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A Comparative Study of Visual Identity Designs of the Central Universities in Uttar Pradesh

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trn:oid::1:3186758665

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A Comparative Study of Visual Identity Designs of the Central Universities in Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

Visual identity shapes higher educational institutions' branding and communication strategies. This study examines the visual identity designs of four central universities in Uttar Pradesh—Aligarh Muslim University, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Banaras Hindu University, and the University of Allahabad. It explores key visual elements such as logos, emblems, typography, and colour schemes to understand their historical evolution, current applications, and potential innovations. The research highlights how universities integrate traditional and contemporary design elements to maintain relevance in the digital era. Findings indicate that while some universities have successfully rebranded their visual identities, others require updates to meet modern communication needs. The study emphasises the importance of strategic visual identity design in fostering institutional recognition, engagement, and consistency across diverse platforms. The paper recommends that universities adopt adaptable, aesthetically refined visual identity systems to enhance their branding and communication effectiveness.

Keywords: Visual Identity Design, Central Universities Branding, Logo, Emblem, Typography, Colour Scheme

Introduction

Visual identity creates a distinctive and recognisable image for a brand, organisation, or institution. It primarily includes a logo, colour scheme, typography, graphics, and other visual design elements that strengthen and maintain brand consistency. These design elements establish a lasting impression in the minds of consumers, reflecting the brand's uniqueness. Visual identity design is crucial to the branding process, enhancing the brand's presence and appeal.

The visual identity design of an educational institution comprises all visual elements that represent the institution's uniqueness. This includes the university's logo, official seal, colour scheme, typeface, and visual standards, which are applied across various media such as websites, brochures, campus signage, and merchandise. "Visual identity design is the strategic use of graphic elements that help create a distinctive and recognisable image of a brand, ensuring consistency across various communication platforms." (Wheeler, 2017) A well-organized visual identity creates a professional image for the institution, establishes trust, and makes it distinctive and memorable for the public, faculty members, and students. Balmer and Liao (2007) highlight that visual identity should be an integral part of an institution's branding strategy, as it creates a long-lasting impression and strengthens stakeholder engagement.

This research paper focuses on the branding of higher educational institutions in India and their visual identity design. Since their inception, India's higher education institutions have been nationally recognised, and their visual identities have evolved. In the modern era of communication, the advancement of visual identity and the essential design elements that

should be incorporated or modified according to contemporary needs form the core of this study. Universities that successfully integrate their historical legacy into contemporary design frameworks establish a balance between tradition and modernity, making them more appealing to diverse audiences (Chapleo, 2015).

8 India is a progressive country that has significantly contributed to the field of education. The scope of higher educational institutions in India is vast. Keeping this in mind, this research paper conducts a comparative study of the visual identity designs of four central universities in Uttar Pradesh—Aligarh Muslim University (Aligarh), Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (Lucknow), Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi), and the University of Allahabad (Prayagraj). The study examines their practical aspects, design development, current status, and potential innovations from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

In the visual identity design process of educational institutions, logos, emblems, colour schemes, typography, etc., should be given priority to ensure their seamless application across various communication mediums. Hence, a detailed understanding of these elements is essential.

Logo

12 A logo is a unique symbol or mark visually representing an institution, product, or service. It effectively conveys the organisation's objectives, values, and vision concisely and impactfully. Logos typically consist of a symbol, a wordmark, or a combination of both, making the brand easily recognisable. The purpose of a logo is to establish a stable and consistent brand image in the minds of consumers and users. A logo design involves carefully selecting colours, shapes, typography, and symbols to ensure the brand's message is communicated clearly and effectively. Duxiu (2018) emphasizes that logos are pivotal in shaping and solidifying corporate identity through visual communication. Similarly, Kim and Lim (2019) highlight that logos serve as visual cues that help firms communicate their unique identities and capture consumers' attention.

Emblem

An emblem is a symbolic design used to represent an organisation, institution, or brand. It often combines images, symbols, and words. Wu and Cheong (2021) emphasize that visual elements like logos and typography are designed as effective semiotic resources to signify a university's brand identity. Similarly, the study by El Qadhi (2023) highlights that logos, through their symbolic indications, affect the sensory and emotional perception of the recipient, contributing to building a positive mental image that reinforces national identity. Emblem designs are generally more complex and detailed, making them a prominent form of visual identity. They are commonly used for government institutions, educational establishments, sports teams, or prestigious organisations. An emblem conveys an institution's uniqueness, prestige, and history. It is a permanent and effective symbol, reinforcing the institution's long-term identity and credibility.

