Challenging Consistency

Effects of Brand-Incongruent Communications

Fredrik Törn

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The Stata Center for Computer, Information and Intelligence Sciences is built on the site of MIT's legendary Building 20. Designed by renowned architect Frank O. Gehry, Stata is meant to carry on Building 20's innovative and serendipitous spirit, and to foster interaction and collaboration across many disciplines. The building is home to the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL), the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems (LIDS) and the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy. Its striking design - featuring tilting towers, many-angled walls and whimsical shapes - challenges much of the conventional wisdom of laboratory and campus building.

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(Description provided by MIT facilities at http://web.mit.edu/buildings/statacenter/)

Preface

This report is a result of a research project carried out at the Center for Consumer Marketing at the Economic Research Institute at the Stockholm School of Economics.

This volume is submitted as a doctor's thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics. As usual at the Economic Research Institute, the author has been entirely free to conduct and present his research in his own ways as an expression of his own ideas.

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In memory of my mother Christina

(who was the first to advise me to pursue doctoral studies,
even before I joined the SSE in 1995)

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

How would you react to the news that the energy drink brand RedBull had decided to sponsor the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm? Probably, you would pay more attention to the news, elaborate on it, and possibly discuss it with friends to a greater extent, than if the news were that RedBull had decided to sponsor the Stockholm Marathon. RedBull sponsoring the Royal Dramatic Theatre would be one example of how communications can be said to be inconsistent or incongruent with established associations held with a brand. Such examples of marketing communications are referred to as 'brand-incongruent communications' in this thesis. Whereas RedBull sponsoring the Royal Dramatic Theatre is incongruent with established brand associations, the case of RedBull sponsoring the Stockholm Marathon is in accordance with associations held with RedBull. Such examples of communications are therefore referred to as 'brand-congruent'.

One reason for a milder reaction to the news that RedBull had decided to sponsor the Stockholm Marathon, is that you are likely to rather easily detect the relationship between the energy drink and the sports event. In the case of Redbull sponsoring the Dramatic Theatre, however, you would as a typical consumer probably find it hard to detect a relationship between the energy drink and the theatre. You might question why RedBull would choose to sponsor the Dramatic Theatre, as such a sponsorship deviates from Redbull's current brand positioning and history of past sponsorships. From a marketing communications point-of-view, would such a sponsorship be advantageous in any way? The traditional literature on brand management would advise against a conduct which violates established brand associations. This thesis, however, argues that – for established brands – the employment of communication executions which challenge existing brand associations may actually improve marketing communication effectiveness.

This is a thesis on how established brands can act to enhance their strength, interestingness, and vitality also in the future. At first glance, mature and established brands should stand a good chance to remain successful also in times to come. However, managers for such brands can no more sit back and relax, relying on the success of past actions. In fact, brand management is seen as being more difficult than ever before (Keller 2003). A number of

factors have contributed to this demanding situation for most brand managers: The growth of savvy consumers, brand proliferation, media fragmentation, increased competition, and greater accountability. As consumers get more experienced and knowledgeable, persuasion through advertising is more difficult and costly today than before (Keller 2003; Shocker, Srivastava and Ruekert 1994). In addition, it has become increasingly difficult to reach through the media clutter, both because advertising is more expensive and because of the availability of alternatives for consumers (cf. Rosengren 2008). These factors contribute to making working life hard for brand managers in their constant struggle for increased brand awareness, increased liking, enhanced sales, and higher profits.

To accomplish success, brand managers may look into the brand management literature to get advice on how to improve the performance of their brands. One of the central tenets in this literature on how to build strong brands is the concept of consistency or congruency (e.g. Aaker 1996; Keller 2003). In essence, it states that the marketing mix for the brand should be internally consistent and that marketing communications should be devised so that one uniform message is communicated to relevant target groups: "Brand consistency is critical to maintaining the strength and favorability of brand associations" (Keller 2003, p 634). The reason for doing this is that consistency in communications facilitates learning about the brand, and therefore increases chances that the brand will be remembered by consumers. Possibly even more important is the fact that, when a product is (successfully) branded, the consumer can expect certain attributes, and a certain level of quality, from it. Indeed, for a brand to have value, it needs to function as a heuristic of a certain level of quality or have certain characteristics. Consider a case in which a brand signals different meanings each time the consumer encounters the brand. Then, s/he will not be able to comfortably classify the brand in memory or develop a clear image of the brand. Consequently other, better positioned, brands may be remembered and preferred in a purchase situation. Brand management textbooks (cf. Aaker 1996; Keller 2003) attribute the success of such brands as Marlboro, McDonald's, and Maytag to their consistent brand strategies. In addition, brand valuation models, such as the one from consulting firm Interbrand, regard consistency and coherence as factors contributing to brand equity value.

Additional advocacy of consistency by practitioners might be illustrated by an opinion piece in Adweek by John Colasanti, a president and managing

partner of communications consultancy Carmichael Lynch, who argues that "A brand must be single-minded... Simplicity has lost ground to the evils of complexity. Consistency has sold out to variety." (Colasanti 2004, p 16). Even more explicitly, Cristi Kirisits, a VP and Marketing & Corporate Communications Manager at Silverton Bank advocates consistency in an opinion piece (Kirisits 2008, p 54), "For example, whether you walk into a McDonald's in San Francisco, New York, London or Beijing, your surroundings immediately feel familiar. The experience is consistent across the globe, from the layout of the store to the placement of messaging. Banks can apply this same concept to their bank branches. Consistency builds familiarity, familiarity leads to comfort, and we all know that people want to do business where they feel comfortable."

In the literature on, and practical employment of, integrated marketing communications (IMC), maintaining consistency is an essential dimension (e.g. Fill 2001; McGrath 2005). Similarly, the literature and practical employment of corporate brand building, sometimes referred to as 'living the brand', argues in favor of consistency in communications (e.g. Ind 2001). As to the literature on more specific elements of marketing communications, research on celebrity endorsements argue in favor of a match-up between the spokesperson and the brand (e.g. Kamins and Gupta 1994; Misra and Beatty 1990; see Erdogan 1999 for a review). Research on media selection argues advantages of thematic congruity between the medium and brand (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). Research on sponsorships (e.g. Cornwell et al 2006; Rifon et al 2004; see Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy 2005 for a review) shows that high-fit sponsorships result in higher communication effectiveness than low-fit sponsorships. Also research on brand extensions argues in favor of a close fit between the parent brand and the extension (e.g. Aaker and Keller 1990; Broniarczyk and Alba 1994; see Czellar 2003 for a review). In sum, there seem to be practitioners and a multitude of research related to brand building, which argue in favor of consistency in communications.

Indeed, this thesis does not intend to derogate the importance of consistency in brand management when building new brands. It acknowledges that consistency in building a brand is crucial for its success. However, even a notable brand management guru as Kevin Keller, who cherishes consistency in brand management, also argues that "consistency does *not* mean, however, that marketers should avoid making any changes in the marketing program. On the contrary, the opposite can be quite true" (Keller 2003, p. 636). In addition, it is not necessarily so that information which violates the

presumptions made about the brand jeopardizes the brand in the case of well-established brands. After all, people are somewhat resistant to information which runs counter to their set of beliefs and are biased in their interpretation of new information so as to fit with their established perceptions (e.g. Fiske and Taylor 1991). In other words, incongruent communications for established, mature brands need not necessarily dilute the brand image.

Whereas the purpose of marketing communications for new brands is to build awareness and establish a distinct position in consumers' minds, the purpose of marketing communications for mature, well-established brands might – in contrast – not be so much to raise public knowledge of the brand's existence, but to make the brand more salient in memory, secure top-of-mind awareness, and make it more interesting to consumers. Kapferer (1997) advocates the idea of brand rejuvenation: The newly developed knowledge of the value of brand equity has led companies to engage in revitalizing a brand rather than launching a new one as a means to counter falling sales and consumer interest in a product. After all, the brand may still be remembered and, in addition, legally protected. He argues that as market conditions change, especially old brands need to be innovative. Kapferer regards revitalizing a brand as "first of all a task of creating innovative products in line with the tastes of today's new consumers, not those of yesterday's" (Kapferer 1997, p.333). Thus, successful revitalization presupposes a substantial shift of consumer perceptions. Furthermore, Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what the advertising will entail for a familiar brand, which reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communication. For such well-established brands, the major objective may not be to increase awareness or liking, but rather to increase consumers' interest in and desire to come in contact with the brand (Machleit et al. 1993). Similar ideas are expressed by Alwitt (2000), who argues that advertisers must concentrate on the interestingness of advertising if they want viewers to attend to their messages throughout the course of a commercial.

Possibly, the threat to well-established brands is that they are in fact *too* well established to be interesting and stimulate curiosity among consumers. A managerial fixation in maintaining consistency in communications also for established brands has put a straitjacket onto the brand. Consequently, as managers for well-established brands need to think in new terms to achieve their objectives of enhanced salience in memory, better top-of-mind

awareness, and greater consumer interest in the brand, they need to devise communication strategies in ways which are different, and even considerably different, from what they used to execute in the past. This thesis examines one such way – communications which are incongruent with consumers' established brand associations.

Irrespective of if they are deliberate, or inadvertent, the marketplace has witnessed a number of communication executions in the last years which could indeed be considered as being incongruent with the brand: A worldwide TV commercial for German car maker Mercedes in which a Mercedes car drives around in the Finnish woodlands, accompanied by traditional Finnish folk music was hardly what most consumers would associate with Mercedes. Convenience store chain Seven-Eleven establishing itself as a mobile telephony provider was likewise probably seen as surprising and deviant from its traditional offer of groceries and fast-food. Keith Richards (guitarist in Rolling Stones) and Mikhail Gorbachev endorsed Louis Vuitton, and in Sweden, local rap artist and "bad-boy" Dogge Doggelito became an endorser for home electronics chain El-Giganten (a subsidiary of Dixon's) which was quite a remarkable choice of endorser given the companies' history of traditional, somewhat boring, white-goods advertising executions.

So independent of our appreciation of consistency, in many cases consumers will face new information which deviates from what s/he has come to learn about the brand in the past. Once noticed, this new information about the brand must be handled somehow by the consumer. The nature of the handling will determine subsequent effects. In this thesis I examine if and how the perception of the brand changes as a result of brand-incongruent communications being presented to the consumer. In doing so, I adhere to a long tradition in advertising research to study outcomes as hierarchies of effects.
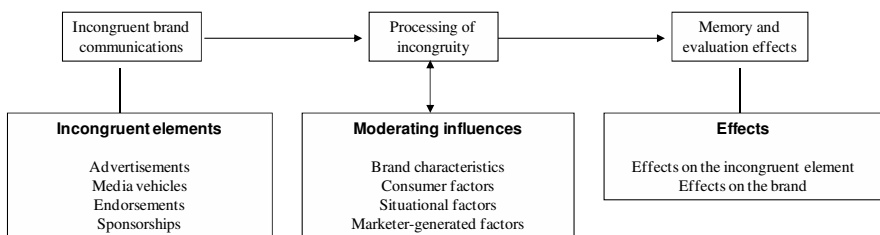
Figure 1. *Framework for the theoretical review on previous research on information incongruity*

In this thesis, the brand communications I refer to are elements of the communications mix. They might include advertisements, endorsements, media choice, sponsorships, sales people, PR and even brand extensions. In my empirical studies I examine several brand-incongruent communication elements, including advertisements, media placements, endorsements, and sponsorships. The effects of brand-incongruent elements include effects on the incongruent element (e.g. attention to the ad, ad attitude, and credibility), and on the brand (e.g. brand attitude, brand associations, brand interest, and purchase intentions). These effects are, however, moderated by factors relating to the brand (e.g. familiarity), the consumer (e.g., attitude toward advertising, optimum stimulation level, need for cognition, and preference for consistency), the situation (e.g., perceived risk, personal relevance, processing time, and mood) and marketer-generated factors (e.g., resolution hints and repetition). This hierarchy of effects provides a framework for the theoretical review on previous research on consumer responses to information incongruity.

Academic relevance of the thesis
This thesis should be of interest to academics for several reasons: First, previous research on effects on incongruent communications has shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of incongruity. This might be reason enough to justify more research on the topic. Furthermore, most studies on information incongruity have been done on the level of an individual communications element (e.g. examining incongruities within an advertisement, not related to the brand), but not on advertisement executions, endorsers, sponsorships, or media placements which are incongruent with the brand.

In addition, the absence of considerable literature on how to improve already established brands is not only a practical problem, but a theoretical problem, in the sense that much – if not most – research on advertising and brand management investigates brand building from the position of a newly established or weak brand. To illustrate, only 28 % of experimental studies in advertising literature between 1990 and 1997 used familiar brands as the object of study (McQuarrie 1998), meaning that results cannot necessarily be applied to the enhancement of well-established brands. Employing only familiar brands in the empirical studies, this thesis is an exception to much advertising research.

The thesis also constitutes an attempt to apply the schema congruity theory framework onto the area of marketing communications for well-established brands. Using the ideas expressed by, for example, Mandler (1982) and Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) and applying them in an advertising and communications domain, this thesis aims to enrich established literature on advertising effects. This thesis should be able to help researchers to discover questions and answers that potentially lie just around the corner from the particular domain they are studying, thus improving research efficiency and lessening the risk for redundant work. With the empirical assistance of articles two through six, it should be clear that the theories of incongruity can be used across marketing communication elements to explain effects when an element deviates from brand expectations.

Practical relevance of the thesis
This thesis should also be of interest to practitioners: First, brand literature is well equipped to tell the brand manager how to establish a brand to make it strong, with an abundance of available and appropriate advice. However, this literature to a certain extent does not address how a brand which is *already* established should act. The strategies and tactics that are needed to establish a new brand might not necessarily be the same strategies and tactics that are needed to revitalize a brand, maintain brand strength or – even more so – improve the strength, given an already firmly established position of a brand. This thesis attempts to provide a source of inspiration to managers of well-established brands seeking to enhance the position of their brands even more.

Second, this thesis involves the problems facing brand managers that were explained in the beginning of this chapter: As practitioners in marketing constantly seek to develop new and different ways of standing out in media clutter, would brand-incongruent communications be able to achieve this objective? In addition, brand incongruent communications do exist in the marketplace (deliberate or inadvertent), but are they effective in strengthening brands? Since research on information incongruity (in other domains than advertising) points at benefits from incongruent information – although traditional brand management literature advocates consistency in brand communications – practitioners should favor a theoretical and empirical discussion to dispel confusion on this apparent paradox.

Aim of the thesis

In this thesis, I seek to challenge the popular adage in maintaining consistency in brand communications, by examining effects of brand incongruent communications for established brands from a schema theory perspective. I do this in a series of six articles, each highlighting different types of brand-incongruent communication elements and effects on consumer memory and evaluations.

The aim of this thesis is to advance the understanding of consumer perceptions of established brands among academics and practitioners in marketing. Through my empirical and theoretical investigations presented in the articles and this introductory chapter, I want to participate in – and contribute to – the literature on the advancement of established brands.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts. It begins with this introductory chapter on what is currently known about effects of information incongruity, providing a conceptual framework for the subsequent empirical studies. This chapter is followed by six articles. The first one is theoretical. It questions the conventional wisdom of maintaining consistency in brand communications, and argues in favor of a more balanced view of inconsistency including proposed benefits of incongruent communications. The second to sixth articles report the results of the conducted empirical studies. They show that established brands can indeed benefit from communications which challenge existing, well-established brand associations, but that the effects are qualified by moderating factors. The articles also discuss how brand managers and advertising professionals can employ brand incongruent communication elements in their attempts to help mature, established brands remain strong, interesting, and pioneering also in the future.

Theoretical framework

To understand the effects of brand incongruent communications on consumer memory and evaluations of a brand, schema congruity theory provides a relevant and helpful theoretical framework. Before going into the theoretical framework in detail, let us initially examine the concepts of schemas and incongruity separately, before we join them into a set of proposed effects of consumer responses to schema incongruity.

The Concept of Schema

Although there is a multitude of theories on how people organize information in memory, researchers are relatively in agreement on the relevance of schema theory. This theory suggests that memory is organized into a series of nodes and links between these nodes. The nodes represent concepts and the links associations to these concepts. Combining nodes and links with each other, people form beliefs or propositions, for example that "Rolex is luxurious". These beliefs and propositions can be combined to form a knowledge structure called a schema. A schema is thus a mental representation of a class of people, events, situations, or objects (Fiske and Taylor 1991). It should be noted that schemas are not exact copies of an experience or an event. Rather, they represent the meaning of the experience or "abstract representations of environmental regularities" (Mandler 1982, p. 16).

Schemas can be formed at different levels: People can develop schemas for a product class, such as beverages, but it is generally believed that people also form schemas for specific brands, such as Coca-Cola. In fact, product information has been seen to be organized in brand schemas rather than product schemas. That is, product information is organized around brand names rather than product attributes(e.g. Russo and Johnson 1980). This is not unexpected since organization of information in memory is typically determined by the way it is processed. Since product information that people are exposed to is typically brand-specific (for example in advertising), a structure based on brands is likely to emerge. Research has also demonstrated that with greater knowledge and familiarity of a product class people increasingly form brand-based schemas (Johnson and Russo 1984). Therefore, at least for well-known brands, it is possible to assume that people have brand schemas.

The brand schema theory puts emphasis on the organization and processing of brand information. The theory is akin to other terms used to describe the knowledge people have about brands. Such concepts include brand knowledge (Keller 1993), brand associations (Aaker 1991, 1996) and brand image (Dobni and Zinkhan 1990).

Although a brand schema typically is individual, some dimensions of the schema should be shared by a majority of consumers: Marketing communication, packaging and product attributes are typically identical, or at least similar, within a market. Therefore, it should be meaningful to talk

about *the* image of a particular brand, referring to the set of associations that is likely to be common to many consumers. For familiar and mature brands, the existence of such a set is even more likely.

In their daily lives, people come across a multitude of sensory input. People interpret this new information in light of their existing schemas. Mandler (1982) expresses this notion as schemas "operate interactively, that is, input from the environment is coded selectively in keeping with the schemas currently operating while that input also selects relevant schemas. Whenever an event in the environment produces 'data' for the schematic analysis, the activation process proceeds automatically (and interactively) to the highest (most abstract) relevant schema. Evidence from the environment activates potential schemas, and active schemas produce an increased readiness for certain evidence and decreased readiness (inhibition) for other evidence." (Mandler 1982, p. 17).

Much information that people come across will fit well with their existing schemas. However, some information will not. In the case of brands, for example, this may be advertising which communicates other associations than the consumer holds with the brand or reports of poor (high) product quality in high (low) prestige brands. Although people may devote much cognitive effort to make this information fit with the activated schema, sometimes the information deviates too much from the schema to fit with it. In these cases, we can talk of schema incongruity.

What is Incongruity?
A simple definition of incongruity may start with the definition of its antonym, congruity, which is defined as "corresponding in character or kind" (American Heritage 2005). It derives from the Latin word *congruere*, which means "to agree". A dictionary definition of incongruent looks like this:

> "Lacking congruity: as (a) characterized by lack of harmony, consistency, or compatibility with one another (~ colors) (~ desires) (b) characterized by disagreement or lack of conformity with something (conduct ~ with avowed principles)
> (c) characterized by inconsistency or inharmony of its own parts or qualities (an ~ story)
> (d) characterized by lack of propriety or suitableness (~manners)."
>   (Websters Third New International Dictionary 1993)

However, as pointed out by Latta (1999) such a definition is not fully satisfactory as the definition does not specify differences between (a) and (b), and makes (b) a subclass of (a), while (c) merely extends the use of the term to its parts and (d) can be seen as a subclass of (b). Latta argues that "under this definition, incongruity boils down to a lack of fit. There is, however, a virtually endless variety of ways in which things can fail to fit and hence a virtually endless variety of sorts of incongruity" (Latta, 1999, p. 104).

Consequently, the word incongruity can be applied to many relationships between an even greater number of objects. In addition, we can see that other labels denote the same or similar phenomenon, such as 'inconsistency', 'atypicality' and 'violation of expectations'. Let us therefore look at some examples of incongruities in other contexts than brands and advertising: From a general schema theory point of view (which is addressed in this thesis), an incongruity occurs when an object or piece of information does not fit with an individual's activated schema structure. Indeed, most theories on incongruity have in common that the perception of an object does not fit with expectations. This is expressed for instance in the classic paper by Bruner and Postman (1949), where they describe the problem of incongruity as "perceptual events which occur when perceptual expectancies fail of confirmation…Incongruity represents a crucial problem for a theory of perception because, by its very nature, its perception represents a violation of expectation. An unexpected concatenation of events, a conspicuous mismatching, an unlikely pairing of cause and effect – all of these have in common a violation of normal expectancy. Yet incongruities are perceived. Through a process of trial-and-check, ..., the organism operates to discover whether any given expectancy will "pay off." It is either a very sick organism, an overly motivated one, or one deprived of the opportunity to "try-and-check" which will not give up an expectancy in the face of a contradicting environment" (Bruner and Postman 1949, p. 208).

What constitutes an expectation has resemblance to the concept of standards (Higgins, Strauman, and Klein 1986; Higgins 1990). As expressed by Biernat and Billings (2003), standards can be of three general types:

> "(1) *factual standards* (beliefs about the attributes of others), (2) *guides* (criteria of excellence or acceptability…) and (3) *possibilities* (standards regarding what will, could or might exist). Expectancies have also been broadly defined as 'beliefs about a future state of affairs…subjective probabilities linking the future with an outcome at

some level of probability ranging from the merely possible to virtually certain' (Olson, Rose and Zanna 1996, p 211). This definition incorporates the notion of anticipation more than evaluation or measurement, but expectancies are nonetheless similar to standards in that they are mental constructs, based on both memory and current experience, that provide the backdrop against which outcomes and events are experienced… Furthermore, standards and expectancies can be either met or not met, confirmed or disconfirmed, with predicable consequences… For these reasons, we will often use the terms 'standards' and 'expectancies' interchangeably"

(Biernat and Billings, 2003, p 258).

These standards, or expectations, are used for structuring information about objects and groups, a phenomenon known as stereotyping (cf. Brewer 1988, Fiske and Neuberg 1990) in which upon encountering an object or person, an automatic process of identification or categorization occurs. Given that the person devotes at least some level of relevance to the encounter, processing typically results in confirmatory categorization (cf. Fiske and Taylor 1991).

Dimensions of incongruity

Heckler and Childers (1992) posit two dimensions of incongruity: expectancy and relevancy. Expectancy refers to "the degree to which an item or piece of information falls into some predetermined pattern or structure evoked by the theme" (p. 477), whereas relevancy refers to the degree a stimulus contributes to clear identification of a theme or the message being communicated. Separating the two components in a study of picture-word incongruities, they show that communication is most effective when information is unexpected and relevant, whereas either expected or irrelevant information is ineffective. However, the Heckler and Childers (1992) framework is not explicitly addressed in the articles in this thesis, but the brand-incongruent communication elements employed in the empirical studies could indeed be considered as unexpected (judging by pre-test and manipulation check results).

Incongruent with what?

Since an object may be congruent in itself, but incongruent only in relation to another object, it is important to firmly establish what an object is incongruent *with* when discussing incongruity. In this thesis, the main type of incongruity discussed and examined relates to communications which are

incongruent with consumers' established associations to the brand. However, it is also possible to talk about incongruities in terms of communications deviating from product category standards (cf. Loef 2002) – for instance, advertising campaigns for cars are typically associated with certain elements and are therefore likely to be relatively similar (Stafford and Stafford 2002). Another is violations of expectations on advertising generally, where for instance TV commercials are expected to feature sound rather than silence, or foreign-language voice-over and domestic subtitles rather than the reverse (Dimofte, Forehand, and Deshpandé 2003). Thus, there may be other incongruities in marketing and advertising than brand-specific incongruent communication executions.

However, it is difficult to draw a clear cut line between incongruities with a brand schema, an ad schema, a general advertising schema and a product category schema. As the schema for a brand, especially for established brands, shares many of the associations attached to the product category, an incongruity with brand associations can also (but does not need to) be an incongruity with category associations. Similarly, a brand incongruent communications execution can (but does not need to) be incongruent with the general advertising schema. This thesis focuses on communication elements which are incongruent with well-established brand associations. It does not focus on executions which could be considered as generally incongruent with any brand or with general advertising schemas (such as bizarre or crazy executions, e.g., Arias-Bolzmann, Chakraborty, and Mowen 2000), as such executions would not be brand-specific.

Considerable research on effects of incongruity has been done on a perceptual (advertisement) level (e.g. Goodstein 1993; Houston, Childers, and Heckler 1987, Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999), but the studies in this thesis examine incongruities on a conceptual (brand) level. However, the results from research on a perceptual level (e.g. advertisement level) are still thought to be relevant for explaining the outcomes of incongruity on a conceptual level.

Schema incongruity
Combining the concepts of schema and incongruity into schema incongruity, the schema congruity theory framework suggests that when people encounter information which conforms to expectations, there is little need to process the information in-depth to relate it to the brand schema (Kent and Allen 1994; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). However, when the information

does not fit comfortably with the existing schema structure, tension will follow. This tension is uncomfortable to people, and they will try to relieve the tension through some kind of resolution of the incongruity (Festinger, 1957; Heider 1958; Mandler 1982). Three strategies are suggested for resolving the incongruity - assimilation, alternative schema, and accommodation (Lee and Schumann 2004; Mandler 1982). They are described in the following section, and conditions and contingencies affecting the resolution process are described later in this introductory chapter.

Assimilation

In the case of assimilation, the incongruent information is incorporated into the existing schema without any "major structural changes" (Mandler 1982, p. 23) to the schema. The incongruity is thus slight, for instance in the form of a new soft drink which is carbonated and sweet and colorful, but which has a certain degree of real fruit juice in it (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Since it is not typical of a soft drink, consumers at a first glance have difficulty in knowing how to fit the new drink with the existing soft drink schema. However, it may be quite easy for consumers, who find the drink to be similar in for example taste to other soft drinks they have tried, to fit the drink with the existing schema reasoning the drink to be 'really just another soft drink' without having to make changes to the schema.

Alternative schema

Alternative schema resolution refers to situations when consumers are unable to assimilate the incongruent information with the existing schema. They try to resolve the incongruity using another schema than the one first employed. Using the same soft drink as in the paragraph above as an example, people who cannot perceive the fruity beverage as a 'just another soft drink' may instead be successful in activating the *fruit drink* schema. Consequently, they may consider the drink as 'not a soft drink, in fact it is more like a fruit juice' (Lee and Schumann 2004; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Similar results have been found for people presented with typewriters with computer characteristics in which people have seen the object not as a typewriter but more like a computer (Ozanne, Brucks, and Grewal 1992). In its simplest form, alternative schema is thus merely a congruent condition which is delayed until the proper schema has been found (Mandler 1982).

Accommodation

If the incongruity is severe, then neither assimilation nor the use of an

alternative schema may help in resolving the incongruity. In these cases, people may need to undertake serious cognitive effort to interpret the incongruent stimulus and create serious amendments to existing schemas. One such method is known as 'subtyping' (Sujan and Bettman 1989; Taylor and Crocker 1981). This involves judging the incongruent information as a special case and an exception. New nodes are added to the previous schema structure to accommodate this specific form of incongruity. For example, consumers may categorize the fruit drink in the soft drink schema but add new elements to the soft drink schema such as "'It is a soft drink, but one that does not have the usual preservatives' (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989) or 'This product is a word-processing typewriter (Ozanne et al., 1992)'" (Lee and Schumann 2004, p.68). Introducing Diet Coke in the 1980s may similarly have made consumers adjust their Coca-Cola brand schemas with new nodes and links. 'This is a Coke drink, and although it shares some similarities with the ordinary Coca-Cola, it is after all quite different - a diet soda'. Interestingly, if consumers subtype Diet Coke (or use the similar schema + tag model, Sujan and Bettman 1989), this implies that the previous schema structure regarding everything else (e.g. the Coca-Cola brand) but the exception (Diet Coke), is maintained relatively constant. This means that prior beliefs are (surprisingly) unchanged and that introducing Diet Coke may have only a slight effect on perceptions of the original Coca-Cola drink (cf. Supphellen et al. 2004; Thorbjørnsen 2005).

If the incongruity cannot be resolved through subtyping, a new schema may have to be created (Mandler 1982). This would require substantial cognitive and emotional effort, and since people in daily situations as consumers typically have limited ability and motivation to engage in serious cognitive elaboration, it is quite likely that they will not resolve the incongruity even after having made attempts to make alterations to their existing schemas (Lee and Schumann 2004).

Resolution of the incongruity thus takes place with the help of the established schema, and as Mandler (1982) contends, many incongruities can be resolved within the existing schema structure. It thus seems to be the case that schemas are quite resistant to change. Indeed, if schemas are to function, they will necessarily be able to handle a certain measure of irregularity or variation since they were established from a large variation in sensory input. However, given the established structure, people will also try to maintain the existing structure, as suggested by theories of cognitive consistency (e.g., Festinger 1957; Heider 1958).

Moderating influences to incongruity resolution

The processing of incongruent information and the subsequent effects are conditional on a number of factors, including brand characteristics, consumer factors, and situational factors. Let us therefore look closer at some of these moderating factors and how they may shape the effects of incongruity.

The role of brand familiarity

First of all, the relevancy of brand incongruent communications is greatest when it can be assumed that the brand has firmly established key associations, typically as a result of a long and visible existence in the marketplace. Indeed, for a new or unfamiliar brand to which consumers have little or no associations, a piece of information cannot be brand image incongruent, since there is no brand image to mismatch it. Instead, this piece of information will form the brand schema using assimilation to the product category schema. This was seen in studies by Lange and Dahlén (2003) and Dahlén and Lange (2004) where advertisements were perceived as brand-incongruent for familiar brands, but not for new brands. Hence, the concept of brand incongruent communications is relevant for well-established brands.

The role of consumer factors

Previous research lists several moderating influences for the resolution of incongruity in advertising contexts (Lee and Schumann 2004). As to consumer factors, these include optimal stimulation level, novelty and sensation seeking, rigidity and dogmatism, tolerance for ambiguity, prior knowledge and need for cognition. To this list from previous research should be added the concept of consumer's general disposition to advertising, referred to as attitude toward advertising (e.g. MacKenzie and Lutz 1989) or skepticism towards advertising (e.g. Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998), which has not previously been examined in an information incongruity context.

Starting with **attitude toward advertising**, consumers with high attitudes toward advertising enjoy the entertainment value in ads whereas consumers with low levels of attitude toward advertising may be less inclined to elaborate on the advertising, thus disabling this route to positive reactions (cf. MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Consequently, consumers with high attitudes toward advertising are more likely to elaborate on incongruent communications, increasing chances that it will be resolved.

Continuing with **need for cognition** (NFC), individuals vary in their enjoyment in thinking. People with a high need for cognition (NFC) are more likely to engage in effortful processing and use the central processing route (Cacioppo and Petty 1982). Therefore, people high in NFC are more likely to follow the central route when processing incongruities, thus increasing chances that the incongruity will be resolved.

Optimal stimulation level (OSL) refers to an individual's preferred level of stimulation (cf. Raju 1980). If a piece of information is below a person's optimal stimulation level, s/he is likely to be bored, and if the piece is considerably above the OSL, s/he is likely to be overwhelmed. Incongruent information is more likely to involve novelty and stimulation than congruent information. Therefore, people high in OSL are more likely to engage in incongruity resolution and enjoy positive effects from it, whereas people low in OSL may want to avoid the incongruent information since it is too demanding to resolve.

Rigidity and dogmatism refer to resistance to change in the belief system. Research has demonstrated that people who are highly dogmatic are reluctant to receive and integrate information which deviates from their current set of beliefs (Rokeach, McGoveny, and Denor 1960). Similarly, people high in rigidity have difficulty in trying new things and are lowly motivated to accept new ideas. Consequently, highly dogmatic and rigid individuals should be less inclined to appreciate brand incongruent communications than less dogmatic and rigid people (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Individuals with a high **tolerance for ambiguity**, that is "the tendency to perceive ambiguous or inconsistent situations as desirable" (Budner 1962), should also be more favorable of incongruent information. A similar, but more contemporary concept, **Preference for Consistency** (PFC) (Cialdini, Trost and Newsom 1995), implies that people with a low (high) preference for consistency are more (less) inclined to appreciate and process incongruent information. A study by Sjödin and Törn (2003) supports this idea, as people low in PFC liked a brand-incongruent advertisement better than did people high in PFC.

Expertise of the consumer may also shape the ability to resolve the incongruity: Memory structures and processing strategies differ between individuals with little or considerable prior knowledge. People with considerable prior knowledge, usually termed experts, are better at problem solving and use cognitive resources better than novices (Alba and

Hutchinson 1987). Alba and Hutchinson (1987) also argue that experts, having an elaborate schema structure, use less schema-based heuristics when forming judgments than do novices. Consequently, incongruent information is likely to be processed in more detail by experts than novices (cf. Sujan 1985). In addition, because of their well-developed schema structure, experts are more inclined to detect an incongruity in a piece of communication. For novices, the incongruent piece of information may indeed not even entail a mismatch, since there is nothing in the novice brand schema to mismatch it with.

