

The Impact of Letter Case Differences in Brand Logos on Consumer Attitudes

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Abstract— This study delves into the influence of letter case in textual brand logos on consumer attitudes, a topic often overlooked in existing research on brand perception. Through 2 experiments, this study tested the influence of case letter in brand logos on consumer attitudes, and to measure the participants' power perceptions, to verify the mediation effect. Also, this study examined the moderating effect of brand luxury perceptions on the case letter in brand logos on consumer attitudes. On this basis, a research model was constructed. The study confirmed that the case of letters affects consumers' power perception, which further influences their attitude towards the brand, and this effect is moderated by the brand's luxury level. The study sheds light on the complexities of consumer responses to letter case in brand design, offering valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize brand communication strategies.

Keywords: Brand Logos, Consumer Attitudes, Power Perception, Symbolic Association

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the world's largest telecommunications operator, AT&T, changed its brand logo from the lowercase letter (at&t) to the uppercase letter (AT&T). International well-known enterprises such as Walmart, Amazon, and BestBuy have also adjusted the letter case in their brand logos multiple times in history. Existing theories have focused on the impact of the overall elements of brand logos, such as color ^[1], shape size ^[2], clarity ^[3] and border ^[4] on consumer perception, yet there are hardly any studies focusing on the impact of letter case in textual brand logos on consumer attitudes. In addition, existing theories have three shortcomings: First, some studies attribute the influence mechanism of letter case to reading fluency ^[5], believing that uppercase letters will reduce reading efficiency and affect reader behavior, and that this effect will become insignificant as sentences shorten. However, other studies have found that uppercase letter logos are more recognizable and memorable than lowercase letter logos ^[6], and brand logos are often quite short. It is clear that the existing theoretical mechanisms are contradictory and do not apply to brand logos. Second, previous studies can only explain consumers' preference for lowercase letters ^[7], but cannot explain why sometimes consumers also like uppercase letter logos. Third, due to the lack of relevant studies, the boundaries of consumers' preference for letter case in brand logos are still unclear.

To address these three shortcomings, this study mainly answers three questions: 1. How does the letter case in brand logos influence consumer attitudes? 2. What is the underlying psychological mechanism? 3. For what types of brands are uppercase/lowercase letter logos respectively suitable?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Symbolic Association and Letter Case

Symbolic association refers to the conjectures consumers make about attributes that do not belong to the brand's appearance in brand symbols ^[8]. The symbolic meanings embedded in brand symbols can trigger various associations in consumers, and the symbolic associations of brand logos (such as pronunciation and shape) can affect consumers' perception and evaluation of the brand ^[3]. For example, Fajardo et. al pointed out that font borders can make consumers feel constrained ^[4]. Hagtvedt found that blurry fonts can make consumers perceive brand risk, but can enhance their evaluation of the brand's innovativeness ^[3].

The font design in brand logos plays a crucial role in corporate image communication ^[3]. It not only affects readability and memorability ^[6], but also shapes the corresponding strategic image for the enterprise ^[9]. Therefore, many brands choose text as the main body of the brand logo, such as Adidas and Nike. According to symbolic theory, the typeface of the brand can affect consumers' perception of brand characteristics, for example, using rounded letters will make consumers think that the brand has a more feminine tendency ^[10]. Although existing research confirms that reading lowercase letters is more fluent and friendlier, it may not apply to short texts such as brand logos.

Given the slower reading speed and shorter information length per reading for individuals with visual impairments, Arditi and Cho found that uppercase letters are actually easier for them to read ^[11]. Uppercase letters can also help skimming readers to quickly get information and form memories. In daily life, uppercase letters are usually used at the beginning of sentences and at the beginning of proper nouns ^[12]; in certain special occasions, such as titles, warnings, and reminders (like NO SMOKING!); in formal official documents ^[13]; in comics, uppercase letters are generally used to express intense emotions (like AHHHHH!). In the experience of consumers, content displayed in uppercase letters is often more important, therefore consumers will pay more attention to uppercase content, and perceive it to be more authoritative and credible ^[6, 14]. In sum, compared to lowercase letters, uppercase letters appear sharper visually, which not only makes the brand more visually attractive ^[12], but also makes the brand appear more persuasive and stronger ^[15], and possess higher

brand value ^[16]. This study proposes:

