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The Corporate Logo: An Exploration of the Logo through Infographics and Other Works

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THE CORPORATE LOGO: AN EXPLORATION OF THE LOGO THROUGH INFOGRAPHICS AND OTHER WORKS

A THESIS PRESENTED BY
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TO THE DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONORS

UNION COLLEGE
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Everywhere we go, we interact with logos in one way or another, whether it is the car we drive, the toothpaste we use, or even the water we buy, a logo is present throughout our every move. The logo can be defined as “a graphic mark or emblem commonly used by commercial enterprises, organizations and even individuals to aid and promote instant public recognition.” The logo has evolved over hundreds of years, and due to its continued presence in our lives, there are many facets of the logo that I chose to explore as the primary focus of my thesis. This information has been be presented in a series of information graphics, a term more commonly referred to as “infographics,” which can easily be described as any "visual image such as a chart or diagram used to represent information or data.”

Since it is clear that corporations use a logo as a form of representation to the public eye that is professional and recognizable, it is clear how important this one symbol can be for the overall success of the corporation. The whole concept of branding is a critical step in differentiating a company against its competitors, for example, “Red Bull’s two charging red bulls in front of a yellow sun differentiate it from numerous competing brands and signify the brand’s promise to provide energy.” The impact that one symbol can have on a corporation’s success was the primary influence for me to begin exploring various facets of the corporate logo.

In terms of displaying the information, infographics was chosen due to my ability to show off my graphic skills as well as display the information. From the authors who put

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infographics on the map, they described this form of representation as, “Information graphics are intended to explain how things really are.” There are many types of infographics, and we interact with this form of visual representation in many ways, for example, a map. A map is a visual representation of specific information in some sort of visual way; therefore, it can be considered an infographic. It is clear that infographics were the best way to display my thesis work due to the necessity to visually represent this complex research in a way where others would understand. These infographics symbolize the skills and knowledge I have gained in my studies of graphic design at Union by representing my research on logos as well as personifying my skills as an artist. These infographics provide a thorough outlook on the power of the logo, within our society, as well as globally.

My infographics were created using a variety of Adobe applications, but primarily through the use of Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop CS6. I have had thorough experience with these programs in the past from the multiple courses I have completed at Union where using these Adobe applications is required. I also have had past experience with the importance and power of the logo and branding on large corporations from my previous work experience in an advertising agency, where the success of a corporation’s branding within the public eye is in the direct hands of the agency. This work experience taught me the importance of how influential the logo can be on corporations worldwide, and was another motivating factor for me in choosing the topic of my senior thesis.

It was not until I signed up for the Topics in Digital Design course taught by Professor Fernando Orellana that I was able to discover my passion for logo design. This

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course introduced me to the Adobe Illustrator program, where I was given the opportunity to create logos, posters, and advertising campaigns for mock companies. Since taking this course, I have been captivated to the advertising field, as well as the idea of how much a logo can affect our everyday lives. This course covered topics such as logo design, branding, information architecture, package design, and an enhanced level of graphics that influenced me to pursue a profession into Art Direction. Professor Orellana was able to tailor this course towards a similar setting to that of an advertising agency, where a client would need branding and advertising techniques and artwork completed by a certain deadline. From here, I have been inspired to pursue a career in Art Direction, where this thesis will be the staple of my online portfolio that my future employers will see.

The first infographic that I made this winter was one that I call “Logo Time.” This infographic documents every logo that I have seen in one day. I did not realize how many logos we see in one day. From the second we open our eyes in the morning to the second we close them as we fall asleep at night, chances are, there is a logo that we see. I was given the inspiration to document this project as an infographic from David Airey’s book “Logo Design Love,” where Airey introduces his book:

“The average American sees 16,000 advertisements, logos, and labels in a day. To illustrate the constant presence of logos in our lives, I decided to spend the first few minutes of a typical working day photographing logos on the products I interact with, beginning from my morning alarm.”

This quotation from David Airey’s book was the motivating factor I had to turn this idea of the overabundance of logos that are present in our lives into an infographic. In preparation for this infographic, I set out one full day to collect and record how many logos I had seen. It can be inferred that it was nearly impossible to

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record every single logo seen in one day, so I tried to write down the ones that I physically interacted with. Along with only writing down the logos of the things I physically interacted with, as oppose to every logo that I saw, such as the million logos found in a grocery store alone, I also chose to only record each logo one time. For example, the minute I woke up I had seen my phone to turn off my alarm, so I wrote down the Apple logo, but since I look at my phone multiple times a day, I decided to only record the Apple logo as the first logo I saw. This decision to only use each logo once was premeditated in order to avoid a clutter of the same logo throughout the timeline, which would take away from the point of this infographic as a whole.

