

Visual Expression and Application of Minimalist Design in Brand Logos

Wenjie Deng¹ & Xin Yao¹

¹ Nantong University, Nantong 226007, China

Correspondence: Xin Yao, Nantong University, Nantong 226007, China.

doi:10.63593/SAA.2026.05.06

Abstract

Brand logos communicate brand identity through graphic forms, colors, typography, and spatial composition. Minimalist design simplifies these elements to create clear and recognizable visual forms. However, excessive simplification may weaken brand distinctiveness, remove meaningful details, and create similarities between different logos. This paper examines the visual expression and practical application of minimalist design in brand logos, focusing on graphic simplification, color organization, typography, and composition. Representative brand logos are discussed to illustrate the relationship between visual simplicity and brand identity. The analysis also considers the challenges of visual homogenization, excessive simplification, and application across different media. Minimalist logo design should preserve distinctive visual features while reducing unnecessary decoration. Its artistic value depends on the coordination of visual clarity, symbolic meaning, brand identity, and practical adaptability.

Keywords: minimalist design, brand logo, visual expression, graphic simplification, brand identity

1. Introduction

A brand logo is an important component of visual identity. Through graphic symbols, colors, typography, and composition, it presents the characteristics of a brand and distinguishes it from other organizations, products, or services. A recognizable logo can be applied consistently to packaging, advertising, websites, and various communication materials, providing a visual connection between the brand and its different forms of expression. Its design requires careful consideration of both artistic qualities and practical functions.

Minimalist design emphasizes the reduction of unnecessary decoration and the organization of

clear visual relationships. In brand logo design, this approach is commonly expressed through simplified symbols, limited color combinations, concise typography, and balanced composition. These characteristics can make a logo visually coherent and suitable for different applications. However, simplicity does not necessarily produce a distinctive visual identity. When different brands adopt similar geometric forms and standardized typography, their logos may gradually lose individuality. Gao and Siek (2025) examine visual similarities between Chinese and international automobile logos, highlighting the importance of shape, color, iconography, and typography in brand differentiation.

The redesign of established logos presents

another challenge. Some decorative elements can be removed without changing the identity of a brand, while other details may have become closely associated with its history and recognizable appearance. Xiao et al. (2026) demonstrate the relevance of visual stability to consumer attitudes toward nostalgic brands. This relationship indicates that simplification should consider the visual continuity of established identities rather than treating every existing detail as unnecessary decoration.

Minimalist logo design involves a balance between visual reduction and meaningful preservation. Its value depends on whether a simplified composition can retain recognizable characteristics, communicate the intended identity, and function effectively across different media. Graphic forms, colors, typography, and spatial relationships must therefore be considered as interconnected components of the complete visual identity.

2. Minimalist Design and the Visual Characteristics of Brand Logos

Minimalist design is based on the selective use of visual elements. In graphic design, it emphasizes clear forms, restrained decoration, and the organization of visual information. Geometric shapes, limited color palettes, concise typography, and open space are commonly associated with minimalist expression. However, minimalism does not require every design to use the same visual style. A logo may contain irregular curves or distinctive lettering while remaining minimalist if its elements form a clear and unified composition.

The central principle of minimalist logo design is to preserve essential visual information while removing unnecessary details. A complicated illustration may contain numerous lines, textures, and decorative elements, but only a limited number of these features may be necessary to establish its recognizable appearance. Simplification can make the main characteristics more prominent by reducing visual competition between different elements. However, removing too many details may eliminate features that distinguish the logo from other graphic symbols.

The relationship between simplicity and distinctiveness is particularly important. A logo composed of a circle and a straight line may have a clear geometric structure, but this combination does not automatically establish an individual

visual identity. Its recognizable character may depend on the proportions, position, orientation, and relationship between the two shapes. Minimalist design requires careful treatment of these details because the remaining elements carry most of the visual information.

A minimalist logo also needs coherence between its different components. Graphic symbols, colors, typography, and spatial arrangements should establish a consistent visual character. A carefully constructed symbol may lose its unity when combined with inappropriate lettering or an excessive number of colors. Similarly, a concise wordmark may appear disconnected from an accompanying graphic if their proportions and stylistic characteristics differ substantially. Simplicity should be achieved through the coordination of the complete composition rather than through the independent reduction of individual elements.