H1: Compared to brand logos with lowercase letters, brand logos with uppercase letters will generate more positive attitudes from consumers

B. Letter Case and Power Perception

Power refers to an individual's ability to control scarce resources in social interactions, and power perception refers to the outside world's perception of an individual's desire to control the environment ^[17]. In social interactions, people perceive others' power based on factors such as their appearance or behavior (such as height and voice) ^[17, 18]. This perception may be biased. Even if the individual does not have actual power, others may still perceive that the individual has the desire to display power based on various clues (such as appearance, voice, etc.) ^[17].

Similarly to interpersonal relationships, consumers perceive the brand's power through various brand characteristics. In consumers' cognition, if elements related to high authority and status are incorporated into brand characteristics, or if a willingness to persuade is displayed, consumers will perceive the brand's power ^[14]. The use of uppercase letters often highlights, emphasizes, and warns, showing solemnity, formality and professional reliability, so brands using uppercase logos are perceived to have a higher power. While lowercase letters are considered to be gentle and friendly, more suitable for use in feminine products such as perfumes, their authority and oppressiveness are lower ^[19, 20]. Therefore, brands using lowercase logos are considered to have a low power. Consumers' power perception of this brand will greatly affect their attitude towards the brand.

In summary, displaying power can bring competitive advantages and obtain more resources for individuals ^[21]. Tiedens and Fragale found that leaders who often display power are more convincing to the public ^[22]. Pitt et al. pointed out that salespeople who display high power (such as those with loud voices, or tall salespeople) can gain more respect from consumers, thereby enhancing consumers' purchase intentions ^[23]. Since uppercase letters are often used compulsorily, such as formal official documents ^[13] or compulsory warning slogans ^[6], therefore, when using uppercase letter in brands, consumers will have similar persuasive and strong power perceptions, triggering associations related to brand power, and thereby affecting consumers' brand attitudes. Based on the above, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H2: Power perception plays a mediating role between the letter case of the brand logo and consumer attitudes. Brand logos with uppercase letters (vs. lowercase letters) will make consumers have a higher power perception, and thus make consumers have a more positive attitude towards the brand.

C. The Moderating Effect of Brand Luxury Perceptions

Brand luxury perceptions refers to the proportion of a product's social value in its total value as perceived by consumers ^[24]. Epley et al. believe that when consumers evaluate products, they form a first impression based on the "social class of the brand" ^[25]. Kim and Kramer further proved that consumers' judgments about the "brand status" would affect their evaluation standards for the product ^[26]. Refer to the research of Fiske et al. ^[27], this study considers the brand luxury perceptions as a specific manifestation of brand status.

In consumers' cognition, compared with general brands, luxury brands have stronger brand power and higher discourse power ^[28]. However, it is worth noting that showing a power does not necessarily lead to the brand luxury perception or the improvement of social class ^[29]. For example, managers who do not have a high status themselves display power, which does not enhance the external perception of their status, but instead has a negative effect ^[30]. If the brand displays power in an inappropriate situation, it will also lead to consumers' more negative brand attitudes and lower perceptions of social class ^[14, 31].

In external cognition, individuals with low social status do not have the ability to lead effectively, and they have a low chance of success even if they ignore the opinions of others ^[30]. At the same time, displaying power may bring negative responses from others, and the outside world generally believes that individuals with low social status do not have enough social chips to deal with these responses ^[29]. Therefore, for individuals with low social status, showing power will be perceived as "bluffing" or "breaking the rules", leading to negative evaluations from society. At the same time, power display is a way to show their own social chips and status wealth, which can help individuals with high social status further improve their own status ^[17]. A similar effect exists in brands. Consumers' brand luxury perceptions will affect their standards for evaluating products ^[32]. This study posits:

H3: Brand luxury perceptions moderates the mediating effect of power perceptions. For brands with high brand luxury perceptions, the effect of uppercase letters (vs. lowercase letters) logos on making consumers have a positive attitude through high power perceptions is strengthened; for brands with low brand luxury perceptions, the effect of lowercase letters (vs. uppercase letters) logos on making consumers have a positive attitude through low power perceptions is strengthened.