The role of situational factors
Lee and Schumann (2004) also discuss a number of situational factors. Such situational factors, relevant to this thesis, include perceived risk, personal relevance, processing time, and mood.

Perceived risk was examined by Campbell and Goodstein (2001), who found that the positive effects of moderate incongruity did not manifest under conditions of high risk. Instead, consumers preferred a congruent product alternative. The authors argued that heightened risk perception leads to higher risk aversion and thus reliance on safe alternatives, that is a preference for congruity.

Personal relevance and interest can generate high involvement, which has been shown to enhance arousal, make consumers devote more cognitive effort to a stimulus, and to facilitate information processing (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983). Consequently incongruent communication, which is relevant to consumers, stands a better chance of being resolved.

Processing time has been shown to affect the ability to resolve incongruity. Srull (1981) and Srull, Lichtenstein, and Rothbart (1985) found that if study participants were not given enough time to think about the incongruity, they were not able to resolve it. In addition, if the exposure time of a communications piece is short, consumers are less likely even to notice the discrepancy in the incongruent message (Houston, Heckler, and Childers 1987). These results actually bear similarity to the early observed effects of incongruent stimuli in the classic Bruner and Postman (1949) study on incongruent playing cards. Exposed to, for example, cards featuring black hearts or red spades, some participants could not perceptually encode the card, failing to resolve the incongruity. As expressed by one participant who was given plenty, but not enough, time to resolve the incongruity: "I can't

make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn't even look like a card that time. I don't know what color it is now or whether it's a spade or heart. I'm not even sure now what a spade looks like! My God!" (Bruner and Postman 1949, p 218).

The situational mood of the consumer is also expected to affect the incongruity resolution. Previous research has indicated that the way information is encoded, stored, and retrieved from memory and the depth of processing is shaped by mood (Batra and Stayman 1990; Bower 1981; Isen 1990; Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983). For instance, research indicates that happiness reduces deliberate, careful processing of information (Asuncion and Lam 1995; Mackie, Asuncion, and Rosselli 1992; Schwarz and Bless 1991), and sadness is expected to increase careful, systematic processing (Mackie, Asuncion, and Rosselli 1992). However, Asuncion and Lam's (1995) results indicate that a neutral mood is better than either a happy or a sad mood for remembering incongruent information since an extreme affect consumes resources that may be necessary for processing incongruent information. In contrast, in research using the Affect Infusion Model proposed by Forgas (1995a), type of mood had a significantly greater influence on judgment of an atypical pattern which required more extensive processing (Forgas 1995b). Therefore, mood should moderate incongruity effects, although as Lee and Schumann (2004, p 71) remark: "The directionality of these effects is not clear at this time and will require more empirical work".

The role of marketer-generated factors
When encountering incongruent information, consumers will have to use a schema and possibly other pieces of knowledge (including additional schemas) to process and resolve the incongruity (Lee and Schumann 2004). Therefore, hinting at a possible way for schema activation may be a way for marketers to encourage incongruity resolution. Research has demonstrated that knowledge transfer between schemas can be enhanced with the help of hints and resolution messages (Cornwell et al 2006; Gick and Holyoak 1983). Furthermore, using explanatory links has been shown to enhance consumers' comprehension of an ambiguous message (Bridges, Keller, and Sood 2000). Therefore, the incongruity in a message could be reduced with active sense-making efforts from the marketer.

Also, the perceived incongruity could diminish over time. For instance, if a brand extension, which was perceived as incongruent when it was launched,

actually sells and therefore manages to stay in the marketplace, consumers are likely to accept it with time and therefore perceive it as more congruent, having become part of the brand schema (probably either assimilated or sub-typed). Indeed, research has shown that with increased exposure, consumers may not perceive brand extensions as incongruent anymore (Lane 2000). However, in many cases the initial response to an advertising campaign or a brand or product launch may be crucial for future success: If a new product or brand extension does not sell, media reports and peer consumer opinions may lead to derogation of the new product among consumers, effectively hampering future sales. Therefore, marketers may consider opportunities for reducing the level of incongruity if they perceive the incongruity to be too severe to be resolvable.

Effects of Schema Incongruity

What are the effects of incongruity following the processing of incongruent information? Previous research suggests a number of effects on a general level. For instance, the broader psychological literature suggests that expectations, which are met, result in little arousal and positive affect (e.g., Mandler 1975, 1982). When expectations are violated, however, people may experience *arousal, negative emotionality,* and *emotion intensification* (Biernat and Billings 2003). Incongruity also attracts *attention*, as the violation of expectations makes the incongruent stimuli salient (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Goodstein 1993; Schützwohl 1998; Vanhamme and Snelders 2001). As to aspects of *memory*, the attempts to resolve the incongruity can improve memory for unexpected aspects of brand communication, the brand featured in the communication, and for other parts of the communication (e.g., Arias-Bolzmann, Chakraborty, and Mowen 2000; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Wansink and Ray 1996).

The literature on humor argues that effects of incongruity include surprise, laughter, and smiling, which should color evaluations of the incongruent incident (e.g., Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Latta 1999; Nerhardt 1977). In addition, since surprise is intrinsically arousing, the experience of related emotions with the incident gets more intense. In other words, surprise caused by incongruity may pave the way for a stronger valenced *emotional reaction* than a non-surprising stimulus would evoke.

Thus, incongruity seems to generate a number of reactions which are positive from a marketing communications point of view. Continuing with

evaluations, previous research has demonstrated that the attitude towards the ad is enhanced when there is incongruity within an ad (Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999). Furthermore, Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren (1994) found a positive relationship between incongruity and evaluations of brand extensions. Research has also demonstrated that a positive evaluation of an extension benefits the evaluation of the parent brand (e.g., Lane and Jacobson, 1997). A positive relationship between incongruity in ads and brand attitude is found in Lee (2000) and Lee and Mason (1999).

However, other researchers have shown negative relationships between incongruity and evaluations of objects and brands (cf. Aaker and Keller, 1990; Czellar, 2003; Grime, Diamantopoulos, and Smith 2002). One reason for the difference in results may be that the relationship may be shaped like an inverted U: Theorized by Mandler (1982) and empirically examined by a number of researchers (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Meyers-Levy, Louie and Curren 1994; Maoz and Tybout 2002; Peracchio and Tybout 1996), it seems as if the benefits of incongruity (for example in terms of improved evaluations) are achieved when there is moderate incongruity, as opposed to congruity, or extreme incongruity. When there is moderate incongruity, people are able to resolve the incongruity after some thought, causing a moderately intense and positive state. So, for positive effects on evaluations to take place, it seems as if a moderate (as opposed to an extreme) level of incongruity is desirable. If we therefore restrict our subsequent discussion on effects to encompass only effects of moderate incongruity, we can infer from previous literature a number of positive effects on the brand following incongruity.

As pointed out previously, incongruent communications stimulates elaboration of the incongruent element and how it fits with the established brand schema. This elaboration should affect consumers' memory: When people try to resolve incongruity, they develop a greater number of associative pathways in memory relative to when processing congruent information (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Although this may not dramatically alter the foundations of existing knowledge for an established brand, it should have the opportunity to influence finer elements of brand-related knowledge. Brand-incongruent communications could thus slightly reform the brand schema and allow more sophisticated representations as more facets of the brand are considered in the sense-making efforts. Since the number of associative pathways increases chances of retrieving a particular item in memory, this should result in

improved memory of the incongruent information and related parts of the communication (cf. Lee and Schumann 2004). Consequently, brand-incongruent communications should lead to more sophisticated processing of brand associations and better memory of the incongruent element and brand. Moreover, the elaboration of existing brand associations entails an iteration of the associations, and the very repetition of these associations might actually strengthen these associations with the brand. Therefore, brand-incongruent communications will not necessarily dilute existing brand associations, but may actually reinforce them.

Continuing with effects on brand attitude, an additional effect of the elaboration of the brand schema is that it increases the salience of the brand in memory (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986). This, in turn, should enhance brand attitude (Holden and Vanhuele 1999). In addition, success of incongruity resolution (cf. Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989) will create positive affect, which may improve attitudes towards the brand-incongruent element as well as brand attitude. Brand-incongruent communications can thus improve brand attitude. The improvement of brand attitude is thus an effect of two factors: Elaboration on the brand, and the success of resolving the incongruity.

Given the ambition that this thesis should discuss how established brands can act to improve their strength, interestingness, and vitality, I will also present effects on interestingness and brand interest following incongruity. Some researchers argue that brand interest and interestingness of communications and the brand (e.g. Alwitt 2000; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993) are different constructs than brand attitude, but equally (if not more) important than brand attitude. Brand interest should be particularly relevant to well-established brands, as it could be considered to go beyond evaluations, focusing on how consumers are intrigued by a brand. For established familiar brands, the well-established brand schema reduces the novelty and uncertainty about the brand, causing the brand's advertising to wear out quickly (Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993).

Consequently, Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what communications will entail for a familiar brand. This reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communications. Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of established and familiar brands should be to bring down the boredom consumers experience with a heavily advertised,

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well-known brand and increase brand interest. For low-risk frequently purchased goods, an enhanced degree of brand interest among consumers should reduce variety-seeking tendencies, and for high-risk categories it should serve as a determinant of which brands are selected in a search process. In addition, Alwitt (2000) argues that advertisers must concentrate on the interestingness of advertising if they want viewers to attend to their messages throughout the course of a commercial. A too narrow focus on consistency may limit opportunities for curiosity and interest in the brand. Consequently, brand-incongruent communications are expected to enhance brand interest.

Another effect of an incongruent communications should be that consumers will talk about the brand-incongruent communications with friends and family to a larger extent than about communications which are consistent with expectations. This could be either as recommendations, referred to as 'word-of-mouth', or without recommendations, referred to as 'buzz'. Indeed, research has shown that distinctiveness (having close similarity to incongruity) is an important determinant of buzz generation (Niederhoffer et al 2007).

In sum, previous research on incongruity – also in other domains than brands and marketing communications – points at several benefits of incongruity, from a marketing communications and brand management point-of-view. The tendency among academics and practitioners in considering incongruity as problematic and jeopardizing to the brand may thus have to be reconsidered.

Overview of the Six Articles

Looking at brand incongruent communications from a broad perspective, this thesis examines the processing of brand incongruent communications and its effects on evaluations and consumer memory. The empirical studies are reported in five articles. Figure 2 below depicts the contribution of each article in an incongruity-processing and effects framework.
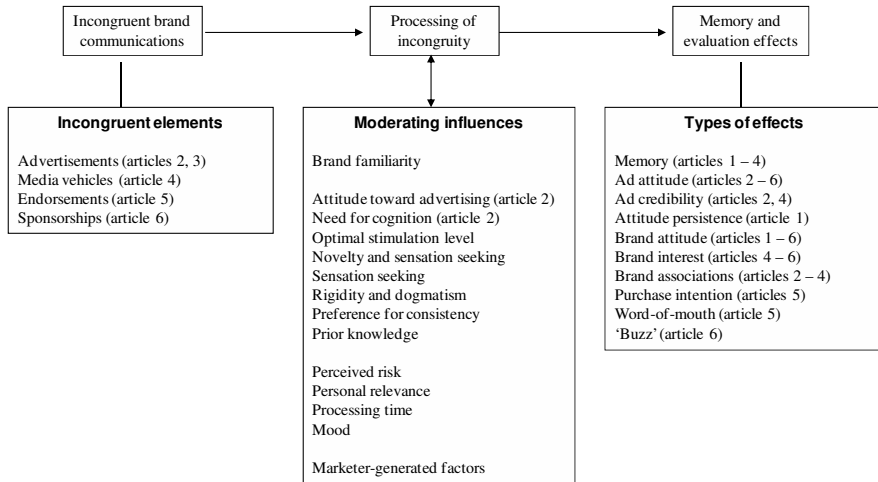
Figure 2. Contributions of each article in an incongruity processing and effects framework.

Article 1. When Communication Challenges Brand Associations: A Framework for Understanding Consumer Responses to Brand Image Incongruity

(with Henrik Sjödin; Published in the Journal of Consumer Behaviour)

The first article is a conceptual paper in which we review literature on how consumers react when a piece of brand communication is incongruent with established brand associations. Although brand experts typically criticize such brand image incongruity, it is a fact that companies at times do communicate in ways that challenge existing associations, for example in some advertising or when launching brand extensions. The article integrates previous work – which has been scattered across several poorly connected domains – into a coherent framework. We propose effects of brand image incongruity on consumers' processing and evaluation. We also identify

marketing implications and avenues for future research. The propositions imply opportunities for brand management, thus suggesting the need for a balanced view on brand image incongruity.

In this article, we put forward brand image incongruity as a common label for discrepancies between a particular piece of communication about a brand and the brand image already established with consumers. We present a set of consumer responses to brand image incongruity. The potential in taking a broad view of brand image incongruity can help researchers discover interesting questions and answers that potentially lie just around the corner from the particular instance they are studying, thus improving research efficiency and lessening the risk for redundant work. Our review may also benefit marketers in several ways, in their need to predict consumer responses. Firstly, the article may be helpful in understanding the consequences of inadvertent incongruity in brand communications. Secondly, it can guide decisions when the brand owner hopes to transform the associations consumers currently hold with the brand, for instance when planning a strategic repositioning. Finally, our account may help practitioners to appreciate the potential in deliberately creating brand image incongruity. This knowledge can be valuable to marketers in search of effective means to gain consumer attention, stimulate interest, and mitigate the predictability of established brands. Thereby we also argue in favor of expanding the conventional view of brand image incongruity. Identifying incongruity only as a problem and not at all as an opportunity is too restricted a view. The core function of a brand is to provide consumers with a reliable rule of thumb as to what they can expect, but at times it may be essential to challenge consumer perceptions if mature brands are to remain relevant and vigorous.

Article 2. Effects of Ad-Brand Incongruency

(with Micael Dahlén, Fredrik Lange, and Henrik Sjödin;
Published in the Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising)

The second article presents the results of two empirical studies investigating communication effects of information incongruity in advertising. The article first tests effects of ad-brand incongruity on ad attitude, ad credibility, brand attitude and processing of brand-related information. In the second part, these results are validated and the understanding of ad-brand incongruity

further developed by investigating effects of a second exposure and the influence of two moderating variables: need for cognition (NFC) and attitude toward advertising.

This article provides insights into the communication effectiveness of established brands. Prior research has shown that traditional advertising is less effective in influencing brand attitude for these brands, since it wears out quickly and consumers get bored with the ads and brands. We show that incongruent ads can increase brand attitude and reduce advertising wear-out by challenging consumers' brand schemata. There are two lessons to learn from this. Firstly, established brands may need to be less consistent in their advertising in order for the brand and its advertising to be interesting. The brand schema could become a prison of sorts, as it reduces the imagination and curiosity of consumers. In order to break out of this prison, advertising needs to challenge consumers' brand schemata. Secondly, advertisers may not need to be so afraid of blurring the brand image with inconsistent advertising.

Article 3. Effects of Brand Incongruent Advertising in Competitive Settings

(with Micael Dahlén; Published in European Advances in Consumer Research)

The third article examines the ability of brand-incongruent advertising to break through competitive advertising clutter. We show that brand-incongruent ads can lead to an increase in attention, more sophisticated processing of brand associations, better ad and brand recall, as well as improved ad attitudes. Due to the competitive context, however, brand attitudes and purchase intentions remained unchanged.

This study provides support for the idea that information which is incongruent with established brand associations may be an effective means of reaching through the advertising clutter: We show that an incongruent advertisement is more attended to and better remembered than a congruent advertisement. In addition, consumers more strongly elaborate on, and more finely process, brand associations after having been exposed to an incongruent ad. Such an effect should be desirable for mature brands since advertising for mature brands seldom is thoroughly processed. We argue that

for established brands in a cluttered advertising milieu, the positive effects on attention, memory, and ad attitudes can be obtained without risks of jeopardizing brand attitudes or purchase intentions.

Article 4. Could Placing Ads Wrong be Right? Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence

(with Micael Dahlén, Sara Rosengren, and Niclas Öhman; Published in the Journal of Advertising)

In the fourth article, we suggest that placing ads in a medium that is thematically incongruent with the brand may be beneficial. Although congruity might be useful in trying to reach the desired target audience, reaching parts of that audience using thematically incongruent magazines might increase the effectiveness of an ad. In a first study, we test the effects of thematic incongruence experimentally by inserting ads for two familiar brands in real magazines. Results demonstrate that an incongruent media placement will defy consumer expectations and that consumers – as they try to resolve the incongruence – process the advertising more. The increased processing and successful resolution lead to enhanced evaluations and strengthened brand associations. A second study rules out competing explanations and replicates the main findings. Furthermore, it tests the moderating effect of brand familiarity.

Indicating that incongruity – rather than congruity – has positive effects on processing, memory, and evaluations, the results of the fourth article are opposite to previous research on thematically incongruent media placements. By choosing the "wrong media", the ad and the brand can be more interesting and persuasive. As consumers become familiar with a brand, they form expectations regarding its advertising. Thematically incongruent media placements challenge these expectations and thus, add novelty and interest to the brand's communication, provoking more careful processing of the advertising.

Article 5. Revisiting the Match-Up Hypothesis:
Effects of Brand-Incongruent Celebrity Endorsements

(Single-authored, forthcoming in the Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising)

The fifth article challenges previous research arguing that communications effects are improved when there is a fit, or match-up, between an endorser and the focal brand. I argue that results found in previous research are valid for new brands, but for established brands, there are arguments for not selecting a celebrity endorser with a perfect match with the brand. I suggest that selecting a brand-incongruent endorser – who mismatches the brand – actually can improve communication effects: Processing, evaluations and purchase intentions are higher with an incongruent rather than a congruent endorser.

This study considers the effect of endorsements where the images of the endorser and the brand mismatch. In a pilot study, the effects of two incongruent and two congruent combinations of brands and endorsers are tested experimentally for two familiar brands. This shows that endorsements by brand-incongruent celebrities are more processed, and result in higher evaluations and purchase intentions. This pilot study uses data from a study, which was originally developed by two students and reported as an SSE master's thesis (Stig and Hessel 2007). The main study confirms the findings from the pilot study, and rules out competing explanations to the effects. Moreover, it compares the effects of brand-incongruent endorsers for market-leading brands and for brands which are established and familiar, but only moderately strong. The results show that the positive effect of incongruity not only applies to market-leading brands but to "second-tier" brands as well.

Article 6. Enhancing Fit and Evaluations In Brand Incongruent
Sponsorships Through Relational Information

(Single-authored, in review for publication in the Journal of Marketing Communications)

The sixth article looks at the opportunity for increasing consumer resolution of an extremely brand-incongruent sponsorship through employing

explanatory ad copy. The purpose is to examine the role of deliberate attempts by the marketer to encourage consumer sense-making as a means to overcome the potential jeopardy of brand-incongruent advertising. The results show that an ad copy which conveys relational information (as opposed to item specific information) reduces the extreme incongruity and enhances ad and brand attitudes, interest in the brand, and the likelihood that consumers will tell others about the sponsorship, referred to as 'buzz'.

The implications are that brand and advertising managers do not need to fear the employment of brand-incongruent communications. If they are uncertain to what extent communications are incongruent with established brand associations, they might fear the communicative element to be extremely incongruent. This would mean that the incongruity would not be resolvable, putting consumer evaluations at risk. However, the study shows that simply using a relational, explanatory copy text will facilitate consumer sense-making effort, reduce the incongruity, and significantly improve evaluations.

Contributions

On an overarching level, this thesis challenges the convention of maintaining consistency in marketing communications: I argue that the advice on how to establish a new brand to become a strong brand may not be as applicable when the objective is to generate enhanced strength, interest, and curiosity in an already established brand. In doing so, this thesis offers a new way of understanding brand change and effects of brand communications. On a more detailed level, this thesis develops the understanding of what happens when consumers are exposed to communications which are incongruent with established brand associations.

Contributions to marketing communications literature
The articles in this thesis constitute a comprehensive attempt to apply the schema congruity theory framework onto the area of advertising for well-established brands. Using the ideas expressed by, for example, Mandler (1982) and Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) and applying them in an advertising and communications domain, this thesis aims to enrich established literature on advertising and communications reception. Indeed, there is quite a number of studies employing schema congruity theory to

explain consumer reception to other marketing elements (e.g. incongruities between pictures and words in ads between an ad and general viewer expectations, between endorsers and the product category schema, between features of a product and product category schemas, between brands and brand extensions as well as in sales-people schemas), for a review see Lee and Schumann (2004). However, this literature has often examined the specific element domains (e.g. brand extensions) rather than the theoretical domain (i.e. incongruity). As proposed in the first article, the theoretical approach (as opposed to an element-specific approach) in this thesis should help researchers to discover questions and answers that potentially lie just around the corner from the particular instance they are studying (i.e. brand extension), thus improving research efficiency and lessening the risk for redundant work. With the empirical assistance of articles two through six, it should be clear that the theories of incongruity can be used across marketing elements to explain effects when the element deviates from brand expectations.

One main contribution to the marketing communications literature is also that much previous research has argued in favor of congruent conduct. This thesis shows that there is theoretical as well as empirical rationale for communicating incongruently, thereby going against the popular adage of consistency in marketing communications and brand management. In this thesis, I argue in favor of expanding the conventional view of brand incongruent communications. Identifying incongruity only as a problem and not at all as an opportunity is too restricted a view. The core function of a brand is to provide consumers with a reliable rule of thumb as to what they can expect, but for established, mature brands, it may – at times – be essential to challenge consumer perceptions if these brands are to remain relevant and vigorous.

In all empirical studies, employing incongruent communications isfound to be more effective than employing congruent communications. We find that incongruent communications are more processed, better remembered, more liked, and that they improve brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and consumer interest in brands. One reason why our findings are contrary to much previous research favoring congruity is that the studies in this thesis have employed real, established brands rather than fictitious or new brands. In doing so, this thesis also enhances the ecological validity of the findings, and provides opportunity for the effect of brand-incongruent communications to manifest also in a real business environment.

Contributing to existing information incongruity theory, the thesis shows that perceived incongruity is not static but can be altered by the marketer. Adding to the works by – for example – Lane (2000) and Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000), I find support for the idea that incongruity can be managed by the marketer, thereby improving chances that the incongruity will be perceived as less extreme (which would affect evaluations positively).

Another contribution to information incongruity theory is the examination of two moderating factors in the incongruity resolution process. Need for Cognition (Cacioppo and Petty 1982) was shown to have a significant effect on the outcome. People with high NFC enjoyed incongruent communications more than people low in NFC. This also suggests that employing incongruity makes the communications more complex. For the other moderating variable, attitude towards advertising (e.g., MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998) showed similar results: People with high attitude toward advertising responded favorably to brand-incongruent ads, whereas for people with low attitude toward advertising, there was no difference between congruent or incongruent ads. The complexity of effects following incongruent communications is also highlighted when examining brand-incongruent advertising in a competitive context. From article three, we learn that there may be boundary conditions to the positive effects of incongruity observed in previous studies. It seems as if the competitive context can be such a boundary condition, hampering the ability to resolve incongruent ads. Since advertising for established brands typically is located in a competitive setting, we should not anticipate brand-incongruent communications to indisputably improve brand evaluations. Results show that in competitive contexts, the level of incongruity and the opportunity and ability to resolve the incongruity must be closely observed to secure positive evaluations. In competitive settings it may be necessary to to reduce the level of incongruity even more to make it moderately incongruent and/or enhance resolution opportunities (which is further examined in article six).

To the literature on media selection, the fourth article presents interesting results as we suggest that thematic incongruity, rather than congruity, has positive effects on processing, memory and evaluations. We also add to literature on creative media choice (Dahlén 2005) when arguing that placing advertising in traditional media can be creative. Thematically incongruent media placements challenge the expectations that consumers have of the brand, and thus add novelty and interest to the brand's communication, provoking more careful processing of the advertising.

Similarly, the fifth article should be of interest to the literature on endorsements, as I show that a mismatch can be better than a matchup between endorser and brand. It is one of few studies using real brands to study matchup effects, thereby extending the validity of matchup effects from new brands to existing brands. In contrast to other studies, it examines matchup based on a general lack of fit in brand associations, thereby showing that matchup studies need not be restricted to specific aspects of endorsement image such as attractiveness or expertise.

The sixth article contributes to existing research on sponsorships, especially research on effects of articulation of relational information in sponsorships. This previous research has looked at consumers' ability to correctly recall the sponsoring brand, but the present study extends the list of effects: It examines the opportunity of relational information to enhance the perceived fit of an extremely incongruent sponsorship and improve evaluations, brand interest, and the chance that consumers will tell others about the sponsorship. It complements previous research on positive effects of relational information in incongruent sponsorships (e.g., Cornwell 2008; Cornwell et al. 2006; Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2008).

Methodological contributions
The empirical studies all employ a similar methodology, which is an experimental design. Although experimental designs constitute the dominant methodology used in the information processing and advertising effectiveness literature (including most of the studies cited in this thesis), there is still some relevant criticism relating to the limitations of laboratory-type experiments. These criticisms essentially question the realism in experiments and the applicability of the results into business practice. Such a critique becomes particularly important for this thesis, as this thesis aims to improve brand practice for well-established brands.

To accomplish this aim, a relatively high degree of realism or "ecological validity" in the empirical studies would be beneficial. Although not a validity type in its original meaning, ecological validity refers to research which addresses samples and settings that represent the ecology of the application (Shadish, Cook and Campbell 2002), that is applying a sense of realism in the studies. In a comprehensive meta-analysis on 443 laboratory experiments in advertising research, McQuarrie (1998) examines the degree to which these studies comply with conditions that could be argued to characterize mass media advertising in real life. This review may serve as a framework for

assessing the degree of ecological validity in the studies making up this thesis. McQuarrie assesses these studies based on six factors of "reality" including 1) Advertisements are embedded and not the focus of attention, 2) Advertisements attempt to influence choice. 3) Advertisements are subject to competitive interference, 4) Advertisements must influence choice after a delay, 5) Advertisements may be repeated, and 6) Much advertising is for familiar brands.

McQuarrie argues that ads normally are embedded in media and that the subject of interest for the consumers is the medium, not the ads. Therefore, findings on effects under forced exposure need not transfer into a real setting. He reports that only 17% of studies conducted after 1990 employ embedded ads. In this thesis, however, the third and fourth studies employ advertisements that were embedded in real copies of the Cosmopolitan magazine and an outdoor sports magazine, catering to McQuarrie's requirements.

McQuarrie argues that the goal of advertising is to alter choice, and that merely measuring attitude change in studies is insufficient. In his view, studies should be designed to let participants make a choice between the advertised and competing brands. Although a relevant viewpoint, to set up such a choice design in the studies would demand considerably greater resources than could be obtained for the studies in the thesis. Furthermore, the fact that all studies employed established brands with strong purchase habits and established schemas, together with the fact that participants were only exposed once (or twice) to the advertisements, means that we might not necessarily expect great changes on choice. Indeed, in study five purchase intention was measured, but in some studies purchase intention was not reported as the change in purchase intention did not reach acceptable levels of significance. Consequently, it is unclear how a choice task would benefit these particular studies significantly better than does a traditional attitude measurement.

The third dimension in McQuarrie's list involves the fact that most real-life advertising is subject to competitive interference. The third and fourth studies attempt to address exactly this by examining the effects of incongruent advertising (study three) and media placements (study four) when advertising is surrounded by other competing advertisements. This was done by inserting the ads into real copies of magazines. McQuarrie reports that 20 % of studies after 1990 had a competitive message present.

McQuarrie argues that except for point-of-purchase advertising, advertisements "must create an enduring impact if they are to succeed" (1998, p 16), and that purchase often takes place at least a day after exposure to media advertisements. In the second article, we did measure brand associations following exposure to brand-incongruent advertising both directly and at a one-week delay, thereby partially catering to McQuarrie's requirements. According to McQuarrie, 5 % of studies after 1990 employed delayed measurements.

Regarding the fifth factor, which is that advertising may be repeated, the second study exposed participants to advertisements twice (with a nine-day delay between exposures). As stated by McQuarrie, advertising campaigns in real life are seldom restricted to one exposure. However, in all studies we find effects from only one exposure, even though we employ mature, well-established brands. If we would have used multiple exposures – in different media vehicles – also in the other studies, possibly the effect of the incongruity would have been even stronger. On the other hand, Lane (2000) showed that with repeated exposures, incongruity can be reduced. Consequently, more research examining the impact of repeated exposure to brand-incongruent communications would be highly beneficial.

The last factor in McQuarrie's list is that much advertising is for familiar brands. Indeed, the point of departure for this thesis is the problems facing mature and well-established brands. Therefore, it is perfectly natural that all empirical studies in this thesis employ well-established, real brands. In doing so, we catered to this requirement across all studies, whereas only 50 % of advertising experiments in McQuarrie's study did.

Although not all articles in this thesis fulfil all requirements at the same time, at least all factors were considered in the thesis. McQuarrie reports that forty per cent of recent (1990 – 1997) advertising experimental studies catered to zero of the requirements, with an average number of .99 factors addressed. Only 2 out of 231 studies used four or more factors. Using McQuarrie's factors as a basis for judging the realism in the studies, the articles in this thesis may therefore be considered to have a relatively high degree of ecological validity.

One dimension that McQuarrie did not address, but often is debated in advertising literature discussions on realism in advertising studies, is the use of student samples (see e.g. Peterson 2001 for a review of the debate). In the

articles in this thesis, both student samples and non-student samples have been employed. Not only are student samples typically easier to administrate. Moreover, due to the complexity of incongruent communications a relatively homogenous sample was deemed desirable. Most of the studies therefore used student samples. The exception is study five, where the initial student sample results were validated with a non-student sample to confirm the relevance of employing brand-incongruent communications also in non-student populations. By using student samples, we reduced the risk of errors due to random heterogeneity between subjects (e.g. Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1982; Peterson 2001). However, in all studies using student samples the brands were still relevant to students, and students were part of the intended target audience to ensure a certain degree of realism.

Contributions to advertising and brand management practice
In addition to attempting to enrich the marketing communications literature, this thesis also has the objective of attempting to enrich and improve advertising and brand management practice. The results of the studies presented in the articles are applicable to brand management and advertising practice for well-established, mature brands. Whereas much research on advertising typically uses fictitious brands to control for prior learning when examining effects in experiments, the studies in this thesis have employed real, established brands. Therefore, the implications should be quite relevant to practitioners working with established brands.

From a managerial perspective, the results of the studies indicate that the popular tendency of embracing consistency in brand advertising may have to be revisited, at least for well-established brands. Brand incongruent communications can cause consumers to better pay attention, to better remember the ad message and focal brand. They can improve evaluations and purchase intentions, and enhance brand associations and brand interest.

These effects are all common communication objectives, which in themselves, should be enough reason to consider the employment of brand-incongruent communications when it is appropriate. Another desirable effect of the use of brand incongruent communications when positioning an established brand should lie in the nature of processing: Whereas traditional positioning efforts typically imply some kind challenge to competitors, or at least consumers having to think about the brand relative to competitors, brand-incongruent communication challenges the brand without reference to competitors. Established brands are thus in the fortunate position to be able

to reinvent themselves and make consumers mentally process the brand – and this brand only – rather than thinking about competitive brands. This should be particularly welcome for brands working in highly competitive environments where competitive interference and clutter pose great threats to communication effectiveness.

The thesis also puts forth the idea of salience and brand interest as important communication objectives for mature, well-established brands. Such brands have established brand schemata, which reduces their need for help from the advertising context to be processed and comprehended. We argue that highly familiar brands stand the risk of becoming too familiar and predictable. The major issue for these brands is not to increase awareness or liking, but rather to increase consumers' interest in and desire to come in contact with the brand (cf. Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). Brand-incongruent communications provide an opportunity to challenge consumers' perceptions of predictable brands. So, for established brands, the advertising campaign objective must not always necessarily be the improvement of brand attitudes (as long as brand attitudes are not hurt). Instead it could be to enhance brand salience in consumer memory to keep the brand "top-of-mind" and to increase consumer interest and the likelihood that they want to come in contact with the brand (Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven 2002; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993).

For marketers working with media selection, this thesis (and in particular article four) should provide food for thought: Employing thematically incongruent media placement enhances communication effectiveness. Although the conclusion is not that thematically incongruent media should be a basis for the bulk of advertising (as reach and repetition are still important issues), our research indicates that thematically incongruent media placements could balance the bulk of mere exposure-inducing advertising (in congruent media) with more attention- and processing stimulating exposures (in incongruent media). Such a conclusion is in line with previous research (e.g., Janiszewski, Noel, and Sawyer 2003) arguing that media scheduling is optimized when there is a mix between low-involvement exposures and more highly involving exposures.

For marketers working with endorsements, the results of article five should provide a source of inspiration for the selection of endorsers to promote the brands. The fact that a moderate misfit between the celebrity endorser and brand can be more effective than a match should be encouraging: The pool of

potential endorsers should be greater, and the risk of consumer predictability with brand endorsers – and potential boredom with the brand – should be substantially reduced. Similarly, employment of an incongruent celebrity endorser should also have the opportunity to break through the advertising clutter.