Color Scheme

The colour scheme is a vital component of visual identity design that helps communicate the brand's message and strengthen its recognition. The selection of colours is based on the brand's values, objectives, and target audience. Gupta and Dingliwal (2023) emphasize that "colours are a pervasive source of knowledge," and their strategic use "can help distinguish products from rivals as well as affect perceptions towards products by altering the moods and feelings of the target consumers." Understanding the psychological impact of colours enhances brand communication. Colours profoundly affect the human mind; for example, blue represents trust and stability, red signifies energy and excitement, and green symbolises freshness and balance. Shukla (2023) notes that "Colour Psychology plays an important role and thus every marketing team should give utmost importance to Brand or Product Colours." Choosing the right colour scheme highlights a brand's emotional identity.

Selecting the appropriate colours can differentiate and define a brand's uniqueness. Since colour meanings vary across different cultures and social contexts, it is crucial to ensure that the chosen colours align with the target audience's cultural sensitivities and contextual relevance.

Typography

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Typography refers to the art and technique of arranging letters and words to make them clear, readable, visually appealing, and impactful. It is a crucial aspect of graphic design that enhances visual communication effectively. Bringhurst (1992) defines typography as "the craft of endowing human language with a durable visual form." Typography includes essential elements such as font selection, size, letter spacing (kerning and letter spacing), line length, and word spacing. These elements work together to give the text a distinct form and impact, leaving a strong impression on the reader.

Typography plays a vital role in defining a brand's personality. For instance, a luxury brand may use classical and refined fonts, while a youthful brand may opt for playful and modern typefaces. It also ensures readability and clarity, allowing the message to be conveyed effectively without communication barriers. Typography can emotionally impact the audience; for example, bold letters represent strength and stability, while thin letters signify delicacy. The choice of typography also considers cultural sensitivities to ensure it aligns with the context and emotions of the target audience.

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After understanding the various elements of the visual identity design process, we can analyse the visual identity designs of the four central universities in Uttar Pradesh, which are as follows:

Aligarh Muslim University (Aligarh)

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Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) is one of India's premier central universities, and it is located in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. It was established in 1875 as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a social reformer and educationist who envisioned modernising Muslim education in India. In 1920, under the AMU Act, the institution was granted full university status.



Fig 1: The Emblem design for the visual identity of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).

The visual identity of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) highlights its existence through the colonial and post-colonial eras. This visual identity is designed in a circular format as an “emblem.” (Fig. 1) At the centre of the emblem is a date palm tree, with an open book on the right and a crescent moon and star on the left, symbolising knowledge, enlightenment, and Islamic heritage. The emblem also features the university's motto inscribed in Arabic: "Allama-al-insana ma lam ya'lam" (Allah taught man what he knew not), emphasising the significance of education.

The AMU emblem predominantly uses a sans-serif font representing heritage and scholarship. Additionally, Arabic calligraphy is used, particularly in cultural and formal design elements.

The primary colour scheme of AMU is green and white, symbolising knowledge, growth, peace, and the influence of Islamic culture. Maroon (deep red) and gold are used in convocation robes and certificates, representing royal dignity and academic prestige.

Key Features of AMU's Visual Identity

The emblem design reflects a harmonious blend of knowledge, faith, and tradition. Its simple lines and minimal colours align with modern design trends while preserving its heritage-based aesthetics.

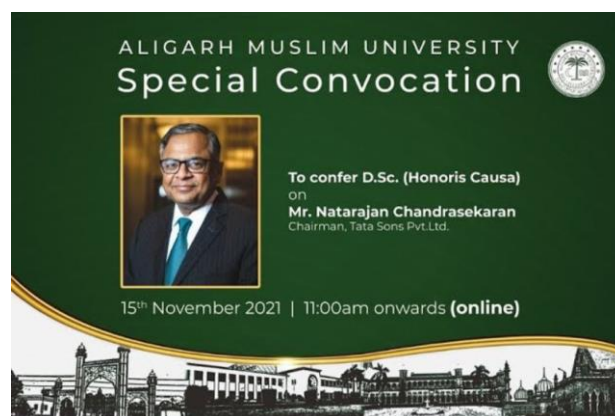


Fig 2: The visual identities are used in the digital banner design created for the special convocation ceremony of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU).