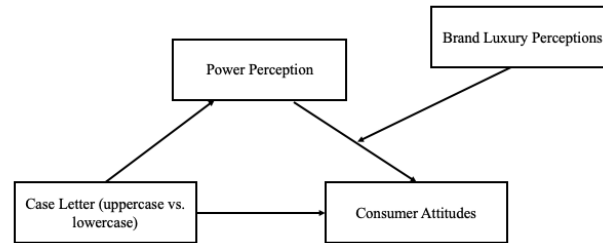


Figure 1. Research Framework of this Study

III. MEHOD

This study includes 2 experiments. The purpose of Experiment 1 is to test the influence of case letter in brand logos on consumer attitudes, and to measure the participants' power perceptions, to verify the mediation effect. The purpose of Experiment 2 was to examine the moderating effect of brand luxury perceptions on the case letter in brand logos on consumer attitudes.

A. Experiment 1: The Influence of Case Letter Brand Logo on Consumer Attitude and Psychological Mediation

a. Participants

A total of 173 subjects participated in the experiment (53% female, $M_{age} = 21$ years, $SD = 4.52$ years). The subjects were mainly teachers and students of the university, with generally high study levels and basic English proficiency. The subjects viewed different stimuli on paper materials and answered the questions on the spot. The subjects were randomly divided into two groups to view different brand logo designs. The independent variable tested in this experiment is the case design of the logo, the dependent variable is the subjects' attitudes, and the mediating variable is the perceived brand power tendency.

b. Procedure

Dunis was chose as the fabricated brand name ($M_{familiarity} = 2.10$, $SD = .41$). Dunis was described as an insurance brand, and the word does not have any substantial meaning and is not similar to well-known brands. The pixel count of the letter logo was kept at the same level (280px x 265px) to avoid changes in consumer evaluations caused by size differences (shown in Figure 2). The participants were randomly divided into two groups (uppercase / lowercase letters), with 86 people in each group. After viewing different logo, the subjects were asked to report their attitudes towards the "Dunis" through a Likert's 7-point scale. The scale has 4 items: "You favor the use of the product in the advertisement", "It gives you positive associations about this product", "You think the use of the product in the advertisement is good", "You think the product will make people happy" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).



Figure 2. Design of Brand Logos in Experiment 1

The additional control variables in the experiment include the participants' familiarity with the brand name and design ($M_{uppercase} = 1.46$, $SD = 1.83$; $M_{lowercase} = 1.61$, $SD = 1.63$), brand awareness ($M_{uppercase} = 4.82$, $SD = 1.34$; $M_{lowercase} = 4.45$, $SD = 1.77$) and art perception ($M_{uppercase} = 4.12$, $SD = 1.57$; $M_{lowercase} = 3.96$, $SD = 1.86$). The results show that there are no significant differences between the two groups in the above variables. The measurement of the mediating variable was used power perceptions scale^[33] ($\alpha = .86$), including: "This logo makes me feel the power of the brand", "This logo makes me feel the control of the brand", "The font of this logo is relatively difficult to read", "The font of this logo makes me feel the importance of brand information" (1=strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree). Finally, the participants were asked to report their brand attitudes using a Likert 7-point scale.

c. Results and Discussion

First, H1 is verified. Compared to the participants who viewed the lowercase logo, the participants who viewed the uppercase logo showed a more positive attitude towards the brand ($M_{uppercase} = 4.61$, $SD = 1.88$ vs. $M_{lowercase} = 3.02$, $SD = 1.39$, $F(1, 171) = 5.27$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). In addition, the case of the letters is significantly related to the participants' power perception ($M_{uppercase} = 5.11$, $SD = 1.62$ vs. $M_{lowercase} = 3.15$, $SD = 1.59$, $F(1, 171) = 8.28$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$). Hayes (2018)'s method was used to test for mediation (5000 times, PROCESS Model4). The results show that both the direct

effect (*Direct effect* = .24, 95% CI [.07, .69]) and the indirect effect (*Indirect effect* = .45, 95% CI [.04, .05]) are significant, thus H2 is verified.