The overall outcome of this infographic was to show the public the immense amount of corporate logos we see in one day. From making this infographic, I even surprised myself at how many logos I interacted with within the first five minutes I was awake. To say that I was frightened by the logos that surround my daily life is an understatement, but what is even more frightening in my eyes, is the fact that I during my average day, I do not even recognize that I see any of these logos at all. In conclusion, it was not until I had taken the time to record the logos that I physically interact with down into an infographic that this idea of our overabundant corporate logo world was brought to my attention, and yet through this entire case study, I chose to not focus on the logos I see, only the logos I had interacted with. All in all, if it were possible to create an infographic showed the amount of logos I actually do see in one day, I would have to make an extraordinary effort to realize that a person
or a brand, which is represented through a logo, has created every single material object seen in our world.

After completing the infographic that describes the immense amount of logos that we interact with on a daily basis, I decided that a logical next step would be to do some research on the corporations whose logos I had interacted with. From this investigation, I discovered the astonishing facts behind the rapid corporation consolidation in our modern world. While looking for infographics that touched on this topic, I found one that displayed information on how much the corporate world of media has been consolidated through various acquisitions and mergers within the past 30 years. This infographic, designed in 2011, stated, "In 1983, 90% of American media was owned by 50 companies. In 2011, that same 90% is controlled by 6 companies." This one fact alone is what inspired me to continue investigating the acquisitions that have occurred among many of our leading corporations, and I then created my infographic of “Corporation Consolidation” based off this idea, and to a larger scale.

My next step in completing this infographic was to focus on the main areas where this corporation consolidation was the most prevalent. The four industries that I decided to focus on were banking, beverage, media, and automotive. Within each of these four groups, I then categorized these groups into subgroups of the major corporations that are prevalent in our country. For the media section, I focused on the Walt Disney Company and Viacom, two of the leading media corporations today. From these subgroups, I branched these companies into sections of the facets that they own, such as TV networks, Internet,

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content, etc. The most eye-opening industry that I focused on was banking, which was split up into the four “power dogs” of the banking industry: Citibank, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and J.P. Morgan Chase. From working on this section of the infographic, the understanding of how powerful these four banks are globally truly sank in.

The last two industries, automotive and beverage contain a great amount of acquisitions and merging’s over the past few decades as well. In the automotive world, the four largest corporations today are Volkswagen, Fiat, General Motors, and Toyota. While working on this infographic, it was very interesting to see which cars are advertised in a certain way, and are owned by a corporation that is very different from those advertisements, for example, Jeep, the “all American car” is owned by the Italian company, Fiat. Last but not least, my research on the beverage industry is what promoted a deeper look into Coca-Cola versus Pepsi, a topic, which I then explored as a completely separate infographic. Within this piece, I did not even have the allowable space to portray the incredible amount of companies that are owned by these two corporations, but I added the ones that stand out in my life the most. While working on the “Corporation Consolidation” infographic, I learned that while we see a variety of brands on a daily basis, this research shows which companies are truly controlling everything that we see, do, and buy.

Through the detailed research that I had completed thus far in regards to various aspects of the logo, I had found that a unifying factor among all logos is their uniqueness of color. While staring at a logo, I found that I never really paid attention to the color of the logo, more so just its overall design. Once I opened my eyes to its color, I realized that most of the large corporation logos that we see on a daily basis have reasoning behind why they chose the color they did. My interest in why certain colors are chosen to represent a brand
as opposed to any other color is described by the famous brand designer Alina Wheeler as, “Choosing a color for a new identity requires a core understanding of color theory, a clear vision of how the brand needs to be perceived and differentiated, and an ability to master consistency and meaning over a broad range of media.”7 Here, Wheeler has made it clear that when a logo is created to represent the brand, it is very important to have an understanding of color theory. This quotation stuck out to me because Wheeler touched on the importance of how a color of a logo can affect how the brand as a whole is perceived and differentiated. I used this basis of information as a model for my “Color Psychology” infographic, which goes through the various shades of 6 different colors, and shows which logos fall into those categories, as well as the meaning of those colors and their representation.