In addition, it is quite possible that the employment of brand-incongruent communications may create more associations with the brand than congruent communications. For instance, incongruent ad elements may become associated with the brand. In the case of endorsers, endorsements by a musician for a sportswear brand or vice versa may lead to that music associations transfer to the sportswear brand or sportswear associations transfer to an audio player brand (Lynch and Schuler 1994). Traditional brand management theory might treat such transfer of associations as a dilution of the brand associations. However, as pointed out in study four, core associations actually are reinforced, rather than diluted, as a result of exposure to brand-incongruent communications. Therefore, these new associations need not undermine the well-established, core sports (music) associations. After all, well-established brands can cater a large number of associations, and there should be no upper limit for this number. In fact, rather than diluting the brand, new associations could be seen to widen the mental map of the brand, thus increasing chances of the brand being evoked in more instances (cf. Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven 2002; Holden and Lutz 1992).

The practical applicability of previous research on information incongruity in marketing generally may be greater for new brands than established brands. Having examined established brands, the present thesis shows that the methods which are successful to build brand equity (for new brands) may have to be revised when moving from building brand equity to enhancing brand equity and consumer interest in already well established brands. The objective for well established brands, is to achieve enhanced salience in memory, better top-of-mind awareness, and greater consumer interest in the brand. The employment of brand-incongruent communications has the potential to achieve this objective.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although it attempts to probe relatively deeply into the domain of incongruent brand communications by investigating a multitude of communication elements and several effects, this thesis has important limitations.

Firstly, there are limitations to the studies – and the application of the results – concerning dynamic aspects of incongruity with regards to time, contexts, levels, and repetition: As for aspects of time and context, the manifestations of incongruity are context and time dependent. That is, what communication elements and executions are incongruent with a brand will vary between different target groups for the brand as well as between cultures (cf. Aaker and Sengupta 2000). For instance, whereas employing female salespeople for a brand oriented towards men (cf. Matta and Folkes 2005) may be perceived as quite incongruent in cultures characterized by "masculinity" (Hofstede 2004), the same employment of females may not be seen as incongruent in cultures characterized by "femininity". As for aspects of time, what used to be incongruent years ago (e.g. having music stars endorse sportswear brands) may not be regarded as incongruent in the future. Consequently, if the conclusions from article four in this thesis would be put into widespread advertising practice, then placing ads for brands in slightly thematically brand-incongruent media may not be perceived as incongruent enough to spark attention and elaboration among consumers.

As to levels of incongruity, an important limitation of the studies is that I did not examine all degrees of incongruity within the same study. That is, the studies manipulated congruity as a dichotomous variable, where the level of incongruity is described as moderate (cf. Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001; Lee and Thorson 2008; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989) except for article 6 (where it is clearly stated that the study examines extreme incongruities). The treatment of incongruity as dichotomous is somewhat problematic as effects of incongruity on evaluations can be described as an inverse-U relationship. That is, moderate incongruity is preferred over either low or extreme incongruity (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). To illustrate the complications from not considering low, moderate, and extreme levels of incongruity within the same study, we can look at the effect on ad attitudes in the studies. Although the hypotheses on the effects on attitudes are just and probable, it may appear contradictory that ad attitudes are lower for

incongruent advertisements only in article two, whereas incongruent ads in all other studies are rated more positive than congruent ads. At play here is, possibly, the level of incongruity. In retrospect, the level of incongruity in the ads in the article two studies was probably more extreme than moderate. This made it difficult for participants to make out how the advertisements related to the brand. On a brand level, it is therefore uncertain if the act of incongruity resolution really did manifest into a positive effect on brand attitudes. Possibly, the increase in brand attitude might be more attributable to the increased amount of processing of the well-liked brand.

As acknowledged in the discussion on methodological contributions, only one article in this thesis (article two) examined the impact of repetition of incongruent communications. This is not only a methodological limitation. It could also be conceptually limiting since previous research by Lane (2000) has shown that consumers can, rather easily, adapt to incongruent communications. In her study, consumers did not perceive incongruent brand extensions as incongruent once they had been exposed to the extensions five times. Tangent to the discussion on dynamic aspects of incongruity with regards to time, it would have been interesting to examine consumer reactions to brand-incongruent communications using as many as five exposures.

A second domain of limitations concerns the type of brands employed empirically in this thesis. All brands used could be considered as low-involvement brands satisfying transformational needs (Rossiter and Percy 1997). For other brands, satisfying informational needs and/or characterized by high involvement, it is far from certain that incongruent communications will be superior to congruent communications. As shown in previous research (e.g. Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Maoz and Tybout 2002) when there is high involvement and risk involved, consumers may prefer a congruent option. Consequently, the results found in this thesis may be qualified for brands of, for instance, banks and insurance companies, cars, and travels. It would be beneficial if future research would examine to what types of brands the positive effects of incongruity are applicable to.

A third domain of limitations involves the lack of empirical investigation of multiple moderating effects. Indeed, the effects of two moderating variables (need for cognition, NFC, and attitude toward advertising) were examined in study two but as presented in this introductory chapter, there are more conditions to the effects of brand-incongruent communications. Empirical

examination of these potential moderators would have benefited the thesis and the practical application of brand-incongruent communications.

Moreover, the articles in this thesis do not examine the relative effect of incongruity versus other aspects of communications executions such as the attractiveness of an advertisement or an endorser. That is, can the incongruity in a communications execution compensate for a less appealing communications design? For instance, a congruent (and handsome) endorser may be very expensive to hire, whereas a cheaper (and less handsome) endorser might be deemed incongruent with the brand. Which option should the manager choose? Although such a problem was not explicitly investigated, the effect sizes of incongruity on evaluations are low to moderate in the studies. This suggests that marketing managers should refrain from using execution elements with strongly negative associations for the brand – such as an unattractive, incongruent endorser for a beauty brand – since the lack of attractiveness may indeed outperform the incongruity effect.

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Returning to the example presented in the introduction to this chapter, the energy drink RedBull sponsoring the Royal Dramatic Theatre, you should now be able to figure out a number of positive effects from such a sponsorship: Not only should you as a typical consumer attend to the message better than if the sponsorship were congruent with RedBull. You would also process the information more, elaborating on how a sponsorship of the Dramatic Theatre relates to the brand schema of RedBull. If you find that there actually are reasons for such a sponsorship (such as that actors use a lot of energy on stage and thus could need energy drinks, or that RedBull can help the audience stay alert to a lengthy performance), you can solve the incongruity puzzle and feel content of your achievement. This, together with the elaboration of RedBull, should improve your attitude towards RedBull and how intrigued you are by RedBull. Possibly, you would also talk about the sponsorship to friends and family about the sponsorship and how you were able to make sense out of it.

So although incongruent communications may be unorthodox, and a challenge to current common practice, it is my ambition to convince the reader that considering the employment of brand-incongruent communications as only a problem is too restricted a view. Instead, I hope that this introductory chapter has provided enough theoretical arguments, and that the subsequent articles will provide enough empirical support, for the reader to realize that there are opportunities from the employment of brand-incongruent communications. They could therefore constitute one means for established brands to enhance strength, interestingness, and vitality also in the future.

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Article 1

When Communication Challenges Brand Associations: A Framework for Understanding Consumer Responses to Brand Image Incongruity

With Henrik Sjödin

When communication challenges brand associations: a framework for understanding consumer responses to brand image incongruity

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● *In this conceptual paper, the authors review literature on how consumers react when a piece of brand communication is incongruent with established brand associations. Although brand experts typically criticize such brand image incongruity, it is a fact that companies do communicate in a way that challenges existing associations, for example in advertising or when launching brand extensions. The article integrates previous work — which has been scattered across several poorly connected domains — into a coherent framework. The authors propose effects of brand image incongruity on consumers' processing and evaluation. They also identify marketing implications and avenues for future research. The propositions imply opportunities for brand management, thus suggesting the need for a balanced view on brand image incongruity.*
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Introduction

What is the common link between an ad that challenges existing associations to the brand featured in the ad, the introduction of a surprising brand extension, and a brand endorsement by an unexpected celebrity? The answer is that these situations share a theme of consumers facing a new and perhaps even confusing piece of information about a brand, which does not fit comfortably with the image they have learned to associate with the brand. It is this theme, the clash between incongruent communication and the existing

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brand image, that we devote our attention to in this article. We conceptualize *brand image incongruity* as a discrepancy between a particular piece of communication about a brand and the brand image already established with consumers. The need for research on effects of such communication, which challenges brand expectations, has been registered in the existing literature (Alden *et al.*, 2000) and this call serves as the starting point for our work.

That successful brand management requires a consistent and cohesive image, upheld by congruent brand communication, is a popular adage. However, it is evident that companies *do* in fact put out communication that runs counter to the established image of their brand, regardless of any advice from brand experts. Some recent examples from the auto industry

include TV commercials from German Mercedes, set in a typically Finnish countryside with Finnish folk music playing the background, or the SUV brand Hummer extending its brand as to now include footwear and even electric guitars.

How do consumers react when brand communication is incongruent? It is not entirely straightforward to find answers in the existing literature. Although companies frequently communicate in a manner that is incongruent with established brand associations, the consequences of such brand image incongruity have not been documented in a coherent framework. The fragmented nature of the literature may present a problem for researchers and practitioners that need to assess and understand this unorthodox kind of communication. The lack of an integrated view is especially noteworthy because the basic recommendation that incongruity should be avoided seems to deserve some qualifications, as there are theoretical arguments in favor of a certain measure of incongruity. For instance, initial incongruity will often be necessary, and perhaps even desirable, in cases of brand repositioning or revitalization. Here, the whole point may be to challenge the old perceptions held by consumers. Brand image incongruity could also be seen in the light of critique against the predictability of major brands (cf. Ritzer, 1993) and intentional use of incongruity may bring potential benefits to marketers trying to revive interest in mature brands (cf. Durgee, 1999; Machleit *et al.*, 1993). The rationale here would be that unexpected communication can excite consumers and make them stop and think.

The purpose of this article is to establish a coherent framework to help managers and researchers better understand consumer responses to brand image incongruity. Our aim is not to comprehensively cover all aspects of brand image incongruity, but rather to suggest a few central ideas, which we hope can stimulate further discussion and research. In this article, we first delineate the concept of brand image incongruity. We then review and integrate previous work relating to our topic.

Drawing on this literature, we put forward a number of propositions on consumer responses to brand image incongruity: effects on processing and effects on evaluation. The article concludes with a discussion, which builds on the proposed catalog of effects to suggest implications for marketers and present themes for future research.

Delineating brand image incongruity

The knowledge that consumers hold about individual brands plays a key role for the notion of brand image incongruity. In our article, the concept of 'brand image' is meant to capture this consumer knowledge. Brand image has been a common term in marketing research and practice for half a century, being assigned somewhat varying meanings by different authors and in different contexts (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). Nevertheless, these definitions typically share the view that a brand image exists in the minds of consumers, as a result of how people perceive and interpret the brand and the marketing activities surrounding it, thus going beyond the actual product itself. Our treatment of brand image specifically adopts the definition by Keller (1993, p. 3) as 'perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory.' In this, we also adhere to a notion of brand associations as information (e.g., attributes, beliefs, attitudes, or experiences) connected to the brand name in memory, essentially making up the meaning of the brand for the consumer (cf. Keller, 1993). Consequently, the image of a given brand can differ among individuals, as people may hold somewhat different associations about the brand. On the other hand, some brand associations should be shared by a majority of consumers. It can therefore still be meaningful to talk about *the* image of a particular brand, referring to the set of associations that is likely to be common for many consumers. For familiar and mature brands, the existence of such a set is even more likely. Thus, we suggest that the relevancy of the

brand image incongruity concept is greatest when it can be assumed that the brand in focus has firmly established key associations, typically as a result of a long and visible existence in the marketplace.

Previous literature draws attention to the fact that the fit between a piece of communication and established brand associations in principle can range from perfect to extremely poor. In other words, incongruity is a continuous construct. Unfortunately, previous research has failed to adopt a common operationalization of incongruity or a way to validly distinguish between different levels of incongruity. Resolving this issue once and for all would go beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, we settle for a practical view to guide our analysis: Moderate incongruity is at hand when a piece of brand communication does not fit with the established brand associations, as judged by the majority of consumers in the target audience. We thus center on moderate incongruity. We do not focus on extreme incongruity, both for purposes of presentation and for reasons of practical relevancy. Given the considerable effort brand owners devote to avoid serious brand image incongruity, we believe that moderate degrees of incongruity are far more common in real-life marketing.

Consumers are exposed to brand-related information via a multiplicity of vehicles (cf. Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996) and brand associations may origin anywhere. In this article, we refer to the full range of vehicles as 'brand communication', as we consider any piece of brand communication to be an opportunity for a consumer to enhance, activate, and possibly reflect on his/her set of brand associations.

Prior research on brand image incongruity

Beyond being characterized as something to be generally avoided on conceptual grounds, brand image incongruity has not been advanced as a unified research theme in the existing literature. Rather, theoretical and empirical work has been scattered across poorly connected domains. To illustrate, brand extension research has to a large degree been carried out separately from research on, say, celebrity endorsers, even though both present instances of brand image incongruity and could benefit from a tighter integration. In the research stream on brand extensions (see Czellar, 2003; Grime et al., 2002; for reviews), the notion of 'fit' between the brand and the new product has played a key role. At a fundamental level most studies share an interest for the degree of correspondence between information conveyed by the brand extension and the information already linked to the brand in memory. We see here a direct match with the concept of brand image incongruity. Research on brand endorsers (e.g., Kirmani and Shiv, 1998; Mittelstaedt et al., 2000) is guided by the same basic idea, that 'the degree of match between accessible endorser associations and attributes associated with the brand' (Kirmani and Shiv, 1998, p. 26) may influence consumer evaluations. Although slightly different words are used, such as 'source congruity' or 'match-up,' the basic issue is still the degree of overlap between new information and existing associations. Analogous reasoning also surfaces, for instance, in the literature on brand alliance partners (e.g., Rao et al., 1999; Simonin and Ruth, 1998), sponsorships (e.g., Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Jagre et al., 2001), advertising (e.g., Dahlén et al., 2005; Keller et al., 1998; Lange and Dahlén, 2003; Wansink and Ray, 1996), point of sale (e.g., Buchanan et al., 1999; Jacoby and Mazursky, 1984), price (Raghubir and Corfman, 1999), publicity (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000), packaging (Schoormans and Robben, 1997), and country of production effects (Häubl and Elrod, 1999). Regardless of the particular applied setting, our contention is that brand image incongruity appropriately captures the common underlying theme of a mismatch between brand communication and existing brand associations.

Separate but related forms of incongruity

The term 'incongruity' and related words appear in the consumer behavior literature also in a variety of contexts where they refer to

other discrepancies than that between a particular piece of communication about a brand and the brand image already established with consumers. Prevalent uses include the mismatch between pictures and words in advertisements (e.g., Heckler and Childers, 1992; Lee and Mason, 1999), between features of a product and product category associations (e.g., Campbell and Goodstein, 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Peracchio and Tybout, 1996), and between an ad and general viewer expectations (e.g., Alden *et al.*, 2000; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999). Consequently, we do not consider these incongruencies as brand image incongruity. However, we believe that such 'distant family members' still can contribute to a richer understanding of the concept of our interest, as they share important theoretical underpinnings with brand image incongruity.

Effects of brand image incongruity

We will now describe key effects of incongruity that have emerged in the research domains identified above, as well as selected findings from related literature that has

been central to this work. Our submission is that the effects reported in individual domains should be relevant in a broader range of applications.

Our treatment of brand image incongruity and its effects should be seen from a probabilistic viewpoint. Admittedly, we emphasize main tendencies in our propositions and withhold conditions that could make these effects stronger or more likely to appear. However, we recognize that there are situational, contextual, and individual difference variables that can restrict or moderate our propositions. For instance, there may exist conditions in which some consumers perceptually rearrange incongruent information so as not to notice the incongruity. (Even though the view of moderate incongruity that we have outlined above should make such instances rare.) We do not rule out the possibility of such exceptions to the principal effects that we propose. In fact, we believe that seeking out conditions is vital to theory development (cf. Greenwald *et al.*, 1986). Nevertheless, we still believe that spelling out the main effects is a necessary first step towards a more complete understanding of brand image incongruity and that other steps are beyond the scope of this article.
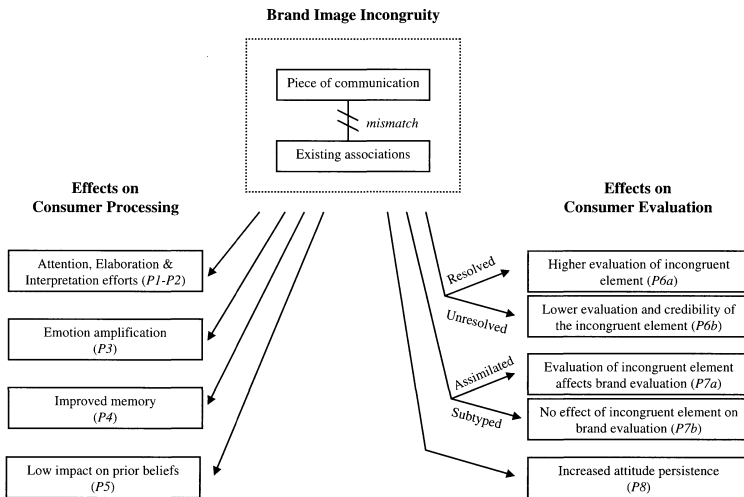
Figure 1. Proposed effects of brand image incongruity.

The proposed framework of effects of brand image incongruity is summarized in Figure 1 below.

Effects of brand image incongruity on consumer processing

In this section we discuss effects relating to how consumers process incongruent stimuli. Specifically, we will consider the impact on attention, emotions, memory, and beliefs.

Attention

Incongruity attracts attention, as the violation of expectations makes the incongruent stimuli salient (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Schützwohl, 1998; Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). The fact that incongruity sets off a 'silent alarm' allows people to monitor their environment while economizing on limited cognitive resources. Incongruent information is held in working memory for a longer time, as people stay 'online' rather than direct their attention to other things. Previous research has provided ample evidence that discrepancies increase elaboration, or 'the amount, complexity, or range of cognitive activity occasioned by a stimulus' (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, p. 39). For example, incongruent ads are viewed longer (Goodstein, 1993) and people require more time to evaluate atypical brand extensions (Boush and Loken, 1991). More extensive processing is also indicated by a greater number of thoughts (e.g., Lane, 2000; Meyers-Levy *et al.*, 1994;) and self-report measures (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999).

> Proposition 1: Brand image incongruity attracts attention and increases elaboration

This information processing is often directed at resolving the mental conflict initiated by the incongruity (Schützwohl, 1998; Stiensmeier-Pelster *et al.*, 1995; Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). Thus, the incongruent message is not immediately easily understood and early reactions include confusion and attempts to understand the incongruity (Heckler and Childers, 1992; Lee and Mason, 1999; Peracchio and

Tybout, 1996). However, the initial discrepancy can be reduced. Lane (2000) theorizes that schema-driven thought can reduce the discrepancy in three ways: by redirecting focus to consistencies not immediately considered, by reducing inconsistent cognitions, and by reinterpreting cognitions. Her study showed that repetition of advertising for a brand extension had a clear effect on perceptions of incongruity (Lane, 2000). Thus, the perception of incongruity can be reduced or even removed when consumers are aided in their sense-making efforts (cf. Boush, 1993; Bridges *et al.*, 2000; Pryor and Brodie, 1998).

> Proposition 2: Brand image incongruity begs resolution, so consumers effectively try to interpret available cues to dispel confusion

Emotions

When people register something out of the ordinary, they will often experience at least some degree of surprise (e.g., Stiensmeier-Pelster *et al.*, 1995; Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). We view surprise as a neutral and short-lived emotion, often followed by other, positive or negative, emotions corresponding to how pleasant the experience is (Vanhamme and Snelders, 2001). Joy and anger are examples of related emotions, coloring the surprising event positively or negatively. Surprise is intrinsically arousing, so the emotional experience of joy or other emotions gets more intensive. In other words, surprise caused by incongruity may pave the way for a stronger valenced reaction than a non-surprising stimulus would evoke.

> Proposition 3: Brand image incongruity amplifies the emotional response to the communication

Memory

As people come across incongruity, they try to come to terms with it, making associative pathways to brand knowledge already in memory. This can improve memory for unex-

pected aspects of brand communication, the brand featured in the communication, and for other parts of the communication (e.g., Arias-Bolzmann *et al.*, 2000; Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Wansink and Ray, 1996). When the set of brand associations is highly developed, as should be the case for familiar and well-established brands, detection and use of incongruity is to be expected (Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

> Proposition 4: Brand image incongruity facilitates recall of information

Beliefs

Even though consumers elaborate on brand image incongruity, they do not necessarily change their beliefs about the brand, since mature brands resist change. Sheinin (2000) illustrates how initial brand beliefs are hard to change and that established knowledge may inhibit cognitive flexibility. The research by, for example, Lane (2000) also implies that sense-making efforts very well can result in acceptance of the incongruent information, without modifications of prior beliefs. If information has any impact on previous knowledge at all, it will typically be 'subtyped' and treated as an exception rather than cause a full revision of the previous knowledge. Only when consumers are highly motivated to process information will incongruity modify prior beliefs (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 1998). The literature seems to hold limited evidence of incongruity being able to dramatically shift perceptions that have been embedded in the mind of a consumer (cf. Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 1998). However, Loken and John (1998) discuss how even robust prior beliefs can be changed, but this seems to require strong and unambiguous incoming information that is diagnostic for making judgments.

> Proposition 5: Consumers tend to assimilate brand image incongruity or view it as a special case, leaving prior beliefs largely unchanged

Effects of brand image incongruity on consumer evaluation

Besides the effects of incongruity on consumer processing, a number of studies indicate that incongruity also has effects in an evaluative dimension. In this section we look at the effects of incongruity on the evaluation of objects.

Attitude towards the stimulus

The attitude towards an incongruent piece of communication, for example an ad or a brand extension, will be affected by the incongruity. Research has demonstrated that the attitude towards the ad is enhanced when there is incongruity *within* an ad (Lee, 2000; Lee and Mason, 1999). Furthermore, Meyers-Levy *et al.* (1994) found a positive relationship between incongruity and evaluations of brand extensions. They argued that with moderately incongruent extensions, people process them more extensively and enjoy satisfaction when resolving the incongruity, coloring the evaluation of the incongruent extension. Similar results were found by Sheinin and Schmitt (1994). Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) found the same relationship for new products in a category.

However, other researchers have found that incongruent brand extensions are evaluated less favorably than congruent extensions (cf. Aaker and Keller, 1990; Czellar, 2003; Grime *et al.*, 2002). As for attitude towards the ad, Sjödin and Törn (2003) found the same type of effect for ads that were incongruent with established brand associations. Since the associations with a familiar brand tend to be strong and perceived as relevant and personal (Low and Lamb, 2000; Pechmann and Stewart, 1990; Petty and Cacioppo, 1984), incongruent stimuli may not be appreciated. Furthermore, an ad that is incongruent with brand associations can also make people question the ad, making ad credibility lower than for a congruent ad (Lange and Dahlén, 2003). We thus propose that the effect of evaluation on incongruent stimuli is contingent on the individual succeeding in resolving the incon-

gruity. As stated earlier, such resolution can be encouraged by the marketer (Boush, 1993; Bridges *et al.*, 2000; Lane, 2000; Pryor and Brodie, 1998). Previous research has also demonstrated that the chance of resolution increases when the consumer has a higher degree of involvement in the communication (Maoz and Tybout, 2002). Recall also that incongruity in itself, by cutting through the clutter, can stimulate attention and thus boost involvement towards a message.

> Proposition 6a: Resolved brand image incongruity leads to higher evaluations of the incongruent element.

> Proposition 6b: Unresolved brand image incongruity leads to lower evaluations and lower perceived credibility of the incongruent element.

Attitude towards the brand

The attitude towards the brand will also be affected by brand image incongruity. However, depending on whether the individual successfully resolves the incongruity or not, we suggest that the influence of incongruity on brand evaluation can be exerted through two routes. Firstly, we expect that a favorable evaluation (cf. proposition 6a) of the incongruent element will lead to a positive evaluation of the brand if the incongruity is assimilated. Research has demonstrated that a positive evaluation of an extension benefits the evaluation of the parent brand (e.g., Lane and Jacobson, 1997). A positive relationship between incongruity in ads and brand attitude is found in Lee (2000) and Lee and Mason (1999).

In the case of unresolved incongruity (cf. proposition 6b above), we propose that the incongruent element typically will be subtyped and regarded as an exception in relation to existing brand knowledge. Therefore, the negative evaluation of the incongruent element will not affect the evaluation of the brand. Empirical research supports this idea. Chang (2002) demonstrated that unfavorable incongruent extensions did not cause negative evaluations of the parent brand. Also, Milberg *et al.* (1997) showed that incongruent extensions that were sub-branded, thus encouraging subtyping of the incongruent element, did not affect family brand attitude. However, although the brand evaluation is not affected by the evaluation of the incongruent element, there may still be an opportunity for brand image incongruity to influence brand evaluations: Incongruity can be seen as challenging and interesting in the context of well-known brands that often may suffer from boredom (cf. Durgee, 1999; Machleit *et al.*, 1993). Furthermore, a challenging ad will cause cognitive elaboration and thoughts about how the ad fits with the established brand image. This elaboration may increase the salience of the brand in memory (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986), which in turn would lead to enhanced brand attitude (Holden and Vanhuele, 1999; Janiszewski, 1993). We thus posit that brand attitude may be enhanced by brand image incongruity.

> Proposition 7a: Brand image incongruity, which is assimilated, leads to a positive relationship between the evaluation of the incongruent element and the evaluation of the brand

> Proposition 7b: Brand image incongruity, which is subtyped, will not lead to the incongruent element affecting the evaluation of the brand

Attitude persistence

Incongruent communication demands more processing effort. This effort may lead to the development of stronger memory traces and a more enduring effect on evaluations (Lee and Mason, 1999). Since evaluations that are formed through systematic processes may be more stable than those formed through heuristics (cf. Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) they may be harder to change when they are influenced by incongruent communication. Goodstein (1993) argues that, for example, an attitude towards an ad or a brand formed by incon-

gruent communication may be less susceptible to change.

>   Proposition 8: Brand image incongruity leads to stronger attitude persistence

Discussion

In this article, we have put forward brand image incongruity as a common label for discrepancies between a particular piece of communication about a brand and the brand image already established with consumers, as well as presented a set of consumer responses to brand image incongruity. The potential in taking a broad view of brand image incongruity, looking across individual research domains, lies in the opportunity to deduce implications and predictions. Giving proper consideration to the common underlying theme may help researchers discover interesting questions and answers that potentially lie just around the corner from the particular instance they are studying, thus improving research efficiency and lessening the risk for redundant work. Our review may also benefit marketers in several ways, in their need to predict consumer responses. Firstly, our submission may be helpful in understanding the consequences of inadvertent incongruity in brand communications. Secondly, it can guide decisions when the brand owner hopes to transform the associations consumers currently hold with the brand, for instance when planning a strategic repositioning. Finally, our account may help practioners to appreciate the potential in sometimes deliberately creating brand image incongruity. This knowledge can be valuable to marketers in search of effective means to gain consumer attention, stimulate interest and mitigate the predictability of established brands. Thereby we also argue in favor of expanding the conventional view of brand image incongruity. Identifying incongruity only as a problem and not at all as an opportunity is too restricted a view. The core function of a brand is to provide consumers with a reliable rule of thumb as to what they can expect, but at times it may be essential to

challenge consumer perceptions if mature brands are to remain relevant and vigorous. Finding the appropriate formula of stability and dynamism is an important task for most brand owners.

As a closing note, we draw on our review to suggest a few implications that may guide brand owners in this undertaking. One such inference is that the potential gains of brand image incongruity should be more applicable to brands that satisfy transformational needs (cf. Rossiter and Percy, 1987) rather than informational needs. The rationale behind this reasoning is that incongruity is disadvantageous to communication credibility, which is more important to informational than transformational brands. Furthermore, we suggest that incongruity is more advantageous to well-liked than poorly liked brands. Since increased elaboration can polarize judgments (cf. Tesser, 1978), elaborating on incongruent communication for a poorly liked brand may worsen attitudes even more. Finally, we think that brand loyals may be more tolerant or even happy to be entertained from the incongruity, as it mitigates boredom and predictability in the brand.

Future research

Our account of main consumer reactions to incongruity represents the first step towards a unified body of knowledge in this area. Additional efforts are required to map out qualifying factors capable to further enrich our understanding. One such direction deals with consumers' processes and sense-making strategies. For example, does it matter if a consumer interprets brand image incongruity as caused by situational circumstances rather than by enduring characteristics of the brand in question? Also, would consumers respond differently to an ad for an incongruent brand extension, which admitted that the extension is incongruent? Attribution theory (cf. Folkes, 1988) is one interesting point of departure.

Another opportunity for future research brings us back to an issue that we touched upon in the first half of our paper, namely that

of how to operationally define various degrees of brand image incongruity. While previous studies have employed relative degrees of incongruity, no systematic attempt has been done to compare these findings on a more absolute level. We miss attempts to determine how to validly distinguish between different levels of incongruity. Is a '4' on a scale from 1 to 7 equivalent to a moderate degree of incongruity? Future research needs to establish guidelines for determining the degree of incongruity of a stimulus in a more general sense.

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Article 2

Effects of Ad-Brand Incongruency

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Effects of Ad-Brand Incongruency

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In this article, we add to the research on information incongruency in advertising with two studies of ad-brand incongruency. In the first study, subjects were exposed to either an ad that was congruent with the brand schema or an ad that was incongruent with the brand schema. Comparisons showed that the incongruent ad produced a lower ad attitude and ad credibility, but a higher brand attitude and more sophisticated processing of brand-related information. In the second study, the results of ad-brand incongruency on ad attitude, ad credibility and brand attitude were tested at one and two ad exposures. Furthermore, the impact of two moderating variables were tested: need for cognition (NFC), and attitude toward advertising. Theoretical and managerial implications from the two studies are discussed.

Introduction

There is a growing body of research relating to information incongruency in advertising. One reason for the increasing research interest is the common industry use of incongruent elements and absurd or unexpected executions in ads (reviews of this practice are given in Alden et al. 2000; Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000; Phillips 2000). For example, ads may have incongruent text and pictures (e.g., a picture of a man in his underwear with the headline "ready for work" in an ad for boxer shorts) or be incongruent with consumers' expectations of advertising in the product category (e.g., an ad for a car brand portraying happy faces, but no car). Numerous studies have proven the many positive communication effects of information incongruency. In this article we focus on a form of information incongruency that has yet not been investigated, namely when the ad is incongruent with consumers' associations to the brand.

Adding conflicting elements to ads can improve ad memorability (Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000; Heckler and Childers 1992; Houston et al. 1987). Incongruent ad elements have been shown to generate more positive thoughts about the ad and the brand (Lee and Mason 1999). Furthermore, ad and brand attitudes

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can be enhanced (Alden et al. 2000; Phillips 2000), as well as attitude confidence (Lee 2000). The most commonly researched form of incongruency is that between the verbal and visual elements of the ad (cf. Heckler and Childers 1992; Houston et al. 1987; Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999; McQuarrie and Mick, 1992; Phillips 2000). However, research has also been conducted on information that is incongruent with consumers' schemata, for example, a sales-person schema (Sujan et al. 1986), a product category schema (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Mitchell et al. 1995), or a situation-based schema depicted in the ad (Alden et al. 2000; Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000). These schema-related incongruencies are based on the fact that consumers expect certain information given the established schema, expectations that can be challenged.

Alden et al. (2000) suggest in their directions for future research, that consumers could have prior expectations for the advertising of a familiar brand which would affect their perceptions of the ad. That is the starting point for our research. Prior research has focused on the incongruency between different elements *within* the ad (i.e., verbal vs. visual, and depicted category and situation incongruencies), whereas we will focus on the incongruency between the ad and the brand. What happens when the ad is incongruent with the brand and the associations consumers hold with it, that is, the brand schema?

A well-established brand schema benefits the brand as it makes the brand stand out more in the advertising clutter (Dahlén 2001). Furthermore, it enhances consumers' motivations to process the brand's ad-

vertising and makes it more persuasive (Kent and Allen 1994; Rice and Bennett 1998). On the other hand, a well-established brand schema reduces the novelty and uncertainty about the brand, causing the brand's advertising to wear out quickly (Tellis 1997) and reducing the interest in the brand (Machleit et al. 1993). In the present research, we hypothesize that ads that are incongruent with the brand schema will increase the interest in the brand and yield positive communication effects.

In the first of two studies, we will test the effects of ad-brand incongruency on ad attitude, ad credibility, brand attitude and processing of brand-related information. In the second study, we will validate the results from the first study and increase the understanding of ad-brand incongruency by investigating the effects of a second exposure and the influence of two moderating variables: need for cognition (NFC) and attitude toward advertising.

