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Brands and Cultural Analysis

Arthur Asa Berger

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*This book is dedicated to my mentors: Maxwell Goldberg (English) and Ray
Ethan Torrey (Botany) at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst;
Marguerite Young (Writers' Workshop) and Gustav Bergmann (philosophy)
at the University of Iowa in Iowa City; and David Noble (History),
Mulford Q. Sibley (Political Science), and Ralph Ross (Humanities) at the
University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.*

FOREWORD

Arthur Berger has written close to 100 books. Maybe more. The subjects range from *Media and Communication Research Methods* to *the Academic Writer's Toolkit* to *the Genius of the Jewish Joke* to *Ads, Fads, & Consumer Culture*. Now, he brings his unique perspectives to the analysis and importance of brand “logos.” With “Branding: A Cultural Analysis,” Berger provides interesting, entertaining, and informative insights into the history and meaning of brands, branding, and their relationships to logos.

Who knew that “logo” was Greek for word? It was Greek to me. Or, that logos are not trademarks and vice versa. And so much more, relevant to understanding the important role of logos in the world around us. There is a fascinating analysis of the Starbuck logo, likening it to an iceberg with so many of its unconscious meanings and communications buried below the surface of that simple iconic drawing of a woman. A hidden number of cultural and societal meanings passed along with each exposure to the consumer. Berger explores this in some depth.

Logos are all-pervasive. In things, which surround us: every day and everywhere. From the moment we awake until we put our head down again on quite likely, “My Pillow.” We awake 6:45 AM and glance at the “Sony” clock radio. We go to wash our face with “L’Occitane en Provence” liquid soap. We put a “Polo” T on over our head and pull up our “Tommy Bahamas.” We perk up a pot of Starbuck’s, drive away in our “Mercedes” E300 and pull up to get a “Big Mac.” And, on and on throughout the day until we put our head down on our pillow and shut our eyes again.

Conceivably, we are interacting every minute of every day with thousands of brands and logos, some we own and use. Many more that we do

not. At least, not yet. It's hard to estimate the importance and influence that these little things called "logos" have on our lives and actions. But it is pervasive and it is profound.

It is also hard to believe that so many companies, with important products and brands, do not do nearly enough protect and connect this tool, which in many cases represents what the company may stand for most. Often, they do not utilize or coordinate their advertising, promotion, publicity, selling, and the other elements of the marketing mix to maximize and reinforce their company logo. Precious as it may be.

Why? So many reasons. No strategic direction from management. Too many folks in the communication and marketing approval process. Personnel turnover. NIH—new people want to put on their stamp. Ignorance, laziness, or stupidity. Or all three at once. This book provides ways to understand the importance to corporate and product positioning and communication of the value that the brand/logo should and can be. The very critical impact which it can have in the product or service selling process.

One of the many sagacious observations Berger makes is with his assessment of the Michelin Tire logo. A cartoon-like figure whose body is made up of layered tires. While this may be an eye-catching device and one which communicates both a "beckoning and friendliness," it does not convey what would seem to be the more relevant attributes for a tire—quality and/or safety. Both are high on the scale of consumer concerns in the purchase decision.

Contrast then, the Michelin logo with one of the greatest ever created: The Nike "Swoosh." Nike puts the "Swoosh" logo on virtually every product they market. They needn't do anymore because of the power that this logo radiates. It ubiquitously but quietly says that Nike, and everything that Nike makes, is "authentic sport." And, Nike supports their logo in every aspect of their marketing mix—advertising, brand event sponsorship, the most celebrated athlete endorsements, performance-oriented product development, store development and display, and on and on and on. The Nike logo is synonymous with "sports authenticity" and "sports authenticity" is synonymous with the Nike logo—and with Nike overall.

There is a wealth of knowledge that can be culled from reading this book. All sorts and sizes of companies will benefit from a deeper understanding of just how important their logo can and should be, and how to take steps to protect, preserve, and promulgate its use. Many I'm afraid may have to re-think how they have thought about their logo in the past.

Others will have to call the nearest brand and logo “expert” and order up a new one.

Founder and former Chief Executive Officer of
Goldberg Moser O’Neill

Fred Goldberg

Author of *The Insanity of Advertising*
(*Memoirs of a Mad Man*)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank Fred Goldberg for writing the preface to this book, Jeff Samuels for writing an insert on legal considerations relating to logos and trademarks, Roland Greenberg for his photo of the Golden Gate Bridge, and Dirk vom Lehn to express my appreciation to the authors of the many articles and books from who I've quoted in this book. There is, it turns out, a great deal of interest in the academic community as well as in the corporate world in brands and branding and I've learned a great deal from reading a number of articles and books on branding, logos, shopping, and consumer cultures. On June 12, 2019, there were 13,260,000,000 "results" on Google search for the word "brand" and approximately, 8000 books on brands at Amazon.com.

I have altered the paragraphing in some quotes to make them easier to read but I've not changed the meaning and I have deleted the numerous citations in some scholarly articles which make these articles difficult to follow and which are not of interest to the general reader. Brands, it turns out, are much more complicated than we might imagine and play a much larger role in society, culture, the economy, the political order, and our lives than most people imagine.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Fig. 1 Images of the author

Arthur Asa Berger is Professor Emeritus of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, where he taught between 1965 and 2003. He graduated in 1954 from the University of Massachusetts, where he majored in literature and philosophy. He received an MA degree in Journalism and Creative Writing from the University of Iowa in 1956. He was drafted shortly after graduating from Iowa and served in the US Army in the Military District of Washington in Washington DC, where he was a feature writer and speech writer in the District's Public Information Office. He also wrote about high school sports for the *Washington Post* on weekend evenings while in the Army. Berger spent a year touring Europe after he got out of the Army and then went to the

University of Minnesota, where he received a PhD in American Studies in 1965. He wrote his dissertation on the comic strip *Li'l Abner*. In 1963–1964, he received a Fulbright scholarship/grant to Italy and taught at the University of Milan. He spent a year as visiting professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1984 and two months in the fall of 2007 as visiting professor at the School of Hotel and Tourism, Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He spent a month lecturing at Jinan University in Guangzhou and ten days lecturing at Tsinghua University in Beijing in Spring, 2009. He spent a month in 2012 as a Fulbright Senior Specialist in Argentina, lecturing on semiotics and cultural criticism, a month in Minsk in 2014, and three weeks lecturing on semiotics and media in Iran in 2015. He is the author of more than 100 articles and more than 70 books on media, popular culture, humor, and tourism.

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