I began the infographic by finding five logos that stand out in our everyday lives and have immense amount of media coverage, and broke them down by color, and then even further by the specific RGB range that they fall in. The top of the infographic has all of the boxes that have the lightest RGB color and as you move down the column, the colors get darker. Wheeler continues to speak of the importance of the pigment of color within logos when she states, “Ensuring optimum reproduction of the brand color is an integral element of standards, and part of the challenge of unifying colors across packaging, printing, signage, and electronic media.”8 From Wheelers look on how colors can be represented through various mediums, I was able to analyze what each of these six colors psychologically represented through the media. It was here that I began to realize how

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difficult it could be for a corporation to choose a color for their logo that represents their brand as a whole, including their audience, mission statement, goals, and overall tone.

An example of how these colors are represented among certain brands, is a look into the color of blue, which from this infographic, it can be seen that blue has been psychologically researched to represent trust, dependability and strength. A logo that falls into this category is United Airlines, which now makes perfect sense because the most important aspect of any airline is to represent those three characteristics for its customers. Another example of how the color of a logo can represent the entire brand as a whole is the color green, which contains logos such as Whole Foods and Starbucks. The color green, which as research has shown represents peace, growth and health, are three characteristics that also represent both Starbucks and Whole Foods in the exact way that they intend. Whole Foods is a corporation that is known for providing optimum health and dependability among their food products, and Starbucks exudes a similar feeling as well.

Another extremely interesting aspect of the logo world to investigate is how the design of logos has evolved over the years to fit the brands' needs, as well as to portray a more modern look to fit the brands' current mission statement. I decided to choose brands that I felt had extremely iconic logos, and ones that anyone would recognize at first glance of my infographic. The fist logo that I researched was Pepsi, which was a logo that I knew had been around for quite awhile. The Pepsi logo has always carried its iconic red color within its logo transformations, but it was not until quite recently that they introduced white into their logo. Until 1940, Pepsi’s logo closely represented Coca-Cola due to their
similarities in cursive text, but in the 1960s, the bottle cap design was introduced. The next form of design for Pepsi was the circle that we see today with the white swirl, which has lasted the test of time for the past few decades, which portrays the logo’s modernity and gives it more of a three dimensional look.

NBC’s logo, which we now associate with a three-dimensional outline cutout of a peacock, did not have this look until the mid 1970s. Through much research with NBC’s logo history, the primary change that happened during the middle of the century was due to the requirement to have a logo which represented the increase in broadcast networking from solely radio networking. Aside from this updated change, the peacock was established as the official NBC logo in the 1970s, and has stayed this way ever since. Moving around the circular infographic onto Volkswagen, it is clear that this logo has seen quite a bit of historical transformations throughout the years. Volkswagen’s success during pre-WWII time period can be largely attributed to Adolf Hitler, who had desired a car brand for Germany to be invented that was affordable to everyone. The first logo contained the memorable “V” and “W” design, which was carried throughout the years, yet many attribute the rest of this design having a Nazi Swastika influence.

There were four other corporations’ logo transformations that I used to complete this infographic, and as one can see from the image, many of these logos have seen drastic changes over the decades. Overall, logos have transformed in many ways over the years, and a particular aspect that stuck out to me while working on this infographic, was the

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move towards taking the name of the brand out and relying solely on the logo, which can be seen with Pepsi, NBC, Starbucks, and many more brands. If the brand is known well enough by the general public, many corporations are taking their name out completely, which is an eye opening outlook on where we are moving in the future of logos.

The last infographic that I chose to make was in response to the “Cola Wars,” which is the constant competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Within this infographic, I compared a variety of statistics between the two brands, including their international presence, annual revenue, employees, number of brands, and much more. One thing that I learned from creating this graphic was that with the exception of a few statistics here and there, both of the brands are pretty equal. I was extremely surprised to see the amount of brands that these two powerhouses own separately. To name a few, Coca-Cola has acquired companies such as Bacardi, Dasani, Fanta, Honest Ade, Minute Maid, Powerade, and much more.11

On the other hand, Pepsi has an extremely impressive list of companies that they have acquired over the years as well. Similar to the research I had completed with Coca-Cola, a fraction of the companies that are now owned by Pepsi include: Mountain Dew, Sierra Mist, SOBE, AMP Energy, IZZE, Propel, Aquafina, Brisk, Mug, and Lipton.12 My motivation on creating an infographic that compared these two companies went further than my interest in the brands themselves. The true reasoning that inspired me was that when someone buys a Coca-Cola or Pepsi bottle, they are not giving money just to the

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company of Pepsi, they are fueling a powerhouse of a corporation, one that owns and controls an incredible amount of the entire beverage market.

