logotipos de clubes esportivos com o eye tracking?

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Abstract

One of the most effective elements used by brands in communicating with their target audiences is logos. Knowing the impressive power of logos, brands apply some strategies on their logos from time to time to differentiate themselves from their competitors. At this point, one of the preferred strategies is rebranding and the other is debranding. Rebranding is a strategy that aims to reposition in the minds of the target audience and involves radical changes. Debranding is a strategy that expresses the process of simplifying the brand by giving up using its own name. Both strategies are frequently used in brand logos, helping brands renew themselves. However, changes to logos are vital for brands. For this reason, brands should accurately analyze their target audience's expectations before applying changes to their logos. At this point, one of the experimental neuromarketing methods that can be used to determine which logos will be appreciated by the target audience is Eye Tracking.

Keywords: Logo. Rebranding. Debranding. Eye Tracking.

Resumo

Um dos elementos mais eficazes usados pelas marcas para se comunicar com seus públicos-alvo são os logotipos. Sabendo do poder impressionante dos logotipos, as marcas aplicam algumas estratégias em seus logotipos de tempos em tempos para se diferenciar dos concorrentes. Nesse momento, uma das estratégias preferidas é o rebranding e a outra é o

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**Palavras-chave:** Logotipo. Rebranding. Debranding. Eye Tracking.

**Introduction**

Human beings have been in a constant effort to meet their wishes and needs since their existence. When we look at today's society, it is seen that people meet these wishes and needs by purchasing a product or service through branded companies (Gobe, 2010). By nature, every person desires to buy the product or service that is best for her/him. So, how do people decide when purchasing a product or service? At this point, before making a decision for consumers, visual elements that create associations with the brand come to the fore (Batra, 2019; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). The perception of quality for the consumer is directly related to the visual image of the brand. Therefore, consumers are highly affected by the visual image of the brand in the process of developing an attitude towards a brand (Hur et al., 2020).

Some marketing strategies are used while building the visual image of a brand (Jin et al., 2019). There are two strategies discussed in the marketing literature in creating visual images: “Rebranding” and “Debranding”. Rebranding can be explained as a changes in the corporate identity of a brand to refresh the image it offers to its users/customers. Rebranding is a marketing strategy in which a new name, term, symbol, logo, design, concept or combination thereof is created for an established brand with the intention of developing a new, differentiated identity in the minds of consumers, investors, competitors, and other stakeholders (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Debranding is a marketing strategy to remove the manufacturers name from a product to appear less corporate, or to save on advertising. Decorporatizing is when a company removes its name from its logo for a marketing campaign in an attempt to make themselves appear less corporate and more personal (Parasuraman, 1983; Babin & Harris, 2023).
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The logo is one of the most important elements that reflect the visual image of the brands (Kim & Lim, 2019). The concept of logo, derived from the Latin word “logos” (Coman et al., 2021); it is defined as the visual elements formed by the distinctive combination of a brand-specific emblem and the brand name. Logos is a kind of language used by brands to communicate with their internal and external environment. For this reason, logo designs have a vital importance in reflecting the brand identity (Hien et al., 2020). Even if a logo is created by professional graphic designers, it does not mean that it will produce successful results for every brand. In this case, the fact that there are other components in the success of a logo comes to light. In addition to components such as the right name and the right color, the message that will reflect the mission and vision of the brand should be visualized in the best way (Dang, 2019). All these features described can be considered as a part of the efforts of brands to express themselves in visible part of the medallion. On the other side of the medallion, there are the expectations of the target audiences from the brands (Voorveld, 2019; Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). Quantitative, qualitative and experimental methods are used by researchers to evaluate these expectations. When the subject is the evaluation of a visual marketing item such as a logo, it is very important to use quantitative and qualitative methods as well as neuromarketing techniques in order to make the right determination regarding the selection process of the logo that will be most liked and preferred by consumers.