AMU's visual identity is traditionally applied across various communication mediums, including websites, social media (Fig. 2), and digital campaigns, and it plays a vital role in establishing strong connections with students and alumni.

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (Lucknow)

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU), established in 1996, is a central university committed to socially inclusive and community-oriented education. It offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs focusing on marginalised communities. With modern facilities, the Amethi satellite campus, and initiatives in leadership, sustainable development, and global collaboration, BBAU promotes academic excellence and social responsibility.



Fig 3: The Emblem design created for the visual identity of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (Lucknow)

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Buddhist philosophy share common principles of equality, knowledge, justice, and rational thinking. Symbolically, they represent social transformation through education and moral living, which are deeply rooted in Dr. Ambedkar's reformist vision and Buddha's teachings.

The emblem design of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (Fig. 3) embodies the philosophy of Buddha through its design elements. The Peepal tree at the emblem's centre symbolises Buddha's enlightenment, representing the pursuit of knowledge and self-realisation. Surrounding it, the stupa railing signifies protection and sacred space, reinforcing the seal of truth in learning. On both sides, the Dharma Chakra (Wheel of Dharma) embodies the continuous cycle of life and knowledge, guiding seekers towards righteous action. At the bottom, the umbrella (Chatra) on the right and left represents greatness, wisdom, and spiritual elevation, signifying the enlightened mind's compassionate shelter. Together, these elements form a visual representation of Prajñā (profound wisdom), Seal (universal truth), and Karuṇā

(compassionate service), the guiding principles that shape the university's philosophy and mission, which is the tagline of the university that they use in the bottom of the emblem,

The typography used in the university's visual identity blends modernity with tradition. Its sans-serif typeface reflects contemporary design aesthetics and the timeless values of knowledge and truth.

The university uses blue overall branding, symbolising wisdom, intellect, trust, and stability. This colour choice reflects the institution's commitment to academic excellence, deep knowledge, and progressive thinking, creating a sense of calmness, clarity, and inspiration among students and faculty. Blue is also associated with limitless potential, much like the vast sky and deep ocean, representing the university's vision of expanding intellectual horizons and fostering innovation.

6 Key Features of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University Visual Identity

The visual identity of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University is thoughtfully designed. Each symbol is deeply connected to Buddhist philosophy, reflecting the core values of wisdom (Prajñā), truth (Seal), and compassion (Karuṇā). The emblem is a self-contained and balanced composition, representing wholeness, unity, and enlightenment.

From a technical perspective, the emblem is meticulously crafted in line art, ensuring a clean, precise, and scalable design that maintains clarity across various applications, from digital platforms to (Fig. 4) physical prints. However, there have been some suggestions for redesigning the emblem to align with contemporary design trends, which emphasise minimalism, simplification, and modern aesthetics while retaining the core symbolism and identity of the university. The present emblem follows a traditional approach, incorporating a multiplication of the same symbols across the design to create a balanced and harmonious composition.



Fig 4: Use of Emblem in Banner design for celebrating 8th International Day of Yoga at BBAU.

Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi)

1 Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is a prestigious central university in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Founded in 1916 by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, it is one of the largest residential universities in Asia. The university is known for its academic excellence, cultural heritage, and contributions to research and education. BHU offers various undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, law, medicine, technology, and management. The campus houses notable institutions like the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT-BHU). With a vast and historic campus, BHU promotes interdisciplinary learning, innovation, and Indian knowledge traditions, making it a hub for higher education in India.



Fig 5: The Logo design for the visual identity of Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

In recent years, Banaras Hindu University has developed its visual identity to align with modern design needs and trends. The old emblem, previously found in official BHU documents, served as the foundation for the new visual identity, which includes a redesigned logo, emblem, tagline, graphic elements, and a refined colour scheme.