Information Incongruency

Incongruent information in an ad is unexpected (Heckler and Childers 1992; Lee and Mason 1999). It is unexpected because it is in conflict with an existing schema in consumers' minds (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Sujan et al. 1986). For example, the picture does not fit with the schema that the headline activates, or the twist at the end of the commercial does not fit with the situation-based schema that the displayed scenario activates. Research shows that information incongruency generates emotional reactions such as surprise and arousal (Alden et al. 2000; Lee and Mason 1999; McQuarrie and Mick 1992) and increased ad message involvement (Lee 2000). Emotional reactions can give a direct positive effect on memory for an ad (Ambler and Burne 1999). The emotions and the increased involvement also lead to more cognitive processing and careful elaboration of the ad (Heckler and Childers 1992; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Muehling and Lazcniak 1988; Muehling et al. 1991), which, in turn, enhances memorability and persuasion (Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000; Houston et al. 1987; Kent and Allen 1994).

Research also shows that information incongruency and consumers' needs for resolution can generate a positive affective effect (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). McQuarrie and Mick (1999) and Phillips (2000) argue that consumers enjoy solving puzzles, and that ads with incongruent elements present a puzzle that they cannot resist. Solving the puzzle creates a sense of accomplishment, which rubs off on the evaluations of the ad and the brand (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994; Phillips 2000).

The cognitive effects of the increased processing and elaboration are enhanced brand recall (Houston et al. 1987), ad recall (Heckler and Childers 1992), attribute recall and number of ad and brand cognitions (Heckler and Childers 1992; Houston et al. 1987; Lee and Mason 1999), and judgement confidence (Lee 2000). The affective effects of information incongruency, in turn, are enhanced ad attitude and brand attitude (Alden et al. 2000; Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000; Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999; Phillips 1999).

Judging from the literature review, we could expect several positive effects from ads that are incongruent with the brand and the associations that consumers hold with the brand. When consumers see an ad for a brand they are familiar with they activate their stored brand associations, their brand schema (Braun 1999; Kent and Allen 1994). The incongruent ad then conflicts with the brand schema, and as consumers are motivated to process information about a familiar brand (Kent and Allen 1994; Rice and Bennett 1998), they will try to resolve the ad-brand incongruency.

Brand Knowledge

Increasingly, advertising research benefits from progress in the cognitive neurosciences, as it relates to information processing (e.g., Ambler 2000; Rossiter and Silberstein 2001). Findings in the cognitive neurosciences indicate that memory and learning may function through two complementary capacities (Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000). One system (the neocortical) is believed to allow stable long-term representation of experiences, while another (the hippocampal) enables processing of new events. Knowledge depends on interaction between these systems. This view enables understanding of how the mind deals with brand-related information. Consumers store their accumulated experiences and associations with a brand in a brand schema (Keller 1993; Kent and Allen 1994; Low and Lamb 2000). This kind of knowledge, managed by the neocortical system, accrues over time and is quite resistant to change (Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000). The brand schema makes it easier for consumers to retrieve information about the brand as well as to process and distinguish new brand-related information (Alba and Hutchinson 1987; Pechmann and Stewart 1990). When brand-related information is encountered, the brand schema is activated and guides the interpretation of the input (Braun 1999).

When the encountered information conforms to expectations, there is little need to process the information in-depth to relate it to the brand schema (Kent and Allen 1994; Machleit et al. 1993). This could possi-

bly explain the weak effect ad attitude has on brand attitude for familiar brands (cf. Chattopadhyay and Nedungadi 1992; Machleit and Wilson 1988). A well-known effect is also that advertising wears out quickly for familiar brands when it does not contain new information (Dahlén 2001; Tellis 1997).

Novel and surprising information is handled by the hippocampal system, which means that existing long-term representations (i.e., brand schemata) are to some degree kept insulated from an unexpected experience. On the other hand, cognitive neuroscience has also provided a view of memory as a very active and ever-shifting structure or even process, in which encoded material is constantly rehashed and reconstructed (e.g., Braun and Zaltman 1997; Eichenbaum 1997). Thus, at the level of details, brand knowledge may be rather dynamic due to this notion of reconstructive memory.

The view of brand knowledge that we have outlined above provides a background for predictions in terms of consumer responses to ad-brand incongruency. When a consumer identifies the brand sponsor of an incongruent ad and begins to relate the ad content to previous knowledge, additional processing will follow in order to deal with the discrepancy (Heckler and Childers 1992; Lee 2000; McQuarrie and Mick 1992). In the case of information incongruency within an ad, as reviewed above, ad attitude is enhanced (cf. Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999). However, this need not be the case for ad-brand incongruency. The associations stored in the brand schema of a familiar brand tend to be strong and to be perceived as relevant and personal (Low and Lamb 2000; Pechmann and Stewart 1990; Petty and Cacioppo 1984). The brand schema works as a standard of comparison when encountering new brand-related information (Allison and Uhl 1964; Braun 1999) and a conflicting ad will probably be perceived as disturbing and therefore be evaluated more negatively (H1).

> H1: Ad attitude is lower for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.

A variable that has been overlooked in research on information incongruency is ad credibility. It is typically defined as "the extent to which the consumer perceives claims made about the brand in the ad to be truthful and believable" (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989, p. 51) and has been found to affect evaluations of ads and brands (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Although its practical importance should be greatest in high-involvement and informational product categories (Rossiter and Percy 1997), ad credibility remains a theoretically interesting variable in the case of ad-brand incongruency: When the incongruent advertising conflicts the ad and brand schemas, consumers will typically compare the information in the ad with the stored information in the brand schema. As consumers are unlikely to change the clear and strong opinions about what the brand stands for (Machleit et al. 1993; Pechmann and Stewart 1990; Sheinin 2000), one way to resolve the incongruency conflict is to degrade the new information as less credible than the information stored in the brand schema. Therefore, we expect that consumers will rate incongruent ads as less credible than congruent ads (H2).

> H2: Ad credibility is lower for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.

Even though ad attitude is expected to be lower for incongruent ads, we do not expect the effect on brand attitude to be negative. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, studies show that the relationship between ad attitude and brand attitude is weak to non-existing for familiar brands (Machleit et al. 1993; Machleit and Wilson, 1988). Therefore, the evaluation of the ad will not influence brand attitude. Secondly, the incongruent ad may have other interesting effects on the brand, namely reducing boredom and increasing the salience of the brand in memory.

Machleit et al. (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of familiar brands may be to reduce the boredom consumers experience with the heavily advertised, well-known brand. Alden et al. (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what the advertising will entail for a familiar brand, which reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communication. An incongruent ad could thus make the brand a little less boring. According to the differential attention explanation, ad-brand incongruency will increase the attention to the ad because it stands out from the rest of the brand's communication (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). This, in turn, could also increase the salience of the brand (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986). And as the familiar brand is automatically positively evaluated (Holden and Vanhuele 1999; Janiszewski 1993), increased salience leads to enhanced brand attitude. We expect that incongruent ads will increase brand attitude compared with congruent ads (H3).

> H3: Brand attitude is higher for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.

Research has shown that information incongruency increases processing and elaboration of the advertising information (Heckler and Childers 1992; Lee 2000; McQuarrie and Mick 1992). The more processing and elaboration, the more activation of the brand schema and matching between the schema and the brand-related information there will be (Kent and Allen 1994; Pechmann and Stewart 1990). The additional elabora-

tive effort may not dramatically alter the foundations of existing knowledge, but should be able to influence the finer elements of brand-related knowledge (cf. Braun 1999; Braun and Zaltman 1997). This means that brand-incongruent ads could slightly reform the knowledge base and allow more sophisticated representations, as more facets of the brand are considered in the sensemaking efforts. Thus, even though the fundamental content of the brand schema should not be revised, there may be finer distinctions between its components than before. We expect this effect to work both immediately in connection to the ad exposure and at a delay, as brand associations are reconstructed (H4).

> H4: Ad-brand incongruency leads to more sophisticated representations of brand-related knowledge a) immediately and b) at a delay.

Method

Ad-brand incongruency (2 levels: brand-congruent ad/brand-incongruent ad) was operationalized as a between-subjects variable. Furthermore, time of response was measured at two occasions: immediate/1-week delay. The hypotheses were tested with print advertisements. Print advertisements are reader-paced and are thus well-suited for research concerning information congruency (Lee 2000). This is because subjects can process the ads for as long as they want, allowing for differences in attention and elaboration induced by the ad formats (Muehling et al. 1991).

Stimulus Development

Chocolate bars were chosen as the product category. Sweden's number one brand (Cloetta, with slogan "feel good with Cloetta") was chosen as the familiar brand. The brand is a heavy advertiser and has held the same position over the last 30 years.

The brand associations were elicited following the procedure of Ratneshwar and Shocker (1991). In a pretest, twenty subjects were asked to list associations they a) held with the familiar brand ("how would you describe Cloetta?") and b) did not hold with the familiar brand ("what would you say is the opposite of Cloetta?"). The five most commonly mentioned associations of each kind were quantified with 7-point Likert scales and rated by twenty new subjects with regard to a) and b) above. The five associations held with the brand (energetic, casual, quality, relaxing and Swedish) received high scores by all the subjects and were chosen for the development of the brand-congruent stimulus. The five associations subjects did

not hold with the brand (trendy, cool, snobby, particular and expensive) received high scores by all the subjects and were chosen for the development of the brand-incongruent stimulus.

Two print ad versions were developed, one brand-congruent and one brand-incongruent. Simulating real-world ads in the product category, the ads consisted of a big picture with a small picture of the chocolate bar and the slogan in the lower right corner. This also resembles the procedure used in Heckler and Childers (1992) and Lee (2000). The ads were pretested in two steps. First, 41 subjects rated the fit between the picture and the brands on a 10-point scale ("How well do the picture and the brand fit together?"). The mean values were 8.5 for the congruent ad and 2.3 for the incongruent ad (difference $p<.01$). Next, associations evoked by the picture in the incongruent ad were analyzed. The five associations that subjects did not hold with the brand (elicited in the previous pretest) were quantified with 7-point Likert scales and rated by twenty new subjects. All five associations (trendy, cool, snobby, particular and expensive) received high scores by all the subjects, indicating that the picture conveyed brand-incongruent associations.

The picture in the congruent ad portrayed a big group of people in their twenties at an after-ski party overlooking a winter landscape. The people were tanned and physically fit and they were laughing and enjoying themselves. The picture in the incongruent ad portrayed five trendy model-like men and women in their late twenties looking directly into the camera. The scenery was a club setting. They wore fashion clothing and looked cool and detached.

In short then, the two visual ads were designed so that they, to the respondents, would evoke associations that were either congruent or incongruent with established brand associations. Pretesting thus ensured that the visual difference between the versions would also correspond to a difference in thematic, or ad-brand, incongruency.

Confound and Manipulation Checks

To make sure that the results would not be confounded by the executions of the two pictures, we measured ad attitude for the pictures in a pretest. One hundred forty-seven subjects were instructed to rate the pictures as ads for a mock chocolate brand (the brand we intended to use in the main study was not disclosed). There were no significant differences in ad attitude between the two pictures ($p>.5$).

In the main study, brand awareness and brand usage were measured as a manipulation check of brand familiar-

ity. Brand awareness was 100 percent, and 91 percent indicated that they bought the brand at least sometimes.

Experimental Procedure

A sample size of 153 college students participated in the study, making a cell size of approximately 76 for the two ads. The subjects were randomly divided into the two cells. The cover story was short, stating only that we were interested in their candy consumption (each respondent was given a small pack of candy as an incentive upon completion of the questionnaire). Without further instruction, the questionnaires were handed out with one of the ads on the first page. Subjects were free to view the ad for as long (or short) as they liked, just like in a real setting. When they turned the page, some filler questions were included. Subjects were instructed not to turn back the page and look at the ad again. This first questionnaire measured the immediate effects.

One week after the exposure and first questionnaire, the subjects were handed a second questionnaire (no ad this time) measuring the brand effects at a delay. Eighty percent (122) of the subjects from the first session completed the second questionnaire.

Measures

Ad attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items. The following items were used: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable/unfavorable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's alpha=.86). The measure was taken from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989).

Ad credibility was measured with a three-item semantic differential scale (1-7) taken from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). The items were convincing/unconvincing, believable/unbelievable, and biased/unbiased. They were averaged to produce an index (Cronbach's alpha=.83).

Brand attitude was measured with three items on a seven-point semantic differential. They were good/bad, negative/positive, satisfactory/unsatisfactory. The averaged index had a Cronbach's alpha=.92. The measure is taken from Loken and Ward (1990) and Simonin and Ruth (1998).

The brand-related information (hypothesis H4) was operationalized as brand associations and was measured with the question, *"How well do you think the following words describe the brand?"* Subjects rated each word on a seven-point Likert-scale. Brand associations were measured both immediately and at a delay.

The associations were elicited in the pre-tests and were as follows: energetic, casual, quality, relaxing, Swedish, trendy, cool, snobby, particular and expensive.

Results

The dependent variables in hypotheses H1-H3 were tested simultaneously in a MANOVA. Ad-brand incongruency had a significant effect on ad attitude, ad credibility and brand attitude ($F=14.6$, Wilks' lambda=.82, $p<.01$). Next, the hypotheses were tested with separate t-tests. The results are listed in Table 1.

H1 was tested with mean comparison t-tests of ad attitude between the congruent ad and the incongruent ad. See Table 1. The congruent ad received a mean of 3.72 compared to 3.11 for the incongruent ad. The difference is statistically significant at $p<.01$. This supports our hypothesis: *ad attitude is lower for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.*

A mean comparison t-test of ad credibility was conducted in order to test *H2*. The results (see Table 1) reveal that mean ad credibility was significantly higher ($p<.01$) for the congruent ad (3.43) than for the incongruent ad (2.49). *H2* is thus supported: *ad credibility is lower for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.*

H3 was tested with a mean comparison t-test of brand attitude between the ads (Table 1). The mean brand attitude was 5.35 for the congruent and 5.80 for the incongruent ad. The difference is significant at $p<.01$. This supports *H3: brand attitude is higher for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads.*

In order to test *H4*, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal components analysis, PCA) of brand associations that subjects were asked to rate. The results are shown in Table 1. The methodology is based on Low and Lamb (2000), who used PCA of a fixed number of associations to test the differences in sophistication of brand schemata between familiar and unfamiliar brands. Several authors have suggested that the number of distinct nodes is a good indicator of how sophisticated the brand schema is (cf. Kent and Allen 1994; Krishnan 1996; Low and Lamb 2000). By testing how many components respondents divided the brand associations into, we get an indication of how well they can discriminate between items of brand-related information. The more components in the PCA, the more sophisticated is the representation of brand-related knowledge.

In the immediate measurement, PCA produced 3 components for the congruent ad (total variance explained, TVE, 59 %) and 4 components for the incongruent ad (TVE 69 %), eigenvalues>1. See Table 1. In the three-component solution, the brand-congruent

Table 1
Hypotheses H1-H4

	Congruent ad	*Incongruent ad*	*Difference*
Aad	3.72	3.11	t=2.67 p<0.01
Ad Credibility	3.43	2.49	t=4.13 p<0.01
Abrand	5.35	5.80	t=2.44 p<0.01
Brand Associations, Immediate	3 Components:	4 Components:	
	(-)Energetic, Trendy, Cool (EV 23.8%)	Quality, Trendy, Cool (EV 24.0%)	
		Swedish, Casual (EV 21.6%)	
	Swedish, Casual, Quality, Relaxing (EV 17.9%)	Energetic, (-)Expensive (EV 12.6%)	
	Particular, Expensive, Snobby (EV 17.3%)	(-)Particular, Relaxing, (-)Snobby (EV 10.6%)	
Brand Associations, Delay	3 Components:	4 Components:	
	(-)Energetic, Trendy, Cool, Snobby (EV 28.1%)	Quality, Trendy, Cool (EV 27.3%)	
	Swedish, Casual, Quality, Relaxing (EV 17.7%)	Swedish, (-)Expensive (EV 15.9%)	
		Energetic, Casual (EV 14.2%)	
	Particular, Expensive (EV 12.9%)	(-)Particular, Relaxing, (-)Snobby (EV 10.8%)	

associations were loaded on two components. All associations but "energetic" were lumped together. The brand-incongruent associations were loaded into two components ("trendy" and "cool" were lumped with the reversed brand-congruent "energetic"). However, in the four-component solution, both the brand-congruent and the brand-incongruent associations were loaded on four components.

The same pattern was found in the delayed measurement; see Table 1. The respondents who were exposed to the congruent ad produced 3 components in the PCA (TVE 59 %), and the respondents exposed to the incongruent ad produced 4 components (TVE 68 %), eigenvalues>1. Once again, both brand-congruent and brand-incongruent associations were divided into two components in the three-component solution and into four components in the four-component solution. It is interesting to note that the difference in the representation of brand-related knowledge was the same in the delayed measurement (a test indicated that less than 40 percent could give accurate descriptions of the ads they saw the

week before). In conclusion, respondents exposed to the incongruent ad discriminated more closely between the associations (dividing both the congruent and incongruent associations into four components) than respondents exposed to the congruent ad associations (dividing both the congruent and incongruent associations into two components). *H4* is therefore supported: *ad-brand incongruency leads to more sophisticated representations of brand-related knowledge a) immediately and b) at a delay.*

Discussion

The results of study 1 add to the current understanding of information incongruency in advertising. When the ad is incongruent with the brand, both ad attitude and ad credibility are significantly lower than in the normal case of a brand-congruent ad. However, the brand-incongruent ad produced more sophisticated representations of brand-related knowledge as brand associations were discriminated more closely. Furthermore, the brand-incongruent ad

produced a significantly higher brand attitude than the brand-congruent ad.

The results differ from previous research on information incongruency in advertising in one major respect. Ad attitude and brand attitude are affected in opposite directions. One explanation for this is the fact that we used an established brand, whereas most studies in the area have used fictitious brands. Research has shown that the relationship between ad attitude and brand attitude is weaker for familiar brands than for unfamiliar brands (cf. Machleit and Wilson, 1988).

A problem with our first study might be that the ecological validity could be low. We measured the response to one single ad exposure. In real life, we would expect consumers to be exposed more than once to ads in a campaign. In study 2, we measure the effects of two repeated exposures. The increased brand attitude from the brand-incongruent ad that was found in study 1 is a result that we expected from the fact that the ad challenges the existing brand-schema and provokes more elaboration. The question, however, is whether this works under conditions when consumers cannot be expected to desire challenging and thought-provoking stimuli. Therefore, in study 2, we investigate variables that may moderate the effects of ad-brand incongruency on brand attitude.

Study 2: Hypotheses

Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) find that consumers with a high need for cognition (NFC) are more positive toward schema incongruency than consumers with low NFC. The reason is that consumers with high NFC are more likely to notice incongruent information and they are more inclined to undertake the necessary cognitive work to resolve the incongruency (Cacioppo and Petty 1982). For consumers with low NFC, ads with information incongruency may be perceived as being too taxing (or, simply, as making no sense). Therefore, we expect that consumers with high NFC react favorably to ad-brand incongruency, whereas consumers with low NFC react unfavorably (H5).

H5a: For consumers with high NFC, ad-brand incongruency has a positive effect on brand attitude.

H5b: For consumers with low NFC, ad-brand incongruency has a negative effect on brand attitude.

Attitude toward advertising, or "the learned disposition to respond in a consistent favorable or unfavorable manner toward advertising in general" (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989, pp. 53-54), has been found to influence ad perceptions (MacKenzie and Lutz

1989). More specifically, consumers' general attitude toward advertising has an important effect on whether they perceive specific ads to be entertaining and informing, or confusing and deceiving (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Pollay and Mittal 1993). Consumers with high attitudes toward advertising enjoy the entertainment value in ads, and, therefore, we expect them to react favorably to ad-brand incongruency (H6a). Consumers with low levels of attitude toward advertising may be less inclined to elaborate on the advertising, thus disabling this route to positive reactions. A common problem noted in the advertising literature is that far-fetched visual conveyors in ads are less likely to be understood when consumers are not motivated to process the message (Rossiter and Percy 1997). Furthermore, consumers with low levels of attitude toward advertising (sometimes called skepticism toward advertising) tend to disbelieve ads and react negatively to the advertiser (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). Therefore, we expect that these people will react unfavorably to ad-brand incongruency as it will make the ad appear as more deceitful (H6b).

H6a: For consumers with high attitude toward advertising, ad-brand incongruency has a positive effect on brand attitude.

H6b: For consumers with low attitude toward advertising, ad-brand incongruency has a negative effect on brand attitude.

Method

The methodology was similar to study 1. The same two ads were used, and they were exposed in a similar fashion. Two hundred twenty-four business students participated in the study and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Two hundred six questionnaires were deemed usable and were retained for the subsequent analyses.

Nine days after the first exposure, the subjects received an email with a link to a Web site. Upon clicking on the link, the same ad that the subjects had seen the week before was exposed (those who had seen the brand-congruent ad previously were exposed to that same ad once again and those who had seen the brand-incongruent ad previously were exposed to that same ad again). Below the ad was a link that led to a questionnaire, which the subjects could click on when they felt ready. One hundred nine subjects completed the questionnaire. Although the lower, compared to the first exposure, response rate of 49% should be noted, it is still acceptable compared to traditional e-mail or mail surveys and should moreover not cause any systematic non-response bias in our analysis.

Table 2
Main Effects for Exposure 1 & 2 in Study 2

	Congruent ad	Incongruent ad	Difference
Exposure 1			
Aad	4.04	3.38	t=3.13 p<0.01
Adcred	3.59	2.79	t=4.29 p<0.01
Abrand	5.55	5.82	t=2.01 p<0.05
Exposure 2			
Aad	4.03	3.17	t=3.02 p<0.01
Adcred	3.62	2.69	t=3.32 p<0.01
Abrand	5.47	5.69	t=1.03 p=0.15

Measures

Need for Cognition (NFC) was measured on a five-item scale (1= Completely false, 5=Completely true), taken from Epstein (1991), who selected these items from the need for cognition scale developed by Cacioppo and Petty (1982). The items were, "I don't like to have to do a lot of thinking" (reverse coded), "I try to avoid situations that require thinking in depth about something" (reverse coded), "I prefer to do something that challenges my thinking abilities rather than something that requires little thought," "I prefer complex to simple problems," "Thinking hard and for a long time about something gives me little satisfaction" (reverse coded). The responses to the five items were averaged to form an index (Cronbach's alpha=.78).

Attitude toward advertising was measured on a three-item semantic differential (1-7), as measured by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). The question read: "What is your attitude toward advertising in general?" The items were good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant and fa-vorable/unfavorable. An index was computed by averaging the responses to the three items (Cronbach's alpha=.80).

Results

Hypotheses H1-H3 were tested simultaneously, at one and two exposures, with a MANOVA. Ad-brand incongruency had significant effects on ad attitude and ad credibility at one and two exposures and on brand attitude at one exposure (F=12.3, Wilks' lambda=.86, p<.01).

Table 2 summarizes the main effects in study 2. After one exposure, the effects of ad-brand incongruency on attitude toward the ad (negative), ad credibility (negative) and brand attitude (positive)

replicated the findings in Study 1. After two exposures, the mean values for attitude toward the ad and ad credibility are still significantly higher for the congruent ad (4.05 and 3.67) than for the incongruent ad (3.31 and 3.09), p<.01. However, even though the directionality is still the same, there is no longer a significant difference (p=.15) in brand attitude between the congruent ad (mean value 5.47) and the incongruent ad (mean value 5.69). Paired samples t-tests did not produce significant differences between the first and the second exposure for any variable.

For each of the two moderating variables, the sample was divided into a "low" (lowest 40 percent), a "high" (highest 40 percent) and a "neutral" (middle 20 percent). Following the procedure from numerous studies, the "neutral" group was eliminated from the study to provide for greater discrimination (cf. Arias-Bolzmann et al. 2000; Muehling et al. 1991). In the analyses, we made comparisons between "high" and "low" NFC and attitude toward advertising, respectively. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that in no condition was the assumption of equality of variances violated (p>.2). T-tests for independent samples were therefore appropriate even though the sample sizes are rather small. The results are presented in Table 3. Paired samples t-tests did not produce any significant differences between the first and the second exposure for the moderating variables.

T-tests for the high NFC group produced a significantly higher (p<.05) mean brand attitude for the incongruent ad (5.98) than the congruent ad (5.60) at one exposure. The same pattern is found at two exposures, with a mean brand attitude of 6.26 for the incongruent ad and a mean brand attitude of 5.41 for the congruent ad (p<.01). H5a is supported: *for consumers with high NFC, ad-brand incongruency has a positive effect on brand attitude.* When comparing brand attitudes for the low NFC group, t-tests revealed no

Table 3
Hypotheses H5-H6

	NFC				Attitude toward Advertising			
	Low		High		Low		High	
	Congruent ad	Incongruent ad	Congruent ad	Incongruent ad	Congruent ad	Incongruent ad	Congruent ad	Incongruent ad
Exposure 1								
Aad	4.19	3.31***	3.92	3.26**	3.53	3.42	4.31	3.35***
Adcred	3.82	2.79***	3.38	2.63***	3.28	2.82*	3.93	2.81***
Abrand	5.59	5.69	5.60	5.98**	5.47	5.63	5.55	5.99**
Exposure 2								
Aad	4.36	2.93***	3.96	3.48	3.63	3.57	4.54	3.02***
Adcred	4.00	2.79***	3.48	2.86	3.17	3.20	4.05	2.68***
Abrand	5.67	5.19*	5.41	6.26***	5.18	5.23	5.51	5.80

***Difference statistically significant at p<0.01.
**Difference statistically significant at p<0.05.
*Difference statistically significant at p<0.1.

significant difference between the ads at one exposure. However, the congruent ad produced a higher (moderately significant at p<.10) mean brand attitude (5.67) than the incongruent ad (5.19) at two exposures, giving partial support to H5b.

For the high attitude toward advertising group, mean brand attitude was significantly higher for the incongruent ad at one exposure (5.99 vs. 5.55, p<.05) but only gives directional support at two exposures (5.80 vs. 5.51, p=.2). This gives partial support to H6a: *for consumers with high attitude toward advertising, ad-brand incongruency has a positive effect on brand attitude.* T-tests for the low attitude toward advertising group revealed no significant differences in brand attitude between the ads, thus finding no support for H6b.

Discussion

The results from study 2 replicate the findings from study 1, with one exception. After two exposures, even though the directionality is the same, the positive main effect of ad-brand incongruency on brand attitude is no longer significant. One reason for this result could be that the incongruent ad does not produce the same element of surprise any longer, when consumers are exposed to it a second time. Previous research has found surprise to be an important mediator of the positive effects of incongruency (Alden et al. 2000). The novelty factor of the incongruent ad is also diminished in the second exposure, which could have a

negative effect on attention to and elaboration of the brand-related information.

The results further our understanding of information incongruency by showing the moderating effects of two variables. There was a positive effect of ad-brand incongruency on brand attitude for subjects with high NFC, whereas the effect was negative (at two exposures) for subjects with low NFC. Finally, ad-brand incongruency increased brand attitude for subjects with high attitude toward advertising, whereas it had no effect on brand attitude for subjects with low attitude toward advertising.

General Discussion

The present research provides insights into the communication effectiveness of established, well-known brands. The absolute differences between the groups on the dependent variables are relatively small, something that was expected based on the nature of the research and previous findings (study of advertising effects on established brands). However, whereas prior research has shown that advertising is less effective in influencing brand attitude for these brands (Machleit and Wilson 1988), it wears out quickly (Dahlén 2001; Tellis 1997) and consumers get bored with the brands (Machleit et al. 1993), in our two studies we have found that incongruent ads can increase brand attitude and reduce advertising wear-out by challenging consumers' brand schemata.

The implications from this are twofold. Firstly, established brands may need to be less consistent in their advertising in order for the brand and its advertising to create interest. The brand schema could become a prison of sorts, as it reduces the imagination and curiosity of consumers. In order to break out of this prison, the advertising can be used to challenge consumers' brand schemata. Secondly, advertisers may not need to be so afraid of blurring the brand image with inconsistent advertising. We found in study 1 that consumers are able to discriminate sophisticatedly between items of brand-related knowledge. The immediate and delayed brand-related knowledge measures were very similar, giving additional support to our findings. The incongruent ad produced more sophisticated representations of brand-related knowledge as the congruent associations were divided into four separate components when consumers were exposed to the incongruent ad. This suggests that ad-brand incongruency can make the brand more multidimensional and complex. Previous research supports this notion, the more elaboration about the brand, the more advanced will the brand schema become (Krishnan 1996; Pechmann and Stewart 1990). Thus, a well-established brand knowledge structure gives flexibility to the advertising.

One noteworthy result in our studies is that the effects of ad-brand incongruency worked in opposite directions on ad attitude and ad credibility on the one hand and brand attitude on the other hand. Even though ad attitude and ad credibility were lower for the incongruent ad, brand attitude was increased. We discussed above the fact that the individual ad (and ad attitude) has been found to have little influence on brand attitude. Our studies show that even if consumers appreciate the incongruent ad less, they may still be more positive toward the brand. Thus, a "bad ad" might still be good advertising. This gives interesting implications for the pre-testing of ads, where variables such as ad liking tend to be the most common means of evaluation (cf. Brown and Stayman 1992; Haley and Baldinger 1991).

We used ad credibility as a dependent variable in this study because incongruent ads should be in contrast to the well-known and established brand's associations. Ad-brand incongruency had a negative effect on ad credibility in our study. One should keep in mind that ad liking is more important than ad credibility for a brand in a low-involvement product category (such as chocolate bars). However, our results indicate that ad credibility should not be overlooked in research on ad-brand incongruency. Ad credibility is likely to affect other products (e.g., in high-involvement contexts) more strongly.

The moderating variables in study 2 give us some possible clues about the workings of ad-brand incongruency. The incongruent ad presents a new impression of the brand and adds an element of novelty to the brand communication. The positive effect that was found for subjects with high NFC suggests that the ad-brand incongruency makes the communication more complex. This is further supported by the fact that the effect was negative for subjects with low NFC. These subjects do not want to have to elaborate too much on the ad and they prefer a simpler, more straightforward message. Thus, it seems plausible that ad-brand incongruency enhances the complexity in the advertising.

Subjects with high attitude toward advertising responded favorably to ad-brand incongruency. As the entertainment value is an important part in attitude toward advertising (cf. Pollay and Mittal 1993), we speculate that ad-brand incongruency makes the brand communication more entertaining. Interestingly, none of the three variables ad attitude, ad credibility and brand attitude were affected by the ad-brand incongruency for subjects with low attitude toward advertising. This suggests that there might be an upside to ad-brand incongruency (those who like advertising are positively affected) but there need not be a downside (those who dislike advertising are not affected).

Limitations and Further Research

There are some important limitations in this research that need to be discussed and used as input in further research on information incongruency between ads and brands. One limitation regards previous findings on incongruency. We included only two levels of ad-brand incongruency (congruent and incongruent), whereas previous research has discriminated between moderate levels of incongruency and high levels of incongruency (cf. Lane 2000; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Positive effects are expected from moderate incongruency (which is possible for consumers to resolve), but extreme incongruency is generally received negatively. Our research does not take this difference into account and future research may investigate how sensitive the effects of ad-brand incongruency are for different degrees of incongruency.

We used an established brand in our studies, which diverts from many studies of advertising (a problem that is pointed out by Kent and Allen 1994). By doing so, we added a dimension that is often overlooked, namely the brand schema. However, brand schemata can be more or less developed. One dimension to investigate is brand familiarity. A more familiar brand

should have a more developed schema and more strongly held brand associations. The conflict between the brand schema and the incongruent ad should thus not be so poignant for less familiar brands. Somewhere along the line between familiar and unfamiliar brands there should be a dividing point where the brand-incongruent ad goes from evoking the brand-schema and making the processing more sophisticated to interfering with the stored brand associations.

An additional dimension is the nature of the brand positioning. For example, is the brand clearly differentiated (suggesting a more narrow brand schema) or is it positioned as a more central actor in the category (suggesting a broader brand schema)? The latter brand schema is likely to be more flexible and able to incorporate new brand associations. Investigating the effects of incongruencies on different kinds of schemas would enhance our understanding of ad-brand incongruency as well as of brand schemata.

In our studies we used a brand that could be classified as a transformational brand (cf. Rossiter and Percy 1992). Communication of transformational brands tends to be rather abstract with a focus on feelings and a positive brand attitude. For informational brands, however, the informative part of the communication becomes more important (Edell and Burke 1987). We would thus expect, for instance, ad credibility to become more important. As ad credibility was affected negatively in our studies, it would be interesting to compare the effects of ad-brand incongruency between transformational and informational brands. Moreover, we tested our hypotheses in a low-involvement product category (chocolate bar) where consumers can be expected to accept more incongruency (Campbell and Goodstein 2001). Ad-brand incongruency may not be accepted or tolerated to the same extent for high-involvement products that are more relevant for consumers' self-identity.