Neuromarketing, which is accepted as an advanced marketing technique, is a methodology based on measuring the unconscious neural and physiological responses of individuals to products, brands and advertisements in order to understand consumer decisions, preferences, motivations and attention and develop marketing strategies accordingly (Lee et al., 2007). Neuromarketing is defined as the transfer of data obtained from neurological research to the marketing discipline. In neuromarketing applications, it is possible to measure neural and electrical activities in the brain, eye and skin with techniques such as Functional Magnetic Imaging (fMRI), Electroencephalography (EEG), Eye Tracking and Galvanic Skin Conductivity (GSR) (Harris et al, 2018). However, only the Eye Tracking technique was mentioned in this study.

Current study is a conceptual study that explains the ways in which rebranding and debranding strategies applied in sports club logos can be evaluated by Eye Tracking technique. It is very important to reveal how target audiences evaluate a sports club logo by using neuromarketing techniques. What types of logos do individuals like? Are complex logos or simplified logos more interesting? The aim of this study is to explain the concepts of
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Logo Changing Strategies

Rebranding and debranding are marketing strategies that aim to create a new name, logo or different design for the brand in order to create a different perception/position among its competitors and stakeholders. It is possible to evaluate the concepts of rebranding and debranding as a model of change and development process (Keller, 2003; Laouisset, 2021). By using these strategies, it becomes easier for brands to keep up with the requirements of current conditions. It should also not be forgotten that the ability of a brand to maintain its popularity is directly proportional to its continuous development (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). For this reason, brands should continue to constantly improve themselves depending on the requirements of the age, that is, trends. The element in a brand that can be most clearly reflected in the indicators of development and change is logos. Logo is one of the visual elements that convey messages to the target audience about a brand's corporate mission, vision and ideology (Moisescu, 2006). Logo change helps brands convey a new message if they want to grow with the market, expand their product range, reach new target audiences or get away from the negative pressure of the previous logo (Walsh et al., 2010).

Rebranding and debranding practitioners think that a newly designed logo will create a positive attitude towards the brand among consumers and will be effective in purchasing the products and services of the relevant brand. However, some researchers state that logo changes do not always have a positive effect on consumers, on the contrary, they can have a negative effect. Miller et al. (2014) argued that logo changes can have both positive and negative consequences due to various facilitators and obstacles. A well-designed logo can positively affect brand performance. It is also emphasized that the logo is very important in terms of being easily recognized by the target audience and creating loyalty towards the brand (William et al., 2021). For this reason, it is important that any change to be implemented in any element of the brand should be carefully planned.
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Figure 1. Revenue of Juventus FC from 2008/09 to 2021/22
Source: Statista, 2023

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Juventus FC's annual revenue between the 2008-2009 season and the 2021-2022 season according to matchday, broadcasting and commercial. The total revenue in the 2016-2017 season, when the club logo was changed, increased noticeably compared to previous seasons. The only reason for this revenue increase is not limited to the logo change. However, it is an expected result that jersey purchases will increase with the logo change.

Rebranding Strategy

It is a well-known fact that brands are looking for creative solutions to maintain a competitive advantage in current conditions. For this reason, one of the methods frequently used by today's brands is the rebranding strategy. Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) defined the rebranding concept as “the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors”. Since the logo is the most visible element of a brand, it is probably the part where the rebranding strategy will have the most obvious reflections (Park et al., 2014; Joseph et al., 2021). In this context, the concept of rebranding discussed in this study is related to the innovations created by a brand in its logo (Marques et al., 2020).

It is seen that this strategy is also used in the field of sports, which is one of the fields that attracts the most attention of people. In addition to many sportswear brands, sports clubs such as baseball clubs, American football clubs, football clubs, basketball clubs and volleyball...
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Clubs also apply these and some similar strategies in their logos (Kosciolek, 2019; Baumer et al., 2023). The aim is to create a unique and easily recognizable visual identity with a refreshed (rebranded) logo that fans can identify with. Clubs want to change their logos to strengthen their brand image and be more permanent in the minds of their fans. In addition, redesigning or changing a logo can provide a positive brand image and economic gains to the brand (Ahn et al., 2012). In order to better explain this strategy, it is useful to benefit from practical applications in addition to the conceptual approach.

