



LUND UNIVERSITY  
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# *The Effects of Brand-Context Congruence*

*A Quantitative Study on Brand Image-Website Congruence and Customer-based Brand Equity*

by

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# Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine if brand-context congruence has an effect on customer-based brand equity and whether brand image impacts this relationship. The relationship between an ad and the surrounding context, so called context congruence, has gained a lot of attention. This as it has been shown to generate beneficial outcomes for brands, such as better brand recall, recognition, and higher attention. Simultaneously, the rise of digital marketing and technological advancements have created new techniques such as targeted advertising, which allows for ads to target a customer rather than a specific website, leaving the ads uncontrollable. Recent events have demonstrated the risks of targeted advertising, where brands' ads appeared on undesired websites and seeming to endorse, or being affiliated with such content, and thus met with criticism from consumers. However, hardly any research has been done on the role of this new phenomenon as a direct impactor on the brand and consequently brand equity.

To test this, an experiment was conducted using two brands with different brand images: symbolic and functional, and these were exposed to two conditions: congruent and incongruent, using websites to either create a match or not. These four conditions were then measured on six dependent variables derived from customer-based brand equity theory. 221 consumers participated in the experiment. A first test was performed on all subjects, and a follow-up test was run using subject with high brand awareness leaving 91 respondents. Significance was reached for the brand-context congruence at a 95% confidence interval, with an effect size reaching up to 18.2%.

Brand awareness was found to be a necessary precondition among the consumers for there to be an effect. Moreover, a difference of the effect was found depending on the brand image, where congruence generated different outcomes. It is thus implied that brand-context congruence is a mutual generation of customer-based brand equity, leaving opportunities to capitalise on the online environment in a more strategic manner.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background	1
1.1.1	Problem Discussion	2
1.2	Aims and Objectives	3
1.3	Research Purpose	4
1.4	Research Questions	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Targeted Advertising and Context	5
2.1.1	Context and Congruence	6
2.2	Brand Image and Advertising	10
2.3	Customer-Based Brand Equity	11
2.3.1	Perceived Quality	15
2.3.2	Brand Association	16
2.3.3	Complementary Measures of Customer-Based Brand Equity	17
<b>3</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1	Research Philosophy	22
4.2	Research Strategy	23
4.2.1	Deductive Approach	23
4.2.2	Quantitative Study	24
4.2.3	Causal Research	25
4.3	Research Design	26
4.4	Variable Measurement and Scaling	28
4.4.1	Measuring Scales	28
4.4.2	Operationalisation - Dependent Variable	28
4.4.1	Operationalisation - Independent Variable	30
4.4.2	Operationalisation - Moderating Variable	31
4.5	Sampling	31
4.6	Data Collection Method	32
4.7	Procedure	33
4.7	Data Analysis	36
4.8	Quality Criteria	37
4.8.1	Validity	37

4.8.2	Reliability .....	38
4.9	Ethical Considerations.....	38
<b>5</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>40</b>
5.1	Quality Criteria.....	40
5.2	Respondent Profile .....	42
5.3	Hypotheses Testing .....	43
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>56</b>
7.1	Theoretical Implications.....	56
7.2	Managerial Implications.....	57
7.3	Limitations .....	58
7.4	Recommendations for Future Research .....	58
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>60</b>
	<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>69</b>
	Appendix 1 - Brand Equity Dimensions (Aaker, 1991).....	69
	Appendix 2 – Experiment Scenarios .....	70
	Appendix 3 – Questionnaire.....	72
	Appendix 4- Age Distribution.....	74
	Appendix 5- Gender Distribution.....	75
	Appendix 6 – Assumption tests.....	76
	Appendix 7. MANOVA output – all cases .....	78
	Appendix 8. MANOVA output – selected cases.....	79

# List of Tables

Table 1. Experimental groups .....	26
Table 2. Operationalisation of concepts .....	30
Table 3. Results from congruence tests.....	35
Table 4. Reliability test results: Cronbach's alpha.....	41
Table 5. Validity test: Pearson's correlation .....	42
Table 6. Descriptives overview .....	44
Table 7. Multivariate Tests – all cases .....	45
Table 8. Two-way MANOVA output – all cases .....	46
Table 9. Multivariate tests – selected cases.....	47
Table 10. Two-way MANOVA – selected cases .....	47
Table 11. Pairwise comparisons.....	48
Table 12. Summary of results .....	50

# List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.....	19
Figure 2. Theoretical framework.....	20
Figure 4. The six steps of deductive research (Bryman & Bell, 2011) .....	24
Figure 5. The randomisation of manipulations .....	27



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In today's marketing environment where customers have immense access to information about brands and products, traditional marketing approaches of impersonalised mass communications seem outdated (Gürhan-Canli, Hayran, & Sarial-Abi, 2016; Keller, 2009). Consequently, as customers are gaining more knowledge, technological advances have allowed for businesses to simultaneously acquire larger amounts of customer information than ever. While customers are creating personal profiles on company websites, using search engines, and engaging in social networking sites; companies are collecting transaction records, tracking customer web browsing, and obtaining real-time consumer data profiles (Gürhan-Canli, Hayran, & Sarial-Abi, 2016). These are how individual customer profiles are constructed, and it is one of the most strategically important assets of digital marketing (Trusov, Ma, & Jamal, 2016). It allows for companies to reveal consumer preferences, interests, and most importantly deliver appropriate ads to customers through targeted advertising, one of the latest developments in digital marketing (Trusov, Ma, & Jamal, 2016; Li, Lin, & Chiu, 2014).

The unique trait of targeted advertising, such as cookies, is that it allows for ads to follow a customer, who has shown interest in a brand or product, wherever he/she moves on the Internet. For example, if an individual searches for New York trips at Hotels.com, and continues to visit a social media platform, a news website, or a forum: the customer will find a New-York trip ad following him/her across the web (Ghosh, Mahdian, McAfee, & Vassilvitskii, 2012). According to 2016's European Union Survey, 27 % of EU businesses using digital marketing use behavioural targeting, which is based on information about users' past browsing activities recorded by cookies (Eurostat, 2016). The digital marketing has thus shifted communication from attaching to a fixed location, to attaching onto customers instead (Johnson, 2013).

Up to date, researchers have recognised a variety of benefits as well as risks with targeted advertising. The reported negative effects of targeted advertising are primarily concerned with the consumer experience. Johnson (2013), demonstrate that consumers can miss out on preferred ads when targeted advertising solely look on past behaviour instead of focusing on potential desires. Avoidance behaviour, scepticism, and rejection of the ads are also common consequences. Aguirre, Mahr, Grewal, de Ruyter, and Wetzels (2015) conclude that a reason for this might be the increasing perceived vulnerability by customers due to the exposure of behaviour and personal traits that the digital advancements contribute with. There is therefore a focus on how to increase acceptance of the advertising. To signal trust to the consumer upfront by providing information icons can offset these effects (Aquirre et al., 2015). It is also suggested by Schumann, von Wangenheim, and Groene (2014) that acceptance of advertising increases when a website highlights the mutual relationship between the user and the company, i.e. that consumers get to visit the website for free in exchange for the exposure of an ad.

On the other hand, Draganska, Hartmann, and Stanglein (2014) empirically substantiate the effectiveness of digital marketing on brand building, and specifically brand recall. Brands benefit from targeted advertising having greater click-through rates, increased profits (Johnson, 2013), a decline in advertising prices (Goldfarb, 2014; Johnson, 2013), and creating brand awareness (Chan, Leung, Peking, & Tse, 2015) and therefore generating brand equity. Brand equity refers to the value that is added to a product or service through associations made to a brand (Chaudhuri, 1995). Dahlén and Lange (2009) refers to brand equity as marketing efficiency and the degree to which consumers choose one brand instead of another. As such, no major research address any negative effects imposed on the brand due to targeted advertising, but rather on the consumer.

Nonetheless, recent events suggest the opposite. In December 2016, Kellogg Co. was in dire straits when the brand's advertising was placed on a right-wing site and therefore unintentionally associated with such (Tode, 2016). Customers criticised the event and the brand pulled out their advertising efforts. Allstate and Warby Parker were faced with the same problem short after, with their advertising present on the same site (Olenski, 2017). Likewise, the marketing service group Havas that spends £175m on digital advertising annually, with clients such as O2, Royal Mail, and BBC, pulled all its advertising spend from Google and YouTube. The decision was made after talks with Google, who could not provide reassurance that advertising displays could be controlled from blunders (Grierson, Topping, & Sweney, 2017). This concern rose following the events where brands such as Mercedes-Benz and Marie Curie were found next to terrorist and neo-Nazis group's content, consequently unintentionally funding such extremist groups (Glenday, 2017). This development leads to a need to anchor and academically examine a context's effect on brand equity.

### 1.1.1 Problem Discussion

As Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, and Wiertz (2013) argue, the consumer-brand relationship has shifted to an online environment, and it is therefore of importance to understand the dynamics of this constantly changing environment. The automation of targeted advertising that is used to decide which ad to expose, does not take into account of what type of website consumers roam. This leaves the ads uncontrolled in where they are placed (Keller, 2009). A consequence of appearing in an incongruent context, as demonstrated, brands run the risk of appearing to endorse, or being affiliated with unwanted content that customers may find objectionable. In the aforementioned incidents, the various brands were associated with unintended political and religious stances. However, as Keller (2009) highlights, a brand's marketing communications must be consistent across all activities, whether offline or online. Therefore, we deduce that the incongruent context might not have to be as extreme as in the presented cases, it can be a matter of subtler unintended perceptions that simply do not conform to the brand's messaging, and therefore its image.

Pursuant to Keller (2007), marketing communication activities have an impact on brand equity. It contributes to creating brand awareness, eliciting positive brand judgments or feelings, facilitating a strong consumer-brand connection, and/or, most concerning for this case: linking the right associations to the brand image. Brand image is the consumers' general perception of a brand (Herzog, 1963) and can vary in both character and strength. This variation can be a result of both internal and external factors (Aaker, 1997). While a strong brand image with high emotional meaning can minimise the consequences of an event, weaker brands with less emotional meaning can be more affected.

As Keller (2009) discusses, digital marketing and the usage of cookies make the consumer in charge of where the advertising is displayed, considering that the advertisement derives from the consumer's past behaviour. Therefore, Keller (2009) argues that an undesirable context may impact the brand equity of the brand. In fact, a deeper review of the phenomenon of targeted advertising reveals that there are instances and notions in the research that tap into this idea. Aguirre et al. (2015) show that negative outcomes from targeted advertising can be mitigated by posting advertising on trusted websites, showing that the content of the website matters in brand messaging. Li, Lin, and Chiu (2014) argue that the attention of viewers and the product impression can be significantly enhanced through social context endorsement. This was tested by adding an interactive possibility to targeted advertising in social media, allowing consumers to comment and like the advertisement (Li, Lin, and Chiu, 2014).

However, hardly any research has been done on the role of this new phenomenon as a direct impactor on brand equity. Like mentioned, different contexts of targeted advertising have shown to play a role for consumers. Likewise, previous studies have mainly focused on the negative effects of targeted advertising for a consumer. This at the same time as the brand perspective has mainly highlighted the positive impact targeted advertising can have on the brand, overlooking the connection between the negative experience a consumer has as a potential direct effect on the brand. Targeted advertising is shown to be an uncontrollable form of marketing communication that leads to brands being placed not only with unintended associations, but also in new context that are incongruent with the brand. The brands' advertisements are ergo placed out of, what we call, their congruent context. There is no empirical evidence in the literature that substantiates the effects of context congruence on brand equity. This poses a knowledge gap in existing theory and is a critical managerial issue.

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

In terms of the theoretical contribution, we distinguish a knowledge gap of how the context affects a brand, specifically how the brand-context congruence affects customer-based brand equity. Our study therefore aims at contributing to the literature with findings on how the context may affect the consumer's perceptions of the brand and consequently impact the brand equity. We further aim at testing the role the brand image plays in this dynamic between context congruence and brand equity. This way adding to the literature of brand management, and specifically brand image management. More specifically, we believe that our study will deepen the

knowledge on how the usage of targeted advertising might entail larger consequences than consumer's irritation towards a specific ad, and thus expand the knowledge of targeted advertising to a brand managerial level. This way integrating digital marketing with brand management literature.