The new BHU logo (Fig. 5) is meticulously designed as a bilingual logotype to enhance the university's global reach. It incorporates the official BHU emblem, featuring Goddess Saraswati, revered in Hindu mythology as the goddess of knowledge. This design choice reflects the university's deep-rooted connection to Basant Panchami, the auspicious day on which its foundation stone was laid.

Using a modern geometric bilingual typeface, combining Devanagari and Roman scripts, enhances the logo's versatility and effectiveness across various applications. This thoughtful typographic choice ensures readability and aesthetic appeal and reinforces the university's commitment to inclusivity and global engagement. The seamless integration of both scripts reflects BHU's rich cultural heritage while embracing contemporary design trends, making the logo more adaptable for diverse communication platforms, including digital and print media.

Blue and saffron serve as the primary brand colours of BHU, each carrying deep symbolic significance.

2 BHU Saffron draws inspiration from the Indian National Flag and the sacred color 'Kesaria' or saffron, with slight modifications to create a distinctive identity. A blend of red and yellow, saffron embodies the dynamic energy of red and the uplifting warmth of yellow. It is associated with joy, enthusiasm, creativity, success, encouragement, transformation,

determination, and spiritual significance. Additionally, it represents balance, freedom, expression, fascination, and a deep sense of holiness, making it a colour of joy and creativity.

BHU Blue takes inspiration from the elements of Earth, Sky, and Sea, symbolising vastness, stability, and depth. It is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, imagination, expansiveness, inspiration, and sensitivity. Blue also conveys trust, loyalty, sincerity, wisdom, confidence, faith, and intelligence, while its calming influence fosters mental clarity and emotional stability. Its key strength lies in its positive impact on the body and mind, reinforcing a sense of wisdom and serenity.

Key Features of Banaras Hindu University Visual Identity

The visual identity of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has been thoughtfully developed to align with modern design needs while preserving its rich heritage. This updated identity includes a redesigned logo, emblem, tagline, graphic elements, and standardised colour scheme, enhancing the university's distinct presence.



Fig 6: The logo is applied to the banner design for the Faculty of Performing Arts cultural event of BHU.

The logo is meticulously crafted as a bilingual logotype, integrating Devanagari and Roman scripts to ensure global accessibility and recognition. A key feature of the logo is incorporating the official BHU emblem, maintaining the university's traditional essence.

From a technical perspective, the university's visual identity is up-to-date and adheres to contemporary design trends while preserving its historical significance. The logo is designed for seamless adaptability across various media, ensuring clarity and effectiveness in digital, print (Fig. 6), and promotional applications. Its illustrative craftsmanship enhances its versatility, making it suitable for diverse platforms while maintaining consistency and aesthetic appeal.

University of Allahabad (Prayagraj)

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The University of Allahabad, also known as Allahabad University, is a central university in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India. Established in 1887, it is one of the oldest universities in India and was once known as the "Oxford of the East" due to its academic excellence. It became a central university in 2005. The university offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across various disciplines, including arts, science, commerce, law, and management. It has a rich academic heritage has produced many notable alumni in politics, literature, and education.

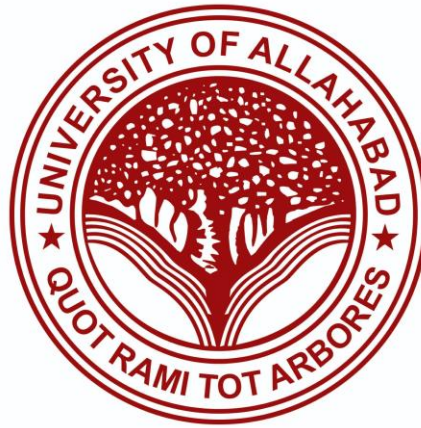


Fig 7: The Emblem design for the visual identity University of Allahabad (AU).

The newly developed emblem of the University of Allahabad (Fig 7) significantly represents its academic and cultural heritage. It features a Banyan tree in the upper part of the design, inspired by India's national tree, symbolising the vast expanse of knowledge and wisdom through its wide-spreading branches. Below the tree, an open book signifies the pursuit of learning and intellectual growth. Additionally, considering Prayagraj's global recognition for the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of three sacred rivers, the emblem embodies the fusion of knowledge and Indian historical roots.