Figure 2. Applied Rebranding Strategy in Juventus FC's Logo
Source: 1000logos, 2023

Juventus FC, one of the most successful football clubs in the Italian Serie A, introduced its new logo with the slogan "more black, more white". The first logo (on the left) in Figure 1 is the logo used by Juventus FC between 2004 and 2007. The second logo (on the right) is the logo used between 2017-2020. It seems that a new approach was adopted by rebranding the club logo in 2017. The club’s iconic character, the heraldic bull, has been dispensed with. Additionally, the black-white vertical stripes and smooth gold arch in the logo are not included in the new logo. It is noteworthy that the new logo, unlike the previous one, is simpler and consists of the initial letter "J", designed in a dynamic form to resemble the club’s classic black-and-white striped jersey.

In essence, changing the logo is considered a very risky approach, because changing a brand’s logo means changing its language and skin. When considered from the perspective of a sports club, it is clear that there will be fans who will accept such a change as well as fans who will not. Considering sports clubs as commercial brands, they do not want to negatively affect the fans' loyalty to their clubs, in other words, consumer loyalty (Kosciolek, 2019). For this reason, clubs are expected to have a historical background in order to implement radical changes in their logos (Barnes, 2023). As a matter of fact, although some sports clubs have
the courage to implement this strategy, it is seen that some sports clubs with a hundred years of history do not deviate from their classical lines (Solomon et al., 2023). Among the main reasons for this hesitancy in logo changes is the lack of research on the impact of this change on sports fans/consumers. At this point, it is very important to find answers to the following questions.

- What are the attitudes of sports fans/consumers towards the logo change?
- How would they react to their club's logo changing if it would result in a better logo?
- How should the best logo be designed?

It is very important to find answers to the above-mentioned questions within a scientific framework. Measuring and understanding the expectations of sports fans regarding the logo to be rebranded is the key to the success of clubs. Today, it is known that some neuromarketing techniques are used to understand individuals' attitudes and expectations regarding a situation and to determine which objects/elements attract their attention the most (Sorrentino et al., 2023). It is possible to determine the logo that will attract the most attention of fans among the new logo designs that are considered to replace the old logo, using neuromarketing methods. Eye Tracking is one of the techniques that provides the most convenience in terms of application and evaluation.

**Debranding Strategy**

Debranding is defined as a company's deliberate elimination of its brand name in order to differentiate itself from its competitors (Parasuman, 1983; Kear et al., 2013). This strategy allows brands to appear in a less corporate and commercial structure (Stolzenburg-Wiemer, 2020). A company or organization needs to seriously consider a debranding strategy when its brand is not among the best brands in its industry or is looking to differentiate itself from other brands (Parasuman, 1983). Debranding strategy can be implemented in different ways. The first known application of the debranding strategy is to remove the brand name from the brand's products. Brands such as Nutella, Coca Cola and Tadelle sometimes remove their names from their packaging, which is an example of debranding (Glavey, 2019; Lindheim et al., 2021).
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Another example of a debranding strategy is “genericization”. Generic brands generally emerge in periods when there is little competition in the market. A generic brand is a well-known product brand that replaces the name of that product over time. People habitually pronounce the brand name instead of the product name (Parasuman, 1983). Gillette, who invented the razor in 1894, patented this product in 1904. The Gillette brand, which successfully implemented the promotion, advertising, marketing and promotion activities of the product at that time, became generic. In fact, it was conceptualized as "jilet" in Turkish.

Another debranding strategy is the process of removing the name in logos, that is, simplification. Brands removing the name from the logo and turning it into a symbol in order to establish a psychological bond with the consumer is a modern debranding strategy. Especially global brands prefer this method to ensure easy local adoption. This strategy is the most commonly used debranding method today (Laouisset, 2021).