Moreover, practical insights can be derived for communication practitioners and digital marketing practitioners. It can further develop the knowledge of using digital algorithms as a marketing activity, specifically how these can influence the customer and the brand. For organisations, the findings of this study can assist marketers in how to increase the effectiveness of digital marketing and guide decision-makers in whether targeted advertising could be a disadvantage or an advantage. This insight provides both a guideline for future research as well as indications for business managers. Enriching the understanding of what context creates a positive effect for customers is essential for businesses as it will allow managers to allocate resources towards the right contexts and therefore gain a more tactical online marketing strategy, meeting customers in the right contexts and ensuring to not appear in wrong contexts.

### 1.3 Research Purpose

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the impact congruence between brand and context has on customer-based brand equity depending on brand image. This is clearly important as marketing budgets continuously need to be used in the most effective way, adapting its use of digital marketing to new existing technologies, but without risking to erode brand equity.

*The purpose of the study is to examine if brand-context congruence has an effect on customer-based brand equity and whether brand image impacts this relationship.*

### 1.4 Research Questions

What are the differences in effects of context congruence on customer-based brand equity?

How does the brand image affect the relationship between context congruence and customer-based brand equity?

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Targeted Advertising and Context

In order to elaborate on the formation of a brand-context congruence, a clear understanding of the concept targeted advertising is required. This to gain a comprehension of the marketing activity from which the occurrence appears. Because of this, a definition is firstly provided, followed by focusing on the research area of how the context in which the targeted advertising appears have different effects. As described earlier, targeted advertising can be seen as companies' *"ability to discover details about individuals and reach them with advertising based on this information."* (Johnson, 2013, p.128). For example, companies can today target advertising by directly tracking which websites consumers visit. Schumann, von Wangenheim and Groene (2014) provide both a definition and a holistic view of the concept specific for the online environment. Therefore, we view this definition relevant to this study and will be used as the leading definition of targeted advertising.

"Targeted online advertising refers to **any form of online advertising** that is **based on information the advertiser has about the advertising recipient**, such as demographics, **current or past browsing or purchase behaviour**, information from preference surveys, or geographic information." (Schumann, von Wangenheim & Groene, 2014, p.2)

Within research of targeted advertising, studies conclude that the concept generally improve the profits of the companies. The first reason for this, Johnson (2013) argues is that targeted advertising raises the information accuracy when the desired consumers can be reached directly. The second argument of targeted advertising for companies is the cost efficiency. According to these studies, targeting advertising save on advertising expenditures considering that the consumers who will never be willing to buy the brand can be left out of the equation while the others can be more advertised towards (Iyer, Sobermann, & Villa-Boas, 2005; Esteban, Gil, & Hernández, 2001; Hernández-García, 1997). Iyer, Sobermann, and Villa-Boas (2005) also suggest that the use of targeted advertising increase the market price. The third argument is that targeted advertising may reduce competition between companies considering that differentiated products or services are targeted towards different segments and particular consumers (Iyer, Sobermann, & Villa-Boas, 2005; Galeotti & Moraga-González, 2004). Roy (2000) shows in his study that if companies apply targeted advertising, the whole market will be divided into mutually exclusive segments where each firm can act as a "local monopolist".

In contrast, consumers are more ambiguous towards targeted advertising than companies (Johnson, 2013; Clifford, 2009). In research, it has been argued that targeted advertising infringes on user privacy (Tucker, 2012; Toubiana, Narayanan, Nissenbaum & Barocas, 2010; Alreck & Settle, 2007), consumers experience feelings of discomfort and intrusiveness when the advertising is too close to their personal preferences (Van Doorn & Hoekstra, 2013; Tucker,

2012; White, Zahay, Thorbjornsen, & Shavitt, 2008). Aguirre et al. (2015) are also aligned with this argument when finding that the rates of drop-out increased immensely when consumers realised that their personal data were tracked and analysed without their consent. Two-thirds of the adults asked in a study were negative towards targeted advertising that was based on their earlier search and browsing behaviour (Turow, King, Hoofnagle, Bleakley, & Hennessy, 2009).

As can be seen in the definition, advantages and disadvantages, targeted advertising can be narrowed down into several concepts and techniques that all aim to serve the same purpose: reach consumers through using advertising based on information about the consumer. Because of the purpose of our study and considering that the brand-context congruence is the main area of research that will be tested, it is important to highlight that target advertising as a concept alone is not of interest and thus not measured. It is instead the consequences of targeted advertising that is studied, which is the placement of a brand in a potentially undesired context.

In digital advertising, it is important to select the best matched ads to the target page. This is strengthened by a number of studies that confirm that the relevance of advertisements to the context where the advertisements are situated has a direct impact on the number of users' ad-clicks (Chatterjee, Hoffman, & Novak, 2003). The context includes two elements: a stimulus context (i.e. editorial or programming material surrounding the advertisement) and viewing context (i.e. circumstances or conditions under which the advertising stimulus is perceived and evaluated (Coulter, & Punj, 1999). Still, the nature of targeted advertising is that the context cannot be chosen by the brand, as the advertising technique instead chooses a consumer to target (Johnson, 2013). And this relationship is referred to the congruence of the context and the advertisement.

### 2.1.1 Context and Congruence

Context and advertising has been mainly studied from two perspectives: brand and consumer. Chun, Song, and Hollenbeck (2014) apply theory of advertising in a specific context in conventional media to new digital media. The study is a comparison of advertising that takes context into account and advertising that does not take context into account online. The authors further examine the effect of digital contextual advertising on brand memory (brand recall and brand recognition) and attitudes towards the advertisement. The results of the study demonstrate that the digital contextual advertising enhances brand recognition and induces favourable attitudes towards the advertisement. The study also shows that consumers have higher recall rates and attitudes toward the brand when being exposed to less complex advertisements that take the context into account or when exposed to a complex, advertisement that do not take the context into account (Chun, Song, & Hollenbeck, 2014). In another study, also categorised as originating from a brand angle, Wang and Wise (2016) rather than looking at the type of advertising, focus on how the media content surrounding the advertisement influences the consumers' recognition of the advertisement. Their result shows that advertisements appearing before media content were recognised better than advertisements appearing after media when the emotional

arousal of media content was high. When the emotional arousal was low, advertisements appearing after the media were recognised better than when the ads appeared before (Wang & Wise, 2016).

The other research stream study consumers' response to targeted advertising in a context. Wojdyski and Bang (2016) study how readers of a news article paid attention to the article, paid attention to the advertisements, and were persuaded by the article contents. The authors argue that little research has been earlier conducted on how the characteristics of the display advertisements affect users' ability to process the main web page content. Two versions of an online news story about the dangers of texting while driving was presented to represent two different levels of argument strength. The results show that the readers were more likely to be persuaded by weak arguments when the news article was presented alongside relevant display ads than when the article was presented alongside less relevant ads. Readers also paid greater attention to relevant ads than irrelevant ads. The results of the research show that targeted advertising alongside a news story does not only have an effect of the attention paid to the news story but also influence the persuasiveness of the news story (Wojdyski & Bang, 2016).

However, more specifically for this study, where the interest lies in the match or mismatch between a brand's advertising and a specific context as perceived by the viewer; consumer behaviour in regard to advertising needs to be addressed. Aaker (1999) discusses the central understanding that brands are consumed by individuals as a means of self-expression. Consumers adapt to the brand personality of the brand they choose to consume and the brand that they perceive to mirror the self of the consumer. Demonstrating the well-known fact that brands encompass significance that goes far beyond the functional aspect of their products, but also entails a symbolic meaning (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; McCracken, 1986). Likewise, Jamal and Goode (2001) tap into the compatibility between a consumer and a brand, where they empirically concluded in the strong relationship of image congruity. Saying that self-image congruity with a brand results in significant brand preferences. Their findings went further and confirmed the notion that brands might be preferred based on their symbolic meaning rather than functional properties. This is significant knowledge for marketers and brand managers, as it illustrates the fact that the symbolism and the functionality of a brand exists as two separate concepts in the consumers' minds (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Recognising this distinction is especially important for brand strategy objections, seeing as not only does symbolic meaning, like the congruence to a consumer's self, result in brand preference (Jamal & Goode, 2001), but it also increases emotional brand attachment if performed correctly (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011).

Congruence research has not only been treated for consumer behaviour purposes, but also gained momentum for advertising and brand strategy aspects (Fan & Chang, 2010; Priester, Godek, Nayakankuppum, & Park, 2004). How an advertisement's impact is affected by its surrounding has garnered attention over the past decades. Multiple functions of the connection between advertising and the context they are placed in have been hypothesised to influence the advertisement's affective outcome. Among the ad-context effects that have been documented, much literature focuses on advertising involvement (Campbell & Wright, 2008; Priester et al.,

2004; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981), recall and recognition (Furnham & Goh, 2014; Zanjani, Diamond, & Chan, 2011; Moore, Stammerjohan, & Coulter, 2005; Sharma, 2000; Furnham, Gunter, & Walsh, 1998), and attitudes towards the advertisement (Lee & Shen, 2009; Campbell & Wright, 2008; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). These aspects often go hand in hand in the different studies.

This pool of research has reached mixed findings in the various contextual effects that have been investigated. The effectiveness of the advertisement, in terms of the aforementioned aspects, is clearly reported to be determined at least in part by the surrounding environment in which it is presented (Russel, 1998). However, there exists a deal of variation in the congruence findings, where some report that congruity yields better results for the brand while other report the exact opposite. Furnham, Gunter, and Walsh (1998) investigated the relationship between memory for televised advertising and the surrounding programme environment. The study examined humorous and non-humorous advertisements in an either humorous or non-humorous setting and the effect it had on recall. The results show that an incongruent match, i.e. humorous with non-humorous generated better recall. The authors discussed that such results could be explained by taking into consideration the mood of the viewer. Meaning that the viewer was set in a certain mood by the setting, either humorous or serious, which when met with an advertisement with the opposing mood resulted in a state of mind that is more attentive to the ad (Furnham, Gunter, & Walsh, 1998).

Similar findings are reported by Priester et al. (2004) and Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter (2005). Priester et al. (2004) investigate brand congruity in comparative advertising. The study argue that the incongruence prompted the recipients to thoughtfully examine the advertising content and consequently resulting in greater attention. Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter (2005) researched banner advertisements and the congruity with the website they were showed on, and also found that incongruity between the two produced more attention-catching content. Therefore, recall and recognition was positively affected by the incongruence. However, in their study, they further found that attitudes toward the advertising had more favourable outcomes under conditions of moderately congruent and congruent ad-website context. Osgood and Tanenbaum (1955) propose one explanation for the congruency effect on attitudes. In circumstances where two objects of judgments are associated, if the individual holds a pre-existing attitude towards one of the objects that is either positive or negative while the other is neutral, attitude towards the neutral object will be judged in the same manner as the first one.

There is also existing research that reports of circumstances where recall and recognition is positively affected by congruence rather than incongruence. This is mostly explained by the role of the recipient of the advertisement in the given moment, whether they are seeking for information or simply surfing the media (Furnham & Goh, 2014; Zanjani, Diamond, & Chan, 2011). In Furnham and Goh's (2014) study on program-advertisement congruity of health and safety advertisements, the authors find opposing results to the previous ones. The congruity between the ad and adjacent content increased the memory for matching context. However, they specifically found this to be true for viewers that were seeking for information and felt that

the ads provided them with relevant information. Similar results were reported by Zanjani, Diamond, and Chan (2011) who surveyed congruence in an online context using an e-magazine. The task-orientation of the viewer was once again attributed to be the decisive moderator of the match. Here seekers generally had lower recall and recognition of ads than surfers, due to their state of mind of looking for specific information. However, a high degree of congruity between the ad and its surroundings improved the memory of seekers significantly.

Xiong, Duff, and Yao (2015) project an alternative explanation to the increase in recall and recognition. They conducted an experiment with the TV-show 'The Big Bang Theory' and advertised alongside the show the same products as the ones in the show. The experiment results show that congruity had a positive effect, and the authors suggest an involvement explanation to this. Stating that higher involvement in the show made the ad more relevant to the viewer and therefore allowed for higher acceptance of the ad, which ultimately yielded higher recall and recognition. On the other hand, Lee and Shen (2009), propose processing load of the information as the cause for favourable conditions for congruity. When an individual is met with either congruent or incongruent information, they engage in an absorption process of the information that requires cognitive resource (Hastie, 1980). Based on this, Lee and Shen (2009) argue that the finding that congruent advertising messages for brands in joint advertising always have better effect on recall and recognition, whether it was under high- or low-processing load circumstances, was because it requires less processing load. At the same time, incongruent messaging violated the expectancies. They further examine the two processing load situations and the effect it had on attitudes towards the brand. In this case, they find congruent information leading to higher attitudes towards the brand and the advertising, indicating that when processing load is low, incongruent information can be processed just as easily (Lee & Shen, 2009).