Ding et al. (2025) identify symbolism, design style, texture, color palette, scalability, and composition as relevant dimensions in brand mark evaluation. These dimensions illustrate the importance of considering a logo as a complete visual form. Simplifying its graphic structure is only one aspect of the design process. The remaining elements must maintain recognizable relationships and contribute to the identity of the brand.

Minimalist design should also be distinguished from visual neutrality. A neutral design avoids strong stylistic characteristics, while a minimalist design concentrates its expression within a limited number of carefully selected elements. A brightly colored symbol, an asymmetrical composition, or a distinctive handwritten wordmark may all reflect minimalist principles. The purpose of minimalism is not to eliminate artistic individuality but to express it through a clear and economical visual structure.

3. Visual Expression of Minimalist Design in Brand Logos

3.1 Graphic Simplification and Symbolic Expression

Graphic form is one of the most direct means through which a brand logo establishes its visual identity. Lines, curves, geometric figures, silhouettes, and abstract symbols can be organized into recognizable compositions. In minimalist design, these elements are simplified to emphasize the most important visual characteristics of the symbol.

Graphic simplification often begins with the identification of a distinctive feature. A logo based on the image of a bird, for example, may originally contain feathers, eyes, wings, and several decorative details. A minimalist interpretation can emphasize the bird's overall silhouette or characteristic wing structure while removing unnecessary internal lines. The resulting image may remain recognizable even though it contains considerably less visual information.

However, simplification must preserve the characteristics that distinguish the intended subject. Removing small decorative details may improve clarity, but replacing every recognizable feature with a generic geometric shape can weaken the relationship between the symbol and the brand. The appropriate degree of reduction depends on the contribution of each element to the overall visual identity.

Geometric forms offer considerable possibilities for minimalist expression. Circles, squares, triangles, and straight lines can create clear compositions through their proportions and spatial relationships. A circular arrangement may establish a sense of unity, while angular forms can create a stronger directional character. However, these associations are not fixed. The overall impression depends on the particular organization of the shapes and their relationship with other visual elements. Wang et al. (2025) examine circular and angular destination logos, demonstrating the relevance of matching graphic characteristics with the identity being represented.

The use of geometric shapes should therefore follow the intended visual character of the brand. A technology brand may employ precise lines and compact geometric arrangements, while a children's product brand may require rounded forms and more expressive proportions. Both approaches can reflect minimalist principles, although their artistic characteristics differ.

Negative space provides another means of simplifying graphic expression. The empty areas within or around a symbol may form recognizable shapes or establish relationships between different elements. This allows a logo to communicate additional visual information without introducing more independent graphics. However, negative space must be carefully organized. Extremely narrow empty areas may disappear when a logo is reduced, while

excessive spacing can weaken the unity of the composition.

Line thickness and proportion also influence the expressive quality of minimalist symbols. A thin curved line may create a delicate appearance, while a thicker line can establish greater visual weight. When a logo contains only a few graphic elements, small differences in thickness, curvature, or position become particularly noticeable. The designer must coordinate these details to create a balanced composition without introducing unnecessary complexity.

Graphic simplification should preserve a recognizable structure rather than pursue the smallest possible number of elements. A distinctive silhouette, an unusual curve, or a carefully arranged combination of shapes can provide the foundation for an individual visual identity. Minimalist expression becomes effective when the reduction of details strengthens these characteristics.

3.2 Color Organization and Visual Identity

Color contributes to the visual character of a logo and helps distinguish it from other brand identities. Minimalist design commonly uses a limited color palette to create unity and reduce visual distraction. However, limiting the number of colors does not necessarily require the exclusive use of black, white, or gray. A single bright color or a carefully organized combination of two or three colors can also establish a concise visual expression.

The selection of colors should reflect the character of the brand and the structure of the logo. A strong color contrast may emphasize a distinctive symbol, while a more restrained combination may create a different visual atmosphere. The relationship between colors is often more important than the meaning assigned to an individual hue. A particular color can produce different visual impressions according to its brightness, saturation, proportion, and surrounding elements.

Smale and Utchhash (2025) examine the relationship between logo color lightness and perceptions of organizational identity. Their findings demonstrate that relatively subtle color characteristics can influence how a logo is interpreted. In minimalist design, where fewer elements share the responsibility of visual expression, color selection deserves particular attention.

Color simplification must also consider established brand identity. Some logos are closely associated with particular color combinations. Replacing these colors with a neutral palette may create a cleaner appearance while weakening recognizable visual characteristics. In such cases, simplifying the graphic structure while preserving the original colors may provide a more appropriate solution.

