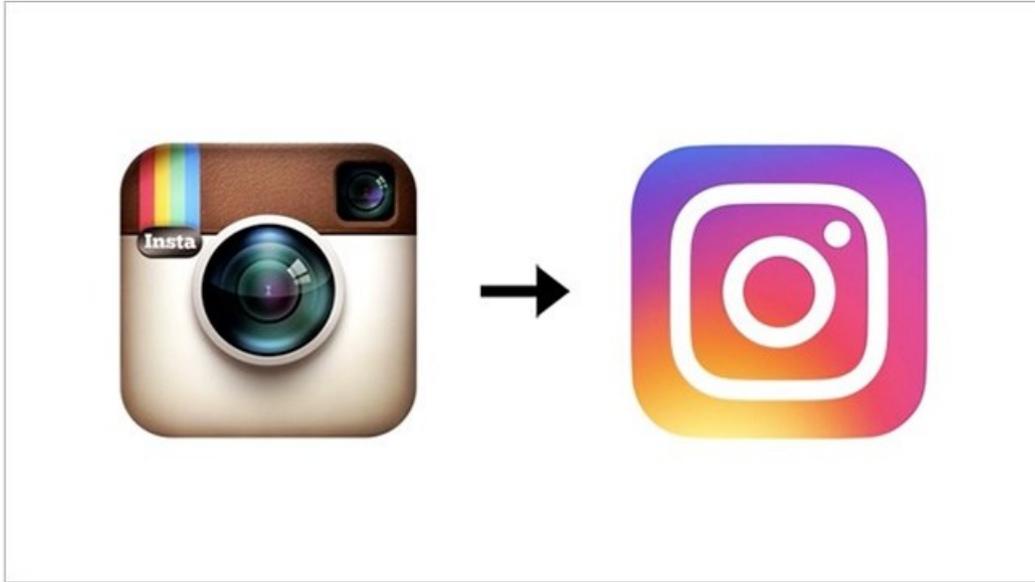


# Three neuroscience tricks behind Instagram's new logo

By [Darren Bridger](#)

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Instagram, the photo sharing app, has launched a new logo. Early reactions are dividing fans, but I believe it will become well-loved in the long run as it uses some clever neuroscience tricks to appeal to our subconscious minds.



Logos, particularly those of mega-popular apps like Instagram, become a familiar part of our lives. Changing them carries the risk of losing all that mental capital. Giants of the web don't have physical presence, like shop fronts; their logos and visual look have to do all the work. They have to appeal to us, be comfortable to look at, and emotionally engage us. To get that level of global appeal, with a design that might have to last years, it's not enough that a logo just appeals to us consciously, it must also have appeal to our subconscious minds.

Instagram's old logo, the one that looked like an old camera, was an example of a design aesthetic – skeuomorphism – that's now falling out of favour. Skeuomorphic logos look like their real world counterparts. For example address books that look leather bound, note apps that look like lined paper. These probably played a role in acclimatising users to the world of smartphone apps, making them feel comfortable with ditching real world objects in favour of using smartphones for almost everything. Now that people are comfier with that, design can move on.

The new design is flatter, slightly more abstract, and as someone who applies neuroscience research to designs, websites and packaging, I recognise in it three familiar techniques:

## 1. Visual saliency

The new Instagram logo has what neuroscientists call high visual saliency. This is a quality of images that grabs our attention and makes us look at them. One of the drivers of visual saliency is high levels of colour contrasts in an image. The thick white line of the camera on the logo against the rich colourful background creates high levels of eye-catching visual saliency.

## 2. Propositional density

The logo also has another important quality: high propositional density. This is when a design is able to convey a lot of meaning with as little detail as possible. Images with high propositional density are easy on the eye, but intriguing to the

mind. Or, more specifically, intriguing to our subconscious mind. Designs that are simple on the surface appeal to our brains as they feel familiar (something we like), but simplicity alone can be boring. By adding in layers of meaning it makes a design.

The logo depicts a camera, but in the most minimal way, with just a square, a circle, and a dot. However, true to its earlier logo, it's not a contemporary camera, it's an old style 1970s/80s Polaroid type camera, carrying connotations of nostalgia, childhood, family photos, and so on. It's overlaid on a colour-array background.

The colours are redolent of light, filters, and being warm colours (notice that they haven't used any cold colours) they convey energy and excitement. They also look like a sunset, a time that film-makers call the magic hour, when some of the best photography can be done. The sunset also carries connotations of the evening, nights out, fun etc. Of course, most of these associations will be triggered subconsciously, as most people won't stop to think too hard about the design consciously.

### **3. The power of curves**

Lastly the logo is curvy. Research shows that, with some exceptions, people generally prefer curvaceous designs over ones that are more angular. Curves can make a design feel approachable, friendly, even cute.

With more companies adopting neuro-research and thinking into creating their designs, I wouldn't be surprised if Instagram's new logo is the product of this type of testing and development.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Darren Bridger, author of [<https://www.koganpage.com/product/decoding-the-irrational-consumer-9780749473846> *Decoding the Irrational Consumer*], and *Neuro Design: Neuromarketing Insights to Boost Engagement and Profit*. He works as a consultant to marketers, advising on using and analysing data that tap into consumers' non-conscious thinking and motivations. He was one of the original pioneers of the Consumer Neuroscience industry, co-founding both the world's first full-service agency, Neuroco, and the first agency dedicated to serving the public relations industry, Mindlab International. He then joined the world's largest agency, neurofocus, as its second employee outside of the US.

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