However, referring to the previously problematized current events on ad-context effects: attention should be given to the responsibilities and the role the brand holds in maintaining the brand with advertising strategies. Russel (1998) theoretically propose that a successful product placement should firstly be done through a good fit to the context in which it is placed. She also demonstrates that the placement of an advertisement functions as a form of endorsement and should therefore be placed in a context that conveys an image preferred by the brand. As the placement is argued to directly link to the experience of the brand. On a similar note, Berry (2000) state the fact that brands need to maintain consistent messaging for branding strategy purposes. He reviewed in his article the strongest brands in the service sector and found that consistent messages in repetitive advertising is a key ingredient for positive brand equity effects.

Contrarily, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) and Campbell and Wright (2008) suggest that personal relevance of the advertisement to the viewers is the decisive factor for persuasion in advertising techniques. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) specifically found that when an individual holds a low personal involvement to the advertised content, the surrounding context such as the credibility and attractiveness of the message source is more important. Suggesting that the context is not as important when personal relevance is high. While Campbell and Wright (2008) specifically study repetitive advertisement in an online context, caused by for example targeted advertising,

and found that for ecommerce advertisements personal relevance can mitigate the negative effects.

## 2.2 Brand Image and Advertising

Brand image refers to consumers' general perception and impression of a brand (Herzog, 1963), shaped by the symbolic meaning of purchasing the product or service (Levy, 1999; Nöth, 1988). Keller (1993) evolves the concept by also including that brand image is the brand associations held in the consumer's memory of a brand. He sees the concept as a combination of the consumer's ability to memorise the brand and the perceptions the consumer have of the brand (Keller, 1993). Gardner and Levy (1955) describe the concept as a character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of a brand than many technical facts about the product. Other researchers use Gardner and Levy's previous research in their argument that brand image is a representation of human personality (Sirgy, Morris, & Samli, 1985) and reflects the consumer's characteristics (Martineau & Vicens Carrió, 1967) and the personification of a product or service (Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2014; Bettinger, Dawson Jr, & Wales, 1979). Even though, there are multiple definitions of the concept and the definitions vary among the research area, there are certain trends that can be distinguished. A vast majority of the definitions are based upon a consumer perspective and stress that the mental picture of the brand held by the consumers determines the image.

Based on consumers' perceptions, brand image can be divided into two main types – functional and symbolic brands (Bhat & Reddy 1998; Nan & Heo 2007; Park et al. 1986). In its core, functional brands satisfy generic needs that are more of a practical and immediate nature (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Keller (2003) argue that functional brands have more intrinsic advantages of product and service consumption and correspond to product-related attributes. These benefits are usually linked to fairly basic motivations such as physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1970). In its core, functional brands satisfy generic needs that are more of a practical and immediate nature, while symbolic brands encompass a status appeal, addressing needs such as those for self-expression, self-image identification, and prestige (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). In Keller's model of brand equity (1993), the symbolic benefit is generally the customer's need of social recognition, personal expression and esteem. Anderson and Jolson (1980) suggest that symbolic image can be expressed through the accessibility of the product, creating barriers to reduce exposure for non-targeted customers, such as language, barriers or chosen locations for distribution. Generally, symbolic brands are affected less by product attributes comparing to functional. There are multiple positioning strategies that involve communicating the brand image to consumers and consequently differentiate the brand from other brands in the category (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986). To position a desired brand image in the minds of the consumers is a key element in successful marketing strategy (Ries & Trout, 1986). Thus, brand image is a critical element in the company's activities to market its products or services (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994).

Advertising is argued to be suitable for enhancing symbolic and functional brand perceptions. Marketing of symbolic brands usually emphasise the psychological implications of the product, and consumers search for a favourable and self-congruent image (Mittal, 1989). Practically this marketing is brand focused where the personality of the brand is the key message (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, & Pervan, 2015). Another focus on communicating this type of brand image is, according to the same authors, to create an emotional attachment through integrating the brand into consumers' lives, in the same manner a person builds a human relationship. Functional brands' advertising is more focused on factual product attributes that provides the customer with a functional utility about which he/she makes a logical and objective purchase decision (Mittal, 1989). The focus for these brands is usually product specific, highlighting the advantages of one specific product rather than the brand in general. In other words, this type of brand image is typically adapting a product marketing strategy rather than brand marketing strategy. Because of this, typically the arguments emphasise differentiation from brands with similar products and clearly visible price discounts in the marketing communication (Li, Yang & Liang, 2015). Because of these fairly futile marketing arguments, there is a risk of the consumers' becoming price sensitive and thus not seeing the brand behind the product (Kotler & Keller, 2015). This generates customers with less brand loyalty to one specific brand but rather willing to turn to the brand that is perceived to have the best deal for them (Krishnamurthi & Raj, 1991).

Considering these aspects, a positive brand image has a strong correlation to consumers' perceptions of the brand which generates higher customer-based brand equity (Latif, Islam, Mdnor, Kongsompong, 2015). The appearance of symbolic and functional brand is also an important aspect where researchers' stress the importance of knowing what type of brand image the customer's perceive. As these perceptions are in the minds of the customers, more aspects than the actual brand can have an effect on the brand image (Meenaghan, 1995). Factors such as packaging (Greenland, 2016), relationship with the store brand where the product/service is distributed (Vahie & Paswan, 2006) and country-of-origin (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007) are all argued to have an effect on the image of a brand. Therefore, the concept has been considered an important aspect within the field of brand management and therefore taking into consideration in this study.

## 2.3 Customer-Based Brand Equity

Brand equity is strategy-based motivation to improve marketing productivity. Given higher costs, greater competition, and flattening demand in markets, organisations must seek to increase the efficiency of their marketing expenses (Keller, 1993). These marketing communication activities must be implemented in a way to deliver a consistent message and achieve strategic positioning (Keller, 2001). Brand equity has mainly been studied through two perspectives: financial brand equity and customer-based brand equity. Theory within financial brand equity refers to the brand as being an asset that generates profit by attracting new customers, retaining existing customers, and allowing the company to adapt a price premium strategy (Aaker, 1991). In customer-based brand equity the focus lies on the customers' perceptions of

the brand (Dahlén & Lange, 2009). Like previously mentioned, earlier research within the field of targeted advertising has focused on negative effects from a consumer perspective and positive effects from a brand perspective separately. Previous studies also argue that different contexts of advertising matter to consumers. Therefore, the customer-based brand equity perspective will be the theoretical basis for this study.

Keller (1993) suggests that customer-based brand equity is a result of differences in customer response as a consequence of customers' knowledge about a brand. This knowledge effects reflections, perceptions, and preferences of marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993). A brand is claimed to possess positive customer-based brand equity when the customers' response to marketing activities is more positive when the brand is shown, in comparison to when the brand is not shown (Keller, 1993). These positive reactions arise when a customer knows a brand and has beneficial associations to the brand in mind (Keller, 1993). Thus, brand awareness becomes the cornerstone of customer-based brand equity as familiarity with the brand is a necessary predisposition for further judgment of the brand. This is demonstrated in Keller's (1993) resonance-pyramid where brand awareness is at the bottom.

Aaker (1991) is more general in his definition of customer-based brand equity and views it as the value customers associate to a brand. Both Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991) argue that customer-based brand equity is created through embedded associations to the brand (Lehmann, Keller, & Farley, 2008; Aaker, 1996a). Anselmsson, Johansson, and Persson (2007) claim that Keller and Aaker principally emphasise the same aspect of brand equity in their theories, but the view of brand loyalty differs them from each other. Aaker suggest that loyalty is an explanatory factor to brand equity while Keller implies that brand loyalty is the consequence of strong brand equity (Anselmsson, Johansson, & Persson, 2007).

Earlier studies within the field, present multiple theoretical approaches to customer-based brand equity. Despite this extensive research, an agreement of the definition and operationalisation of customer-based brand equity remains ambiguous. A reason for this, Punj and Hillyer (2004) propose, is the broadly inclusive manner in which the concept is conceptualised. This stream of criticism questions the theoretical usefulness of the all-inclusive approach of the conceptualisation of customer-based brand equity (Barwise, 1993). The same author also questions if the concept adds value to what is already known about consumer behaviour through earlier constructs such as brand loyalty and attitude towards the brand (Barwise, 1993).

The other stream of criticism towards customer-based brand equity derives from a strategic management perspective where studies question the outside-in approach where brand equity originates from the brand knowledge of buyers. In their article, Burmann, Jost-Benz, and Riley (2009) propose an inside-out approach suggesting that the employees of an organisation represent an important stakeholder group and constitute the original source of brand equity. Kapferer (2008) also suggests that the brand identity leads the external brand image and associations. Because of this, the internal brand identity represents the basis for the external customer-based brand equity.

In research, a potential risk of the internet is that it potentially harms brand equity. The reason for this, researchers argue is the emergence of new business models and a large scope of available information (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). Some studies apply existing conceptualisations of brand equity by Keller (1993) or Aaker (1996a) while others depart from them (Christodoulides, de Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, & Abimbola, 2006). In their article Christodoulides et al. (2006) develop a measurement model named “online retail service brand equity”, with five sources: emotional connection, online experience, responsive service nature, trust, and fulfilment. The brand equity created is argued to be an interaction between consumers and an e-tail brands. The model is based on retail management and focuses on the retail process of greater sales and customer satisfaction. It does not include marketing communication activities.

Another proposed measurement model is “web equity” by Page and Lepkowska-White (2002). The authors argue that “web equity” can be created in a similar manner as offline product brand equity by influencing the main sources proposed by Keller (1993): brand image and brand awareness. Similar to Keller's brand equity theory brand loyalty is the outcome. To create brand awareness and brand image Page and Lepkowska-White (2002) propose several marketing communication activities that are specific to the online landscape. The authors stress word of mouth to be one these activities that can be developed by both marketers and non-marketers. More specific web-specific advertising tools are also mentioned like banners and web design features. The web equity model implies, similar to Keller's model from 1993, that brand loyalty is the outcome rather than brand equity.

An alternative model for measuring brand equity online was tested by Rios and Riquelme (2008) following Aaker's model of customer-based brand equity. In their study, they mediated the dimension of perceived quality into the term value associations in addition to the dimensions brand loyalty and brand awareness. In another study Rios and Riquelme (2010) uses Aaker's model in a similar manner and takes their earlier research's (Rios & Riquelme, 2008) result into account, testing the dimensions brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations from the original model but also implements the term of brand value rather than perceived quality. The authors argue that consumers make a judgement on value first where quality is one of the components of value associations (Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, Rocks, & Wirth, 2004; Zeithaml, 1988; Holbrook and Corfinan, 1985;). Rios and Riquelme (2010) also stress the importance of trust in the context of online (Pennanen, Tiainen, & Loumala, 2007; Ha, 2004), and acknowledge trust to be a source of brand equity for the online landscape. Aaker (1991) also stresses brand trust but in his model, the concept is included in the dimension of brand associations.

Based on the earlier research on brand equity in an online context, we will use Aaker's model of customer-based brand equity as a basis for the theoretical framework. Unlike the online retail service brand equity model, our study tests marketing communications activities, which is not included in this theory. Looking at the web equity model and the Keller's model of customer-based brand equity, the nature of this study does not aim to result in brand loyalty. Brand loyalty, we argue, evolves during a longer set of time and takes factors such as repeated purchase into account.

Aaker's theoretical framework within customer-based brand equity is entitled Brand Equity Dimensions and describe how brand equity creates value for brands from different assets (Aaker, 1991). The immaterial assets Aaker describes (1991), help the costumers to interpret and gather information about products and services. Furthermore, the assets can influence the perceived uncertainty surrounding a purchase and adds value by increasing the customer satisfaction when the product or service is being used. These assets create a model with five dimensions that together make up the basis for brand equity for customers and companies. The model of Aaker's brand equity dimensions can be found in appendix 1. In simple terms, by laying a more robust foundation for the dimensions of brand equity, a stronger brand equity can be created (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000).