Finally, we provide one manipulation of ad-brand incongruency, but there are many others. Effects of ad-brand incongruent ad elements (e.g., visual imagery, copy text, slogan, endorsers) could be tested further. Our results are therefore limited to the characteristics of the ad execution used. To highlight one important aspect, the incongruous users in our studies were attractive to the respondents, though incongruent with the brand. Ads portraying other, less attractive and incongruent, user groups may not increase brand attitude than what we have demonstrated. Further research can explore the effects of different types of ad-brand incongruency executions.

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Article 3

**Effects of Brand Incongruent Advertising in
Competitive Settings**

With Micael Dahlén

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ABSTRACT

This study examines if brand-incongruent advertising (ads which are incongruent with established brand associations) can break through the competitive advertising clutter. Challenging the popular belief in maintaining consistency in brand communications, we show that brand-incongruent ads can lead to an increase in attention, more sophisticated processing of brand associations, better ad and brand recall, as well as improved ad attitudes. Due to the competitive context, however, brand attitudes and purchase intentions remained unchanged. The study contributes to research on competitive advertising and information incongruity, in addition to having practical implications for advertising well-established brands.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines if incongruent advertising has the potential of breaking through the competitive advertising clutter, and how consumers respond to it. We examine a specific type of information incongruity, namely that between an advertisement and established associations for the advertised brand, referred to as ad-brand incongruity. Drawing on schema congruity theory, we examine the potential for this somewhat unconventional way of communicating, deviant from advice from brand management practice and textbooks embracing the importance of consistency in brand communications (e.g. Keller 2003). On the other hand, some research caution against exaggerating advertising consistency for well established brands (Alwitt, 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005; Machleit 1993; Sjödin and Törn 2006). Addressing this issue of balancing consistency and change in brand communications is important since the use of brand incongruent advertising should have the potential to combat two increasingly growing problems to established brands.

The first problem is that established brands need to be constantly rejuvenated and spark consumer interest: Research demonstrates that established brands increasingly need to be interesting if they are to be successful (Alwitt 2000; Machleit 1993) also in the future. The second problem is that established brands are located in mature markets and highly mature media. This makes it hard for established brands to break through the advertising clutter (Jewell and Unnava 2003; Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2000). Interestingly, these

two problems are interlinked: The vast amount of marketing communications puts demands on advertising to be interesting to consumers (Alwitt 2000), and one way to reach through the advertising clutter is to make distinctive, creative, and interesting ad executions (e.g., Till and Baack 2005). Incongruent advertising should be such a way, but it is a more precise tool than the somewhat vaguely defined concepts of originality as proposed by Pieters et al (2002) or creativity as proposed by Till and Baack (2005). Examining the more specific concept of brand-incongruent communications also provides an advantage over "originality" in that we can provide a theoretical background to explain the effects of incongruity based on a solid foundation in cognition literature.

Research has examined opportunities for employing information incongruity in ads (e.g., Houston, Heckler, and Childers 1987; Lee 2000; Lee and Mason 1999) and specifically the employment of advertising which is incongruent with established brand associations (Dahlén and Lange 2004; Dahlén et al. 2005; Lange and Dahlén 2003; Sjödin and Törn 2006). However, previous studies on effects of incongruent advertising (e.g., Dahlén and Lange 2004; Dahlén et al. 2005; Goodstein 1993; Lange and Dahlén 2003) have not discussed opportunities with incongruent communications from a competitive perspective. On the contrary, studies on incongruity have typically examined only one brand, or if there have been more brands, they have not been competing brands (e.g., Goodstein 1993).

This is highly problematic since advertisers typically select thematically congruent media for their advertising (Kent 2002), making competition from other brands difficult to avoid. In the presence of such competitive ads, brand advertising is less effective, one reason being that consumers have difficulties in retrieving brand-related information, a phenomenon known as competitive interference (Burke and Srull 1988; Jewell and Unnava 2003). Examining effects of incongruent advertising in a more realistic, competitive setting should therefore be of theoretical interest as well as practical relevance since the competitive context may hamper the positive effects of incongruity reported in previous studies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are numerous studies on effects of the use of information incongruity in the marketing literature. Studies have been conducted on incongruities

between pictures and words in ads between an ad and general viewer expectations, between features of a product and product category schemas, between brands and brand extensions as well as in sales-people schemas (for a review see Lee and Schumann 2004). Drawing on this literature and specifically a few studies on the employment of brand-incongruent information in advertising (Dahlén and Lange 2004; Dahlén et al. 2005; Lange and Dahlén 2003; Sjödin and Törn 2006), we examine the potential for brand incongruent advertising to combat effects of the competitive context.

The need for devising interesting communications campaigns becomes especially relevant in a cluttered advertising milieu, which is the case for most well established brands: In terms of media selection, marketers typically select media which are thematically congruent with the brand (Moorman et al. 2002). This makes competition fierce as similar brands select the same media (Kent 2002). Malaviya et al. (1999) found that a typical magazine may comprise close to 70 ads, divided into categories with up to five directly competing brands. Likewise, Law (2002) reported that 41 percent of TV ads in a prime-time hour has at least one direct competitor also advertising. Moreover, advertisers in a thematically congruent medium face competition also from the editorial material, directing consumers' attention away from the ads, as they are more likely to focus on the editorial material than on ads (Jun et al. 2003).

The effects on attention of brand-incongruent advertising have not been examined previously, but schema theory postulates that information which fits an existing schema – i.e., confirms to expectations – will be encoded effortlessly into that schema structure. When information does not fit the schema, however, people will engage in more extensive processing to resolve the incongruity (e.g., Mandler 1982; Srull 1981). Incongruent information will cause people to pay more attention to it, and make them more motivated to think about it, resulting in deeper cognition (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983). For example, ads are viewed longer if they are incongruent compared to when they are consistent with previous knowledge (Goodstein 1993) and original ads induce more frequent eye fixations than traditional ads (Pieters et al. 2002). Recent research also suggests that processing ads in a cluttered ad context is a capacity-demanding job which will encourage ad perceivers to rely on salient heuristic cues to formulate judgments (Chang 2005). One such salient cue should be brand associations stored in long-term memory. If an ad execution does not conform to these

brand associations, the heuristic cannot be utilized. This should force consumers to study the ad longer to make sense out of it. Consequently, we expect that *consumers will pay more attention to brand-incongruent ads than brand-congruent ads* (H1).

Previous research has documented that in the presence of competitive advertising, there is a lower recall of target brand information (e.g., Jewell and Unnava 2003). Commonly investigated from the perspective of associative network memory, interference refers to the impaired ability to remember information about a stimulus from long-term memory since other information interferes with the retrieval of the target information. This seems to take place independent of whether competing ads feature brands in the same product category (Burke and Srull 1988) or in different product categories (Kumar 2000).

However, incongruent advertising should be able to combat interference effects: Not only does incongruent information in general have a tendency to attract attention, the mental activity is also likely to be higher and more sustained. Information is held in working memory for a longer time, as people stay "online" rather than direct their attention to other things. Previous research has provided ample evidence that discrepancies increase elaboration (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999). This extensive processing and deeper encoding should affect consumers' memory: When people try to resolve incongruity, they develop a greater number of associative pathways in memory relative to when processing congruent information (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Although this may not dramatically alter the foundations of existing knowledge, it should have the opportunity to influence finer elements of brand-related knowledge (cf. Braun 1999). Brand-incongruent ads could slightly reform the brand schema and allow more sophisticated representations as more facets of the brand are considered in the sensemaking efforts. Although effects on memory of brand-incongruent advertising have not been tested before, we believe that since the number of associative pathways increases chances of retrieving a particular item in memory, this will result in improved memory of the incongruent information and related parts of the communication (cf. Lee and Schumann 2004).

Therefore, we expect that *brand-incongruent ads lead to a more sophisticated processing of brand associations than do brand-congruent ads* (H2), and that *consumers will have relatively better memory of the ad and*

brand from brand-incongruent ads than brand-congruent ads (H3).

Many times, advertising is painfully predictable (cf. Ritzer 1993). For a considerable number of multinational brands, advertising is quite similar to what it looked like even ten or twenty years ago and often very similar to other competing brands in the same product category (for example motor, perfume, or alcohol ads). Although brand management literature (e.g. Keller 2003) stresses the importance of consistency in effectively building a successful brand, some research points to hazards of embracing consistency too much for an already well established, familiar brand. For instance, Alden et al. (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what the advertising will entail for a familiar brand, which reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communication. Machleit et al. (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of established and familiar brands should be to reduce the boredom consumers experience with a heavily advertised, well-known brand and increase brand interest. For low-risk frequently purchased goods, an enhanced degree of brand interest among consumers should reduce variety-seeking tendencies and for high-risk categories, it should serve as a determinant of which brands are selected in a search process. In addition, Alwitt (2000) argues that advertisers must concentrate on the interestingness of advertising if they want viewers to attend to their messages throughout the course of a commercial. A too narrow focus on consistency may limit opportunities for curiosity and interest in the brand. Therefore, we believe that incongruent advertising also has the potential to affect evaluations.

An effect on evaluations could also be inferred from schema congruity theory: We can expect that for congruent ads, which are unlikely to lead to cognitive elaboration or arousal, the evaluation of the ad and brand is typically mild (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). The incongruent ad on the other hand is likely to be perceived as challenging and interesting (Alwitt 2000). Furthermore, the challenging ad will cause cognitive elaboration, as pointed out previously, and a questioning of how the ad fits with the established brand schema. Mandler (1982) argued that incongruity could be resolved rather easily through assimilation or the use of alternative schemas. When this is the case, positive affect will follow from the success of the resolution (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). This should color evaluations (e.g., Lee and Mason 1999) and enhance purchase intentions of the advertised brand. Furthermore, the elaboration of the brand schema increases the salience of the brand in memory (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986), which

in turn leads to enhanced brand attitude (Holden and Vanhuele 1999). We therefore expect that *brand-incongruent ads generate higher* (H4a) *ad attitudes,* (H5a) *brand attitudes, and* (H6a) *purchase intentions than brand-congruent ads.*

However, processing ads in a competitive, cluttered setting is more demanding of consumers than processing ads in isolation (Burke and Srull 1988; Chang 2005). Furthermore, when several brands advertise in the same medium, consumers tend to engage more in relational, or between-brand, processing rather than individual, within-brand processing, meaning that they focus more on common traits between brands than unique brand features (Malaviya et al. 1996, 1999). This should have consequences for the resolution of the incongruity as consumers may not have the capacity to resolve it. Analogous to findings that external conditions such as limited time may hamper resolution of incongruity (Srull 1981), we believe that the competitive setting may limit resolution ability. If resolution cannot be resolved, negative affect will typically follow which would harm evaluations of the incongruent ad and brand (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). So although incongruity in advertising offers the potential for cutting through the clutter by raising attention and enhancing brand memory, resolution of incongruity in a competitive setting (i.e. ads in the presence of ads from competing brands) may simply demand too much effort to become successful. Consequently we propose an alternative to hypotheses 4–6 for competitive settings, such that *brand-incongruent ads generate lower* (H4b*) ad attitudes,* (H5b) *brand attitudes, and* (H6b) *purchase intentions than brand-congruent ads.*

METHOD

Ad-brand incongruity (2 levels – brand congruent and / brand incongruent ad) was operationalized as a between-subjects variable. Using print advertisements inserted into real magazines, the hypotheses were tested in an experiment in which participants were exposed to advertising for familiar brands and asked to indicate their reactions to the advertisement and the brand. Participants were thus exposed to one target ad and several competitive filler ads.

A sample of 38 college students (from the same population as in the experiment) were asked to rate a number of brands on familiarity (scale 1-7,

ranging from "not at all familiar with" to "very familiar with") and associations (along 14 dimensions of brand personality). The scale for brand personality was adapted from a subset of dimensions presented by Aaker (1997).

Based on the results of the pre-test, we selected two familiar brands that differed significantly from each other in terms of brand associations. The first brand was L'Oréal, which was rated as highly familiar ($M = 5.87$), and whose four most strongly held associations were: successful, charming, cheerful and imaginative (all $M > 5$). The second brand was Gore-Tex, which was also rated as highly familiar ($M = 5.51$), and whose four most strongly held associations were: reliable, down-to-earth, honest and intelligent (all $M > 5$). The associations differed significantly ($p < .01$) between the brands, so that the four most strongly held associations for each brand rated below 4 (midpoint of the scale) for the other brand.

Magazines were chosen as a medium for two reasons. Print media are reader-paced and are therefore well-suited for research concerning information incongruity (cf. Lee 2000). This is because subjects can process the ads for as long as they want, allowing for differences in attention and elaboration induced by the ad placements. Secondly, they are typically thematic and comprise ads for competing brands (Malaviya et al. 1999), thus creating a possibility for competitive interference effects.

To control for prior exposure to ads, a professional advertising agency developed new ads for each brand employing the associations elicited in the first pretest. For each brand, one brand-congruent ad and one brand-incongruent ad were developed. The congruent ad for L'Oréal featured the face of a model-like young woman while the incongruent ad featured the face of rock artist Iggy Pop. The congruent ad for Gore-Tex portrayed a person alpine skiing while the incongruent ad portrayed a person indoor playing the guitar. In a second pretest 30 participants judged how well the ad fit the advertised brand (1 = low perceived fit, 7 = high perceived fit). The results showed that the congruent ads fit the brand well – *M(L'oréal)* = 6.12, *M*(*Gore-Tex*) = 5.95 –   and that the incongruent ads had low fit with the brand – *M(L'oréal)* = 1.89, *M*(*Gore-Tex*) = 2.33.

To select appropriate magazines in which to place the ads, 30 participants were presented with a list of magazines and asked to indicate how well each magazine fit the two brands (1= low perceived fit to 7= high perceived fit).

Two magazines were selected on the basis of the results of the pretest: "Cosmopolitan" for L'Oréal and "Outdoor Sports Magazine" for Gore-Tex. L'Oréal had a high fit ($M = 6.16$) with Cosmopolitan and Gore-Tex had a high fit with Outdoor Sports magazine ($M = 6.11$). Both brands had also been advertising repeatedly in the selected magazines.

A sample of 169 college students participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to one of four groups (L'oreal congruent ad / L'oréal incongruent ad / Gore-Tex congruent ad / Gore-Tex incongruent ad). Copies of the magazines were distributed together with a questionnaire. Participants were instructed to look through the magazine in the "same fashion that you normally do for this type of magazine", thus being exposed to the target ad as well as several filler ads. When participants finished reading, they closed the magazines and answered the questions in the booklet. To clear short time memory, the first part of the questionnaire consisted of filler items (demographics and magazine-related questions). The second part consisted of measures of memory, attention, processing, and evaluations.

Attention (H1) was measured by self-reported study time: "Approximately how long time did you study the ad when you looked through the magazine the first time? About __ seconds". *Brand associations* (H2) were measured with the question "How well do you think the following adjectives describe the brand?" Respondents rated each adjective on a seven-point Likert type scale. The measures of brand associations were adopted from a subset of a scale of brand personality developed by Aaker (1997). The four brand associations found to be associated most strongly (all $M > 5$) with each brand, respectively, in the pre-tests, were successful, charming, cheerful and imaginative for L'Oreal, and reliable, down-to-earth, honest and intelligent for GoreTex. These associations were selected for the testing of H2.

Three different aspects of memory (H3) were examined; ad related brand recall, ad related brand recognition, and ad message memorability. *Ad related brand recall* was examined by asking participants to "name all brands, for which you have just seen ads". Answers were coded as 1 (focal brand recalled), or 0 (focal brand not recalled). *Ad related brand recognition* was examined by asking participants to "Please tick the names for the brands, for which you have just seen ads". A list with all brands that were advertised in the magazine was presented. To control for false recognition several brands not advertised in the magazine were also included in the list. However, no participant falsely marked an additional brand. Answers were

coded as 1 (focal brand recognized), or 0 (focal brand not recognized). *Ad message memorability* was measured using the questions: "How difficult was it to remember the message of the ad?" The answer was given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (very easy) to 7 (very difficult). The measure has been found to be a valid proxy of competitive interference (Dahlén and Nordfält 2004).

Ad attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable/ unfavorable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α = .89). *Brand attitude* was measured with the following three items: good/bad, negative/positive, and satisfactory/ unsatisfactory. The averaged index had a Cronbach's α = .93). *Purchase intentions* were measured with "Imagine you were to buy a winter jacket (beauty product), how likely is it that you would buy one with Gore-Tex (buy L'Oréal)?" on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (very likely).

RESULTS

As a manipulation check, ad-brand incongruity was assessed by indexing two measures: "How well does the ad fit/match the brand?" (r = .94). The congruent ad had a significantly, $t(167) = 9.6$, $p < .01$, higher fit ($M = 4.50$) with the brand than did the incongruent ad ($M = 2.19$).

A MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was run on all dependent variables (excluding brand associations, which were tested separately for each brand).   Level of congruity had a significant main effect on dependent variables, $F(7,159) = 11.25$, $p < .01$, Wilks'λ = .67). Whereas brand had a significant main effect ($F(7,159) = 4.79$, $p<.01$, Wilks'λ = .83) on dependent variables (e.g., brand attitude was higher for Gore-Tex than for L'Oréal), there was no significant interaction effect with level of incongruity ($F < 2$). Thus, for purposes of testing H1 and H3-H4, the two congruent conditions were collapsed, as were the two brand-incongruent conditions. H2 had to be tested separately since the set of brand associations were unique to each brand. Planned comparisons (with significance levels Bonferroni adjusted) were used to test each hypothesis individually.

H1 stated that consumers will pay relatively more attention to brand-incongruent ads than brand-congruent ads. As shown in Table 1,

analysis of the self-reported study time of the ad showed a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the congruent and incongruent conditions, such that study time was longer for incongruent ads ($M = 6.24$ seconds, $SD = 4.69$) than for congruent ads ($M = 2.35$ seconds, $SD = 1.39$). Therefore, H1 is supported.

In order to investigate H2, we conducted exploratory factor analyses (PCA with Varimax rotation) of brand associations, separately for each brand. Results are shown in Table 2. The procedure was based on Low and Lamb (2000) and Dahlén et al (2005), who used PCA of a fixed number of associations to test differences in sophistication of brand schemata. By examining how, and into how many, components associations fall into, we get an indication of how well consumers can discriminate between items of brand-related information. The more components, the more sophisticated is the representation of brand-related knowledge: In the congruent conditions, the PCAs produced two components, one component for target brand associations and one for non-target brand associations, where as in the incongruent conditions, the PCAs produced three components with brand associations no longer loading on the same component. This gives support to H2: Brand-incongruent ads seem to lead to a more sophisticated processing of brand associations than brand-congruent ads.

H3 suggested that memory of the ad and brand should be better for brand-incongruent ads than brand-congruent ads. Planned comparisons for ad-related brand recall, ad-related brand recognition, and ad message memorability all showed significant (all $p < .01$) results in accordance with the hypotheses (Table 1). Hence, H3 is supported.

As for H4-H6, we hypothesized that ad-brand incongruity would affect ad attitudes, brand attitudes and purchase intentions. However, analysis of results showed no significant difference in either direction on ad attitude, brand attitude, or purchase intentions between the two conditions ($p > .2$). However, since the effects of incongruity on evaluation may be contingent on resolution of incongruity (Mandler 1982), for exploratory purposes we re-ran the MANOVA using the index for perceived fit between the ad and brand as a covariate. Level of congruity again had a significant main effect on dependent variables, but this time the effect of incongruity was significant also on ad attitude (see Table 1). This suggests that the effect on ad attitude is contingent on consumers' ability to resolve the incongruity.

Table 1. Tests for Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 – 6.

	Means		Planned comparisons (1)	Planned comparisons (2)
	Congruent condition	Incongruent condition		
Attention (H1)	2.35 secs	6.24 secs	$F_{(1,165)} = 52.93$, p < .01	$F_{(1,164)} = 44.28$, p < .01
Memory (H3)				
Ad-related brand recall	27%	62%	$F_{(1,165)} = 22.47$, p < .01	$F_{(1,164)} = 12.46$, p < .01
Ad related brand recognition	68%	92%	$F_{(1,165)} = 13.62$, p < .01	$F_{(1,164)} = 13.87$, p < .01
Ad message memorability	5.21	3.86	$F_{(1,165)} = 17.93$, p < .01	$F_{(1,164)} = 10.16$, p < .01
Evaluations				
Ad Attitude (H4)	3.57	3.72	n.s.	$F_{(1,164)} = 8.54$, p < .01
Brand attitude (H5)	4.76	4.79	n.s.	n.s.
Purchase intention (H6)	3.35	3.46	n.s.	n.s.

(1): initial MANOVA: $F_{(7,159)} = 11.25$, p < .01, Wilks'λ =.67
(2): additional MANOVA with ad-brand fit as covariate: $F_{(7,158)} = 10.85$, $p < .01$, Wilks'λ = .68

Table 2. Brand associations (H2)

	Congruent conditions		Gore-Tex Incongruent Condition			L'oréal Incongruent Condition		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Gore-Tex brand associations	Reliable Down-to-earth Honest Intelligent		**Reliable** **Honest** **Intelligent**	**Down-to-earth**		Down-to-earth Intelligent		Reliable Honest
L'oréal brand associations		Successful Charming Cheerful Imaginative	Successful Imaginative		Charming		**Successful** **Charming**	**Cheerful**

(In L'oréal Incongruent Condition, Factor 1: Imaginative)

TVE (Gore-Tex $_{Congruent}$) = 72 %, TVE (Gore-Tex $_{InCongruent}$) = 73 %
TVE (L'oréal $_{Congruent}$) = 63%, TVE (L'oréal $_{Incongruent}$) = 71%

DISCUSSION

This study examined effects of brand-incongruent advertising in competitive settings. The results showed that ads, which are incongruent with established brand associations, can lead to an increase in attention, more sophisticated processing of brand associations, better ad and brand recall as well as enhanced ad attitudes. However, brand attitudes and purchase intentions remained unchanged. The results of this study contribute to research on competitive advertising and information incongruity, in addition to having practical implications for advertising of well established brands.

This study contributed to competitive interference literature by providing support for the idea that information which is incongruent with established brand associations may be an effective means of reaching through the

advertising clutter: We noticed that the incongruent ad was more attended to and better remembered than the congruent ad. In addition, consumers more strongly elaborated on, and more finely processed, brand associations after having been exposed to an incongruent ad. Such an effect should be desirable for mature brands since advertising for mature brands are seldom thoroughly processed (cf. Alden et al 2000). Also, it could provide opportunities for brand schema change if the advertiser is interested in rearranging brand associations, for instance before launching new, less related products under the same brand (cf. Jewell and Unnava 2003).

Contributing to the information incongruity literature, we demonstrated previously untested effects of brand incongruent advertising enhancing ad and brand recall. Our research also showed that there may be boundary conditions to the positive effects of incongruity observed in previous studies. It seems as if the competitive context is such a boundary condition, hampering the ability to resolve incongruent ads. Since advertising for established brands typically is located in a competitive setting, we should not anticipate brand-incongruent ads to indisputably improve brand evaluations: This study shows that employing incongruity may not be the guaranteed success one might interpret the conclusions by Dahlén et al (2005). In a more realistic setting than their study, we did find expected effects of ad-brand incongruity on attention, processing and memory, but these effects did not suffice to improve brand evaluations in the competitive setting. This study also showed that brand-incongruent ads improves ad attitudes, but only if consumers are able to resolve the incongruity inherent in the ads. This calls for close observation of the level of incongruity and the opportunity and ability to resolve the incongruity in the employment of incongruent advertising. As the positive evaluative effects of incongruity only follow if the incongruity is resolvable (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), in competitive settings advertisers may need to reduce the level of incongruity even more to make it moderately incongruent and/or enhance resolution opportunities. One way to do this might be to use informative copy texts that help the viewer resolve the incongruity (cf. Bridges et al. 2000).

From a managerial perspective, the results of this study indicate that the popular tendency of embracing consistency in brand advertising may have to be revisited, at least for well-established brands. Although incongruity did not improve brand evaluations in this study, three other desired advertising effects were observed showing that incongruity can reach through the advertising clutter: It causes consumers to better pay attention, to better

remember the ad message and focal brand and improves ad evaluations (when incongruity is resolved). For established brands, the advertising campaign objective must not always necessarily be the improvement of brand attitudes (as long as brand attitudes are not hurt). Instead it could be to enhance brand salience in consumer memory to keep the brand "top-of-mind" (Ehrenberg et al. 2002; Machleit et al. 1993). Consequently, for established brands in a cluttered advertising milieu, the positive effects on attention, memory, and ad attitudes may be enough reason to employ brand-incongruent advertising. Indeed, these objectives could be obtained without risks of jeopardizing brand attitudes or purchase intentions.

Practitioners and academics alike would benefit from future research examining the role of involvement on the effects of brand-incongruent communications as the present study did not consider this important factor. Drawing on previous research, we may expect incongruent communication in high involvement situations to stand a better chance of being resolved than in low-involvement situations, as consumers with high involvement will devote more cognitive effort to a stimulus, facilitating information processing (cf. Maoz and Tybout 2002; Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983).

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Article 4

Could Placing Ads Wrong be Right?
Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence

With Micael Dahlén, Sara Rosengren, and Niclas Öhman

COULD PLACING ADS WRONG BE RIGHT?

Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence

Micael Dahlén, Sara Rosengren, Fredrik Törn, and Niclas Öhman

ABSTRACT: This paper adds to the research on media-context effects with two experimental studies of thematic (in)congruence (i.e., advertising placed in media with themes that are either congruent or incongruent with the advertised brands). We hypothesize that by challenging expectations, placing ads in thematically incongruent media could enhance ad processing. Furthermore, employing theory on information incongruence, we hypothesize that thematic incongruence could enhance advertising evaluations and produce stronger perceptions of existing brand associations. The results support the hypotheses and suggest that effects are moderated by brand familiarity.

Flip through the pages of an automotive magazine and you are sure to find advertising for cars. Similarly, readers of a beauty magazine will encounter ads for makeup brands. These are examples of thematic congruence, where advertising is placed in media with themes matching the brands. As advertising context and the editorial environment are gaining importance in the media-planning process, thematic congruence has become the default criterion in media selection (King and Reid 1997; King, Reid, and Macias 2004; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). Whereas there has been ample research on advertising context and congruence effects relating to the immediate editorial environment (for a review, see, e.g., De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002), thematic congruence has still received relatively scarce attention (for exceptions, see Dahlén 2005; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002).

The research conducted to date suggests that matching advertising with the total media context enhances its effectiveness. Apart from the obvious reason that placing an ad in a medium with a similar theme should guarantee a good audience match (those reading an automotive magazine are likely to be in the market for car products), the rationale for choosing a congruent context for advertising would be that it facilitates processing of the ad. This is in line with the literature on congruence: A congruent context eases comprehension of the advertising (e.g., Goodstein 1993; Kamins, Marks, and Skinner 1991). Thematic congruence has been found to enhance

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ad recall (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002) and produce stronger target associations and more positive evaluations than neutral or incongruent media (Dahlén 2005).

However, a premise for the facilitating effect of congruence on processing is that consumers would otherwise experience some difficulty in comprehending the advertising (e.g., Goodstein 1993). Whereas this is often the case in advertising experiments using mock brands and unfamiliar exposure vehicles (e.g., Dahlén 2005), most of the advertising in major media is sponsored by established and well-known brands (Kent 2002). Advertising for these brands activates consumers' prior knowledge of the brands (so-called brand schemata), which guides attention and processing of the information content (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994). Thus, the value of external processing help is reduced. Therefore, a congruent context for the ad may not increase processing; in fact, it could actually reduce it. Furthermore, selecting a similar theme does not necessarily lead to a perfect audience match. Not all potential car buyers read car magazines, for example, and most car buyers could be expected to read other magazines besides car magazines as well. In many cases, target audiences will thus overlap in their media habits. For instance, to reach fashion-oriented car buyers when marketing a fashionable car, advertisers' best option may be to reach them through an ad in a beauty or fashion magazine.

In this paper, we challenge the conventional wisdom and suggest that placing ads in a medium that is thematically incongruent with the brand may be beneficial. Although congruence might be useful in trying to reach the desired target audience, we suggest that reaching parts of that audience using thematically incongruent magazines might increase the effectiveness of an ad. In a first study, we test the effects of thematic incongruence experimentally by inserting ads for two familiar brands in real magazines. We hypothesize that an incongruent media placement will defy consumer expectations, and that as consumers try to resolve the incongruence, they will process

the advertising more. Increased processing and successful resolution should lead to enhanced evaluations and strengthened brand associations. A second study rules out competing explanations and replicates the main findings. Furthermore, it tests the moderating effect of brand familiarity.

ADVERTISING EFFECTS OF THEMATIC INCONGRUENCE

Consumers develop knowledge about brands when encountering brand-related information such as advertising, packaging, and trying out products. Over time, as brands become increasingly familiar, consumers' brand knowledge and brand perceptions build a rather robust memory structure, typically referred to as a brand schema. The brand schema could be considered a kind of investment: It is the end result of all previous processing that a consumer has devoted to the brand, and it pays off by reducing the effort that is required on future encounters with the brand. When consumers encounter new information about a brand, the brand schema is activated, and the information is interpreted in light of it. The brand schema also forms expectations about where and how the brand will be encountered in the future (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005).

When brand information conforms to expectations (such as when a car brand advertises in an automotive magazine), there is little need to process the information in-depth to relate it to the existing brand schema (Kent and Allen 1994; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). In contrast, information that defies expectations (such as when a car brand advertises in a beauty magazine), encourages people to pay attention to the information and motivates them to think about it (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983). Indeed, previous research has shown that ads which are incongruent with an evoked schema elicit more processing than ads which are schema-congruent (Goodstein 1993; Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter 2005). Advertising in a thematically incongruent medium will conflict with the brand schema, as the advertising does not fit with the brand's existing associations or previous media placements. This should lead consumers to engage in more extensive processing to resolve the incongruence (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Consequently, we expect that

H1: An ad is processed more (less) when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

Previous research shows that successful resolution of incongruent information can enhance evaluations of advertising for two reasons. First, more thorough processing leads to enhanced confidence in resolution judgments, which is usually interpreted as a greater liking of the ad and the brand (e.g., Lee 2000). Second, incongruent information produces a kind of entertainment value, as it challenges the consumer and

presents him or her with a puzzle to solve. Solving the puzzle that the thematically incongruent ad placement offers should thus produce positive affect and a sense of accomplishment (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994; Phillips 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Ad and brand attitudes are more (less) positive when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

One obvious argument against thematically incongruent ad placements would be that even though evaluations may be enhanced, there is a risk that the brand image (i.e., its core associations) will be diluted: Whereas a thematically congruent medium would share target associations with the brand, a thematically incongruent medium provides associations that are incongruent and may interfere with the brand's existing associations. However, we expect that a thematically incongruent medium will not dilute, but rather reinforce, existing brand associations.

When advertising conforms to expectations (as would be the case in a thematically congruent medium), the consumer needs to activate the brand schema only briefly to confirm his or her existing knowledge of the brand. The conflicting information from a thematically incongruent medium, however, should provoke more extensive activation of the brand schema, as the consumer searches for potential explanations and elements that could match (Dahlén et al. 2005; Kent and Allen 1994). The more extensively the brand schema is activated, the more salient its content should become. Searching for a match, the consumer reiterates the brand associations that are stored in the schema and the very repetition of these associations should strengthen their ties with the brand. We therefore hypothesize that consumers perceive brand associations more strongly when encountering an ad in a thematically incongruent medium:

H3: Brand associations are perceived more (less) strongly when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

STUDY 1

A method similar to that of Moorman, Neijens, and Smit (2002) was used to test the hypotheses. Participants were exposed to one target ad and several filler ads inserted in either a brand-congruent or brand-incongruent magazine and then asked to indicate their reactions to the advertisement and the brand.

Stimulus Development

Magazines were chosen as the medium for a number of reasons. First, magazines are well suited for tests of thematic congruence as they are usually thematically organized. Second, print

media are reader paced, meaning that participants can process the ads for as long as they want (cf. Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991). This makes magazines suitable for research on information congruence (Lee 2000). Third, by using magazines, the present research aligns with previous research on thematic congruence (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002).

To come up with appropriate brands and magazines, we conducted a series of pretests using participants from the same population as (but not included in) the experiment. In a first pretest (*n* = 38), several brands were rated on familiarity (using a scale of 1 to 7, ranging from "not at all familiar with" to "very familiar with") and associations (along 14 dimensions of brand personality taken from Aaker 1997). To ascertain suitable levels of associative overlaps between brands and magazines, participants were also asked to rate a list of magazines on the associations (Kusumoto 2002). Based on the results, two familiar brands with significantly different brand associations were selected: L'Oréal (familiarity: *M* = 5.87; associations: successful, up-to-date, charming, cheerful, and imaginative, all *M* > 5) and Gore-Tex (familiarity: *M* = 5.51; associations: tough, reliable, down-to-earth, honest, and intelligent, all *M* > 5). The associations differed significantly (*p* < .01) between the brands and the five strongest associations for each brand rated below 4 (scale midpoint) for the other brand. The brands were then matched with magazines that shared associations with each brand. *Cosmopolitan* magazine scored high, and did not significantly differ, on any of L'Oréal's top five associations (*M* > 5), whereas it rated significantly lower on Gore-Tex's top five associations (*M* < 4). Similarly, *Outdoor Sports* magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of Gore-Tex's top five associations (*M* > 5), whereas it rated significantly lower on L'Oréal's top five associations (*M* < 4).