Through Experiment 1, the influence of case letter in logos on consumer attitudes and psychological mediation was verified. Using uppercase letter in the brand logo makes consumers feel persuaded, triggering associations related to the brand's power, making consumers more convinced and respectful of the brand, thereby improving consumers' attitudes towards the brand.

B. Experiment 2: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Luxury Degree on the Effect of Case Letter Brand Logo

a. Participants

169 participants joined in the Experiment 2 (44% female, $M_{age} = 36$ years, $SD = 8.38$ years). Among them, 68 were university students, 64 were working people outside the school (including employees in banks, education and training, civil servants, and retail, etc.), 31 were school faculty and staff, and 6 were unemployed.

b. Procedure

In Experiment 2, the fabricated clothing brand "ABC" was used. This brand name does not have any actual meaning and is not similar to well-known brands (see Figure 3). This experiment adopts a 2 (high vs. low perceived luxury) x 2 (uppercase vs. lowercase) design, and the 169 participants were randomly divided into four groups. They viewed different brand logo designs and text descriptions of brand luxury perceptions on the computer screen, and then filled out the power perceptions questionnaire. Finally, the participants were asked to report their attitudes towards the brand using a Likert 7-point scale.



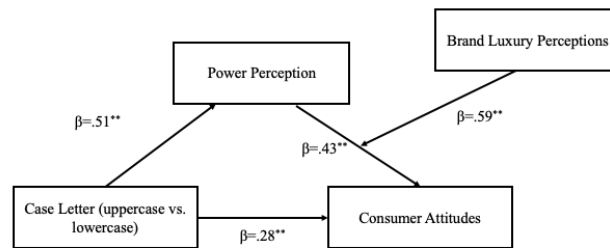
Figure 3. Design of Brand Logos in Experiment 2

The methods of Kirmani and Rao^[34] and Mishra et al.^[35] were used to explore brand luxury perceptions, emphasizing higher prices and grades in the description of high brand luxury perceptions, and emphasizing cost-effectiveness and mass positioning in the description of low brand luxury perceptions. The measurement of brand luxury perceptions referred to Ward and Dahl^[36]. The participants were asked to describe the brand luxury perceptions through a Likert 7-point scale, including liking (1=particularly dislike, 7=particularly like); distinctiveness (1=low distinctiveness, 7=high distinctiveness); product popularity (1=low popularity, 7=high popularity); and the degree of desire to be seen using this luxury item by others (1=no desire at all, 7=particularly desirous). Experiment 2 again tested the mediating role of power perception. The measurement used the power perceptions scale^[33], with the same items as Experiment 1. The selection of additional control variables (familiarity, art perceptions, and logo attention) was the same as Experiment 1. In addition, the difficulty of participants in reading the brand logo and the perceived importance of information was also measured to exclude their alternative mediating effects.

c. Results and Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 show that the case letters in the brand logo is significantly related to the participants' attitudes ($M_{uppercase} = 4.37$, $SD = 1.52$ vs. $M_{lowercase} = 3.02$, $SD = 1.72$, $F(1, 165) = 6.27$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$); there is a significant interaction effect between case letters and brand luxury perceptions, $F(1, 165) = 5.73$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The results show that in the high brand luxury perceptions, the uppercase letter logo makes consumers have a more positive attitude ($M_{uppercase} = 4.72$, $SD = .91$ vs. $M_{lowercase} = 2.41$, $SD = 1.74$, $F(1, 82) = 5.03$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$); while in the low brand luxury perceptions, the lowercase letter logo makes consumers have a more positive attitude ($M_{uppercase} = 3.03$, $SD = 1.47$ vs. $M_{lowercase} = 5.28$, $SD = 1.65$, $F(1, 83) = 7.39$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$).