As discussed by Arora, Raisinghani, Arora, and Kothari (2009), marketing efforts such as advertising, are cornerstones in the creation and maintenance of brand equity. They claim that advertising can produce a positive customer attitude towards a brand by bringing in "brand power, influences brand's market position, creates brand loyalty, and reinforces past brand purchases and experiences" (Arora et. al, 2009, p. 78). Likewise, Goldfarb, Lu, and Moorthy (2009) argue that advertising generates brand equity by living up to its brand promise. Additionally, Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2001) show that various marketing efforts can impact one or more of the specific dimensions, which then in turn has an influence on the brand equity. For example, high advertising expenditure and good store image has shown to have a positive effect perceived quality and also on brand equity. It is even argued that any marketing action has the potential to impact brand equity as it indicates the investment that is brought into the brand (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2001).

Through Aaker's five dimensions a combination of customer and market behaviours are created that together create brand equity. For the model Brand Equity Dimensions there are established questions based on the theory to operationalize and measure customer based brand equity. Aaker (1996b) however suggest that questions for each dimension should be adapted to the context. In this study we will consider two of Aaker's dimensions. This because the other three are not considered to be applicable to the study's experiment. Brand Loyalty occurs according to researchers (Grewal & Levy, 2011; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978) when customers use products or services of a brand repeatedly for years without replacing it by other brands in the same segment. Because this consistency is needed during a certain time span (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978), to fairly measure brand loyalty there is a need to conduct repeated measuring, which was not the aim of this study. Brand Awareness is defined as the consumer's ability to identify a brand under different conditions (Keller, 1993). Exposure of a brand thus generates brand awareness (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Considering this definition of brand awareness, previous research within contextual advertising studying the two underlying factors of brand awareness, and the nature of our study where we expose customers to the brand, we did find this dimension to be applicable in our study. The dimension Brand Assets consider other proprietary brand assets such as patents, trademarks and channel relationships (Aaker, 1991). These assets are according to Aaker (1991) composed differently depending on the specific brand. Because of this, it is recommended to conduct studies with exploratory natures, which is not the case in

this research (Aaker, 1991). The dimensions that will be further taken into consideration is therefore Perceived Quality and Brand Associations.

### 2.3.1 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality includes the customer's subjective impression of a product's quality in relation to its purpose (Aaker, 1996b). Kirmani and Rao (2000) discuss in their article the presence of uncertainty in the minds of consumers regarding the quality of the products offered. The authors suggest that this is caused by an information asymmetry where the seller have more information than the buyers. Therefore, brand name, product design, packaging, advertisements, and other brand identities are cues of information, communicating the unobservable quality. This type of elements can build favourable perceived quality in the minds of the consumers (Gill & Dawra, 2010).

Companies must be aware of how the consumers perceive the quality to meet the expectations of the product (Aaker, 1996b). In regards to this, perceived quality is not the actual performance of the product. In Aaker's model, it is not objective and measurable quality that is intended but a subjective judgement by the customer regarding the product's quality in relation to expectations. The dimension creates value by motivating purchase, differentiates the brand, creates a foundation to build product expansions, attracts interest from distributors and generates a possibility to increase the price (Aaker, 1991).

The perceived quality has an effect on the brand's positioning, if the brand is a premium or low cost brand and if it is a market leader (Jacoby, Olson, & Haddock, 1971). The positioning in turn affects the brand's possibility to withdraw a higher price as brands that are positioned as high quality can ask for a higher price as the customer's price picture is bigger (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Aaker (1991) argue that perceived quality also can be linked to the usage and frequency of purchase of the brand as a high degree of usage suggests that the customers find the brand of high quality. A higher price or a higher frequency thus leads to increased profits that can be reinvested in the company (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality can also generate long-term value when the established quality perceptions can be transferred to product- or brand extensions (Aaker, 1991). However, Aaker (1991) emphasizes in his article that the factors that underpin the assessment of perceived quality depends on the context.

To measure the dimension Aaker (1996b) suggests two measures: perceived quality and leadership. Perceived quality is measured by asking questions about price premium, price elasticity and brand use. The measure leadership is measured by questions concerning the popularity and if the brand is perceived as a leader (Aaker, 1996b). A potential risk of measuring this dimension is that it requires a competitor frame of reference. The measurement can for example be influenced in the consumer compares the product with all other products within the industry or if the comparison is done within a particular segment of the industry.

### 2.3.2 Brand Association

A core dimension of customer-based brand equity is the network of associations in consumers' memory (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller & Lehmann, 2003). It can be seen as the most substantial dimension as it lays the ground for both brand loyalty and customers' buying behaviour (Boisvert & Burton, 2011; Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995). It is also argued (Lee, James, & Kim, 2014) that a cluster of brand associations makes up the brand image which is how the consumers connect to the brand name in memory. Brand associations can therefore underpin the consumer's propensity to consider and buy the brand as these make the brand more likely to be thought of in a choice situation through giving the brand links to potential retrieval cues (Romanjuk, 2003; Nedungadi, 1990).

To build lasting and strong associations, the brand should be exposed in different channels and the associations should be based on multiple experiences (Keller & Lehmann, 2003). Because associations are both subjective and individual, they can look immensely different from person to person and go against the associations that the brand strives to evoke (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1991) suggests that associations can vary in strength, extent, product attributes, lifestyle, product category, origin, emotions, symbols, and use.

The relationship between the attribute and the brand is moderated by competitor brands, in the sense that these can interfere with retrieval and provide alternatives to reduce the propensity to select the brand (Aaker, 1991). Associations can therefore prevent customers from trying or leaving the brand in favour of a competitor (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Thus, the brand associations work as a barrier against competitors (Aaker, 1991). Because of this, marketers try to link a brand to strong, favourable associations (Keller & Lehmann, 2003) to keep ahead of competitors and generate a differential effect on consumer behaviour.

In his article, Aaker (1991) presents different ways which brand associations create customer-based brand equity.

1. The first way describes associations as a help-process to gather and clarify information. Associations reduce the time and cost to collect information at the purchase by simplifying customers' recall of the brand.
2. Furthermore, Aaker (1991) suggest that associations create value by providing a basis for differentiation and are used to distinguish brands. Unique associations create a distinctive competitive advantage for brands as they make it difficult for competitors to imitate (Aaker, 1991).
3. The third way by which brand associations create value is that they, like the dimension perceived quality, affect the motives for purchase.
4. Positive emotions and attitudes towards a brand is the fourth way by which associations create brand equity (Aaker, 1991). At the point of usage of the product, positive emotions can for example make the product taste better or feel more exclusive.
5. The fifth way, which brand associations create value is that they lay a foundation for brand extensions and brand expansions (Aaker, 1991).

Brand associations are argued to be largely product specific and measures should be customised for the unique characteristics of specific brand categories (Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Bearden & Etzel, 1982). The dimension brand association, Aaker (1996) proposes, is measured by looking at three perspectives: brand-as-product (value), brand-as-person (personality) and brand-as-organisation (organisational associations).

Brand value includes the company's value proposition which is considered by examining whether the brand is perceived as affordable and if there are reasons to buy the brand instead of competitors. Comparing value to the earlier perceived quality dimension, the latter has a higher association to prestige and respect that a brand hold while value relates more to functional benefits and the practical utility of buying and using the brand. These traits are usually not strongly associated to symbolic brands as research suggests that the consumption of symbolic brands is seldom justified by a high sense of value.

The second element of associations, brand personality can in some cases provide a link to the brands emotional and self-expressive benefits as well as a basis for the relationship between the customer and the brand and the differentiation. This is especially significant in industries where the brands have only minor physical differences. The brand personality includes if the brand is perceived as interesting and if an image exists of the type of person who uses the brand. One potential problem with using this element, is that it can be considered to be stable and therefore not be affected by a one-time occurrence of change. On the other hand, symbolic brands are normally positioned with strong personality traits making this element of high relevance to investigate further.

Organisation associations refer to if the brand is perceived to have a concern for customers, being innovative, striving for high quality, being successful, having visibility, being oriented toward the community, and being a global player. (Aaker, 1996). These associations are usually important bases of differentiation and choice. Just like the personality element, organisational associations can be static and not be affected by a one-time happening.

### 2.3.3 Complementary Measures of Customer-Based Brand Equity

In addition to theoretical models, marketers use industry models to measure customer-based brand equity. Complementing industry models are found in many cases to be more applicable and connected to reality in comparison to the theoretical frameworks (Ruževičiūtė & Ruževičius, 2010). From a compilation of measurements that Lehmann, Keller and Farley (2008) present, we have chosen to include three Brand Metrics to complement Aaker's customer-based brand equity theory. The measurements that has been included in the study is Esteem, Acceptability and Overall Attitude.

The brand metric Esteem come from the Young & Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator (BAV). This industry model seeks to establish a measure of brand equity that is independent of category context. The measurement of Esteem aims to examine the extent which consumers like a brand and hold it in high regard. Esteem is driven by two factors: perceived quality, same dimension as Aaker's, and the perceived popularity of a brand (Lehmann, Keller, & Farley, 2008). As Esteem and the dimension Perceived Quality is said to measure similar parts of customer-based brand equity, we thought it to be adequate to complement Perceived Quality with this industry dimension to ensure that the concept is covered.

Acceptability is taken from Research International's Equity Engine and derive from the construct of Approval, this construct is described as the status the brand brings among a wider social context (Lehmann, Keller, & Farley, 2008). Senecal and Nantel (2004) propose that acceptability originates from multiple sources, including friends and experts. This dimension we decided to be appropriate for our experiment considering symbolic brands' status appeal (Bhat & Reddy, 1998).

The measurement Overall Attitude derive from the same industry model and aims to look at the customer's general opinion about a brand. Attitude is one of the most widely examined construct in consumer behaviour (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001) and other researchers argue that a person's self-reported brand value is driven by their attitude towards the brand (Dyson, Farr, & Hollis, 1996). Aaker (1991) argues that attitude should enhance the development of Brand Equity and in Keller's conceptual model, attitude is a part of Brand association concept.

Advertising as a marketing communication has been shown to be significantly related to brand attitude (Suh & Youjjae, 2006). Hwang, Yoon, and Park (2011) found in their study that response toward advertising is positively related to the website attitudes, while the latter positively influence brand attitude. Consumers' level of involvement in the purchasing decision is also a factor related to the brand attitude. Advertisements in low-involvement conditions has a bigger effect on brand attitude considering the feelings evoked play a bigger role (Homer, 1990). Considering these arguments, we reason that attitude is relevant to complement the dimension of Brand Association.

### 3 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The below figure shows the relationship of the reviewed literature that we will study. As presented in the review, context congruence, customer-based brand equity, and brand image have received much examination in the past. However, few, if any, tests of the concepts in relation to each other have been reported. There is no doubt that any marketing efforts that are employed by a brand has the potential to affect brand equity (Arora et al., 2009; Goldfarb, Lu, & Morthy, 2009; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991).

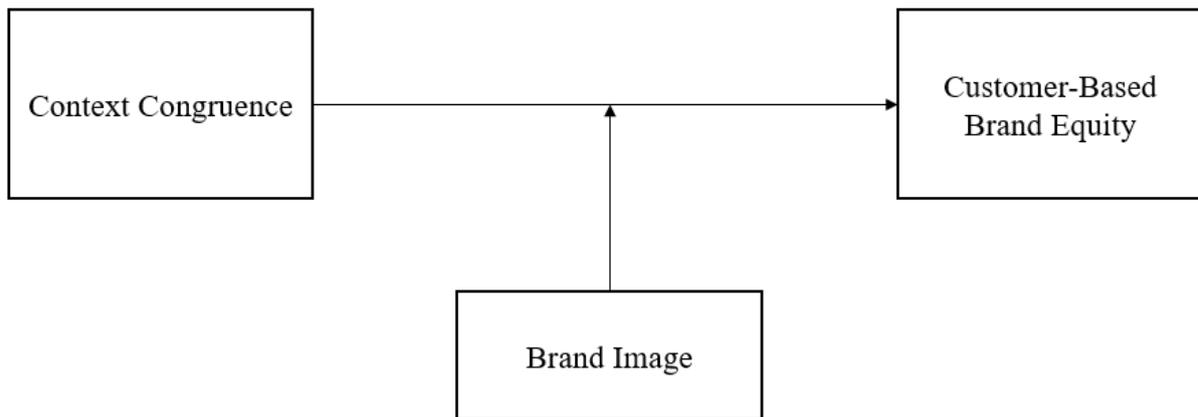


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

As shown in the literature review, many different results and effects have been reported on targeted advertising and congruence. This pool of research has reached mixed findings on the effect that incongruent or congruent matches may have. Still, it is a common understanding that the two conditions do generate some kind of effect on the brand (Furnham, Guner, & Walsh, 1998; Russel, 1998). Furthermore, it is argued that advertising is a primary tool to develop and nurture brand equity (Arora et al., 2009). Thus, just like Jamal and Goode (2001) demonstrated that the compatibility between a consumer and a brand has a strong relationship to brand preference, we suggest that the compatibility between a brand and a website has an impact on customer-based brand equity. This additionally derives from the previously problematised current events of brands being situated on undesired websites as a consequence of the uncontrollable mechanism of targeted advertising.