The relationship between color and practical application is equally important. A logo may appear clear against a plain white background but become difficult to distinguish when placed on dark packaging or a photograph. Alternative color treatments may be necessary to maintain appropriate contrast. A monochromatic version can also help determine whether the graphic structure remains recognizable without relying entirely on color differences.

Effective color organization requires a balance between visual unity, expressive character, and practical clarity. The purpose of reducing colors is to strengthen the complete composition while preserving the identifying features that contribute to the brand's visual identity.

3.3 *Typography and Spatial Composition*

Typography gives written language a distinctive visual appearance and plays an important role in minimalist logo design. A brand name may be presented through a conventional typeface, modified lettering, or a customized wordmark. Letter shapes, stroke thickness, spacing, and proportions influence the overall character of the design.

Minimalist typography commonly reduces excessive decoration and emphasizes clear letterforms. However, replacing every distinctive wordmark with standardized lettering may weaken brand individuality. A particular curve, unusual letter proportion, or recognizable connection between characters can provide the main identifying feature of a brand name. Such characteristics should be preserved when they contribute to the logo's visual identity.

The relationship between readability and individuality requires careful consideration. Yang et al. (2026) examine overlapping letters in textual logos and their relationship with perceived uniqueness and comprehensibility. Overlapping or modified letters can create distinctive visual forms, but excessive modification may make the wordmark difficult to read. Typographic design should maintain the

recognizable structure of the brand name while allowing appropriate artistic variation.

Letter spacing is particularly important in minimalist wordmarks. When decorative elements are reduced, the empty areas between characters become more noticeable. Excessively narrow spacing may make individual letters difficult to distinguish, while excessive spacing can weaken the unity of the complete word. Adjustments should consider the shapes of neighboring letters rather than rely exclusively on equal numerical distances.

Spatial composition organizes the relationship between typography, graphic symbols, and surrounding empty space. A logo containing both a symbol and a wordmark should establish a clear visual hierarchy. The symbol may function as the primary identifying element, while the typography provides written information. Their proportions, alignment, and spacing should make them appear as components of one visual identity.

Visual balance does not require every element to occupy an equal amount of space. A large graphic may be balanced by a smaller wordmark if their visual weights are appropriately coordinated. Similarly, an asymmetrical arrangement can create a coherent composition through the careful distribution of shapes and empty areas.

Negative space contributes to the clarity of the complete logo. Sufficient space around the symbol can distinguish it from surrounding information, while carefully organized internal spaces can strengthen the relationships between its elements. However, excessive empty space may separate related components and weaken the unity of the design.

Typography and composition should be refined together. A distinctive wordmark may require a restrained accompanying symbol, while a highly expressive graphic may be more suitable with simpler lettering. Their relationship should support the intended character of the brand without creating unnecessary visual competition.

4. **Practical Application of Minimalist Design in Brand Logos**

4.1 *Representative Cases of Minimalist Logo Design*

Nike: Movement and the Expressive Potential of a Single Form

The Nike Swoosh demonstrates how minimalist design can communicate movement through a concise graphic form. Its distinctive silhouette

consists of a continuous curve with pointed ends and varying thickness. The direction of the curve creates a sense of movement, while its asymmetrical structure gives the symbol a dynamic visual character. Rather than using a detailed illustration of an athlete or sporting activity, the design concentrates its expression within a single recognizable shape.

The simplicity of the Swoosh does not eliminate artistic detail. Its changing thickness, curved outline, and overall proportions contribute to its distinctive appearance. If these characteristics were replaced by a conventional straight line or a uniform geometric curve, the symbol would lose much of its individual character. The surrounding negative space also helps define its shape and allows the graphic to remain visually clear without additional decoration.

The Swoosh can function independently from the Nike wordmark in many product and communication contexts. Its compact structure allows it to be reproduced on footwear, clothing, packaging, and digital interfaces while maintaining a consistent visual identity. This example illustrates how minimalist design can establish brand recognition through a distinctive silhouette rather than through numerous graphic elements.

Apple: Graphic Simplification and the Preservation of Distinctive Features

The Apple logo illustrates how a recognizable object can be transformed into a concise graphic symbol. Its design retains the basic silhouette of an apple while removing realistic textures, shadows, and unnecessary internal details. The distinctive bite and separated leaf provide additional identifying features, allowing the symbol to establish an individual visual identity without relying on a detailed illustration.