Peters (1999) claimed that humans are visually thinking beings and underlined that a visual element means more than dozens of words. He emphasized that globalized brands such as Nike and Apple have logos that allow them to be easily recognized by everyone. It is known that customers pay most attention to the logo, apart from product and packaging design. Since logos are the visible face of brands, they must have a very strong design (César Machado et al., 2021). This strong design is sometimes as obvious as having a simple design that reflects the mission and vision (Dew et al., 2022).

The logo generally consists of the name of the institution-brand written in a special typography (logotype) as well as the sign-symbol (emblem) that is thought to evoke the brand. Some logos may not have an emblem. It can only be created with a font. In some cases, the brand name is not written over time. Because the brand's emblem has become sufficiently known about the brand's identity in the target audience's memory, and wherever it is seen as a symbol, it directly expresses the brand. It is known that global brands such as Nike, Adidas, Starbucks, McDonald's apply this strategy in their logos (Aydin & Belli, 2022).

Brands that design a new, simpler logo prefer to use the brand name next to the logo to emphasize which brand their newly designed logo belongs to. In the next stage, when the
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expected "recognition process - recognition of the logo" by the target audience occurs, the logo is simplified by removing the name of the brand in the logo. This strategy applied during the logo change process is called debranding (Wenzel, 2018; Stolzenburg-Wiemer, 2020).

Although sports clubs make changes to their logos in certain periods by applying a rebranding strategy, it is seen that they do not prefer the debranding strategy at the same rate (Easter et al., 2018). Because the debranding strategy carries some risks in terms of implementation (Laouisset, 2021). Debranding strategy is carried out by removing the brand's name and similar words from the logo (Wenzel, 2018). This brings with it the risk of not being recognized for many brands. However, it should not be forgotten that sports clubs are brands that are recognized by both their fans and non-fans due to their decades-old history. Therefore, the most suitable brands to realize the debranding strategy are sports clubs. However, it is beneficial to implement the debranding strategy gradually (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2008).

When Figure 2 is examined, it is possible to see that Juventus FC changed its logo very drastically by implementing a rebranding strategy in 2017. The club continued to use this rebranded logo together with the team name for 3 years. The aim here is for the target audience to recognize and adopt the newly implemented logo. When it was determined that the desired goal was achieved, the team name was removed from the logo (Figure 4). It becomes easier for the renewed, simplified and strengthened logo to be placed on the club's licensed products.

Why Do Sports Clubs Apply Rebranding and Debranding Strategy?

For sports brands, logos are considered a very important brand association tool (Williams & Son, 2022). Depending on the change and renewal process experienced, it is seen that almost all sports clubs have changed or redesigned their logos many times since their establishment (Klingmann, 2010). Among the reasons for these logo changes, there may be...
more than one situation such as changes in club management, inability to express the corporate image correctly, not reflecting corporate values such as mission and vision, insufficient originality, not keeping up with the era (Bauer et al., 2005). Apart from all these reasons, it may also want to enter a new formation process as a brand. Considering today's competitive conditions, another reason may be to expand the target audience or to endear the logo to people other than the target audience, and to create sympathy for the brand/club. (Wenzel, 2018).

Some of the fans are concerned about the change in the logo of the sports club they support (Cocieru et al., 2019). They want to see traditional characters in their team's logos that strongly express the club's heritage and status (King & Springwood, 2001). These characters are generally mythological and iconic characters that reflect the mission and vision of the club, some symbols specific to the city where the club is located, and, although rare, religious symbols and colors (Bouchet et al., 2013). Especially fanatical fans want to see one or more of these characters in the logo of the team they support (Wakeland, 2007). They do not accept changes to the logo that is completely devoid of these characters. For this reason, the rebranding and debranding strategy on a logo must be implemented professionally.