We therefore hypothesise a first set of six hypotheses that suggest that a congruent context generates better outcomes on customer-based brand equity and its dimensions. Adding brand image to the equation, which generates different meanings for consumers', we posit that a congruent context for a symbolic brand image has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity and its dimensions. This due to the fact that symbolic brands and the meaning attached to such a brand, namely the prestige, self-expression, and self-image, is valued highly by consumers (Bhat & Reddy, 1998).

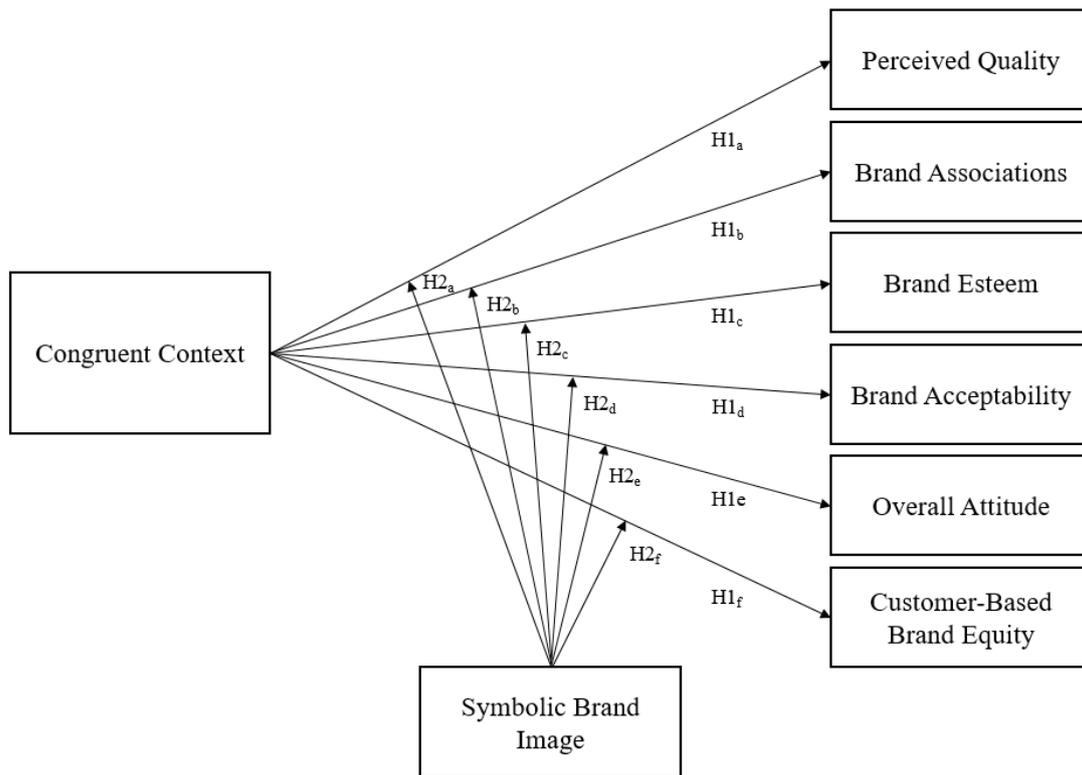


Figure 2. Theoretical framework

**H1a:** A congruent context has a positive effect on perceived quality compared to an incongruent context.

**H2a:** A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and perceived quality.

**H1b:** A congruent context has a positive effect on brand associations compared to an incongruent context.

**H2b:** A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand associations.

**H1c:** A congruent context has a positive effect on brand esteem compared to an incongruent context.

**H2c:** A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand esteem.

**H1d:** A congruent context has a positive effect on brand acceptability compared to an incongruent context.

**H2d:** A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand acceptability.

**H1e:** A congruent context has a positive effect on overall attitude compared to an incongruent context.

**H<sub>2e</sub>**: A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and overall attitude.

**H<sub>1f</sub>**: A congruent context has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity, compared to an incongruent context.

**H<sub>2f</sub>**: A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and customer-based brand equity.

## 4 Methodology

This study examined the effect of the brand-context congruence online has on brand equity. In line with targeted advertising, two brands were chosen to be displayed either in a congruent context or incongruent. The choice of subject is based on our interest in the recent events of companies starting to draw back their digital marketing activities because of the nature of targeted advertising providing a risk that brands might be affiliated with unintended brands or material online. Because of this, we want to anchor these practical implications in an academic reasoning, to further gain a deeper understanding of the happenings.

A quantitative method was applied where data was collected through a digital questionnaire that thereafter was analysed to measure the effect in customer-based brand equity as the dependent variable. An experimental research design was chosen to be able to compare the four conditions as four groups. The research has not strived gaining a generalisable result, but rather experimentally examine if one can determine statistical differences in the effect on customer-based brand equity.

To explore the hypothesised brand-context congruence effect, a couple of stages of pre-studies were required to develop suitable materials and manipulations in the experiment. To control for factors that could impact the experiment, we decided to limit the study to one product category. We set for portable speakers as there is a wide range of price classes and they are readily available and consumable by both females and males. The pre-stages tests were conducted to aid in developing the four scenarios of the experiment, establishing the two brands for the study as well as the contexts (websites) in which they were to be displayed.

### 4.1 Research Philosophy

The concept of research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. In this study, we aimed to develop knowledge in the field of digital branding strategy. To achieve this, we had to make assumptions regarding the realities we encountered in the research (ontological assumptions) and human knowledge (epistemological assumptions). These assumptions therefore shaped how we formulate research questions, the methods used and how the findings were interpreted (Crotty, 1998). By being aware of these assumptions we can actively shape the relationship between the philosophical position and how the research is understood (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015).

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). Considering the nature of targeted advertising and its risk of appearing in undesired contexts, we considered it to be appropriate to adopt an objectivist ontological perspective to develop an understanding of the phenomenon. Objectivism incorporates the assumptions of natural sciences, that the social reality we research is external to us and other (social actors). Objectivism embraces realism which considers social entities to exist independently of how we

think of them, label them or are aware of them. In other words, in the central question of ontology, whether social entities need to be perceived as objective or subjective, we consider them to be objective (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015).

To test our purpose, we chose to take on the epistemological position of adapting a natural scientific method, we assumed that there is a truth in the effects of congruence, but this truth is obscure. Our set of assumptions builds on internal realism, suggesting that research in the social science can be conducted by relying on research principles dominant in the natural sciences while still understanding that human behaviour and nature are prone to subjectivity inherent to humans (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). Because of the assumption of realism, we take a positivistic research position (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). We focused on discovering observable and measurable facts and regularities that led to the production of credible and meaningful data. As researchers, we did not interfere with the phenomenon being studied but rather isolating the phenomenon and comparing it in an experiment. Predictions were made prior to the study that was based on previously observed and explained realities. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the result of the study is designated to depict an objective reality that can be measured. If the study was repeated, we can expect that the results should give the same indication and tendency even though the exact result varies. Therefore, the constructed hypotheses can be empirically tested and either be accepted or rejected depending on the study's outcome (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

## 4.2 Research Strategy

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the research strategy is the framework which the researcher uses during the collection and analysis of data. The choice of research design will provide a specific direction of procedures within a study for researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This because it outlines the framework of necessary steps for obtaining the information needed. The research strategy is indicative for the research because it provides a decision basis for the style and choice of research design. It enables the researcher to answer the study's research questions by electing an appropriate research design for the purpose of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### 4.2.1 Deductive Approach

This study examines the relationship between the theoretical framework of customer-based brand equity and the data collected. The study therefore was derived from grounded theories that were deducted into hypotheses, thereafter translated into researchable entities and tested empirically through the collection of primary data. For this causal study, the choice of a deductive approach has been central to examine if the congruence between brand and context has an effect on brand equity.

The deductive approach constitutes of the development of assumptions based on existing theories and forming a research plan to test the assumption (Wilson, 1999). Bryman and Bell (2011) emphasise that a deductive approach is a linear process that use knowledge within a subject and theoretical consideration as the basis of the research and from that, hypotheses can be formulated to reach conclusive findings. Bryman and Bell (2011) lists these six sequential steps through which a deductive approach will progress:



Figure 3. The six steps of deductive research (Bryman & Bell, 2011)

When deductive method is applied, the researchers formulate a set of hypotheses that need to be tested using relevant methodology. As deductive reasoning follows a logical course precisely and if the premises are accepted, the conclusion must necessarily also be accepted. If for example new premises are added to the argument, the conclusion must still follow. Arguments begins with theory and generates a new assumption (Beiske, 2007). The assumption is tested through the observations and finally accepted or rejected (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These arguments can also be described as a general to specific (top-down) reasoning process. Bryman and Bell (2011) emphasise the importance of the deductive research as well as formulating hypotheses that operationalise the theory in a competent manner. The theoretical concepts need to be operationalised in a way that enables facts to be measured, be documented with specifications on how the data was collected and state how the study is positioned (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This to enable replications in the future.

#### 4.2.2 Quantitative Study

There exist earlier academic studies that define and study congruence. The earlier research has not however studied the congruence between brand and context and its brand equity effects. This study aimed to tested an effect through a comparison of groups exposed to brand-context incongruence and brand-context congruence, and customer-based brand equity and if there are difference considering the brand's brand image. Because of this and the fact that a deductive approach was utilised including hypotheses-testing, the chosen strategy was to conduct quantitative research.

Quantitative method is common within the deductive research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The authors argue that a deductive approach is utilised as the process helps to develop research. Bryman and Bell (2011) describe that the way through which gathered data is presented and analysed, is one way to distinguish quantitative research from qualitative. While the

former presents hard and factual data with the help of statistics and numbers, the latter provides deeper insights through for example interviews where research gives priority to the spoken word rather than collecting numbers (Creswell, 2014).

The benefits of quantitative method are that it allows more accurate estimates, as well as enabling the identification of relationships, and relations between studied concepts. In those cases, where a concept covers more than one measure, Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that each measure should be considered independently and as a whole. For this study, customer-based brand equity had multiple measures in terms of dimensions. By considering all of these dimensions individually and as a whole, we could draw conclusions about the brand-context congruity's effect on each dimension and on customer-based brand equity.

### 4.2.3 Causal Research

In accordance with the purpose, the study was chosen to be conducted as causal research. This choice was done to study if there was a relation between the two forms of brand-congruence and brand image, and customer-based brand equity. In this case, the forms of was the two categorical independent variable, brand image was the moderating variable and customer-based brand equity the dependent variable. We wanted to explore if the manipulated independent variables had an effect on the dependent variable. An assumption of correlation between these concepts and customer-based brand equity was deduced on the basis of existing theory within the field, and stated as the study's hypotheses.

Causal research is within the category of conclusive research, considering its attempt to reveal a cause and effect relationship between variables. Causal studies focus on analysis of a situation to explain the patterns of relationships between variables (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). Malhotra (2010), and Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that causal research cannot occur until there is enough knowledge on the topic so that predictions of subsequent happenings can be drawn with a considerable amount of accuracy. The research was characterised by causal factors that were studied to see which effects that arose as a result of a relationship. This type of research is preoccupied with attempts to connect ideas and determine cause-and-effect relationships (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The advantage of causal research is that it can play an instrumental role in terms of identifying reasons behind a wide range of processes and therefore assess the impacts of changes on existing processes (Samii, 2016). This type of research can also enable the possibility of replication, seeing that this type of research is associated with considerable high level of internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The disadvantage of causal research is that even though cause-and-effect relationships can be distinguished, it can derive from coincidences. In some cases, even though a correlation between two variables can be established, it can be difficult to distinguish which variable is the cause and which is the impact (Holland & Thayer, 1986).