In order to make a series of infographics that I felt would make a good representation of my final thesis project, I conducted a lot of research on what constitutes as a successful infographic. Through much research, I have found that a successful infographic:

“Infographics are visualizations of data that can help audiences quickly grasp complex sets of ideas. The key to a good infographic design is to find interesting and reliable data, and then come up with an awesome blueprint and visual story to deliver the underlying message.... You can find good infographics at the intersection of reliable data, compelling story telling, and creative design and viral share ability”

This form of displaying information needs to have a visual component, through color-coding and graphics, along with the content itself, as well as the knowledge behind the content described. Throughout this process of creating infographics based on a set of information, I found the biggest challenge was being able take the incredible amount of information and research collected, and present this in a way that clearly displays the information in order for people to understand the content, all while making it aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

Another major challenge that I came across with these infographics was being able to design them all in a different and unique way. It was very easy for me to choose a design for a certain infographic that I enjoyed working with, and wanting to use that same ‘template’ for the rest of the work. When I made my first infographic, which was the “logo time” piece, I thought that the only way to make other infographics was to follow the same...

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vertical pattern. Being able to break this mold, and be inspired to create a variety of these infographics with a unique look, but also a design that made sense with the information that was being presented, was extremely difficult. For example, for the “logo time” infographic, it would not have necessarily have made sense for me to display this information with block text surrounded by different shapes of boxes in a rectangular way, whereas when displaying the comparison between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, this design layout worked best.

Once having explored the various facets of logos through infographics, I chose to dive into creating graphics that reflect other topics that I am interested in. From this exploration of other topics of interest, I began to create work that reflects many aspects of my life. The first graphic I designed after the infographics were complete was a piece of work that displays a quote from a song that is very important to me. This song, called "Rather Be" by Clean Bandit feat. Jess Glynne similarly reflects the relationship that I have with my longtime boyfriend. Specifically, I have gravitated to the quote "If you gave me a chance I would take it, it’s a shot in the dark but I’ll make it, know with all of your heart, you can’t shame me, when I am with you, there’s no place I’d rather be." Within this quote, I have always immediately thought of the relationship that I share with my boyfriend due to how long we have been dating and the relationship that we share. Within this graphic, I used the quotes in the foreground to mix in with the background, with somewhat of a romantic theme. Everyone has someone that they truly care about, and aside to of course my family; my boyfriend is the next most important person in my life. In light of this, I felt that it was only necessary to create an aspect of my thesis that focused on those who are important to me.
There is a certain aspect of song quotes, and any quote in general that I have always loved. I find myself always looking at quotes and how they are visually displayed on many graphic-inspired websites such as pinterest.com and behance.net. Both of these websites, among many more are outlets for me, not only for graphic design inspiration, but also for ideas that I often use to design quotes in a visually pleasing way in my free time. The way that words can be displayed on a page, along with other graphic influences is a very important skill to learn for the field that I will be entering after my college life. Advertising, specifically Art Direction, is tailored around how to display an image in a successful way to the public, and I feel that light of this requirement, I have chosen to practice this through the display of quotations in an aesthetic way.

While continuing a reflection of who I am as a person through graphic design, a significant defining aspect of my life is the fact that I am from Chicago. From moving away from Chicago at 14 to attend boarding school in Connecticut, to choosing a college in upstate New York, I have always felt the need to express how great of a city Chicago is to others around me. This feeling had inspired me to represent my home city within a graphic to present as my thesis. Within this graphic, I have made the skyline the center of focus, and in order to keep a clean and simple approach to the artwork itself, I have added the three letters “CHI” into the graphic to specify which city the graphic is about. Within this piece, I am able to convey a look of idolization to the city, with somewhat of a propaganda poster feel, as well as show others how beautiful the skyline truly is throughout Chicago.

Aside from my love for Chicago as I have mentioned, the whole concept of traveling has been somewhat of a defining aspect of my life. Due to my consistent need to explore new places and see as many places in the world as possible, it was only fitting that I make a
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graphic visual representing a few of my favorite places where I have traveled. I have made a collection of four pieces, which go together under the traveling theme, and each one of these spots has a special meaning to me personally. In order to make all of these graphic designs look in unison, these pieces primary focus is the airport code specific to that city as the center of the work. The four places which I have traveled to that have resonated with me in an important way are Florence Italy, Sao Paulo Brazil, Bali in Indonesia, and Paris France. I traveled to Florence, Italy for a full term abroad my junior year at Union and had one of the most defining moments of my life as I traveled to various countries and was able to see Europe without my parents. Sao Paulo, Brazil is another very important city in my life because since my father was born and raised in that city, I was sent down there alone on my 15th birthday to celebrate with family, because turning 15 in their culture is a very big deal. This trip to Brazil was the first trip I had traveled alone.