In a second pretest (*n* = 30), brand–magazine fit was explicitly tested using a two-item (match/fit), seven-point scale. L'Oréal had a high fit (*M* = 6.16) with *Cosmopolitan* magazine and a low fit (*M* = 2.32) with *Outdoor Sports* magazine, while Gore-Tex had a low fit (*M* = 2.42) with *Cosmopolitan* magazine and a high fit with *Outdoor Sports* magazine (*M* = 6.11).

To avoid any confounding effects of previous exposure (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002), a professional advertising agency developed a new ad for each brand (both ads featured a headline, a model, and the brand logo). Thirty participants indicated how well the ad fit the brand in the same manner as in the previous test. The results showed that both the L'Oréal ad (*M* = 6.12) and the Gore-Tex ad (*M* = 5.95) were highly representative of their brands.

Procedure

The ads were placed in regular (not yet released) copies of the magazines, to provide a real environment comprising editorial material and advertising for other brands. A sample of 157 college students (53% female, 47% male) participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to one of the four brand–media combinations. They were told that they participated in a study of different magazines and their only instructions were to "look through the magazine in the same fashion that you normally do for this type of magazine." Once participants were finished browsing the magazine, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire (starting with some filler questions). Target questions were arranged to first measure memory for all advertising (including the test ad), followed by brand associations and brand attitude. Next, participants were instructed to turn back the pages in the magazine to inspect the test ad and answer questions about processing time and ad attitude.

Measures

Processing (H1) was measured by self-reported study time: "Approximately how long did you study the ad when you looked through the magazine the first time? About _____ seconds." Although self-reports may not give completely accurate measures of actual study time, there should be no systematic differences between conditions.

As more processing should lead to better memory, we also used ad memory as an indicator of processing. Ad-related brand recall was examined by asking participants to "name all brands, for which you have just seen ads." Ad-related brand recognition was examined by asking participants to "Please tick the names for the brands, for which you have just seen ads." A list with all brands that were advertised in the magazine was presented. To control for false recognition, several brands not advertised in the magazine were also included in the list. No participant falsely marked an additional brand, however. For both measures, answers were coded as 1 (focal brand recalled/recognized), or 0 (focal brand not recalled/recognized).

For H2, ad attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable/unfavorable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α = .93). Brand attitude was measured with the following three items: good/bad, negative/positive, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory. The averaged index had a Cronbach's α = .94.

Brand associations (H3) were measured by asking, "How well do you think the following adjectives describe the brand?" Participants rated each adjective on a seven-point Likert-type scale. We employed the five brand associations that were found to be associated most strongly (all *M* > 5) with each brand in the pretests.

Results

For purposes of testing H1 and H2, the four different conditions were combined into two main conditions (brand–media

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congruent exposure and brand–media incongruent exposure). H3 had to be tested separately since the set of brand associations were unique to each brand. A MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was run on all dependent variables (excluding brand associations). We also included gender, magazine readership (measured as number of issues read last year, 0–12), and attitude toward the magazine (same measure as brand attitude, Cronbach's α = .83) as covariates. Gender (F = 6.32, p < .01) had a significant main effect on processing and ad attitude, attitude toward the magazine (F = 3.00, p < .01) on ad attitude, and there were no significant effects of readership (F < 2). The main effect of thematic congruence on the dependent variables was significant, $F(5, 146)$ = 9.12, p < .01, Wilks's λ = .76. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences between the two conditions (see mean values in Table 1).

H1 stated that when an ad is placed in a thematically incongruent medium, processing of that ad would be higher relative to when the ad is placed in a thematically congruent medium. Analysis of the self-reported study time of the ad showed a significant difference (p < .01) between the congruent and incongruent conditions, such that study time was longer for the incongruent media placement (M = 4.26 seconds) than for the congruent media placement (M = 2.40 seconds). Planned comparisons for ad-related brand recall and recognition showed significant (p < .01) results in the same direction. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Continuing with H2, ad attitude and brand attitude were hypothesized to be rated more (less) positively in the thematically incongruent (congruent) condition. The analysis showed a significantly (p < .01) higher ad attitude in the incongruent condition (M = 4.31) than in the congruent condition (M = 3.62). However, although in the hypothesized direction, we found no significant difference in brand attitude between the two conditions ($M_{incongruent}$ = 5.07 versus $M_{congruent}$ = 4.78). The results give only partial support for H2.

To test H3, two separate MANOVAs using the five most strongly held associations of each brand as dependent variables were run, GoreTex: $F(5, 68)$ = 4.76, p < .01, Wilks's λ = .80; L'Oréal: $F(5, 67)$ = 3.76, p < .01, Wilks's λ = .90. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences between the two conditions (see Table 1). For GoreTex, significant (all p < .05) differences were found on all associations. For L'Oréal, however, we only found significant (p < .05) differences for three (out of five) associations. The results mostly support H3.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, Study 1 suggests that placing ads for familiar brands in thematically incongruent media could enhance advertising effectiveness. Consumers exposed to an ad placed in "wrong" rather than "right" media processed the ad more and remembered the brand better. The thematically incongruent media context also enhanced ad attitudes and strengthened brand associations. Media incongruence did not influence brand attitudes, however. Although this was contrary to our expectations, the nonsignificant effect on brand attitude is in line with previous research showing that attitudes toward well-known brands are stable and hard to affect through advertising (e.g., Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). For these brands, it would be more important to keep the brand salient and interesting to consumers—for instance, by making them think about what the brand stands for.

We used real magazines and brands to simulate a real scenario as much as possible. Finding support for our proposed effects in such a setting suggests that the effects are, indeed, likely to occur in a real-life setting. The ecologically valid setting did, however, constrain our findings in several ways. The general set-up of the experiment did not allow us to test our theoretical reasoning in detail. Even though incongruently placed ads were processed more, we cannot know for sure that such processing involved resolving the incongruence rather than just dealing with novel stimuli as such. The benefits that were uncovered in Study 1 could therefore have been due to a simple novelty effect: The more uniform the surrounding (ad and editorial) material in the magazine, the more the incongruently placed ad will stand out. Numerous studies have shown that novelty increases processing, memory, and evaluations (cf. Lynch and Srull 1982). To actually show that the effects were due to incongruence, a more detailed assessment of the type of processing would be needed. Our theoretical reasoning would also be strengthened if we could show that the incongruence effects mainly occur for familiar brands with established brand schemas.

Another limitation of the current study is that in using real magazines we could not control for competing ads or competition from the immediate editorial environment. As thematic congruence is a widely applied criterion in media selection, head-on advertising competition is fierce among similar brands that select the same media (Kent 2002; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). Competing advertising increases generalization so that the links become stronger between each ad and the product category and weaker between the ads and the brands (see, e.g., Keller 1991; Law 2002). It could therefore be that the effects found were due to high levels of competitive interference in congruent magazines rather than the unexpectedness of placements in incongruent magazines.

STUDY 2

A second study was conducted to rule out competing explanations and to replicate the findings from Study 1. To provide a more conclusive test of theory, processing was measured in terms of ad-evoked thoughts. This allowed us to track

TABLE I
Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence: Study I

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
Advertising processing and evaluation				
$F(5, 146) = 9.12, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .76$				
Processing time	2.40 seconds	4.26 seconds	.07	$p < .01$
Ad-related brand recall	.27	.64	.14	$p < .01$
Ad-related brand recognition	.68	.88	.06	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	3.62	4.31	.05	$p < .01$
Brand attitude	4.78	5.07	.01	n.s.
Brand associations				
GoreTex				
$F(5, 68) = 4.76, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .80$				
Tough	4.89	5.69	.10	$p < .01$
Reliable	4.76	5.70	.10	$p < .01$
Down-to-earth	4.21	4.61	.14	$p < .05$
Honest	4.36	5.22	.12	$p < .01$
Intelligent	4.21	4.86	.07	$p < .05$
L'Oréal				
$F(5, 67) = 3.76, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .90$				
Successful	3.96	4.58	.07	$p < .05$
Up-to-date	4.51	5.00	.07	$p < .01$
Charming	3.82	4.31	.08	$p < .01$
Cheerful	3.66	3.89	.01	n.s.
Imaginative	2.96	3.25	.03	n.s.

Note: n.s. = not significant.

the response process following exposure in detail. We also included brand familiarity as a factor. To reduce potential confounds, only one thematic cue was used: a magazine cover or one typical ad from the magazine. Using only the magazine cover as a cue enabled a clear focus on the thematic (rather than immediately surrounding editorial) congruence. Using only a typical ad as a cue enabled us to see whether it is the advertising featured in the magazine (rather than the magazine itself) that was the basis for congruence judgment. By excluding all other material from the magazine, we made sure that novelty/contrast or competitive interference due to the uniformity of the surrounding editorial and advertising could not come into play. To replicate the findings, a new set of brands and magazines were used.

In Study 2, we thus employed a 2 (familiar brand/unfamiliar brand) × 2 (magazine/ad) × 2 (congruent/incongruent) full factorial, between-subjects design. Participants were exposed to the same ad for a familiar (unfamiliar) brand, immediately preceded by a cover (ad) from a magazine that was thematically congruent (incongruent) with the brand.

Stimulus Development

Brands and magazines were chosen in the same manner as in Study 1. In a first pretest ($n = 29$), a number of brands and magazines were rated on familiarity and spontaneous associations to them were listed. In a second pretest ($n = 30$), the three most-mentioned associations for each brand and magazine were rated. Based on the results, we selected two familiar brands that differed significantly from each other in terms of brand associations: a hi-fi brand (familiarity: $M = 6.10$; associations: modern, unique, and exclusive, all $M > 5$) and a bookstore brand (familiarity: $M = 6.61$; associations: knowledgeable, practical, and versatile, all $M > 5$). The associations differed significantly ($p < .01$) between the brands, so that the three most strongly held associations for each brand rated below 4 (scale midpoint) for the other brand. The brands were then matched with magazines that scored similarly on the three associations. A home decorating magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of the hi-fi brand's top three associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on the bookstore brand's top three associations ($M < 4$). Similarly, a career magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of the bookstore brand's top three associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on the hi-fi brand's top three associations ($M < 4$). The hi-fi brand had a high perceived fit ($M = 6.10$) with the home decorating magazine and a low fit ($M = 1.93$) with the career magazine, whereas the bookstore brand had a low fit ($M = 2.50$) with the home decorating magazine, but a high fit with the career magazine ($M = 6.37$).

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Five participants were given a random issue of each magazine and asked to choose an ad that was typical of the advertising in the magazine. All five participants agreed on two ads that were used in the study. New ads were professionally developed for both brands (with real, old ads as models) to represent typical, but not previously exposed, ads for the brands. Both ads featured a headline, a picture of the product, and the brand logo. For the unfamiliar brand conditions, the familiar brand's logo was changed into a mock brand's logo (resembling the familiar brand's name and design).

Procedure

A sample of 239 college students (46% female, 54% male) participated in the study, making a cell size of approximately 30 participants. Students were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. The questionnaires contained either (1) a magazine cover followed by the test ad, or (2) an ad from the magazine followed by the test ad. Participants were told that they participated in a study of advertising and their only instructions were to "look at the pages for as long as you wish and then please proceed to answer a number of questions."

Measures

All measures were taken immediately after exposure, and with the exception of processing, they were identical to those used in Study 1. To assess processing (H1), we measured ad-evoked thoughts. More specifically, participants were asked to write down their spontaneous thoughts in immediate reaction to the advertising, offering as many (or as few) thoughts as they wanted. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to go back to the listed thoughts and checkmark any thoughts that concerned the fit between the advertised brand and the preceding magazine cover/ad. This provided us with a direct test of consumers' judgments of fit between the advertised brands and the context (magazine cover or ad). Testing the notion from the discussion of Study 1's results, we also included a simple one-item measure of brand interest: 1 (the brand is not at all interesting) to 7 (the brand is very interesting).

Results

Manipulation Check

Tests of perceived fit and brand familiarity yielded results in line with our manipulations. The congruently placed ads rated significantly higher ($F = 11.29$, $p < .01$) on perceived fit than the incongruently placed ads ($M_{congruent} = 5.25$ versus $M_{incongruent} = 2.44$), and there were no differences between the magazine cover and ad conditions ($F < 1$). Brand familiarity

was significantly higher ($F = 8.17$, $p < .01$) for the familiar brands than for the unfamiliar brands ($M_{familiar} = 5.60$ versus $M_{unfamiliar} = 2.11$).

Tests of Hypotheses

A MANOVA was run on all dependent variables (excluding brand associations, which were tested separately for each brand). Gender, magazine readership (measured as number of issues read last year, 0–12), and attitude toward the magazine (same measure as brand attitude, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) were included as covariates. Only attitude toward the magazine had a significant effect ($F = 2.33$, $p < .05$) on ad attitude.

Turning to our manipulated factors, neither thematic congruence ($F < 2$) nor context type (magazine cover versus ad, $F < 1$) or brand familiarity ($F < 2$) had any significant main effects. However, the thematic congruence × context type interaction term had a significant effect on ad-evoked thoughts, ad attitude, and brand attitude, $F(6, 239) = 2.11$, $p < .05$, Wilks's $\lambda = .91$. Furthermore, the thematic congruence × brand familiarity × context type interaction term had significant effects on all the dependents, $F(6, 239) = 4.96$, $p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .86$. Separate MANOVAs on the two brands' associations produced significant effects only from the thematic congruence × brand familiarity × context type interaction term, $F_{hi-fi\ brand}(3, 118) = 3.12$, $p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .89$, and $F_{bookstore\ brand}(3, 121) = 4.54$, $p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .85$. A closer inspection of the results showed that effects of thematic congruence only materialized when the magazine cover served as a cue. Ad and brand evaluations did not differ between conditions when an ad from the magazine was the cue. For clarity, we will only report planned comparisons between conditions where the magazine cover served as a cue (mean values are displayed in Table 2).

As seen in Table 2, ads that were placed in a thematically incongruent magazine evoked more thoughts and matching processes compared to ads in thematically congruent magazines ($p < .05$), thus supporting H1. In line with H2, they also enhanced ad attitude ($p < .05$), brand interest ($p < .05$), and to a limited extent, brand attitudes ($p < .10$). The effects of the media placement were greater for the familiar brands (all dependent variables higher at $p < .01$, except total thoughts, $p < .05$) than for the unfamiliar brands. For the latter, there was only an increase in matching thoughts at $p < .01$, and significant effects on total thoughts, ad attitude, and brand interest at $p < .05$.

As the MANOVAs revealed no main effects of the thematic congruence of magazine covers on brand associations, Table 3 only lists planned comparisons on familiar brands and unfamiliar brands, respectively. The patterns are identical for both sets of associations, with thematically incongruent ad placements

TABLE 2
Advertising Processing and Evaluation: Study 2

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
Main effect				
$F(6, 239) = 3.96, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .90$				
Total thoughts	.77	1.21	.05	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.15	.80	.07	$p < .05$
Ad attitude	4.06	4.67	.06	$p < .05$
Ad credibility	4.65	4.85		n.s.
Brand attitude	4.50	4.84	.02	$p < .10$
Brand interest	4.52	5.01	.07	$p < .05$
Familiar brand				
Total thoughts	1.11	1.56	.05	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.23	1.07	.10	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	4.15	4.99	.12	$p < .01$
Ad credibility	4.91	5.44	.07	$p < .01$
Brand attitude	5.05	5.73	.08	$p < .01$
Brand interest	4.72	5.23	.12	$p < .01$
Unfamiliar brand				
Total thoughts	.44	.88	.04	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.11	.55	.08	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	3.96	4.37	.06	$p < .05$
Ad credibility	4.38	4.35		n.s.
Brand attitude	3.99	4.12		n.s.
Brand interest	4.33	4.75	.04	$p < .05$

yielding stronger target associations. Whereas all differences are directionally similar, they were only significant for the unfamiliar brands, qualifying our predictions in H3.

We employed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure to test whether the effects of thematic incongruence were mediated by matching thoughts (i.e., thoughts matching the medium with the advertised brand). For the familiar brands, we used ad and brand attitudes as dependents, and for the unfamiliar brands, we used a brand association index (as all associations behaved similarly in the previous tests, we joined them for a more clear and simple test; Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). (See Table 4.)

In the first step, media placement affected ad and brand attitude, as well as brand associations, in separate regressions (both $p < .01$). Second, media placement was regressed on amount of matching thoughts, which were found to have a significant effect ($p < .01$). Third, ad and brand attitude, as well as brand associations, were regressed on matching thoughts in separate regressions, with significant effects (both $p < .01$). Finally, when both media placement and matching thoughts were included, the squared partial correlations indicating the effect of the experimental condition dropped compared with when it had been used as a single independent variable. The results suggest that matching thoughts may mediate the posi-

tive effects of the thematically incongruent ad placements on ad attitude, brand attitude, and brand associations.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicate the main findings from Study 1, mostly supporting H1 to H3. Thematic congruence of the magazine had a significant main effect on ad-evoked thoughts and ad attitude, as well as on brand attitude and interest. This suggests that placing advertising in a thematically incongruent medium produces positive effects. Further analyses revealed an interaction effect with brand familiarity, suggesting that the effects were significantly more pronounced for the familiar than for the unfamiliar brands. This provides more compelling evidence for our reasoning that familiar brands should gain more from incongruent ad placements because of their established brand schemata. The results also showed that there was a mediating effect on evaluations from consumers' thoughts about the match between the brand and the medium. The "wrongfully" placed advertising made consumers think more carefully about the ad ("why is it placed here, what is the brand really about?"), and in doing so, they became more certain that their conclusion was "right" ("I *know* what the

TABLE 3
Brand Associations: Study 2

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
Hi-fi brand associations				
Familiar brand				
Modern	6.00	6.30		n.s.
Unique	5.42	5.78		n.s.
Exclusive	6.44	6.60		n.s.
Unfamiliar brand				
Modern	3.78	4.36	.12	p < .01
Unique	3.00	4.12	.17	p < .01
Exclusive	3.55	4.53	.20	p < .01
Bookstore brand associations				
Familiar brand				
Knowledgeable	5.60	5.76		n.s.
Practical	5.88	6.12		n.s.
Versatile	5.50	5.80		n.s.
Unfamiliar brand				
Knowledgeable	4.21	5.20	.21	p < .01
Practical	3.66	5.00	.23	p < .01
Versatile	3.44	4.80	.24	p < .01

TABLE 4
Regression Coefficients, Tests of Mediation

Variable	Standardized β	Statistics
Ad attitude		
Media placement	.19	$t = 2.88, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.09	$t = 1.81, p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.21	$t = 5.42, p < .01$
Brand attitude		
Media placement	.16	$t = 1.99, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.05	n.s.
Matching thoughts	.23	$t = 5.67, p < .01$
Brand associations		
Media placement	.16	$t = 3.04, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.09	$t = 1.90, p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.24	$t = 5.32, p < .01$

brand is about and what the advertising says!"). This feeling of being right then rubbed off on ad and brand evaluations for the familiar brands.

Although the strengthening effects on brand associations were directionally the same as in Study 1, they were only significant for the unfamiliar brands. This result could be seen as curious, as one would expect familiar rather than unfamiliar brands to benefit more, as was the case with the other dependent variables. A closer inspection of the absolute values of brand associations in Table 3 could lead one to suspect ceiling effects for the familiar brands. That is, whereas the thematically incongruent ad placement exerted positive effects on all brands, associations for the familiar brands were already so strong that they could not be significantly enhanced (whereas there was plenty of room for strengthening the unfamiliar brands' associations). The reason that brand associations were enhanced for the familiar brands in Study 1 but not in Study 2 could be that processing was higher overall in the second study. When there was no competing material, the congruent media placement did a better job of evoking brand associations (requiring the incongruent condition to achieve even higher values for significant effects to materialize). Therefore, we would guess that Study 1 provides a better test of the media placement's ability to enhance brand associations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of our studies contribute to our understanding of advertising context effects in a number of ways. First, they extend Moorman, Neijens, and Smit's (2002) research, lending further support to the notion that total editorial context, in the form of thematic congruence, affects advertising effectiveness. Whereas Moorman, Neijens, and Smit (2002) only found effects on memory, we also found effects on ad attitude, brand associations, and (for familiar brands) brand attitude.

More important, our results are opposite to theirs, as we suggest that thematic incongruence rather than congruence has positive effects on processing, and thereby, memory. One explanation for the contrasting results could be the employed level of incongruence. Moorman, Neijens, and Smit used lifestyle, interior decorating, and health magazines to test their hypotheses. These three magazines seem to have a certain thematic overlap (lifestyle could manifest itself in both interior decorating and health, for example) and therefore might not have been incongruent "enough" for the processing effects found in our study to occur. In the present study, the thematic overlaps between the employed media were tested to be low; thus, the incongruence should be greater. The conflicting results could perhaps also serve as an illustration of the type of source confusion discussed in Kent (2002). Due to competitive interference, ads and media may become dissociated, so that consumers match the two based on an ex-post judgment of fit ("Would the brand have advertised in that magazine/would the magazine have run that ad?"). As suggested by Pham and Johar (1997), provoking such thoughts at the time of exposure could enhance both processing and accuracy of memory. Indeed, the results from Study 2 suggest that such thoughts mediated the positive effects of the thematically incongruent ad placement.

Second, our results add to Dahlén's (2005) findings on the creative aspect of media choice. Whereas Dahlén studied the communicative power of untraditional ("creative") media, the present study shows that placing advertising in traditional media can be creative as well: Choosing the "wrong media" could make the ad and the brand more interesting and persuasive. As consumers become familiar with a brand, they form expectations regarding its advertising (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005). Thematically incongruent media placements challenge these expectations and thus add novelty and interest to the brand's communication, giving rise to more careful processing of the advertising.

Managerial Implications

Thematically incongruent media should not be a basis for the bulk of advertising, where reach and repetition are still important issues. But recent research suggests that media scheduling is optimized when there is a mix between low-involvement exposures and more highly involving exposures (Janiszewski, Noel, and Sawyer 2003). Thematically incongruent media placements could thus balance the bulk of mere exposure–inducing advertising (in congruent media) with more attention- and processing-stimulating exposures (in incongruent media). Overlaps between target groups and media audiences should provide ample opportunities to identify media where advertising for a specific brand is unexpected but relevant. This is true mainly for products with a broad target audience, such as cars. In fact, following previous research arguing for media selection based on brand absorption and impact on positive buyer responses rather than frequency and reach goals (cf. Kusumoto 2002; Pingol and Miyazaki 2005), it might even be beneficial to allow for some degree of mismatch to make the impact of the ad message significantly stronger.

Thematically incongruent media placements are especially interesting for mature brands. They have established brand schemata, which reduce their need for help from the advertising context to be processed and comprehended. In fact, research shows that highly familiar brands stand the risk of becoming too familiar and predictable. The major issue for these brands is not to increase awareness or liking, but rather to increase consumers' interest in and desire to come in contact with the brand (Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). A thematically incongruent media placement provides a possibility to challenge consumers' perceptions of predictable brands: Rather than necessarily expecting enhanced brand evaluations, the primary goal should be to increase consumers' interest and the likelihood that they will want to come in contact with the brand. Our second study showed that placement in thematically incongruent media did indeed make the brand more interesting.

Limitations and Further Research

The present research employed four specific media and brand/product categories. These may have produced idiosyncratic effects. For instance, one could speculate that *Cosmopolitan* and L'Oréal appeal more to a female than a male target group. Indeed, gender and attitude toward the magazine were found to exert significant effects as covariates in the first study. Gender was not a significant covariate in the second study, however, whereas attitude toward the magazine still was. Including the variables as covariates in the analyses suggests that they were not driving forces behind our results. Nevertheless, the significant effects of attitude toward the magazine as a covariate in both studies suggest that it deserves more attention in the future, possibly as a moderator. Magazine readership was also included as a covariate, but had no significant effect in either study (although previous research has found it to moderate ad evaluations; see, e.g., Appel 1987). Furthermore, there may be a difference in effects between consumers who are familiar with the brand and those who are also users of the product category, a distinction that was not measured in this study. It should be noted that the conclusions in this paper must always be qualified by the fact that there must be a good fit between the media audience and the advertiser's target group. This, of course, sets boundaries for what type of products incongruent placements could be a real option. Further research is needed to explore what those boundaries are and whether product type could moderate the advertising effects of incongruent placements.

The present studies manipulated congruence as a dichotomous variable. However, congruence can reach levels from complete congruence to extreme incongruence. Our operationalization of incongruence could best be described as moderate, as it appeared to be resolvable (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). We do not propose the employment of *any* degree of thematic incongruence. We believe that the results are applicable only to moderate incongruencies that can benefit from enhanced elaboration, but are still resolvable from an incongruence-processing perspective. Employing extreme incongruence (such as placing cigarette or candy ads in a health magazine) might trigger inferences harmful to the brand, as well as to the magazine, and yield negative evaluations from the inability to make sense of the placement. Moreover, we did not measure actual behavior. Research suggests that consumers may react differently to incongruence when there is actual choice involved. For instance, Campbell and Goodstein (2001) found that consumers' preferences for moderately incongruent products over congruent ones were reversed when perceived risk increased in a purchase. Future research is needed to qualify our results with respect to actual behavior and levels of perceived risk.

Research on brand extensions has shown that level of incongruence is, in part, a matter of repetition. Consumer acceptance of incongruent elements increases with repeated exposures (e.g., Lane 2000). This would suggest that there is a dynamic aspect to thematically incongruent media placement. Whereas we tested only one exposure, repeated exposures in the same medium may reduce the thematic incongruence (and over time may therefore have an assimilating rather than contrasting effect). This deserves further attention. There is also a dynamic aspect to brand associations. The present studies found that thematic incongruence can strengthen established brand associations, but a brand manager might want to alter or add new associations to the brand. Future research is needed to understand whether, for example, ads for a car that have been altered to better align with women's needs would be more effective if placed in a car magazine or in a beauty magazine. Would improved opportunities for making sense of and resolving the incongruent choice of medium outweigh the strength of established associations?

The present research employed student samples. They were used for convenience, given our goal of having full control over the exposures in a "laboratory-like" setting. Participants were indeed in the target groups for the test brands and magazines. Still, the results should be interpreted with the specific samples and test situations in mind.

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Article 5

Revisiting The Match-Up Hypothesis:
Effects of Brand-Incongruent Celebrity Endorsements

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Forthcoming in the *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*.

ABSTRACT

Literature on celebrity endorsements indicates that communications effects are improved when there is a fit, or match-up, between the endorser and the brand. This notion should be particularly relevant to new brands. For established brands, on the other hand, it might actually be more beneficial to select a celebrity endorser with a less than perfect match with the brand. Building on schema congruity theory, this article suggests that selecting a brand-incongruent endorser improves communication effects. Results show that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsers generate longer ad viewing times, higher brand attitudes and brand interest, higher purchase intentions, and more positive word-of-mouth.

INTRODUCTION

The proportion of commercials worldwide featuring a celebrity has doubled in the last 10 years to about 17 percent, and in the United States an estimated 25 percent of commercials use celebrity endorsers (Money, Shimp, and Sakano 2006). Indeed, the decision to select an appropriate spokesperson to endorse a brand may be one of the most delicate for the marketer. Consequently, a large body of literature has examined effects of endorsers and endorsements with more than 70 articles published in marketing literature until today (see Erdogan 1999 for a review of research until 1999). A considerable portion of these studies examine the fit between the endorser and the advertised brand, often referred to as the match-up effect. This research typically argues that communication effects are improved when there is a fit, or match-up, between the endorser and the brand (e.g. Kamins 1990; Lee and Thorson 2008; Till and Busler 2000) since a congruent context eases comprehension of the advertising (e.g., Goodstein 1993; Kamins and Gupta 1994) and improves the transfer of meaning from the endorser to the brand (McCracken 1989). These effects should be particularly applicable to new brands. So, for a relatively small and unknown brand of energy drinks, it may make perfect sense to have an athlete (such as Usain Bolt) endorse their products in an effort to build consumer awareness and memory of the brand and to associate the brand with sports.

However, for more established brands such as Nike with (already) high awareness, selecting yet another famous athlete may not be very

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attention-grabbing to most consumers. In fact, Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what the advertising will entail for a familiar brand, which reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communication. Indeed, for a considerable number of multinational brands, advertising is quite similar to what it looked like ten or even twenty years ago and not very different from other competing brands in the same product category (especially for sportswear, auto, perfume, or alcohol ads). Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of established and familiar brands should be to reduce the boredom consumers experience with a heavily advertised, well-known brand and increase brand interest. A too narrow focus on consistency and endorser matchup may therefore limit opportunities for curiosity and interest in the brand. Consequently, selecting an endorser which does not match the brand should defy expectations and have the potential to enhance consumer interest in the brand. This idea is supported by recent research (Lee and Thorson 2008) which found that brand-incongruent endorsers (as opposed to brand-congruent endorsers) actually can improve purchase intentions.

The purpose of this study is to replicate and extend the study by Lee and Thorson (2008) by examining the effect of endorsements where the images of the endorser and the brand mismatch. Whereas the study by Lee and Thorson (2008) examined three levels of incongruity (congruity, moderate incongruity, and extreme incongruity), the present article compares effects of moderate incongruity only with congruity. The reason for this is that Lee and Thorson (2008) showed that, in accordance with previous research (e.g. Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), there is little practical reason for employing extremely incongruent endorsers. As to effects of *moderate* incongruity however, this article suggests that for established brands, employing an incongruent endorser – that is, who moderately mismatches the brand – may be more effective than using a congruent endorser. Building on schema incongruity theory, we hypothesize that employing an incongruent endorser will defy consumer expectations and therefore that the incongruent endorsement will be viewed for a longer time. The increased elaboration and resolution should lead to enhanced evaluations, purchase intentions, and likelihood of word-of-mouth. We also compare the effects of brand-incongruent endorsers for market-leading brands and for brands which are established and familiar, but only moderately strong.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A large body of literature has examined the effects of endorsers and spokespeople (often celebrities) and under what conditions endorsers and endorsements are more or less effective.

A multitude of mechanisms and paradigms have been used to explain the empirical results: Attribution theory (e.g. Mowen and Brown 1981; Ryu, Park and Feick 2006; Tripp, Jensen and Carlson 1994), meaning transfer (McCracken 1989), source effects (Kirmani and Shiv 1998), social adaptation theory (Kahle and Homer 1985), associative learning (Till and Shimp 1998), as well as schema theory (Lee and Thorson 2008; Lynch and Schuler 1994; Misra and Beatty 1990). A comprehensive review of endorsement studies can be found in Erdogan (1999).

A recurrent observation in this body of literature is that the fit or congruity between the endorser and product or brand has an important impact on dependent variables (e.g. Kamins 1990; Kamins and Gupta 1994; Lee and Thorson 2008; Lynch and Schuler 1994; Ryu, Park and Feick 2006; Till and Busler 1998, 2000). Therefore, many studies specifically examine the relationship between endorser and brand with reference to the matchup hypothesis framework. This matchup hypothesis (e.g. Kamins 1990) suggests that endorsers are more effective when there is a "matchup", "fit", or "congruity" between the endorser and the product.

The pioneering studies on the matchup hypothesis examined matchup based on the attractiveness of the endorser. For instance, Kahle and Homer (1985) found that an attractive (rather than an unattractive) celebrity improved the attitude towards a product (razor blades). Similarly, Kamins (1990) found support for a positive matchup effect when pairing an attractive/unattractive celebrity endorsement with an attractiveness-enhancing product (a luxury car) / a product not enhancing attractiveness (a computer).

However, as Till and Busler (1998, 2000) argue, attractiveness could hardly be the only criterion for a matchup. Therefore, they investigated *expertise* of the endorser as a basis for matchup. Their conclusion – supported by findings by Lynch and Schuler (1994) and Ohanian (1991) – was that expertise was more important than attractiveness for driving the matchup effect.

A few studies have also used the characteristics of the endorser as a basis for matchup with the product. They include endorser ethnicity (e.g., Ryu, Park,

and Feick 2006) and physical features such as muscularity (Lynch and Schuler 1994). The latter showed that a matchup between spokesperson characteristics and the product attribute can facilitate the incorporation of a desirable attribute into the brand schema.

From a practical perspective, the selection of a brand endorser is not done through simply examining appropriate attractiveness, expertise, or ethnicity of the endorser. Rather, it is based on the overall correspondence between the images of the endorser and the brand (where expertise, attractiveness, and ethnicity may be three key, but not the only three, components). A few studies have tried to address this by examining brand associations (e.g., Misra and Beatty 1990; Till and Shimp 1998) as the basis for fit between the endorser and brand. The Misra and Beatty (1990) study showed that congruity between the endorser and brand enhanced recall and affect transfer from the celebrity to the brand.