The bite is particularly important to the composition. Although it occupies a relatively small area, it interrupts the rounded outline and helps distinguish the graphic from a generic fruit silhouette. The leaf contributes to the recognizable structure of the symbol, while the proportions of the main body establish visual balance. These features demonstrate that minimalist design does not require the elimination of every irregular detail. A small characteristic element may be essential to the identity of the complete logo.

The Apple logo also demonstrates the importance of a clear silhouette in practical

application. Its recognizable structure allows the symbol to be presented in different color and material treatments without fundamentally changing its appearance. A solid-color version emphasizes the relationship between the main body, bite, and leaf, while a metallic or monochromatic treatment can accommodate different product surfaces and communication environments.

The design illustrates the distinction between effective simplification and excessive reduction. Removing realistic surface details can strengthen the clarity of the symbol, but eliminating the bite or substantially changing its proportions would alter the recognizable characteristics of the logo. Its minimalist expression depends on preserving the necessary features of the original subject rather than reducing the entire image to the simplest possible geometric form.

Mastercard: Geometric Composition and Color Organization

The Mastercard logo demonstrates how simple geometric forms can establish a recognizable visual identity through their arrangement and color relationships. Its primary graphic consists of two overlapping circles, one red and one yellow, with the overlapping area creating a connection between the two forms. The composition uses familiar geometric shapes, but their proportions, horizontal arrangement, and color combination give the symbol its distinctive appearance.

The relationship between the circles is central to the design. Their overlap creates visual unity without eliminating the individuality of either form. The limited color palette also contributes to the clarity of the composition, allowing the relationship between the geometric elements to remain prominent. Removing additional decorative details concentrates attention on these essential visual characteristics.

The symbol can be used independently from the Mastercard wordmark in appropriate applications, including payment cards, digital interfaces, and other brand communication materials. Its compact geometric structure supports reproduction at different sizes, while the established color relationship helps maintain visual consistency.

This example demonstrates that minimalist design does not depend on creating complicated or entirely unfamiliar shapes. Distinctiveness can emerge from the careful organization of basic

geometric elements. The artistic value of the Mastercard logo lies in the coordinated relationship between shape, color, overlap, and spatial composition.

FedEx: Typography and the Expressive Use of Negative Space

The FedEx logo illustrates how minimalist principles can be applied to typography without introducing a separate graphic symbol. Its visual identity is established through the arrangement of the brand name, the proportions of the letterforms, and the arrow created by the negative space between the capital E and the lowercase x. The arrow is formed through the existing structure of the typography rather than added as an independent decorative element.

The negative-space arrow introduces a visual association with direction and movement while preserving the readability of the wordmark. Its appearance depends on the precise relationship between the adjacent letters. If their shapes or spacing were substantially altered, the arrow would become less recognizable or disappear entirely. The design therefore demonstrates how a small spatial relationship can contribute meaningfully to the identity of a minimalist logo.

The FedEx wordmark also shows that visual simplicity does not require typography to be completely neutral. The modified letterforms and their arrangement provide individual characteristics without relying on elaborate decoration. The written brand name remains the main identifying element, while the hidden arrow adds another layer of visual expression within the same composition.

In practical applications, the wordmark can be reproduced across vehicles, packaging, printed materials, and digital interfaces while maintaining its essential typographic structure. Its visual unity depends on preserving the relationship between the letters and the negative space that connects them.

The FedEx logo demonstrates how minimalist design can integrate graphic expression and written information through carefully controlled typography. Rather than adding more elements to communicate an idea, the design uses the existing letterforms to create an additional visual relationship. Its simplicity is achieved through the organization of necessary elements, allowing typography and negative space to contribute to a coherent brand identity.

4.2 Application Across Different Media

A brand logo may appear on product packaging, advertising materials, websites, mobile applications, and architectural signage. These environments differ in their available space, background conditions, and reproduction methods. Minimalist design can support adaptability by concentrating visual information within a relatively clear graphic structure.

Digital applications often require logos to function within limited spaces. A complicated symbol containing numerous fine lines may lose clarity when reduced to a small application icon. A simplified silhouette can preserve recognizable characteristics more easily when its proportions and internal spaces are carefully organized. However, a minimalist logo may still require a compact version if its primary arrangement contains a long wordmark or delicate graphic details.

Product packaging presents different requirements. A logo may be printed on cardboard, plastic, glass, or metal, and its appearance can change according to the material and reproduction method. A clear silhouette and an appropriately organized color palette can help preserve visual identity across these applications. A monochromatic version may also be necessary for engraving, embossing, or other reproduction conditions.