Traveling to Bali, Indonesia was a life changing experience because I was able to travel halfway around the world and experience a culture that is polar-opposite of how I have been raised. Within this piece, I wanted to display the incredible colors that stuck out to me that are a part of their culture, but within keeping of the design template that I had created. The Balinese culture was extremely beautiful and unique, and by making a piece that symbolizes how important my experience was there to me. While I was in Bali, I was able to discover more of myself than I ever had in the past. Namely, I realized what it takes for me to be happy, and I could not be more grateful for my time spent there. Last but not least, I created a piece that followed this same template for Paris. The city of Paris is important to me because this is where I truly discovered my love for art. While in Paris, I was on a mini term through Union and it was for drawing. Up until this moment, I was very
uneasy about officially declaring myself as an art major, and I took this time in Paris to figure out if it was for me. We spent almost every day drawing in the Louvre, and I would have been crazy to not fall in love with the art culture from this trip. I chose to dedicate a piece to this trip, because if it were not for Paris, I would not be an art major today.

Another very important aspect of my life is exercise. If I am not going for a run, training for a race somewhere, on a bike or on my way to yoga, then I am not truly happy. There is nothing I enjoy more, than going for a bike ride, whether that be in a city or through the countryside, so I decided to use biking as a staple for the piece “bike.” While working on the graphic for the bike, I decided to use the skyline of Chicago as the background, because Chicago is the city where I will be moving after gradation and starting my next chapter in life. I look forward to using my bike to get to and from work, as well as to basically any destination in within the city limits. I chose to superimpose the word GO behind the tires of the bike to symbolize my “go for it” way of thinking, whether that is for exercise, my work mentality, or any other aspect of my life.

While looking ahead to my life outside of Union, I have made the decision to work for an advertising agency in Chicago as an art director. The advertising world is nothing less of intimidating, and as I get ready for this next step in my life, I have been trying not to overwhelm myself. A quote that has gotten me through to this point is “Great Things Never Come From Comfort Zones.” This quote embodies a mentality that I have been trying to carry with me as I enter an exciting, yet very intimidating time in my life. From having the anxiety of deadlines constantly being due, as well as the feeling of being at the bottom of the working chain, I have used this quote to help step back and realize that if I want to achieve my dream of becoming a creative director for an advertising agency, this is the first
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step. My comfort zone has been Union for the past four years, and as I leave here to try something new, this quote will be with me wherever I go.

The last piece of work that I have made to complete my collection for my thesis project is a piece that shows two headphones intersecting in opposite directions, similar to the official Chanel logo. I made this graphic, and intentionally made it my last piece, in the hopes of combining my concentration on logos seen from the beginning of my thesis project, along with the focus on graphics based on my on personal life. Within this graphic, I have two headphones as the center focus of the piece, in light of importance that music has on my everyday life. Whether I am walking to class, going for a run, working on thesis, or need a mental break, I use music to get me through my everyday activities. The Chanel logo, among many high fashion logos, is such an idolized figure in our American society. This logo, as well as logos such as Louis Vuitton, or Gucci, has clouded our perception of what fashion should be. I feel that it is important to look at these logos and realize what they truly represent. I feel that the Chanel logo represents nothing more than your average clothing brand, but it was not until I dissected the logo and manipulated it into what I thought was a good piece for my thesis collection, that I began to realize that this logo, which represents only one brand, should not be so idolized in my head.

It is hard to say everything that I have learned from this thesis project as I conclude. From the incredible amount of information that I have gained from corporations and their branding, to my discovery of who I really am as a person through digital artwork, I could not be more pleased with how my project turned out. This investigation of logos taught me how much corporations have hid from the general public in terms of whom they have acquired, and how they have done so. There was quite a bit of information that I had
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intended on incorporating into my thesis, especially in the “Corporation Consolidation” piece, but certain industries refuse to disclose the information that I needed. Not only did this research make me consider what more I do not know about these mega brands, this thesis project has made me extremely fearful of the future. I was appalled at how many logos I interact with daily, and even the brands that I thought were privately held, were actually bought out by a larger corporation years ago. As I sit here, I begin to wonder if the small business America that started the foundation of an American dream will continue to exist. Aside from my logo work, which I will continue to work on after college, it was extremely fulfilling to create artwork for fun. I never thought of my thesis as a course I had to take, in fact it was a part of my day that I looked forward to.

I would like to give a special thanks to my thesis advisor, Fernando Orellana, for guiding me to this direction, my parents, for funding my studies and being incredibly supportive of me being an art major, and of course to Union College for giving me the opportunity to take these past 6 months to complete this research.
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