However, the Misra and Beatty study employed fictitious brands. Indeed, most previous research has employed fictitious brands (although McDaniel, 1999 and Roy and Cornwell, 2003 are two exceptions) in order to reduce effects of prior experience with the brand. Although using fictitious or mock brands may be necessary to secure internal validity of an experiment, doing so may also limit the ecological validity of the findings: A premise for the facilitating effect of matchup on processing is that consumers would otherwise experience some difficulty in comprehending the advertising (cf. Goodstein 1993). Whereas this is often the case in advertising experiments using fictitious brands, most real advertising (including endorsements) is actually sponsored by established and well-known brands (Kent 2002). Advertising and endorsements for strong brands activate consumers' prior knowledge of the brands (so-called brand schemata) – which guide attention and processing of the information content (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994) – thereby facilitating comprehension. Therefore, examining the impact of match-up for well-established brands may provide different results than for new or fictitious brands.

In conclusion, testing the effects of endorser-brand incongruity should be most ecologically valid and relevant to the practitioner – and academic – audience if done using existing brands and based on an *overall* (mis)match between the endorser and brand. In fact, the recent study by Lee and Thorson (2008) calls for exactly this: An examination of celebrity endorsements of real, strong brands rather than fictitious brands and a match-up based on a

more holistic assessment of fit than attractiveness or expertise.

Positive effects of mismatches

The general conclusion from previous research is that endorsements are more effective when there is a matchup with the brand than when there is a mismatch (Erdogan 1999). Indeed, this notion sounds plausible and is in accordance with conventional wisdom (Misra and Beatty 1990). However, as Till and Busler (1998) report, the empirical evidence for a matchup effect has not been entirely convincing. For instance, the Kahle and Homer (1985) study did not examine if attractiveness as a basis for matchup would be effective for a product *not* used to improve attractiveness, and the Kamins (1990) study did not find an effect of matchup on brand attitude or purchase intentions.

In fact, there is some theoretical and empirical support in previous research that actually would suggest that a mismatch is more effective than a match: Theoretically, Lynch and Schuler (1994) suggest that a mismatch between spokesperson and product can result in greater attention to message detail. In the domain of sponsorships, Jagre, Watson, and Watson (2001) in a conceptual article propose that a moderate mismatch between a sponsoring and the sponsored brand should be more effective than a match. Empirically, Debevec and Iyer (1986) found that for gender-oriented products (e.g. beer and dishwashing liquids), an opposite-gender endorsement was more effective than a same-gender endorsement. Recently Ryu, Park, and Feick (2006) showed that a mismatch between the ethnicity (which was a salient aspect of the product image in the study) of the endorser and the product was more effective than a match. Even more recently, Lee and Thorson (2008) found that an endorsement by a celebrity which was moderately incongruent with the product category generated higher purchase intentions than when there was a match between the celebrity and product category. However, it should be noted that the relationships between incongruity and evaluations or intentions is non-monotonic such that moderate incongruity is more effective than extreme incongruity (cf. Lee and Thorson 2008; Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989).

The study by Lee and Thorson (2008) is exceptional since it is one of few studies (Lynch and Schuler 1994 is another exception) on matchup effects which employs the schema theory framework despite its high occurrence in the marketing literature to explain irregularities and deviations from the

unexpected. In the marketing literature, studies have been conducted on incongruities between pictures and words in ads, between an ad and general viewer expectations, between features of a product and product category schemas, between brands and brand extensions, as well as in sales-people schemas (for a review see Lee and Schumann 2004). More recently a stream of research has examined effects of the employment of brand-incongruent information in communications (Dahlén et al. 2005; Sjödin and Törn 2006). These studies on effects of information incongruity in marketing have demonstrated a number of positive communication effects of information incongruity. We believe that schema congruity theory could be used to explain the seemingly unrelated findings above and justify why a mismatch between endorser and brand may sometimes work better than a complete match.

Hypothesis development

Schema congruity theory postulates that information which fits an existing schema – that is confirms to expectations – will be encoded effortlessly into that schema structure. When information does not fit the schema, however, tension will follow. This tension is uncomfortable to people, and they will try to relieve it through some kind of resolution of the incongruity (Festinger 1957; Mandler 1982). Thus, incongruent information will cause people to pay more attention, and make them more motivated to think about the information, resulting in deeper cognition (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983). Previous research has provided ample evidence that discrepancies increase elaboration (e.g. Goodstein 1993).

The employment of an endorser which does not fit with the brand will conflict with the consumer's brand schema, since the endorser does not fit with the brand's existing associations or previous communication executions, which are also stored in the brand schema to form expectations about how the brand will be encountered in the future (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005). The brand schema could be considered a kind of investment, as it is the end result of all previous processing the consumer has devoted to the brand, an investment that pays off in the reduced effort that is required upon future encounters with the brand. Therefore, the consumer should be both motivated and able to attend to – and process – the endorser communications to reduce the conflict with the brand schema (e.g., Lee and Mason 1999; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989).

From the marketing communications literature, we know that ads are viewed longer time if they are incongruent compared to when they are consistent with previous knowledge (Goodstein 1993) and original ads induce more frequent eye fixations than traditional ads (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002). In the context of endorsements, also Lynch and Schuler (1994) suggest that mismatches between spokespersons and products result in greater attention to message detail. Therefore we expect that:

H1: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands will be viewed longer time than brand congruent celebrity endorsements for established brands.

An effect of incongruity on evaluations could also be inferred from schema congruity theory: We can expect that for congruent ads, the evaluation of the ad and brand is typically mild (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). The incongruent ad on the other hand is likely to be perceived as challenging and interesting (Alwitt 2000). Furthermore, the challenging ad will cause cognitive elaboration, as pointed out previously, and a questioning of how the ad fits with the established brand schema. Mandler (1982) argued that incongruity could be resolved rather easily through assimilation or the use of alternative schemas. When this is the case, positive affect will follow from the success of the resolution (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). This should improve evaluations (e.g. Lee and Mason 1999) and enhance purchase intentions of the advertised brand. Furthermore, the elaboration of the brand schema increases the salience of the brand in memory (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986), which in turn leads to enhanced brand attitude (Holden and Vanhuele 1999).

The study by Lee and Thorson (2008) showed that a moderately incongruent celebrity endorsement will generate higher purchase intentions than a congruent endorsement. Additional empirical support in the endorsement literature for a positive incongruity effect on evaluations comes from Debevec and Iyer (1986) and Ryu, Park, and Feick (2006).

H2: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands generate higher *ad attitudes* than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements for established brands.

H3: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands generate higher *brand attitudes* than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements

for established brands.

H4: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands generate higher *purchase intentions* than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements for established brands.

In addition to generating higher attitudes and purchase intentions, consumers should be more likely to respond to incongruent communications than congruent communications by talking about them (cf. Mandler 1982). If incongruent communications generate higher purchase intentions, this should also manifest in effects on word-of-mouth recommendations, such that word-of-mouth should be more positive from brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements than from brand-congruent celebrity endorsements.

H5: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands will generate more positive *word-of-mouth recommendations* than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements for established brands.

For well-established brands, brand attitudes may not be the only key measure to indicate consumer attachment to the brand. Some researchers argue that brand interest and interestingness of communications and the brand (e.g. Alwitt 2000; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993) is a different construct than brand attitude, but equally (if not more) important than brand attitude. Alwitt (2000) argues that advertisers must concentrate on the interestingness of advertising if they want viewers to attend to their messages throughout the course of a commercial. In addition, Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of established and familiar brands should be to reduce the boredom consumers experience with a heavily advertised, well-known brand and increase brand interest. For low-risk frequently purchased goods, an enhanced degree of brand interest among consumers should reduce variety-seeking tendencies, and for high-risk categories it should serve as a determinant of which brands are selected in a search process. Therefore, it may make sense to treat brand attitude and brand interest as two separate, although related, effects.

H6: Brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements for established brands will generate higher *brand interest* than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements for established brands.

PILOT STUDY

Before the main study was initiated, a pre-test and a pilot study were conducted: Four brands (IKEA, iPod, Nike, and Moët & Chandon) and eight celebrities (a mix of international and national celebrities from various backgrounds which included football player Zlatan Ibrahimovic, singer Darin, actress Angelina Jolie, model Victoria Silvstedt, golf player Tiger Woods, singer Peter Joback, Swedish princess Madeleine, and television chef Tina Nordstrom) were identified, which would be relevant for the intended pool of participants in the pilot study (business students between 18-25 years old). In a pre-test, participants were asked to indicate associations held with the brands and celebrities. The associations used were the five dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) developed by Aaker (1997), as this measurement was specifically designed to capture and compare associations for brands *across* product categories. As well-known celebrities could indeed be considered as brands themselves, the reliability and generalizability of the brand personality construct should allow for comparison not only between brands but between brands and celebrity endorsers (although no previous research has employed the brand personality construct to compare brands and celebrity endorsers). In the pre-test, 40 people each rated five celebrities and brands, making a total of 200 questionnaires. To assess the overall fit between brand and celebrity, the mean values for each dimension were calculated, to form an overall personality value for each brand and celebrity. The difference for all 32 combinations between brand and celebrity were calculated and compared. A similar method to obtain a measure of fit or similarity between two elements is found in, for example, Sirgy et al. (1997).

To have congruent and moderately incongruent endorser-brand combinations, the combinations with the smallest difference (= congruent) and fifth out of eight in rank (= moderately incongruent) were selected. For Nike and iPod, the absolute differences in congruity value between combinations ranked first and fifth were greatest, and they were therefore the brands selected for the pilot study. From the pre-test, two congruent and two incongruent combinations were selected: Zlatan Ibrahimovic endorsing Nike (rank 1, congruity value = 1.15) and Angelina Jolie endorsing iPod (rank 1, congruity value = 1.91) were deemed as brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. Singer Darin endorsing Nike (rank 5, congruity value = 3.10) and Victoria Silvstedt endorsing Ipod (rank 5, congruity value = 3.55) were deemed as moderately incongruent celebrity endorsements. Four

advertisements were developed picturing the face of the celebrity and the brand logotype.

| | iPod | | | Nike | |
Celebrity endorser	Congruity value	Congruity Rank	Celebrity endorser	Congruity value	Congruity Rank
Angelina Jolie	1.91	1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	1.15	1
Princess Madeleine	2.3	2	Princess Madeleine	1.73	2
Peter Joback	2.61	3	Victoria Silvstedt	2.04	3
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	2.87	4	Angelina Jolie	2.15	4
Victoria Silvstedt	3.55	5	Darin	3.1	5
Tiger Woods	3.9	6	Tina Nordstrom	3.36	6
Darin	4.8	8	Peter Joback	3.48	7
Tina Nordstrom	5.61	9	Tiger Woods	3.95	8

Table 1. Measure of congruity between endorser and brand, calculated as the absolute difference between brand personality and celebrity endorser personality. Small values indicate congruity between endorser and brand and high values indicate high incongruity.

For the pilot study, a sample of 200 business students at a large European university were randomly assigned to one of four groups, shown the advertisement and asked to fill out a questionnaire. The results were analyzed using a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) which was run on all dependent variables. In the analyses, the four different cells were combined into two main conditions (brand-congruent vs. brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements). To control for effects of the specific endorsers in the ads, liking of the celebrity endorser (measured before ad exposure) was included as a covariate in the MANOVA. Endorser-brand incongruity had a significant main effect on all dependent variables, $F(5,193) = 4.66$, $p < .01$, Wilks' λ =.89, partial eta squared = .11. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences between the two conditions (see mean values in Table 2). In the pilot study, only measures regarding the first five hypotheses were included.

Ad viewing time was measured using the question: "Compared to how long time you normally look at advertising featuring celebrities, I looked at this ad..." The answer was given on a six-point Likert type scale ranging from "shorter time" (1) to "longer time" (6). *Ad attitude* was measured on a six-point semantic differential scale consisting of four items: Good/bad, positive/negative, exciting/unexciting, interesting/uninteresting. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α = .88).

Brand attitude was measured on a six-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: Positive/negative, exciting/unexciting, interesting/uninteresting. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α = .94). *Purchase intention* was measured using the question "How likely are you to buy a product from [Brand]?". The answer was given on a six-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (6). *Word-of-mouth* was measured using the question "How likely are you to recommend [Brand] to a friend?". The answer was given on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (6).

The results of the pilot study seem to support the first five hypotheses, such that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements generated longer time spent watching the ad, higher ad attitudes, higher brand attitudes, higher purchase intentions, and more word-of-mouth (see Table 2).

	Means		F	sig.	Partial Eta Squared
	Congruent	Incongruent			
Viewing time	2.67	3.27	11.65	< .01	.06
Ad attitude	2.28	2.55	3.89	< .05	.02
Brand attitude	3.62	4.22	10.32	< .01	.05
Purchase intention	4.27	4.62	3.16	< .05	.02
Word of mouth	3.89	4.41	5.53	<. 01	.03

Table 2. Results of the pilot study. All measures were given on Likert type scales ranging from (1 = lower) to (6 = higher).

The results of the pilot study were thus in accordance with the study by Lee and Thorson (2008) who found that moderately incongruent celebrity endorsements generate higher purchase intentions than congruent endorsements. However, there were two major weaknesses with the pilot study: The first problem was that congruity and incongruity were determined by pre-tests and not verified by manipulation checks. The second problem was that the study did not use a 2 x 2 design, so although prior liking of the celebrities was controlled for in the MANOVA, it may be that the results were clouded by other factors (such as expertise) pertaining to the celebrities than merely the level of incongruity between brand and celebrity endorser.

MAIN STUDY

In the main study we not only wanted to rule out possible confounds by crossing celebrity and brand. We also wanted to employ a non-student sample in order to generate a higher degree of external validity. Furthermore, we sought to extend the generalizability of the results on a brand-level: Previous research on brand-incongruent communications (e.g. Dahlén et al. 2005; Dahlén et al. 2008; Meyers-Levy, Peracchio, and Tybout 1994) has used the strongest brands (i.e. market leaders) in the product category. Examples include L'Oréal for cosmetics, a national market-leading chocolate bar, Gore-Tex outdoor gear, Coppertone sunscreen etc. While we should not expect new or very weak brands to benefit from communicating incongruently, could there be an opportunity from employing an incongruent celebrity endorser for a brand positioned as number three of four in a product category? We therefore wanted to investigate if only the strongest brands with very salient schemas would benefit from brand-incongruent endorsements or if also brands with not as strong a position, but with a moderate level of awareness, would benefit from brand-incongruent endorsements. In the following, we refer to these brands as second-tier brands.

METHOD

The hypotheses were tested in an experiment using a 2 (endorser) x 2 (category) x 2 (leading / second-tier brand) between-subjects Latin square design. As in the pilot study, participants were exposed to celebrity endorsed print advertising for an existing brand and asked to indicate their reactions to the advertisement and sponsoring brand. We used print ads since they are reader-paced and therefore well-suited for research concerning information incongruity (cf. Lee 2000): Participants can process the ads for as long as they want, allowing for differences in attention and elaboration between them (Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991).

Stimulus development

In the main study, we needed two celebrity endorsers, two leading brands and two second-tier brands such that endorser one would be congruent with the first leading brand and the first second-tier brand but also incongruent with the second leading brand and second-tier brand, whereas endorser two be

oppositely congruent and incongruent with the brands, respectively. We selected the same brands as in the pilot study – Nike and iPod – as leading brands. For second-tier brands in the same product categories, we selected Puma and Creative. A pre-test involving 30 participants showed that consumers were less familiar with Puma than Nike, as with Creative versus iPod ($p < .05$). The pre-test also suggested that football player Henrik Larsson would be considered congruent with Nike and Puma, but incongruent with iPod and Creative. A nationally famous musician, Hakan Hellstrom, was considered congruent with iPod and Creative but incongruent with Nike and Puma.

Eight mock advertisements were developed featuring a picture with an image of the endorser, the name of the endorser, and the brand logo and a copy text saying that starting next fall, [brand] has decided to co-operate with [endorser] and that he will be the new endorser for [brand]. It thus catered to the requirements (a picture, a brand name or logo and a copy text) of a typical advertisement format (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002).

Procedure

264 consumers who were approached in a downtown shopping mall in a large European city participated in the study in return for a € 1 lottery ticket. Their mean age was 22 years with 54 % males and 46 % females. There was no significant difference in age between the groups ($p > .05$). Participants were told they participated in a "study on marketing" and were randomly assigned to one of the eight cells, making a cell size of 33 people, and given a booklet. When participants finished looking at the ad, they were asked to answer the questions in the booklet.

Measures

Although the hypotheses from the pilot study were retained for the main study, some measures were somewhat refined for the main study. In the main study we used established measures from previous research to improve internal validity. For example, to measure ad viewing time, we used self-reported study time rather than longer versus shorter time as in the pilot study. We also removed the "exciting/unexciting" and "interesting/uninteresting" aspects from the brand attitude measure and introduced brand interest as an additional measure.

Ad viewing time was measured by self-reported study time: "Approximately how long time did you look at the advertisement? About __ seconds". This measure was taken from Dahlén et al. (2008). Although self-reports may not give completely accurate measures of exact viewing time, there should be no systematic differences between conditions.

Ad attitude and *brand attitude* were measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: like/dislike, good/bad, positive/negative (cf. Goodstein 1993). An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α for ad attitude = .88, for brand attitude = .95).

Brand interest was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of two items: Interesting/uninteresting and surprising/unsurprising, based on Alwitt (2000). An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (r = .94).

Purchase intention was measured using the question "How likely are you to buy a product from [Brand]?" (cf. Reichheld 2003). The answer was given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (7).

Word-of-mouth was measured using the question "How likely are you to recommend [Brand] to a friend?" (cf. Reichheld 2003). The answer was given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (7).

RESULTS

Manipulation checks

To verify that the combinations of endorsers and brands, as well as the strength of brands, was perceived by participants as intended, two manipulation checks were performed. *Perceived fit* between the celebrity endorser and brand was significantly higher ($F = 198.90$, $p < .01$) for the congruent conditions ($M = 4.40$) than for the incongruent conditions ($M = 1.99$). *Brand familiarity* (measured as an index, Cronbach's α = .87, of three items on a seven-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = not at all familiar/inexperienced/unknown to 7 = very familiar/experienced/well

known) was significantly ($F = 60.76$, $p < .01$) higher for Nike ($M = 6.16$) than Puma ($M = 4.61$), and significantly ($F = 151.72$, $p < .01$) higher for Ipod ($M = 5.66$) than Creative ($M = 3.19$). As in the pilot study, the congruent conditions and the incongruent conditions were combined in the analyses.

Hypothesis testing

We performed a two-way MANOVA on all dependent variables with endorser-brand congruity and brand strength (leading vs. second-tier brands) as fixed factors. Endorser-brand incongruity had a significant main effect, $F_{(6, 255)} = 15.94$, $p < .01$, Wilks' $\lambda = .73$, partial eta squared = .27. As could be expected, brand strength had a significant effect on dependent variables (for example on brand attitude which was significantly higher ($F = 8.65$, $p < .01$) for leading brands (M = 4.94) than second-tier brands (M = 4.49). There was also an interaction effect for incongruity x brand strength, but this was found for viewing time only, and the interaction effect was weak ($F = 3.25$, $p < .10$). Therefore, when examining the specific hypotheses to test differences between the congruent and incongruent conditions, we did the analyses separately for leading brands and second-tier brands (see mean values in Table 3). There was a difference in the proportion of men and women between sample cells ($\chi^2 = 44.29$, $p < .01$), but gender had no significant effect on dependent variables in the MANOVA ($F = 1.54$, $p > .15$).

Hypothesis 1 stated that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will be viewed longer time than brand congruent celebrity endorsements. The analysis of ad viewing time showed a significant difference between congruity conditions for leading ($F = 10.39$, $p < .01$) as well as second-tier brands ($F = 15.02$, $p < .01$) such that there was longer viewing time in the incongruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 11.35$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 15.48$) than in the congruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 7.22$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 6.64$), supporting H1.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will generate higher ad attitudes than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. Although the results were in the hypothesized direction, the analysis failed to show a significant difference in ad attitude ($F < 2$) between congruity conditions for leading as well as for second-tier brands. Therefore, H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will generate higher brand attitudes than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. The analysis for brand attitude showed a significant difference between congruity conditions for leading ($F = 41.82$, $p < .01$) as well as for second-tier ($F = 19.69$, $p < .01$) brands such that consumers reported higher brand attitudes in the incongruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 5.58$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 4.31$) than in the congruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 5.02$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 3.95$), supporting H3.

Hypothesis 4 suggested that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will generate higher purchase intentions than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. For second-tier brands, the analysis showed that purchase intention was significantly higher ($F = 3.86$, $p < .05$) in the incongruent conditions ($M = 4.70$) than the congruent conditions ($M = 4.21$), but for leading brands, the difference was not significant ($F < 2$). The results thus only support H4 in part.

Hypothesis 5 stated that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will generate more positive word-of-mouth than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. The analysis showed that word-of-mouth was significantly more positive in the incongruent conditions ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 5.50$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 4.73$) than the congruent conditions ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 4.98$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 3.68$) for leading ($F = 13.23$, $p < .01$) as well as for second-tier brands ($F = 20.39$, $p < .01$), supporting H5.

Hypothesis 6 stated that brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements will generate higher brand interest than brand-congruent celebrity endorsements. The analysis for brand interest showed a significant difference between congruity conditions for leading ($F = 30.73$, $p < .01$) as well as for second-tier brands ($F = 30.24$, $p < .01$) such that consumers reported higher brand interest in the incongruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 5.13$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 3.71$) than in the congruent condition ($M_{\text{Leading brands}} = 4.67$, $M_{\text{Second-tier brands}} = 3.24$), supporting H6.

	Leading brands (Nike, Ipod)				
	Means				
	Congruent	Incongruent	F	sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Viewing time (seconds)	7.22	11.35	10.39	< .01	.07
Ad attitude	3.70	3.82	< 2	n.s.	< .01
Brand attitude	4.31	5.58	41.82	< .01	.24
Purchase intention	4.42	4.98	< 2	n.s.	< .01
Word-of-mouth	4.73	5.50	13.23	< .01	.09
Brand interest	3.71	5.13	30.73	< .01	.19
	Second-tier brands (Puma, Creative)				
	Means				
	Congruent	Incongruent	F	sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Viewing time (seconds)	6.64	15.48	15.02	< .01	.10
Ad attitude	3.66	3.95	< 2	n.s	< .01
Brand attitude	3.95	5.02	19.69	< .01	.13
Purchase intention	4.21	4.70	3.86	< .05	.03
Word-of-mouth	3.68	4.98	20.39	< .01	.14
Brand interest	3.24	4.67	30.24	< .01	.19

Table 3. Results of the main study. All measures were given on Likert type scales ranging from (1 = lower) to (7 = higher), except viewing time which was measured in estimated seconds.

DISCUSSION

Except for the lack of a significant effect on ad attitude, the results of the main study supported our hypotheses on the relative effectiveness of brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements over brand congruent endorsements. Interestingly, the effectiveness of incongruent endorsements was found not only for market-leading brands but also for second-tier brands.

As for the lack of a significant effect of ad attitude, this may be attributable to the ad layouts. All ads in the main study were quite simple in layout and

printed in black and white. Whereas the stimuli in the pilot study showed only the (handsome) faces of the endorsers, the advertisements in study two pictured more of the endorser body. The ads in the pilot study were also larger in size (full page) than in the main study (half page). The effect of the smaller opportunity to see the celebrities close-up, together with the simple layout, may have reduced the incongruity effect on ad attitudes.

One obvious criticism against the use of brand-incongruent endorsements would be that the brand risks being perceived as less credible with an incongruent endorser than with a congruent endorser. An additional analysis of brand credibility was undertaken, but actually showed that credibility was higher ($F = 15.6$, $p < .01$) in the incongruent conditions ($M = 4.93$) than the congruent ($M = 4.23$). Brand credibility was measured as a single construct: "How trustworthy is [brand] ?" measured on a seven-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all trustworthy" (1) to "very trustworthy" (7). Possibly this can be attributed to a halo effect from brand attitude to brand credibility. Nevertheless, there is no support in the present study for a negative effect on brand credibility from using a brand-incongruent endorser. From the endorser perspective, there was no significant difference in endorser credibility ($p > .15$) between the two conditions. Endorser credibility was measured as an index of two variables: "How credible/trustworthy do you think [celebrity] is?" ($r = .78$), measured on a seven-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all credible/trustworthy" (1) to "very credible/trustworthy" (7). Consequently, a celebrity endorsing a "mismatching" brand need not necessarily jeopardize his/her credibility.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present article was to examine the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements where the images of the endorser and the brand mismatch over endorsements where the endorser and brand match. The main study confirmed the results of the pilot study on the relative effectiveness of brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements and demonstrated that results can be applied not only to market-leading brands but also to second-tier brands.

This study contributes to the literature on endorsement matchup effects in three respects: Firstly, it is one of few studies using real brands to study matchup effects, thereby extending the validity of matchup effects from new brands to existing brands. Secondly, in contrast to most previous research, it

examines matchup based on a more holistic view of brand image using brand associations, thereby showing that matchup studies need not be restricted to specific aspects of endorsement image such as attractiveness or expertise. In doing so, the practical applicability of the matchup hypothesis is enhanced. Thirdly, and most importantly, it provides evidence for a positive effect of mismatches, thereby challenging conventional wisdom and the typical results found in previous research.

When finding that an incongruent celebrity endorsement is more effective than a congruent celebrity endorsement, it strongly validates the results in Lee and Thorson (2008), but with more methodological rigor: In their study, the product categories were vacuum cleaners (extremely incongruent with George Clooney and Brad Pitt), candy bars (moderately incongruent) and colognes (congruent). However, since the authors did not cross product category with celebrity, there is a chance that the results were clouded by the specific product category: For instance, although attitude is a relative construct, most people may enjoy candy bars more than vacuum cleaners, which might generate more positive attitudes towards a new candy bar brand than a vacuum cleaner brand. Consequently, with such a design a positive effect on brand attitude on moderately incongruent endorsements could be attributed to the product category, irrespective of the level of congruity. In addition, although in the hypothesized direction, the authors did not see a significant effect of moderate incongruity over congruity in their second study. Furthermore, whereas Lee and Thorson only found significant effects on purchase intentions, we found significant effects on ad viewing time, brand attitudes, brand interest, and word-of-mouth, in addition to effects on purchase intentions.

We believe that the present study therefore complements the study by Lee and Thorson (2008), as well as previous research on celebrity endorsements, by showing an opportunity for a mismatch to be more effective than a traditional match in the case of well-established, familiar brands. The results of this study may also help to explain other empirical findings supporting a positive effect from incongruity in the existing literature (e.g. Debevec and Iyer 1986; Ryu, Park, and Feick 2006). The study also provides a response to several of the calls by Lee and Thorson (2008) for research examining actual brands, for studies where the basis for matchup is beyond a single attribute (for example attractiveness or expertise), as well as research "employing different types of celebrities (e.g., musicians...)" (Lee and Thorson 2008, p. 447) as the present study examined real brands, based matchup on a holistic

fit between endorser and brand, and where the endorsers were either musicians or athletes.

Managerial implications

For practitioners working with well-established familiar brands, the results of this study should provide a source of inspiration for the selection of endorsers to promote the brands. The fact that a moderate misfit between the celebrity endorser and brand can be more effective than a match should be encouraging: The pool of potential endorsers should be greater, and the risk of consumer predictability with brand endorsers – and potential boredom with the brand – should be substantially reduced. The results also are among the first studies where matchup between the endorser and brand is based on brand associations, rather than one or two specific dimensions of the endorser image, such as attractiveness or expertise. They should therefore have greater applicability for practitioners: Seldom, the decision to select an endorser is based on a scrutiny of celebrity characteristics such that each and every aspect – e.g., awareness, attractiveness, expertise, ethnicity, and product-matchup – of the celebrity image is maximized. There simply are very few celebrities that score high on every aspect. Rather, the decision is more based on a holistic fit between the celebrity and brand – based on salient celebrity and brand associations.

The practical applicability of previous endorsement research may be greater for new brands than established brands. Having examined strong brands, the present study shows that the methods which are successful to build brand equity (for new brands) may have to be revised when moving from *building* brand equity to *maintaining* (high) brand equity and continuously enhance consumer interest. For new brands the purpose of an endorsement by a celebrity may be to raise awareness and transfer the meaning and image of that celebrity onto the brand (cf. McCracken 1989). In contrast, for major brands – such as Nike hiring Tiger Woods or Reebok hiring 50 Cent and Jay-Z – the purpose of the endorsement might not be so much to raise public knowledge of the brand's existence, but to make the brand more salient in memory and secure top-of-mind awareness among consumers.

In addition, it is possible that associations will indeed transfer from celebrity to brand with an incongruent endorser (cf. Lynch and Schuler 1994). For instance, music associations may transfer to a sports brand with substantial advertising or sports associations transfer to the mp3-players. Such a transfer

of associations is, however, not necessarily undesirable as the new associations need not undermine the well-established sports (music) associations. Rather, they can widen the mental map of the brand, thus increasing chances of the brand being evoked in more instances (cf. Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven 1997; Holden and Lutz 1992).

Limitations and Future Research

The present studies manipulated congruity as a dichotomous variable. However, (in)congruity can reach levels from complete congruity to extreme incongruity. Our operationalization of incongruity could best be described as moderate (cf. Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001; Lee and Thorson 2008; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). We do not propose the employment of *any* degree of incongruity. We believe that the results are applicable only to moderate mismatches between celebrity endorser and brand, which can benefit from enhanced elaboration but still are resolvable from an incongruity-processing perspective. An example of such an extreme mismatch might be Keith Richards endorsing Louis Vuitton or Kate Moss endorsing Ben and Jerry´s Ice Cream. The extreme incongruity in such endorsements would not be resolved, and consequently brand credibility and evaluations be jeopardized (cf. Lee and Thorson 2008). Moreover, an extremely incongruent endorsement might make consumers counter argue the selection of endorser. Similarly, the marketer should not select a celebrity which has associations that are negative for the brand – such as an *unattractive*, incongruent endorser for a beauty brand – since the lack of attractiveness may outperform the incongruity effect.

A second limitation of the study involves the selection of brands and stimuli. The choice of brands were selected by the author, and not based on published data sources that could confirm that these were appropriate choices for the target population; and the ads were not inserted into magazines or placed among other ads, which reduces the external validity of the results (cf. McQuarrie 1998).

A third limitation concerns the type of brands examined. All of them might be described as brands which satisfy transformational needs (e.g. Rossiter and Percy 1997). Therefore, it is far from certain that the same effects would appear for brands with informational purchase motives, especially if consumers are also highly involved. As such situations are characterized by high risk, congruity may be more preferable (cf. Campbell and Goodstein

2001). In addition, in their VisCAP model on selection of presenter characteristics, Rossiter and Percy (1997) argue that purchase motivation and level of involvement together determine what presenter characteristics (such as expertise, likability, and similarity) are essential for the endorsement to be effective. Probing deeper into this should be an interesting, and relevant, area for future studies.

Another issue for future research to take on involves the effects of brand-incongruent celebrity endorsements from the perspective of the celebrity. Although endorser credibility was not affected, there may be other positive effects (such as increased salience and flexibility) or negative consequences (such as dilution of the celebrity brand equity) for the celebrity when endorsing an image-incongruent brand (cf. Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994). These speculations would merit more investigation.

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Article 6

**Enhancing Fit and Evaluations In Incongruent Sponsorships
Through Relational Information**

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ABSTRACT

For most well-established brands, it is becoming increasingly difficult to reach through the clutter in traditional media. Therefore, companies increasingly use sponsorships to reach through to customers. However, sponsor-event pairings do not always fit in a self-evident way and engaging in such incongruent sponsorships may be risky, as the fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored event may be perceived as too low to consumers. In such – extremely incongruent – sponsorships, the incongruity is irresolvable for consumers and evaluations of the sponsorship and brand are hurt. This article examines the opportunity for increasing consumer resolution of such an extremely brand-incongruent sponsorship through employing ad copy which stresses the relation between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored event. The results show that a relational ad copy reduces the sponsorship incongruity and improves attitudes, interest in the brand, and consumer buzz.

INTRODUCTION

In practice, sponsorships can vary in terms of how well the sponsoring brand fits with the sponsored event. For instance, Cornwell et al. (2006) refer to Sue Bee (honey) and Cheerios (cereal) sponsoring NASCAR (the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing), as one example of how sponsoring brands not always fit the sponsored event in a self-evident way. Additional examples might include well-known soft drink or fast-food brands sponsoring sport events, Austrian Raiffeisen Bank sponsoring the Eurovision Song Contest, or Gruyère Cheese Company sponsoring the European Curling Championships held in Sweden. Cornwell et al. (2006) acknowledge that the answer to why brands decide to engage in sponsorships despite a lack of self-evident fit is multifaceted but includes "concepts of brand awareness and image development" (p. 312). In addition, brands may want to reach new target groups, and to reach through the media clutter by avoiding traditional media. Furthermore, the events being sponsored may also want to reach new target groups for their activities by allying with unexpected sponsors. However, if there is a considerable mismatch between the sponsor and the sponsored event, this may jeopardize the opportunity for achieving consumer acceptance of the sponsorship, as well as memory and liking of the brand and event. The question is therefore what means can be used to overcome such jeopardy. That is, how can communications be designed so that consumers

will accept and like the sponsorship better?