### 4.3 Research Design

To fulfil our research purpose and test the hypotheses, an experiment was conducted. An experimental design is conducted through manipulating the independent variable in order to see if this has an influence on the dependent variable (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The same authors emphasise that absolute experiments are rare in business administration research because independent variables are usually hard to manipulate. This study’s independent variable however had relatively good conditions to be manipulated enabling the application of experimental research design (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Experimental designs can be classified into different types, where our study we argue is true experiment type of design. According to Malhotra (2010) this type of design is characterised by a random assignment of respondents to the different experimental groups containing different conditions. This is in accordance of our study.

The overall design of the experiment was a 2 x 2 between-subjects design, with congruence as the between-subjects factor, with two levels: congruent and incongruent. Additionally, there were two brand images for each level, i.e. a total of four conditions. Experimental subjects, in this case respondents, were allocated to experimental groups where each represent different types of independent variables. After being assigned to an experimental group, the respondents received the respective manipulation, in this case being exposed to one of the two brands with one of the two contexts. After this the dependent variables were measured by asking the respondents to respond to the same questionnaire where they were asked to take a stand towards statements regarding their perceptions of the brand. Their standpoint towards the statements were intended to measure the brands’ customer-based brand equity. A detailed outline of the experimental groups is displayed in the diagram below:

Table 1. Experimental groups

		<i>Context Congruence</i>	
		<b>Congruent</b>	<b>Incongruent</b>
<i>Brand Image</i>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<u>Group 1</u> Symbolic brand in congruent context	<u>Group 2</u> Symbolic brand in incongruent context
	<b>Functional</b>	<u>Group 3</u> Functional brand in congruent context	<u>Group 4</u> Functional brand in incongruent context

Bryman and Bell (2011) state that classic experimental design is characterized by certain features. The first element is that a random distribution of respondents to each test group has taken place. The randomisation was attained through a digital URL-link. This link randomised and forwarded the respondents to a new sets of intermediates where half of the respondents were directed to an incongruent intermediate and half were randomly directed to the congruent intermediate. This randomisation was attained as the person’s device, when following the url-link, generated a random decimal value between 0 and 1. This value was rounded off to closest whole

number. If the value was rounded down to zero, the respondent was sent to the surveys with the incongruent scenarios. If the value was rounded up to one the respondent was sent to the two congruent scenarios. The second step followed a similar randomisation took place where the respondent's decimal value was rounded either up or down and therefore sent the person to either survey 1,2,3 or 4. Because of this, it was not every fourth person who was sent to each survey but a complete randomisation was conducted. Bryman and Bell (2011) emphasise that a random distribution of respondents improves the internal validity and strengthen the trustworthiness of a causal link. The randomisation method is displayed in the diagram below:

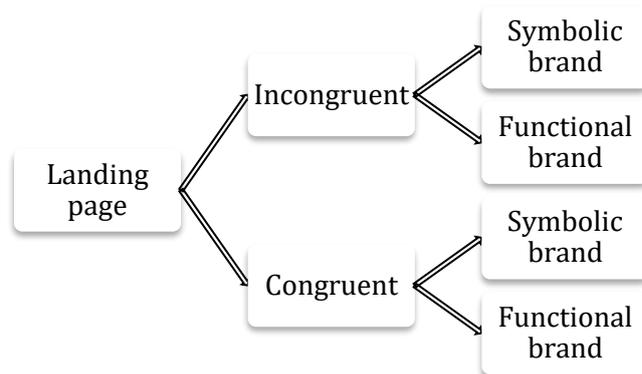


Figure 4. The randomisation of manipulations

Classic experimental design, according to Malhotra (2010), measures the dependent variable before and after a manipulation is introduced. After this, the difference between the before and after measurements between the groups is analysed. We did not do this because we did not want to influence the respondents before the manipulation, considering that the manipulation might be interpreted differently because of this. Testing the respondents' perceptions before the manipulation would not affect the overall results of how different brand-context congruence matters for customer-based brand equity, thus unnecessary for the study's purpose. Because of these reasons, our experiment is classified as a posttest-only type of true experiment.

Our experiment does not include control groups, in this case a brand image without brand-context congruence. The reason for this is because there is already previous research that states that a symbolic brand image has a positive impact on customer-based brand equity. Because of this, we take this assumption into account and rather investigate if the brand-context congruence can have an effect on this. Therefore, our purpose is not to test whether brand image has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity but rather comply with this. Secondly, looking at the occurrences of companies, we argue that it is more interesting for researchers and for practitioners to elaborate this rather than just stating that it is negative/positive for a brand to appear in a context. By looking at how different brand-context congruence effects customer-based brand equity we can contribute to more understanding. A result of this argument, is that we look and compare four different experimental groups and not a control group which enables us to gain a greater understating of different brand-context congruences.

## 4.4 Variable Measurement and Scaling

### 4.4.1 Measuring Scales

For the questions regarding how the respondents perceive the marketing and the questions regarding customer based brand equity, we adopted a seven point Likert scale. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), Likert scale is a suitable measurement scale to examine opinions and thoughts, which is desirable for the current study. This scale is of close-ended format with typically five-point or seven-point response alternatives. The respondents were here presented with a statement they were asked to rate their level of agreement with on seven-point scale. The upper part of the scale constitutes of degrees of agreeing responses while the lower part constitutes of degrees of not agreeing responses. The seven-point scale has been shown to reach the upper limits of the scale's reliability (Likert, 1932). The Likert scale was then in our study interpreted as an ordinal scale and encoded as value 1 being "strongly disagree" and value 7 as "strongly agree". The middle number and therefore the neutral option will be encoded with the value 4.

The demographic questions regarding age and gender had a different measuring scales in comparison to the other questions of the study. To measure age, the highest scale of measurement ratio scale, was used while for gender nominal scale, the lowest level of measurement, was adopted.

### 4.4.2 Operationalisation - Dependent Variable

The operationalisation of the dependent variable customer-based brand equity was conducted in the study by a compilation of the questions for each dimension that Aaker (1996b) and Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2001) presents. Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that operationalisation is the procedure of creating theoretical and abstract concepts more manageable to handle in the data collection. It is a valuable tool that allows consistency when interpreting the data which consequently can be simplify the process of measuring and handling theoretical concepts and thus increase the level of replicability in future research (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The theoretical model Aaker's Brand Equity Dimensions has from earlier research, accepted questions that operationalise the concept. All of the questions are aimed to measure customer-based brand equity was retrieved from literature. Aaker (1996b) stresses that the questions should be adapted to the context. In line with Aaker's (1996b) recommendations, we included the dimensions we found to be applicable- Perceived Quality and Brand Association. Like mentioned earlier in the literature review, three of Aaker's model Brand Equity Dimensions were eliminated. This was due to the nature of this study.

Examining the given questions for each dimension, especially the “organisation associations” under Brand Association where there are questions regarding the employees, programs, strategies and heritage (Aaker, 1996b). These questions were all relationship-oriented, making the problematic to test solely at one occasion as relationship with customers is more regarding interaction during a longer period of time. Another set of questions that were eliminated were questions regarding value in the same dimension. The reason for this was the choice of examining symbolic and functional brands, including a value dimension might result in misleading outcome considering that the price of the two brands was immensely different. Aaker also argues in his theory that the questions regarding value are mainly applicable on value-brands, brands using price as a competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996b) and not on premium brands.

In the same manner were three measures of Brand Metrics included and adapted to the context of the study. The Brand Metrics that were added to the study include Esteem, Acceptability and Overall Attitude from Lehmann, Keller and Farley (2008). This was done to gain a deeper understanding of the brand-context congruence effect on customer-based brand equity. The measuring is conducted by replacing each concept with a measurement that creates an indicator of the concept (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The indicators of customer-based brand equity constituted of the degree of which the respondents agreed to statements regarding the brand within the different dimensions of customer-based brand equity. Presented below is a demonstration of how the study has treated measures deriving from Aaker’s Brand Equity Dimensions and the complementary brand equity measures.

Table 2. Operationalisation of concepts

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Theoretical Reference</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Perceived Quality	Aaker (1996b)	Perceived Quality	In comparison to alternative brands, this <i>has high quality</i> <i>is the best</i> <i>has consistent quality</i>
		Leadership	In comparison to alternative brands, this <i>one of the leading brands</i> <i>growing in popularity</i> <i>innovative</i>
Brand Associations	Aaker (1996b)	Personality	<i>This brand has personality</i> <i>This brand is interesting</i> <i>I have a clear image of the type of person who would use the brand</i>
	Yoo and Donthu (2001)	Differentiation	<i>This brand is different from competing</i> <i>This brand is basically the same as competing brands</i>
		Associations	<i>Some characteristics of [brand] come to my mind quickly</i> <i>I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of [brand]</i> <i>I have difficulty in imagining [brand] in my</i>
Brand Esteem	Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2008)	Esteem	<i>I hold the brand in high regard</i> <i>The brand has earned a strong reputation</i> <i>This brand respects me</i>
Brand Acceptability	Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2008)	Acceptability	<i>You never go wrong selecting this brand</i> <i>This brand is accepted by friends, family, and associates</i> <i>Almost no one dislikes this brand</i>
Overall Attitude	Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2008)	Attitudes	My opinion of this brand is: <i>bad - good</i> <i>negative - positive</i> <i>undesirable - desirable</i> <i>unfavourable - favourable</i> <i>I have positive associations with this brand</i> <i>When I think of this brand, I have positive thoughts</i>
Customer-Based Brand Equity	Aaker (1996b); Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2008)	Brand Equity	A cumulative score of all items

#### 4.4.1 Operationalisation - Independent Variable

The context congruence (incongruent or congruent) is the study's categorical independent variable. This was operationalised in the study by asking questions about congruence. Up to date, researchers have not yet developed any brand image context-congruence scale measurements.

Therefore, Sirgy, Grewal, Mangleburg, Park, Chon, Clainbone, Johar, & Berkman's (1997) self-congruity scale was adapted with minor changes to make it fit to the current study. Following the work of Parker (2009), who researched brand user-imagery congruence, the respondents were asked to characterise brand congruence with the website it was displayed on, repeating the following procedure:

Take a moment to think about [Brand x]. Think about the kind of person who typically uses [Brand x]. Imagine this person in your mind and then describe this person using one or more personal adjectives such as stylish, classy, masculine, sexy, old, athletic, or whatever personal adjective you can use to describe the typical user of [Brand x]. Now do the same for the brand of the website that [Brand X] is displayed on.

Once you have done this, indicate your agreement or disagreement to the following statement: [Brand x] is consistent with the brand of the website.

The last part of the instructions was adjusted for the current experiment, matching the brand with the website rather than the brand with the self-image of a respondent.

#### 4.4.2 Operationalisation - Moderating Variable

The moderating variable that effects the relationship between the context congruence (IV) and customer-based brand equity (DV) is in our case the brand image. This was operationalised in a pre-study using Bhat and Reddy's (1998) items for brand symbolism, we could rank the symbolic value in each brand and choose appropriately. Respondents were to agree or disagree with these statements developed by Bhat and Reddy (1998, p. 35):

1. People use (brand) as a way of expressing their personality.
2. (Brand) is for people who want the things in life.
3. A (brand) user stands out in a crowd.

### 4.5 Sampling

The population for this study was based on the psychographic segmentation of activities, interests and opinions. This is defined by an individual's psychographic profile. We describe the population of this study to be digital consumers. These are people who involve online activities in their customer journey. This can for example be searching for more information about the product/service on a website, read reviews, or make purchases online. Digital consumers are because of this, exposed to digital algorithms and cookies and therefore relevant to our study of this subject. Moreover, these digital consumers needed to be present in countries where the brands and the websites in the experiment could be accessed. The population is the entire collection of all observations of interests as defined by the researcher. Researchers must define the entire group about which they want to make judgements (Burns & Burns, 2008). Because of

the large size of the defined population, it is not possible or practical to measure every single person or element. A sample must therefore be selected to represent the population (Burns & Burns, 2008).