The emblem also includes the university's motto in Sanskrit, "Quot Rami Tot Arbores," which translates to "As many branches, so many trees," emphasising the expansion of knowledge. In a recent redesign of its visual identity, the emblem and its colours were updated to align with contemporary design principles while preserving traditional symbols.

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The colour Indian Red has been chosen as the new brand colour of the university; it is deeply associated with the earth, resilience, and a profound depth of knowledge. This earthy hue not only represents the rich intellectual traditions of the university but also reflects the cultural and historical legacy of Prayagraj, a city known for its deep-rooted connection to Indian heritage. The use of Indian Red embodies a sense of stability, wisdom, and timeless learning, reinforcing the university's role as a centre of academic excellence and cultural enlightenment. It also establishes a visual connection to Indian aesthetics and traditions, creating a strong and distinctive identity that resonates with historical values and contemporary aspirations.

The minimal typography and modern yet traditional sans-serif typeface used in the upper part of the emblem reflects a harmonious balance between contemporary design sensibilities and the university's rich heritage. The clean, elegant letterforms enhance legibility and sophistication, ensuring a timeless visual appeal that aligns with global design standards while staying rooted in Indian traditions.

Additionally, the tagline is thoughtfully incorporated at the bottom of the emblem, reinforcing the institution's values, vision, and academic mission. This strategic placement creates a sense of completeness and structure, ensuring that the university's identity is effectively communicated. Combining modern typography and traditional elements results in an aesthetic and versatile emblem that embodies the institution's commitment to knowledge, culture, and progress.

15 **Key Features of the University of Allahabad Visual Identity**

The University of Allahabad's visual identity has been meticulously crafted, ensuring its design elements align with contemporary design trends while maintaining a strong connection to its rich heritage. The emblem has been developed with a modern illustrative line-based approach, creating a refined and elegant aesthetic that enhances clarity, adaptability, and versatility across various applications.



Fig 8: Application of the emblem at the top of the inaugural stone panel.

One of the standout features of the redesigned emblem is its single-colour application, which ensures consistency and compatibility across different media (Fig. 8), from digital platforms to print materials, signage, and merchandise. A monochromatic Indian Red palette reinforces visual harmony and brand recognition, making the emblem adaptable and preserving its distinct identity.

The minimal yet intricately detailed linework embodies a fusion of tradition and modernity, reflecting the university's progressive vision while honouring its historical roots. The precision of the design elements ensures that the emblem remains legible and impactful even at more minor scales, making it highly effective for both formal and promotional uses.

The University of Allahabad's new visual identity seamlessly balances heritage and innovation by incorporating contemporary design principles. It presents a timeless, versatile, significant emblem representing academic excellence, intellectual depth, and cultural significance.

Conclusion

This study on the visual identities of central universities in Uttar Pradesh provides a comprehensive perspective on amalgamating modern and traditional design elements. In the digital age, visual identity plays a crucial role in reaching a vast audience, making it essential for institutions to align their branding with contemporary communication mediums.

This paper has examined the fundamental elements of visual identity design across central universities in Uttar Pradesh, including logos, emblems, typography, and colour palettes. It explored best practices, current trends, and the implementation of visual identities in these institutions.

The findings reveal that most central universities have historical identities, which they periodically redesign to suit modern requirements. For instance, Aligarh Muslim University has evolved its emblem, tagline, and colour palette, blending contemporary and traditional elements. Banaras Hindu University is a strong example of effective rebranding through visual identity design, having developed a distinctive brand colour, custom typefaces, and a universally adaptable logo. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University also possesses a visual identity; however, it requires redesigning to align with contemporary design trends and usability. The University of Allahabad has undergone visual identity transformations over time, creating an emblem in an illustrative style and adopting a single-colour scheme (Indian red) while incorporating a relief-like seal across various mediums.

This study reveals that most universities modify their visual identities to meet modern communication needs and effectively engage with their audiences. Higher educational institutions must adopt well-structured communication strategies when designing their visual identities. Universities should prioritise design aesthetics and technical parameters to ensure their visual branding remains relevant, consistent, and adaptable to contemporary communication platforms.

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