It is not enough that only people who are fans of the club like and show interest in the club logo (Abosag et al, 2012). The main thing for a brand's logo is to appreciate by everyone with an unbiased view (Wijaya, 2013). Each of the design elements such as icons, symbols, texts, colors and illustrations in club logos should be evaluated separately. Debranding and rebranding, which are among these design change strategies applied in logos, are used by many sports clubs today (Wenzel, 2018). Therefore, it is very important to determine what impact rebranding and debranding strategies have on target audiences.

**Eye Tracking**

Eye Tracking is one of the neuromarketing methods that determines the subjects’ eye movements and gaze position throughout time and task, and shows which points the eye focuses on with heat maps (Sargezeh et al., 2019). It helps determine which objects focus the subject’s visual attention on without any conditioning (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2006). There is a physiological connection between the eyes and the nervous system. Neurological and cognitive processes are effective in the formation of eye movements (Hodgson et al., 2019). In this context, eye movements offer some clues about the internal functioning mechanism of the brain. This technology has provided the opportunity to study many fields such as
psychology, medicine and health, neurosciences, marketing, mathematics and computer science, other social sciences and education (Carter & Luke, 2020).

Eye Tracking is currently very flexible, easy to use and suitable for a variety of applications. Nowadays, it is seen as very important, especially for brands with commercial concerns. The most exciting and remarkable applications in this regard appear in the field of marketing (Maughan, 2007).

Subjects in eye-tracking studies do not report any discomfort and often forget that their eyes are being monitored. This allows the observation to be close to natural behavior. Eye Tracking techniques offer the opportunity to examine consumer reactions to marketing and advertising tools in scientific steps. Eye Tracking technology can provide solid and original answers to questions that are valuable to brands. It can guide brands on a vital issue such as logo change. The question of which logo is more eye-catching can be answered with an experimental method.

Sports clubs that are considering implementing a rebranding or debranding strategy in their logos should first create professionally designed alternative logo options. While creating these options, the information stated under the heading of rebranding and debranding should not be ignored. As the next step, a task should be created that includes logo options (Johnson & Misiaszek, 2022). This task should be applied to a sufficient sample group to determine which logo is the most striking. The data obtained shows the researchers which logo the subjects looked at first and which logo they spent the most time on. After the task is completed, it can be said that only one solution with the same features (for example, a mug) will be given to the subjects for participating in the experiment. Subjects may be asked to choose a glass and take it for themselves. Thus, based on the data obtained through Eye Tracking measurements, it can be tested whether the logo that attracts the most attention of a participant is the same as the logo on the product he/she prefers among the souvenirs. With this and similar tasks, it is possible to identify logos that attract the attention of the subjects. However, after these measurements, testing the consistency of the data obtained with qualitative or quantitative research methods will help establish confidence in Eye Tracking studies.

**Conclusion**

The logos used by brands are very important, because these logos are a reflection of their brand identities (Hynes, 2009; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Budelmann et al., 2010; Singla & Sharma, 2022). This also applies to sports clubs because sports clubs are a brands.
It is seen that sports clubs also implement some changes in their logos. These changes are defined as rebranding and debranding strategies in the marketing literature (Parasuraman, 1983; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2008; Wenzel, 2018; Laouisset, 2021). Sports clubs use these strategies in their logos to increase their brand identity and brand value. It is known that many clubs with a hundred-year-old corporate identity still use the logos of their early periods. Some of them change their logos very strictly by adapting to trends.

Sports clubs should try to learn the expectations of their fans before applying changes to their logos (Brandt & Kurscheidt, 2022). Implementing the most liked and desired logo plays a key role in achieving successful results. In fact, it is thought that a well-designed logo can be a pioneer in marketing products other than sports.

There are many different methods of evaluating design changes applied to logos, and Eye Tracking is one of them (Sargezeh al., 2019). Eye Tracking can be used as a method to determine which logo is paying attention.

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