As the population of the study was wide it was characterised by a high level of heterogeneity and as the experiment and questionnaire were distributed online, there was a need to obtain a bigger sample size (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Wilson Van Voorhis and Morgan (2008) argue that when computing for group differences in for example a t-test or an ANOVA-analysis, there is a need for 30 respondents per cell for 80% power, the probability of correctly rejecting a false null hypothesis. In our case where there were four different cells, we would need to obtain  $4 \times 30 = 120$  respondents.

Our study used a non-probability sampling method, which according to Levy and Lemeshow (2008) is a selective approach rather than a random. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), non-probability sample can both save time and money since respondents that are relevant to the study can easily be targeted. It also minimises the risk of obtaining respondents that are irrelevant to the specific research. In non-probability sampling the sample has not been chosen randomly where each entity within the population has equal chance of being selected (Malhotra, 2010). Because of this, we cannot claim that the result of our study is representative of the entire population, and therefore we cannot claim that our result is generalizable. This is one disadvantage of using a non-probability sample according to Bryman and Bell (2011). Because a non-probability sampling was applied, a corresponding sub-sampling technique needed to be employed. These techniques exist in order to specify the process of gathering the data and ease the possibility of replication.

For the collection of respondents, we did a judgement call and selected respondents who we knew to be digital consumers. This is a convenience sample strategy. The next step of our sampling was to ask these respondents to ask other respondents whom they knew also were digital consumers. These were then asked to invite people they knew to be digital consumers. By doing this, we obtained a snowball sample where we could reach respondents beyond our own knowledge.

## 4.6 Data Collection Method

Because of the new context that was applied in the study, trying to recognise a congruence effect, there was little existing data on the topic. Therefore, new data collection was desired. The study's analysis thus emanated from primary data specific for this study. This meant that the collected information's validity needed to be tested. Quantitative data collections methods are based on mathematical calculations in different formats. Lundahl and Skärvad (1999) state that primary data is data that is collected from people for the study's specific research purpose.

A digital questionnaire was chosen as data collection method. This was chosen because of the increased speed of data collection and limited resources. The answers were obtained through

close-ended questions with single choice answer options. The respondents were presented with statements which they rated their level of agreement. Synodinos (2003) argue that the response choice should be carefully evaluated beforehand to determine whether open-ended answers, where the respondents phrase their own replies, or close-ended answers where the respondents are to select on or more stated answers is the preferred alternative. Open-ended questions should be employed where answers are not foreseeable, responses can be influenced by stated choices, or other situations where the validity can be affected (Peterson, 2000). As for the close-ended questions, Synodinos (2003) stress the importance that the response alternatives are comprehensive and not overlap.

The questionnaire was presented after one of the four conditions that was, as previously mentioned, randomised to the respondent. The respondents were asked to pay attention to the targeted advertising and then answer the questions by themselves. Therefore, it was of high importance that the questions were easy to follow and answer. This should be a focal point when designing questionnaires in order to minimise errors and misunderstandings of the topic, both in the case of respondents' interpretation of the questions and the researchers' interpretation of the results (Bee & Murdoch-Eaton, 2016; Persson, Björnram, Elvers, & Erikson, 2015; Phillips, 2015). Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that special attention should be given to the content and the phrasing of the questions. Refined questions make it easier for respondents to answer which consequently generates more accurate information (Malhotra, 2010; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further, as claimed by Snowball and Willis (2011) well-written questionnaires allow a self-completion questionnaire where the respondents must read and answer all questions themselves. This is favoured as the researchers cannot influence the results.

## 4.7 Procedure

*Stage 1 Pre-study I.* The aim of this pre-study, was to establish two brands from the same product category that were clearly identified as two separate brand images. For this study, we chose to conduct the experiment on brands with either a functional or symbolic concept. Comparing responses on two such distinct brand concepts allow us to clearly assess the impact of congruity in this 2 x 2 experimental design. To ensure consumer input, a pilot sample of 20 respondents were asked to complete a quick survey to rank brands as symbolic or functional. However, in order to avoid information overload, we decided to predefine a set of eight symbolic and functional brands. As discussed by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), certain positioning strategies and characteristics can be recognised in the different concepts. These characteristics were applied to the choice of brands as a first step of the selection process, and can be found in section 4.4.2.

The pre-study showed that Bang & Olufsen and Bose scored equally as the most symbolic brands, scoring 50 out of a maximum of 60 (20 respondents x 3 items). However, Bang & Olufsen was slightly more recognised, and therefore chosen to represent the symbolic brand for this study. Contrarily, Logitech scored as the least symbolic brand, with 0 responses for symbolic meaning, qualifying for the study as a functional brand concept.

*Stage 2 Pre-study II.* The purpose of this stage was to have subjects select the final versions of the four advertisements that would represent the congruence between the brand and a website, by testing for various websites to place the advertisement on. To do so, we prepared a set of six website options (three congruent and three incongruent) per experimental condition, resulting in 12 different versions of the scenarios (six websites for two brands). The 12 alternatives were produced to once again control for information overload: having subjects generate suitable options themselves might result in too many alternatives (see Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991). When choosing websites, regards was taken to characteristics of how the two brands typically produce their marketing communications and where the two brands typically place their advertising. Moreover, attention was given to generate two ends of one spectrum, meaning that where one brand has a congruent and incongruent match at the two ends, the other brand should have an opposite effect of the match. Preliminary research identified four news websites and two social media platforms: Dagens Nyheter, Nyheter 24, New York Times, Mirror, LinkedIn and Facebook. Two Swedish websites were chosen to test whether respondents produced more consistent opinions within one nationality.

When developing the various scenarios, they were designed with the aim to replicate credible targeted advertising. We chose to display the advertisements as top banners, controlling that the size of the ads and the relation to the content was similar in both cases. The motive for both brands showed a portable speaker and the logotype. In the case of Bang & Olufsen we decided to enhance the logotype, as the previous pre-study showed that some responders did not catch the name of the brand when too small. By enlarging the logotype, we could ensure that the name of the brand was clearly visible. None of the advertisements included a price. This because we did not want that to be a determining factor when later responding to the questionnaire. Logitech has more information than Bang & Olufsen, this goes hand in hand with their typical advertising where Bang & Olufsen elicit a cleaner and minimalistic design. See appendix 2 for the scenarios.

As indicated by the results in table 3 where the respondents were asked to characterise brand congruence with the website it was displayed on between 1-7, New York Times had the best match for congruity with Bang & Olufsen, and the best match for incongruity with Logitech. Mirror. Logitech scored as most incongruent with New York Times, and scored highest congruency with both Mirror and Facebook. We chose to move forward with New York Times and Mirror for the experiment, as we could then develop pairs of congruent and incongruent matches with same conditions for both brands.

Table 3. Results from congruence tests

New York Times		Nyheter 24		LinkedIn		Mirror		Dagens Nyheter		Facebook	
B&O	Logi	B&O	Logi	B&O	Logi	B&O	Logi	B&O	Logi	B&O	Logi
6	2	3	7	6	3	1	4	5	4	4	5
6	1	3	3	4	6	1	7	5	1	3	7
6	3	2	5	6	5	3	7	5	5	2	6
7	3	3	4	2	3	1	7	6	3	2	6
7	4	4	1	5	3	4	5	5	4	3	6
<b>*6.4</b>	<b>**2.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>**1.7</b>	<b>*6.0</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>*6.0</b>

\*Scored highest, indicating congruity

\*\* Scored lowest, indicating incongruity

*Stage 3 Pilot study.* To ensure comprehensibility of the questionnaire and to check for errors. The finalised questionnaire was distributed to a few respondents, representative of the sample, feedback on clarity and understanding was requested, as well as sent for review to an expert within the field to control the questions.

*Stage 4 Experiment.* A total of 221 subjects participated in the experiment and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions using the survey tool Qualtrics. Consequently, each subject was exposed to only one brand advertisement within one of the websites. This brand advertising was designed in Photoshop to reflect a realistic website and advertisement. The respondents were approached online, using Facebook to invite respondents to the experiment. We also prompted for respondents to invite and contact further potential respondents in order to increase the amount of responses. All subjects were informed that the survey is on digital marketing.

In the survey, respondents were firstly exposed to the developed scenario and instructed to pay close attention on both the advertisement as well as the surroundings of the advertisement. What followed was a series of questions, as previously operationalised, to measure (1) the brand equity and (2) the different dimensions of brand equity (see operationalisation), of the brand. The questionnaire was made up of 26 statements measuring the said six dimensions. Subjects were firstly controlled for their familiarity with the brand, in order to be able to screen for this value later. Next, subjects were asked to indicate on seven point Likert scale their agreement (7 = “completely agree”) or disagreement (1 = “completely disagree”) to the series of questions. Four of the attitude items concerned evaluative judgments. Subject were to give their opinion on the brand on these four scales: “bad – good”, “negative – positive”, “undesirable – desirable”, and “unfavourable – favourable”, using a seven-point semantic differentiation scale. In all the experiment conditions, all items appeared the same. The survey can be found in appendix 3.

## 4.7 Data Analysis

*Data analysis plan.* The data analysis encompassed three steps; firstly, we controlled for the reliability and validity of our data, which is addressed further in the next section. The second step was the analysis of the entire data set, and a third step was performed where we decided to screen out those with low or no familiarity with the brands following Keller's (1993) argument that brand awareness is the basis of brand equity while the other dimensions should be assessed as a second step. As such, the same statistical test was performed with selected cases. The different statistical tests will be elaborated further below. All tests and data analysis were performed using SPSS which supported the employed survey tool Qualtrics.

*Data preparation.* First off, a control-question was used to ensure that the subjects were aware and had paid attention to the scenario they were exposed to. We therefore controlled by asking about which brand they had seen and what website, any answers that indicated that they had no knowledge of this, was eliminated. However, no such blunder was found. Next, the data file was checked for errors such as missing data and out of range data. This was done by observing the descriptive statistics and no errors were encountered. Further, two of the items needed to be reverse coded so that the interpretation of the numerical labels was aligned. This was necessary for two items of brand association: "this brand is basically the same as competing brand" and "I have difficulty in imagining X in my mind." Next off, to be able to perform the statistical tests, we computed the variables of each dimension by combining the scores from the items that were used for each construct. This was done as we used multi-item scales to measure the variables. Lastly, we created a group variable for the independent variable 'context congruence'. This also needed to be aligned as the brand-context matches had opposite meanings of congruity. Respondents exposed to the symbolic brand had congruity with New York Times while those who received the functional brand were congruent with Mirror. Thus, this need to be computed into one variable where 1=congruent and 2=incongruent.

*Data analysis method.* A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (two-way MANOVA) was used for the main analysis of our study. The MANOVA enables us to compare mean differences between groups on more than one dependent variable (Pallant, 2013), as in the current study. Additionally, the two-way MANOVA allows for a test of an interaction effect on top of the main effect. The interaction-effect refers to the presence of a moderating effect, which means that the main independent variable's effect on the dependent variables is affected by the level of another dependent level. For the current study the moderating effect is caused by the independent variable brand image, while the main effect variable is the context-congruence. As previously discussed, the MANOVA was performed a second time using selected cases since we believe that brand awareness could influence the brand-context congruence effect on customer-based brand equity.

## 4.8 Quality Criteria

Bryman and Bell (2011) stress that there are two crucial quality criteria that researchers have to consider in order to evaluate a study, its validity and its reliability. Validity assures that a study actually measures what it intends to measure. Reliability determines to what extent a measurement of a concept is stable. In other words, if the same study was repeated it would result in a similar outcome.

### 4.8.1 Validity

Both Bryman and Bell (2011) and Malhotra (2010) argue that there are usually four different types of validity that has to be considered when conducting research. These are content, construct, criterion and external validity.

*Content validity* entails to what extent a measurement construct's components. This was ensured in this study by conducting a pre-test where an expert within the field reviewed the questions. The feedback was then taken into account and the questions were modified accordingly. The content validity was further ensured through a pilot-study in which the study was presented to external individuals whom tested the experiment. This resulted in that the measurement instruments were further evaluated and could be further improved.