Hayes's method^[37] was used to test the moderating effect (5000 times, PROCESS Model 14). This study used the case letters as the independent variable, consumer attitudes as the dependent variable, the sense of power as the mediating variable, and the brand luxury perceptions as the moderator. The resulting bias-corrected Bootstrapping confidence interval did not include 0, confirming the significant mediating effect of power perceptions, 95% CI [-.83, -.05], see Figure 4. In addition, the potential substitutive mediating effects of reading difficulty and luxury perception were also tested. Similarly, the mediating effects of the two variables were tested (5000 times, PROCESS Model 14). The results showed that the confidence intervals of information importance (95% CI [-.71, .04]) and reading difficulty (95% CI [-.89, .05]) both included 0, so the alternative mediating effects of these two variables were excluded.



Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Figure 4. The impact of case letters in brand logos on consumer attitudes: moderated mediating framework (n = 169)

IV. CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

The study confirmed that the case of letters affects consumers' power perception, which further influences their attitude towards the brand, and this effect is moderated by the brand's luxury level. Specifically, uppercase letters enhance consumers' perception of the brand's power, and high power perception is only beneficial for brands with a high perceived luxury level. For brands with a lower perceived luxury level, lowercase letters, which have a low power perception, are more suitable.

Firstly, this study innovatively focuses on the effect of case letters in brand logos and its psychological mechanism. The previous study of brand font focused on the overall recognizability, readability, or artistic design of the brand font and its impact on consumer attitudes [12, 38]. However, few study has focused on the relationship between the font type of case letters in logo and power perception and its impact on consumers. This study started with the extended meaning of case letters in English linguistics and literature, enhancing the interdisciplinary value of the research.

Secondly, this study innovatively chose power perception as the entry point at the visual stimulus, introducing interpersonal theory into study of brand perception. This study broadens the use of symbolic theory and expands the idea of related brand logo design.

Finally, this study confirmed that brand luxury perceptions affect consumers' preferences for case letters. Uppercase letters will enhance consumers' judgment of the brand's desire for control, which is consistent with people's understanding and expectations of high brand luxury perceptions, but it will have a negative impact on brands with low brand luxury perceptions. This conclusion links case letters with brand luxury perceptions for the first time, providing new ideas for marketing of luxury.

When choosing a design plan, companies should not only pursue aesthetics, but also consider product type, product purchasing scenarios, and consumer types, especially factors such as brand luxury perceptions, to decide whether to use uppercase or lowercase letters in the logo. Many companies today use a large number of uppercase letters in brand logos and advertising slogans, and even in corporate documents, to reflect a sense of formality. However, companies should also pay attention to the sense of power experienced by consumers in brand interactions due to the effect of case letters. The persuasive feeling brought by the sense of power and the sense of restriction on consumer freedom are beneficial in some scenarios, but they can cause consumers to have negative attitudes in some situations. Companies can strengthen their attention to consumers' power perception, such as the combination of color, size, and geometric elements in brand logos.

V. LIMITATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Firstly, future research can continue to explore more moderating variables in the effect of case letters. In different situations, consumers' demand and preference for the sense of power. Targeted discussions on these factors can help managers make more rational choices about the case of letters in their logos.

Secondly, this study only explored the impact of white and gray letters in brand logo design. However, in brand logo design, color and saturation are also important visual elements [1].

Although this study selected brands of insurance and clothing to respectively reflect service product brands and physical product brands, the types of products on the real market are diverse. Whether the conclusions are still applicable to more categories of brands needs further clarification. Finally, this study focuses on the behavior of Chinese consumers. Cultural differences can greatly affect consumers' preferences and behaviors, and Chinese consumers' understanding and standards of English slogans or pinyin differ from Western consumers. Therefore, future research can consider exploring the effect of case letters from a cultural perspective in more depth.

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