The relationship between the logo and its surrounding information must also be considered. A minimalist symbol may become difficult to distinguish if it is placed against a visually complicated background or surrounded by numerous competing elements. Sufficient space and appropriate contrast can help maintain its visual clarity without requiring changes to its essential structure.

Different applications may require variations in the arrangement of the logo. A primary version may contain both a graphic symbol and a wordmark, while a compact version may use only the main symbol. These variations should preserve recognizable proportions, colors, and graphic characteristics. Their purpose is to accommodate different environments without creating unrelated visual identities.

The practical value of minimalist design depends on the relationship between visual clarity and consistent identity. A logo should remain recognizable when its size, placement, or color treatment changes. Adaptability should be

considered during the development of the design rather than treated as a separate requirement after its final appearance has been established.

5. Problems and Improvement of Minimalist Brand Logo Design

A major problem in minimalist logo design is visual homogenization. When different brands repeatedly use similar geometric forms, neutral colors, and standardized typefaces, their logos may begin to share comparable visual characteristics. Although these elements can create clear compositions, their repeated use may weaken the individuality of particular brands. The problem is not caused by simplicity itself but by the mechanical application of familiar minimalist styles.

Avoiding visual homogenization requires attention to the distinctive characteristics of the brand. A logo may incorporate an unusual curve, a particular geometric relationship, or a recognizable typographic feature without introducing excessive decoration. The selected element should contribute directly to the visual identity rather than serve as an arbitrary addition intended only to make the design appear different.

Excessive simplification presents another difficulty. Removing decorative details can improve the clarity of a logo, but removing essential features may weaken its symbolic meaning. A traditional decorative motif, for example, may contain characteristic proportions or line arrangements that connect it with a particular artistic tradition. Replacing these features with generic geometric shapes may produce a concise image while eliminating its original cultural reference.

The distinction between necessary and unnecessary visual elements should guide the simplification process. Details that contribute directly to recognition, symbolic meaning, or individual expression should be preserved, while elements that interfere with the clarity of the composition may be reduced or removed. The importance of an element cannot be determined solely by its size or decorative complexity. A small irregular feature may be essential to the identity of a symbol, while a large decorative background may contribute little to its recognizable character.

The redesign of established logos requires particular attention to visual continuity. Removing unnecessary details may improve

practical adaptability, but substantial changes to the primary symbol, typography, or established colors can weaken the relationship between the new design and the brand's previous identity. Simplification should preserve recognizable characteristics while allowing appropriate visual refinement. Temporary variations may also be introduced when they maintain a clear relationship with the primary logo. Zeng et al. (2026) examine situational logo design and demonstrate the relevance of the relationship between temporary visual changes and brand characteristics.

Practical readability is another important consideration. Thin lines, narrow internal spaces, and subtle color differences may appear visually refined in a large composition but become difficult to distinguish at smaller sizes. A logo should maintain sufficient contrast and preserve its essential graphic structure under different reproduction conditions. Adjustments to line thickness, spacing, or color relationships may be necessary to prevent the loss of recognizable details.

The improvement of minimalist logo design should begin with a clear understanding of the brand's visual identity. The designer needs to identify the characteristics that distinguish the brand and determine which of them can be expressed through graphic forms, colors, or typography. A logo associated with traditional craftsmanship may require a different artistic treatment from one representing digital services. The choice of minimalist elements should reflect these differences rather than follow a uniform design formula.

Graphic refinement should focus on preserving distinctive silhouettes and recognizable relationships between shapes. Color simplification should strengthen visual unity without unnecessarily removing established identifying features. Typographic adjustments should improve readability while maintaining the individual character of the wordmark. Spatial composition should coordinate these elements through appropriate proportions, visual hierarchy, and negative space.

The application of different logo versions should also be organized consistently. A primary logo, a compact symbol, and a monochromatic version may serve different practical purposes, but they should retain a common visual foundation. Their proportions, shapes, and typographic

characteristics should remain sufficiently connected to preserve the brand's recognizable identity.

Minimalist logo design should not be understood as the continuous removal of visual information. Its purpose is to establish a concise and meaningful relationship between graphic form and brand identity. The removal of unnecessary details can strengthen artistic expression when distinctive characteristics are preserved and carefully organized. A successful minimalist logo maintains visual clarity without losing individuality, allowing its essential features to remain recognizable across different media and applications.

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