As sponsor-event pairings in practice can vary in degrees of fit, research has recently begun to thoroughly examine the effectiveness of the degree of incongruity between the sponsor and the sponsored event. Moreover, there is a limited, but growing, stream of research on communication strategies or tactics on how to enhance effectiveness of the sponsorship given the degree of incongruity (e.g., Cornwell et al. 2006; Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2008). This paper adds to this stream of research by examining the opportunity of relational information to enhance the perceived fit of an extremely incongruent sponsorship and improve evaluations, brand interest and the chance that consumers will tell others about the sponsorship, sometimes referred to as "buzz". It complements the studies by Cornwell and colleagues (e.g., Cornwell et al. 2006; Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2008) and investigates the proposition put forth in Cornwell (2008) on possible positive effects on attitudes following employment of relational information in incongruent sponsorships.

SPONSORSHIPS AND INCONGRUITY

Companies rely on commercial sponsorship as one means to promote their brands, and events and cultural institutions rely on sponsorships as a source of funding for their activities (Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2008). For reviews of research on sponsorship, see Cornwell (2008) and Cornwell, Weeks and Roy (2005). From 1987 to 2004, the growth in sponsorship-linked marketing expenditures has been about twice as strong as the growth in advertising expenditures (Cornwell 2008). One of the reasons for this rapid development is that companies are finding it increasingly hard to reach through the clutter of traditional media (Rosengren 2008). At the same time, participation in out-of-home activities has increased: Expenditures on performing arts increased by 50% between 1989 and 2000 (adjusted for inflation) in the United States and admissions to major sports events, and participation in sports, has significantly increased since the 1960s and 1970s (Cornwell 2008; Green, Smith, and Roberts 2005; Westerståhl et al. 2003; Woudhuysen 2001). As consumers become increasingly harder to reach through traditional media, sponsorships provide an interesting means for marketers to create or enhance brand awareness, and improve brand image through the transfer of associations from the sponsored event to the sponsoring brand.

Whereas advertising in traditional media offers the flexibility of communicating any message, sponsorships offer fewer opportunities for communicating other information than the brand logo or perhaps a tagline. In short, the medium becomes the message, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan (1964), who suggested that the medium in itself can be a vehicle for transferring imagery from the brand to consumers and create awareness (cf. Dahlén 2005). Consequently, it seems logical that marketers would want to sponsor events that are congruent with core brand associations, as an image transfer of associations from the sponsored event to the sponsoring brand will help reinforce existing brand associations. Indeed, previous research provides ample evidence of an image-transfer effect when there is a fit between the sponsored event and the sponsoring brand (e.g. Gwinner and Eaton 1999). A congruent context seems to facilitate processing and transfer of associations.

However, a premise for the facilitating effect of congruent sponsorships on processing is that consumers would otherwise experience some difficulty in comprehending the purpose of the sponsorship (cf. Goodstein 1993). Whereas this may be the case for sponsorships by new or unfamiliar brands, many sponsorships are made by strong, established, and well-known brands for well-known events. Sponsorships by such well-established brands activate consumers' prior brand schemas (e.g. McDaniel 1999), which guide attention and processing of the information content (cf. Kent and Allen 1994). Thus, the value of external processing help is reduced. Therefore, a congruent sponsorship context may not increase attention or processing; in fact, it could actually reduce them. Furthermore, Jagre, Watson, and Watson (2001) suggest that moderately incongruent sponsorships will be more positively evaluated than congruent sponsorships. Recently, Lee and Thorson (2008) found support for these ideas in a study on incongruent celebrity endorsements. In addition, Cornwell (2008, p 49) suggests that "a brand with a very distinctive image might have to work to develop a fit with a sponsorship opportunity, but would then be expected to have a stronger relationship in memory due to the distinctiveness of the association".

From a schema theory perspective on incongruent sponsorships, the arguments for opportunities from communicating incongruently are quite simple: Schema congruity theory postulates that information which fits an existing schema – that is, confirms to expectations – will be encoded effortlessly into that schema structure. However, when the information does not fit comfortably with the existing schema structure, tension will follow.

This tension is uncomfortable to people, and they will try to relieve it through some kind of resolution of the incongruity (Mandler 1982; Srull 1981). Incongruent information will cause people to pay more attention, and make them more motivated to think about the information, resulting in deeper cognition (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983). For example, ads are viewed longer if they are incongruent compared to when they are consistent with previous knowledge (Goodstein 1993) and original ads induce more frequent eye fixations than traditional ads (Pieters, Warlop and Wedel 2002).

From schema congruity theory we could also anticipate an effect on evaluations. We can expect that for congruent sponsorships, which are less likely to lead to cognitive elaboration or arousal, the evaluation of the ad and brand is typically mild (Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). An incongruent sponsorship on the other hand is likely to be perceived as challenging and interesting (cf. Alwitt 2000). Furthermore, a sponsorship which challenges existing brand associations will cause cognitive elaboration as the consumer tries to understand how the incongruent sponsorship fits with the established brand schema. Mandler (1982) argued that moderate incongruity can be resolved through assimilation or the use of alternative schemas. When this is the case, positive affect will follow from the success of the resolution (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). This should color evaluations (e.g., Lee and Mason 1999) of the sponsoring brand and sponsored event.

So, when brands engage in sponsorships with less self-evident fit between the brand and sponsored event, this need not necessarily be problematic in the case of well-established brands. In fact, it may actually be beneficial! However, as pointed out by Jagre, Watson, and Watson (2001), incongruent sponsorships may risk running completely counter to the established brand schema. In such cases, when the incongruity is considered as extreme, consumers cannot resolve the incongruity and make sense of it, leading to negative evaluations (cf. Mandler 1982). The effect of incongruity on evaluations could thus be portrayed as an inverted-U relationship, so that moderate incongruity is preferable to either extreme incongruity or congruity, whereas the effect on attention, elaboration, and recall could be described as more linear – suggesting that the more incongruent it is, the more attentive people are. From a theoretical as well as a practitioner perspective, this raises the question if the benefits of incongruity in terms of increased attention and processing can be obtained without jeopardizing evaluations. That is, would there be ways that allow for high attention, but

encourage consumer sense-making such that perceived fit, and evaluations, are improved?
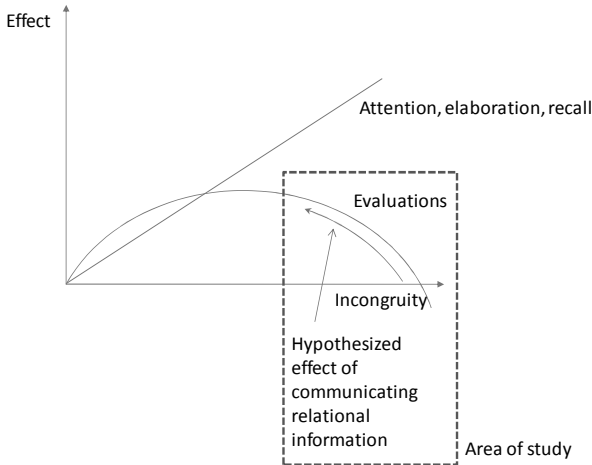

Figure 1. Effects of incongruent sponsorships and hypothesized effects from communicating relational information

Hypotheses

To examine this question, the research by Cornwell and colleagues can provide input. In a series of studies, they showed that articulation in memory can benefit memory of incongruent sponsor-event pairings (Cornwell et al. 2006), and that relational information, as opposed to item specific information, can improve recall for incongruent sponsors (Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2008). The authors argued that when there is low fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored event, articulation "through the provision of relational information or the activation of associative pathways in memory should support recall" (Cornwell et al. 2006, p 313). 'Relational' information is here defined as information which links two identities, whereas 'item specific' information provides no relationship between the two identities (cf. Hunt and Einstein 1981). The ways in which information can be relational seem to be multiple, but to illustrate how it can be manifested in a research setting, Cornwell et al. (2006) manifested the relational information in simulated press releases articulating the linkage between an incongruent sponsor (Heinz) and a sponsored event (a music festival), such that the festival had a target group (youths) similar to the expected target group for easy-to-prepare foods. The relational information

read: "Heinz officials said the sponsorship of the Moonlight Music Festival is ideal, as the young people attracted to the festival are those likely to opt for easy-to-prepare foods. Heinz is excited about this move to target young adults, and views this sponsorship opportunity as the perfect starting point" (p 314).

Cornwell (2008, p 48) also proposed that supplying mediating associations or links of information should help consumers to "form better memories for sponsor-event linkages and may also influence formation of positive attitudes". In the research literature on brand extensions, Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000) indeed showed that introducing relational, explanatory links between salient brand associations and an incongruent brand extension can improve the perceived fit.

H1: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and sponsored event than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

Communications that are incongruent with the brand schema increase the interest in the brand and yield positive communication effects (e.g. Alwitt 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005; Lee and Mason 1999). In the case of brand-incongruent sponsorships, researchers argue that incongruent sponsorships should produce higher attitudes and more favourable sponsor evaluations (Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001). However, these effects are contingent on consumers' ability to resolve the incongruity (cf. Lee and Thorson 2008). Consequently, a moderate level of incongruity is more effective for generating evaluations than an extreme level of incongruity. In the case of well-established brands, the concept of brand interest (Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993) has gained some attention as an alternative to brand attitude. We believe that brand interest follows the same inverted U-relationship such that extremely incongruent sponsorships may reduce brand interest, whereas an improvement of fit from an extreme degree of incongruity can enhance brand interest.

With deliberate attempts by the marketer to link the event and brand, to make sense of the sponsorship, consumers should be more able to resolve the incongruity. We therefore expect that brand-incongruent sponsorships with relational information will generate higher attitudes and interest in the brand. Another effect of an incongruent sponsorship should be that people talk

about the sponsorship with friends and family, often referred to as "buzz". Here, we do not hypothesize about word-of-mouth (cf. Arndt 1967), which typically involves recommendation, but rather the mere act of talking about the sponsorship. Research has shown that distinctiveness (defined as being unique and exciting) is an important determinant of buzz generation (Niederhoffer et al. 2007). We believe that consumers are more likely to tell about the sponsorship to others if they themselves are better able to make sense of an incongruent sponsorship.

H2: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher ad attitudes than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

H3: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher attitudes towards the sponsoring brand than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

H4: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher interest in the sponsoring brand than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

H5: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate more buzz than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

As a sponsorship should favour not only the sponsoring brand, but also the sponsored event, we want to present two hypotheses on effects on the sponsored event. Based on Mandler's (1982) reasoning on affective reactions from reducing extreme incongruity, and the research by Jagre, Watson and Watson (2001), we expect that less extreme incongruity between the sponsoring brand and sponsored event should also improve evaluations of the sponsored event and stimulate interest. Thus, we hypothesize that

H6: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher attitudes towards the sponsored event than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

H7: Brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher interest in the sponsored event than brand incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information.

METHOD

The hypotheses were tested in a between-subjects design in which participants were exposed to an advertisement for a sponsorship by a well-established brand and asked to indicate their reactions to the advertisement, sponsoring brand, and sponsored event. We used print ads since they are reader-paced and are therefore well-suited for research concerning information incongruity (cf. Lee 2000): Participants can process the ads for as long as they want, allowing for differences in attention and elaboration between subjects (Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991).

Stimulus development

First, the author and two assisting students made up a list of brands that would be relevant to the sample target audience (students), including such brands as Nike, Colgate, IKEA and RedBull, and events or institutions that could be subject to sponsorship (including a football player, a TV program, a national theatre, and a national zoological park). In a pre-test, 35 students were asked to select combinations between the brands and sponsored institution that would be incongruent. Two sponsorships were identified as extremely incongruent, *RedBull* sponsoring the Royal Dramatic Theatre (*M* = 1.84 on a scale ranging from 1 (very atypical) to 7 (very typical)) and *RedBull* sponsoring a well-established zoological park (*M* = 2.04).

Next, we developed advertisements for the two sponsorships. The advertisement should include a picture, a logotype of the sponsoring brand and a copy in the advertisement to be realistic (cf. Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002): The picture showed the entrance to the respective institution buildings and the RedBull logotype was put at the center bottom of the advertisement. To create relational and item specific information about the sponsorships, we sought to manipulate the ad copy such that there would be two text versions: One where the text would be relational for the first sponsorship but would be item specific (i.e. would not be explanatory) for the second sponsorship and the other text be relational for the second sponsorship and item specific for the first sponsorship. By using a crossed design, the risk of idiosyncrasies deriving from a formulation of words in the text, rather than the relational linkage, would be reduced.

In an additional pre-test, another ten participants were told that the sponsorship had been realized recently, and were asked to think of reasons

why RedBull would want to sponsor the Royal Dramatic Theatre. Their answers included "Actors on stage actually use a lot of energy when performing", "Energy drinks can keep you awake", and "RedBull and/or the Royal Dramatic Theatre are probably trying to reach a new audience". This pre-test demonstrated that consumers can come up with possible linkages even for extremely incongruent sponsorships. Although participants typically regarded the sponsorship as unexpected, no one saw it as outright impossible nor gave an indication that it be made up or faked. Based on the results of the pre-test, we developed the ad copies "RedBull speeds up the drama" (relational when sponsoring the dramatic theatre, but not related to a sponsorship of the zoological park) and "RedBull gives you animal strengths" (relational when sponsoring the zoological park, but not related to a sponsorship of the dramatic theatre). The copy drew attention to the (common) attribute associations between the sponsoring brand and sponsored institutions, rather than the type of people visiting the establishments. It thus satisfied the requirements on a relational, attribute-based communications strategy rather than an elaborational user-based strategy to reduce incongruity (Bridges, Keller and Sood 2000). Reproductions of the stimuli are provided in the appendix.

Procedure

A sample of 184 non-marketing students at a large European university participated in the study in return for a €1 lottery ticket. Students were randomly assigned to one of four groups (brand incongruent sponsorship 1 with relational copy / brand incongruent sponsorship 2 with relational copy / brand incongruent sponsorship 1 with item specific copy / brand incongruent sponsorship 2 with item specific copy) and given a booklet. Participants were instructed to look at an ad from a "recently initiated sponsorship by RedBull of the Dramatic Theatre/Zoological Park". When participants finished reading the ad, they were asked to answer the questions in the booklet.

Measures

Perceived fit was measured using the questions "How well do RedBull and [sponsored institution] fit?" and "How well do RedBull and [sponsored institution] match?". The answer was given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very well" (7). The answers were averaged to produce an index ($r = .73$).

Ad attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable/unfavorable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's α = .88). The measure was taken from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989).

Brand attitude (which was measured for the sponsoring brand as well as toward the sponsored institution) was measured with the following three items: good/bad, negative/positive, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). The averaged index for RedBull had a Cronbach's α = .92 and the averaged index for the sponsored institution had a Cronbach's α = .88).

Brand interest (which was measured for the sponsoring brand as well as for the sponsored institution) was measured with the questions "I'd like to know more about [Brand]", "The ad made [Brand] interesting to me", "The advertisement made me want to learn more about [Brand]", "The marketer increased my interest in [Brand]", adapted from Machleit, Allen and Madden (1993). The answers were given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (7). The averaged index for RedBull had a Cronbach's α = .91 and the averaged index for the sponsored institution had a Cronbach's α = .92).

Buzz was measured using the question "How likely are you to tell a friend that RedBull is sponsoring the Dramatic Theatre/Zoological park? The answer was given on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from "not at all likely" (1) to "very likely" (7).

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 stated that use of relational copy will increase perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and sponsored institution. Analysis of perceived fit between the two main conditions (relational vs item specific copy) showed a significant difference ($F = 2.88$, $p < .05$) between the relational copy and item specific copy conditions, such that perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and sponsored institutions were higher in the relational copy condition ($M = 1.77$) than in the item specific copy condition ($M = 1.52$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

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To test hypotheses H2-H7, a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was run on all dependent variables. Type of copy had a significant effect, ($F(6,177) = 3.17$, $p < .01$, Wilks' λ =.90). There was no main or interaction effect on the dependent variables ($F < 2$) due to sponsorship (Royal Dramatic Theatre/Zoological park). Therefore, for testing hypotheses two through seven, the four different conditions were combined into two main conditions (relational copy vs. item specific copy). Planned comparisons (with Bonferroni adjusted significance levels) were used to test for differences between the two conditions.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher ad attitude for the sponsoring brand. Comparisons for ad attitude showed a significant ($F = 11.36$, $p < .01$) difference between the two conditions such that ad attitude was higher in the relational copy condition ($M = 3.73$) than in the item specific copy condition ($M = 3.17$). H2 was thus supported.

For Hypothesis 3 on brand attitude, there was a significant difference ($F = 3.77$, $p < .05$) between the conditions with higher brand attitude for the sponsoring brand when there was a relational copy ($M = 4.33$) than an item specific text ($M = 3.87$). Therefore, H3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information would generate higher interest in the sponsoring brand than sponsorships communicating item specific information. Comparisons for brand interest showed a significant ($F = 16.87$, $p < .01$) difference between the two conditions such that brand interest was higher in the relational copy condition ($M = 2.43$) than in the item specific copy condition ($M = 1.73$). Hypothesis 4 was thus supported.

Hypothesis 5 stated that brand incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information would generate more buzz about the sponsorship than sponsorships communicating item specific information. The analysis showed a significant difference ($F = 3.09$, $p < .05$) between the conditions with higher likelihood of buzz about the sponsorship when there was a relational copy ($M = 3.10$) than an item specific text ($M = 2.63$). Consequently, H5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6 suggested that incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information also generate higher attitudes for the sponsored event

than incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information. Comparisons for attitude towards the sponsored institution showed a moderately significant ($F = 2.29$, $p = .07$) difference between the two conditions such that attitudes were higher in the relational copy condition ($M = 5.43$) than in the item specific copy condition ($M = 5.16$).

For hypothesis 7 – stating that incongruent sponsorships communicating relational information generate higher interest in the sponsored event than incongruent sponsorships communicating item specific information – the difference was significant ($F = 5.81$, $p < .01$). Interest in the sponsored institution was higher in the relational copy condition ($M = 2.91$) than in the item specific copy condition ($M = 2.42$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 was supported.

DISCUSSION

For mature and well-established brands, maintaining high brand equity may be more difficult than ever before. Consumers are increasingly savvy, there is an increased abundance of choice from niche brands (Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert 1994), and reaching out to consumers through traditional media is more expensive and less effective with less attention paid to commercials and increasing advertising clutter (e.g., Jewell and Unnava 2003; Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002; Rosengren 2008). One option for brands is therefore to better exploit alternative communication channels, such as sponsorships, to reach through to consumers.

Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000) suggest that consumers could come to anticipate what communications will entail for a familiar brand, which reduces the curiosity and interest in the brand and its communications. Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993) argue that the most important goal for advertising of established and familiar brands should be to bring down the boredom consumers experience with a heavily advertised, well-known brand and increase brand interest. So, for mature and well-established brands, sponsoring events which are congruent with the brand (such as Sony sponsoring yet another music festival) might not spark the level of excitement, consumer interest, and constant revitalization that mature brands must commit to if they are to continue to be successful also in the future (Alwitt 2000; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). Therefore, occasionally sponsoring events which are incongruent with the brand can provide an opportunity to generate attention in the brand and rejuvenate it.

However, if the sponsorship is deemed as extremely incongruent, consumers cannot make sense of the sponsorship, leading to negative evaluations (e.g. Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001). In order to reduce the risk of inability to resolve the incongruity, this study examined effects of employing relational copy as one means to encourage sense-making among consumers exposed to brand-incongruent sponsorship advertisements. The results showed that a relational copy was successful in reducing the incongruity between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored event relative to when the copy was item specific. In accordance with schema congruity theory, attitudes towards the sponsorship advertisement and the sponsoring brand as well as brand interest and buzz were positively affected. In addition, the sponsored institutions benefited from a reduction in incongruity in terms of higher attitudes and interest. Notably, the effects occurred despite a relatively modest decrease in incongruity. Possibly, an even stronger articulation of relational information (cf. Cornwell et al. 2006) might have reduced incongruity and improved communication effects even more. Nevertheless, the results of this study contribute to research on sponsorship-linked marketing and research on incongruity in marketing communications. In addition, they have practical implications for sponsorships by well established brands.

Whereas previous research on articulation of relational information in sponsorships has looked at consumers' ability to correctly recall the sponsoring brand, the present study extended the list of effects by examining perceived fit, attitudes, interest, and buzz. In doing so, this study empirically confirmed the proposition put forth in Cornwell (2008) on possible positive effects on attitudes following employment of relational information in incongruent sponsorships.

The present study also complements previous research by Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000) who (only) found an effect on improved perceived fit between the parent brand and an incongruent brand extension following employment of relational information whereas we found additional effects on attitudes, interest and buzz. With this result, the present study also adds to the literature on effects of information incongruity in marketing communications, particularly to the stream of research arguing benefits of brand-incongruent communications (e.g., Dahlén et al. 2005; Dahlén et al. 2008; Sjödin and Törn 2006), as none of these studies examined how resolution of incongruity can be facilitated by the marketer through – for example – copy or informative voice-overs. By demonstrating that perceived

incongruity is not static – but can be altered by the marketer to enhance communication effectiveness – the present study provides an impetus to further research on dynamic and contextual aspects of consumer reactions to information incongruity.

Managerial implications

The present research should provide relief for brand managers who consider benefiting from the positive effects of brand-incongruent sponsorships, but still are uncertain about to what extent these sponsorships are perceived by consumers as incongruent with the sponsoring brand. If the brand manager fears a sponsorship to be extremely incongruent and not resolvable for the target audience – thereby putting evaluations at risk – the results of this study are comforting: They indicate that using a even a simple relational copy can facilitate consumer sense-making efforts, reducing the incongruity and significantly improving evaluations.

The fact that consumer likelihood of buzz was higher with a relational copy in the advertisement should also be of great interest to marketers as such extra spreading of the communication is increasingly becoming a separate communications objective and is very cost-effective, too (Niederhoffer et al. 2007; Reichheld 2003). The results of the present research thus imply that marketers should be able to reap the benefits from incongruity without necessarily exposing the brand to the risks that incongruity may carry as long as they undertake actions to encourage consumer sense-making.

From the perspective of the event, using sponsors may be an effective means to reach new audiences (for example trying to signal relevance to a younger audience using a sponsorship with RedBull). The results show that an initial mismatch can be handled such that attitudes and interest in the event are improved. Therefore, for event owners seeking sponsors to support their activities, the results provide an argument for accepting and inviting potential sponsors despite a lack of self-evident fit between the brand and the event.

Limitations and future research

One limitation of the present study is that it did not examine if also *moderate* incongruity would benefit from sense-making assistance from the marketer. Would we see the same communication effects in reducing the level of incongruity from moderate to low, or even to congruity, such that consumers

accepted an incongruent communications execution, possibly assimilating it into the existing brand schema?

Another interesting area for future research would be to examine the potential impact of optimal stimulation level (OSL) (e.g. Raju 1980) on responses to information incongruity. More specifically, consumers with high OSL may prefer incongruent communications which require more effort to resolve whereas consumers with low OSL may prefer communications which require little effort in resolution. Consequently, consumers with high OSL might prefer brand-incongruent sponsorships without relational information attached, and consumers with low OSL might depend on relational information attached to be able to resolve the incongruity.

From a theoretical perspective, it might have been interesting to also compare the effect between conditions where there be a relational copy and where there be no copy attached to the sponsorship advertisement. However, from a practitioner perspective, such an execution would not be very realistic: Typically, print advertising contains a picture, a sponsoring name or logotype, and copy (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002). If a brand-incongruent communications execution also deviated from convention by omitting the copy, chances are that it might be perceived as more atypical, and consequently affect evaluations. Also, simply adding text should stimulate elaboration of the sponsorship and brand. Since the brands and institutions studied were real, well-established and liked, the act of elaboration should in itself lead to an increase in evaluations, irrespective of the extent of sense-making enhancement. The present study circumvented these potential confounding problems by comparing the outcome of identical copy, which stimulated sense-making of, vs. were unrelated to, the two different sponsorships.

Although the results seem promising to marketers, they should be taken with caution: In this study, we employed one exposure for only one brand as the sponsoring brand. This brand, RedBull, is a low-involvement brand satisfying transformational needs. It is far from certain that one exposure would be enough to generate the same positive results in the case of an incongruent sponsorship by, for instance, a high-involvement informational brand such as an insurance company. Another reason for taking the results with caution is the use of a student sample, used for reasons of convenience. Although participants were not dedicated marketing students, the results should still be interpreted with the choice of sample in mind.

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Epilogue - Dialogue

The reader: Well, this was some quite some reading. I understood a great deal of it, but not all. If you were to sum up the results, what do we know no?

The author: Well, the research by me and my colleagues shows that mature and established brands can gain from communicating incongruently, that is in ways that actually run counter to the associations which people hold with the brand. Compared to congruent communications, employing incongruent communications can improve memory for the brand, evaluations of the brand and the advertising, and create a higher degree of interest in the brand.

The reader: OK, but what's new about this? We always like things that are novel, don't we? Your research doesn't seem very revolutionary.

The author: Well, in practice the results are quite counterintuitive. Whereas literature in psychology and in some domains of marketing, have long pointed to benefits from information incongruity, brand management literature is very oriented towards maintaining consistency in marketing communications. And so is brand management practice. Very few managers for established brands would even think about communicating a message that would, to some extent, run counter to the associations that people hold with their brand. They fear that the brand would be diluted with communications which say something different than what the brand always says, or has said. Or they would not want to place advertising in media vehicles that are thematically incongruent with their brand.

The reader: So what you are saying is that it has consequences for advertising and brand management practice?

The author: Firstly, the results apply to well-established, mature brands. For building equity in new brands and to firmly establish a brand, consistency is absolutely crucial. However, for brands that are already established, the adage of maintaining consistency may have to be revisited. For established brands, managers have more degrees of freedom in designing communication executions than they think they do. I believe that relying too much on consistency puts a straitjacket onto the brand and its manager. If managers are courageous enough to employ brand-incongruent communications, then they will benefit more than if they had selected a

congruent execution: Consumers have a greater chance of remembering the brand and they will like it better.

The reader: But why didn't you do research that would help small brands rather than big, multinational brands? They will always make it somehow, won't they?

The author: Well, I'm not so sure. Although some brands that are strong today may be around the next hundred years, most strong brands have a tough time. In a global world with global choice and easy access to all kinds of information about products, why should a consumer attend to a brand like Nike? There are after all so many alternative options out there in the marketplace. An additional answer to your question is that a lot of research has been done on fictitious brands, so there is room for research on both well established and less established brands. And there is relatively little research on how to make established brands even stronger. And why shouldn't strong brands that are good (after all many brands are strong because they have a good offer to consumers), also deserve to be researched and further developed?

The reader: Would you say that anything can be incongruent?

The author: I guess that as soon as something is put in an unexpected context, then we may call it an occurrence of incongruity. But within this study, the interesting thing is still that a mature brand can actually benefit from brand-incongruent communications although the convention is that it would always be better off employing congruity.

The reader: But what if all advertisers for established brands started advertising incongruently?

The author: Well, what is incongruent today does not necessarily need to be incongruent tomorrow. For instance, if all sportswear brands began employing music artists as endorsers, then the selection of a music artist might not be regarded as incongruent. The perception of what is incongruent versus congruent is, in other words, relative to marketplace conditions over time and cultures.

The reader: Aren't there serious risks involved in communicating incongruently? Would a status brand like Rolls-Royce or Louis Vuitton

really benefit from incongruent communications?

The author: That is difficult to say. This thesis has only looked at brands for product categories typically characterized by low involvement (as opposed to luxury cars or high-fashion items). There is probably a positive incongruity effect even for high-involvement brands from enhanced elaboration of the brand, but this may be outperformed by the effect of a preference for congruity in cases of high risk which has been discovered in previous research. To answer your question, more research needs to be done.

The reader: Wouldn't a brand-incongruent advertisement be interpreted as somewhat ironic, or made with a twinkle in the eye?

The author: Most likely so. If we look at incongruity in the literature on humor, we can see that incongruities may contain an element of irony.

The reader: And novelty, too?

The author: Yes, there is definitely a considerable element of novelty in incongruent communications, but incongruities are more than just novelty. For instance, it presents a puzzle that begs resolution by the recipient.

The reader: Can we really be sure about the results?

The author: I believe so: Not only do we test the hypotheses using established methodologies with statistical tests of significance, but what we find is quite consistent across the studies. So if results were only found in one, but not other studies, then they might not be very reliable. In this thesis, the large number of relatively consistent results provides us with greater reason to trust the ideas to hold. But as I point out, there are limitations to the thesis (so I welcome more research on the area), especially with regards to moderating effects, that is factors that influence the main effect of incongruent communications.

The reader: How does this relate to wear-out of advertising?

The author: Well, the potential for the employment of incongruent communications could of course be seen from a wear-in/wear-out perspective. As you know, companies want consumers to pay as much attention as possible to their marketing communications executions. The

optimal balance between the time and effort consumers need to comprehend a message (wear-in) and the point in time or effort where consumers no longer pay attention to the message (wear-out) depends on the complexity of the specific message and the experience with the brand. Less established brands may require more wear-in whereas well established brands (with their established schemas) require less wear-in. If managers for established brands want to postpone wear-out, a more complex message may be required. Brand- incongruent communications should meet this requirement, as they are more complex to understand than congruent communications.

The reader: Is there a difference between inadvertent and deliberate employment of incongruent communications?

The author: From the perspective of the consumer, no. But I guess that if it is deliberate, the manager stands a better chance of being able to cope with the potential jeopardy of, for example, extreme incongruity (which could hurt evaluations).

The reader: What if a car manufacturer advertises in a women's magazine (as you hint at), will we perceive the car brand as more feminine?

The author: That depends on if the incongruity is assimilated or subtyped. We do not know that. However, we did learn that the core associations of the brand, when placed in a thematically incongruent medium, were reinforced. This suggests that, if the car is perceived as more feminine, at least this doesn't happen at the expense of other associations.

The reader: When I read the introductory chapter, I actually remembered the Mercedes commercial you were referring to. I remember never understanding it.

The author: That is probably because they did not supply any relational link between the commercial and the Mercedes brand. The driver in that commercial was actually Finnish Formula1 star Mika Häkkinen. But unless you knew that, the commercial made little sense. They probably would have benefited from having some kind of text or voice-over explaining the link.

The reader: I have another question about specific commercials. Recently here in Sweden, there was a commercial for the cookware brand OBH Nordica. A former football player, Glenn Strömberg, who now has his own

series of foods, was the endorser. Since he is more famous for being a football player than his brand of food items (in many people's minds), he might be regarded as an incongruent endorser. My question is, if OBH Nordica would contract another spokesperson, say Thomas Brolin (another football player, but who also is in the food business), would the brand be perceived as a football cookware brand?

The author: What you are asking is, I guess, if a brand in its communications can employ different incongruent elements without diluting the brand. I believe the answer is that it is not improbable that repeating incongruent elements (which are congruent with one another) will enforce those particular aspects. In essence, it works like a re-positioning of the brand (although in this OBH Nordica case it might be inadvertent). So if you want to communicate incongruently over time, maybe you would actually like the different brand-incongruent elements to also be incongruent with one another. That way, the "original" brand associations are reinforced as the common denominator, and consequently strengthened in consumers' minds. Let me also be clear in that, in this thesis, I do not propose that all established brands should stop communicating congruently and only engage in incongruent communications. What I am saying is that, at times, it may be necessary to challenge the brand associations, in order to make consumers more curious about the brand, generating interest and bringing more vitality to it.

The reader: Alright, I have one last question: As I understand it, incongruent communications are challenging to consumers and work partly because they (at least initially) confuse the consumer about the message and how it relates to the brand. Don't you think there is too much confusion in advertising already now? Isn't it better if there is less confusion, and more order and tranquility, in the advertising and media landscapes?

The author: Of course it sounds nice to have tranquility and peacefulness and all, but in a long-term perspective, I don't agree with you. I think a slight disorder of things is better than a complete order where everything is similar to what is has been and life is very predictable. And I don't think we should be afraid of the unexpected, but appreciate the opportunities this brings us. To conclude, let me quote the poet Peter Curman (2003, pp 124-125, my translation) who rather eloquently captures this view:

"It is not Disorder that threatens our lives
It is Order,
,…,
Order is the security guard of the soul that walks around,
Locking, and putting out the lights
Order sends its rigor mortis
Through thoughts and actions,…,
The words on a form sheet, the expected answers are Order,
But the word suddenly born on your lips, the quick touch, the sudden
insight, is Disorder.
The love that awakens you and unlocks you, and makes you take
violent steps out of your life,
is Disorder,
,....,
The water streaming and never standing still
is Disorder
The bevy of birds
under the sky and in your mind
is Disorder
,....,
Disorder is the fertile soil of all opportunities".

Curman, Peter (2003), "Medan livet ännu är – Dikter 1965-2003",
Stockholm: Podium.

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