*Construct validity* refers to what extent an operationalisation directly measures the specific concept it is supposed to measure. To obtain construct validity researchers should strive towards responding questions such as, what deductions can be formulated from the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010). Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that if construct validity is not obtained, it is an indication that the concepts are unstable and thereby be unreliable and questioned. In a statistical context, this validity can be ensured by for example testing correlation coefficients. This is according to Bryman and Bell (2011) a tool of measuring how closely related a data set is. The most commonly used method for analysing this correlation is through Pearson's correlation. This is defined as "a method for examining relationships between interval/ratio variables" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.347). By running a Pearson's correlation test, the degree to which two variables relate to each other is obtained. A scale is used where the coefficient should lie between -1 and +1 where a strong correlation is said to be between 0.5 and 1 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In this study Pearson's correlation test was conducted to ensure construct validity. In other words, we used the test to see if the items measured what they aimed to do, specifically if the questions measured the different dimensions of customer based brand equity.

*Criterion validity* is defined as to what extent an operationalisation can further predict other constructs as expected in connection to other variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010). This is achieved by hypotheses-testing. Hence, this validity was assured in this study by testing our hypotheses that were grounded in the operationalisation as well as comparing the data and the operationalisation.

*External validity*, is the requirement of generalisation. Specifically, if a study's result can not only be generalised for the study but for other contexts that go beyond the defined study. For this, it is essential that the sample is will representative for the entire population. Therefore, careful sampling is required (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Like earlier mentioned, a non-probability sample method was used, making the result ungeneralizable.

#### 4.8.2 Reliability

As previously mentioned, reliability refers to what extent a study's measurement is internally stable and consistent. Golafshani (2003) stress that if reliability is not achieved the study cannot be argued to be valid, as validity assumes reliability. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are several measurement and instruments to apply to measure reliability. A commonly used analysis for internal reliability is Cronbach's alpha and a common strive is to remain objective for the external reliability. In order to secure reliability for thesis study, a Cronbach's alpha analysis was conducted. Cronbach's alpha is described by Spiliotopoulou (2009) as a test measuring the consistency of set of items in a questionnaire. In other words, it refers to the extent to which it is a consistent measure of a concept, and Cronbach's alpha is a way to measure the strength of this consistency. The values of alpha range between 0 and 1, the closer to 1 the stronger the consistency (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However, the alpha level is commonly accepted at the level of 0.7 for social science research, and was the level of acceptance used for the current research. If there is perfect consistency the alpha will be 1, whereas a level above 0.95 is not recommended (Spiliotopoulou, 2009). A low value indicates a poor correlation of the test items while a too high alpha value indicates that some items should be questioned as they are too similar to another. If the Cronbach's Alpha analysis show an acceptable level it suggests that the questions asked are well and correctly developed for what they try to measure.

To ensure external reliability, Golafshani (2003) state that objectivity is an important aspect. Objectivity was strived throughout the methodology by practising transparency through the disclosure of the study's procedures in detail. The methodological choices rely on literature in the field and multiple scientific articles, where the objective was to practice unbiasedness.

### 4.9 Ethical Considerations

The topic of ethics in business research needs to be treated carefully, as research involves collecting data about and from individuals, which makes the treatment of data very sensitive (Cresswell, 2014). Not only is the handling of the collected data a process that requires thoughtfulness, but the interaction with research subjects is equally as important of a task to consider (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). As Wallace and Sheldon (2015) points out, "Much business and management research is informed by social science principles and methods, and no research is entirely value free or exists in a completely risk-free context (p. 267). This is specifically obvious when conducting experiments since there is a necessity to disguise the

purpose of the research in order to produce valid results (Malhotra, 2010). As such, Bell and Bryman (2007) have identified ten ethical principles that should guide researchers in doing research. These address two main aspects, which is to protect the interest of the respondents, and to protect the integrity of the research community, through ensuring accuracy and lack of bias in research results. We will hereafter present the ten principles and discuss our approach to each aspect:

(1) Ensuring that no harm comes to participants. Harm in this sense relates not only to physical, but also harm such as stress or psychological ones. We therefore chose the experiment to be conducted with objects (the brand advertisement and chosen websites) that do not induce stress through any offensive material. The participants also had the advantage of being able to answer the survey anywhere they prefer as it was distributed online.

(2) Respecting the dignity of research participants. The participants were all treated with care and respect in regards to their participation in the study by providing them with information and allowing for questions.

(3) Ensuring a fully informed consent of research participant. As argued before, some disguise is a necessary nature of experiments. Malhotra (2010) proposes the act of debriefing as a way to treat the issue of consent. This was done in two steps. In the introductory page of our survey, where the participants were briefed about the survey, we also disclosed that the survey is a part of an experiment that cannot be exposed at this stage. However, once they had finished the survey a last page presented the experiment and what manipulations were performed. The participants were encouraged to contact us if they felt uncomfortable in participating in the experiment, and we would then eliminate their response.

(4)-(6) These three principles entail protecting the participants privacy, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting anonymity. As the survey was distributed online, and no information of the participants' identity was requested that could enable their exposure, all three aspects were met.

(7)-(10) The last four principles takes into consideration the research standards, touching upon avoiding deception (refer to point 3), declaration of affiliations or sponsorship (which was not applicable), honesty and transparency, and avoidance of misleading or false reporting research findings. These principles guided the conduction of the current study.

## 5 Results

To examine if the nature of the congruence of contexts effected the customer-based brand equity, various tests were employed in SPSS. The total sample size of the study was 221, with 53 groups in experimental group 1, 55 in experimental group 2, 54 in experimental group 3 and 59 in experimental group 4. Presented below are the results of the tests that were conducted.

### 5.1 Quality Criteria

To ensure the accuracy of our assessment and measurements, the reliability and validity of the items was controlled as a first action in reporting the results. As previously discussed, a Cronbach's alpha test was performed to control for internal consistency, i.e. reliability. This was carried out on all items for each construct separately in order to ensure that the items that make up a construct are measuring the same construct. As there lies an interest in examining specific groups of the interaction effect (symbolic group and functional group), the data set was also examined separately for these two settings.

The Cronbach alpha is expressed as a number between 0 and 1, and as previously argued, for social science research the acceptable values usually start at 0.7 up until 0.95, where the items are seen as too closely related, meaning that some items might be redundant testing the same question. Still, for constructs with items lower than six, it is commonly accepted for an alpha coefficient of 0.6 (Ha, Yoon, & Choi, 2007; Petrick & Backman, 2002). This is the case for two of our constructs, namely brand esteem and brand acceptability. Looking at table 4 below, summarising the alpha coefficients for all constructs, all values are reported at desired levels. The lowest value is for the construct of brand acceptability in the functional brand grouping that is reported at 0.649, which is still decisively accepted. Likewise, the highest alpha coefficient is at the level of 0.937 for the construct of overall attitude within the functional brand grouping, which also achieves an accepted value. Notably, initially the attitude construct reported a too high value using all six items, with a score at 0.951. As such, one item was deleted (negative-positive question) and thus reported an acceptable score.

Table 4. Reliability test results: Cronbach's alpha

Construct	Brand Image	Cronbach's alpha	N of items	N of cases
Perceived Quality	Symbolic	0.867		108
	Functional	0.894	6	113
	Total	0.887		221
Brand Associations	Symbolic	0.834		108
	Functional	0.790	8	113
	Total	0.831		221
Brand Esteem	Symbolic	0.782		108
	Functional	0.808	3	113
	Total	0.794		221
Brand Acceptability	Symbolic	0.649		108
	Functional	0.768	3	113
	Total	0.720		221
Overall Attitude	Symbolic	0.911		108
	Functional	0.937	5	113
	Total	0.928		221
Customer-Based	Symbolic	0.890		108
Brand Equity	Functional	0.906	5	113
	Total	0.904		221

The acceptance of all measurements allowed for calculating an average of the items for each construct that was hereafter used to represent the constructs accordingly.

Continuing, to measure the construct validity, a Pearson's correlation test was performed. The test generates correlation coefficient  $r$ , which measures the strength and direction of the relationship between the constructs. Firstly, addressing the significance of the relationships (Sig. (2-tailed)), all correlations report a p value lower than 0.01 showing decisive significance. Looking at Pearson's  $r$ , the correlation values are all positive showing positive pairwise linear relationships between the constructs. This means that, for example, the relationship between perceived quality and brand associations, when the perceived quality increases, so does the brand associations. Thus, high levels of any of the constructs, are associated with higher levels of the corresponding pair. The lowest value of Pearson's  $r$  is at 0.427 between brand acceptability and brand associations in the functional group, all else lie above this correlation, concluding that there exist substantial relationships among the constructs. Pallant (2013) suggests that correlations at 0.8 or 0.9 are reasons for concern, as this would imply that the constructs partly explain each other, however no such violations are reported in the current study.

Table 5. Validity test: Pearson's correlation

	Brand Image		Perceived Quality	Brand Associations	Brand Esteem	Brand Acceptability	Overall Attitude	Customer-Based Brand Equity
Perceived quality	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	1	.511**	.607**	.506**	.630**	.443**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	1	.489**	.749**	.697**	.791**	.607**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	1	.546**	.697**	.609**	.736**	.531**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221
Brand Associations	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	.511**	1	.637**	.555**	.652**	.618**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	.489**	.616**	1	.427**	.546**	.553**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	.546**	.639**	.485**	1	.629**	.572**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221
Brand Esteem	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	.607**	.637**	1	.677**	.752**	.454**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	.749**	.616**	.656**	1	.784**	.625**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	.697**	.639**	.668**	.778**	1	.555**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221
Brand Acceptability	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	.506**	.555**	.677**	1	.660**	.501**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	.697**	.427**	.656**	.766**	1	.523**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	.609**	.485**	.668**	.715**	.517**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221
Overall Attitude	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	.630**	.652**	.752**	.660**	1	.535**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	.791**	.546**	.784**	.766**	.666**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	.736**	.629**	.778**	.715**	.605**	.605**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221
Customer-Based Brand Equity	Symbolic	Pearson Correlation	.443**	.618**	.454**	.501**	.535**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Functional	Pearson Correlation	.607**	.553**	.625**	.523**	.666**	.666**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Total	Pearson Correlation	.531**	.572**	.555**	.517**	.605**	.605**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	221	221	221	221	221	221

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## 5.2 Respondent Profile

To qualify into the study, the respondents had to fulfil the criteria of having previously either searched online for product/service information or shopped a product/service online. This was conducted through three steps:

1. We posted the link of the experiment online, which generated respondents with an online activity behaviour.
2. We invited people to an event on the social media Facebook whom we judged to fulfil the criteria

3. In the event we posted directives of our criteria. Therefore, also the respondents who weren't invited directly by us but by other respondents were communicated this qualification.

A total of 221 subjects participated in the research and a frequency analysis revealed that the most common age group was between 20-24 (47.5%) and the second most common age group was between 25-29 (38.5%). Minimum age was 19, maximum age 65 and the mean age of a respondent to our survey was 26,56 years old. The frequency of male respondents was 91 (41%) and female 129 (58%). One respondent (1%) did not want to specify their gender. A full disclosure of age and gender distribution can be found in appendix 4 and appendix 5.

Looking at each grouping separately, the respondent profile is quite similar. Both the symbolic brand- and the functional brand-grouping had respondents ranging from 19 to 65. The total amount of subjects in the symbolic brand group was 108 and 113 in the functional group. In both groups the most common age group was also from 20-24 and 25-29, with 56% and 37% respectively for the symbolic group, and 40% as well as 40% for the functional group.

### 5.3 Hypotheses Testing

To test the study's hypotheses, a two-way between MANOVA was performed using IBM SPSS. This way we could investigate congruence differences for symbolic and functional brands on the range of dependent variables. The confidence interval was set at 95%. Two categorical independent variables were used, namely brand image and congruence. As discussed by Pallant (2013), working with MANOVA means that a number of assumptions need to be met that controls for Type 1 error, which is the risk of believing there is a difference between groups when in fact there is not. The assumptions that apply to the current study are: sample size, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity (Pallant, 2013).

The listed assumptions were treated accordingly: (1) sample size: Pallant (2013) suggests that the minimum number of cases required per cell is to have at least the same number as the number of dependent variables. This would mean a minimum of 6 cases per cell. Nonetheless, as we have previously disclosed, following Wilson Van Voorhis and Morgan (2008), we ensured at least 30 respondents per cell to make more accurate comparisons between the groups. (2) Normality: Tabachnick and Fidell (2013, p.253) propose that a sample size of at least 20 cases per cell ensures 'robustness' of the multivariate normal distribution. This criterion was met having at least 30 cases per cell. (3) Linearity: this assumption refers to the dependent variables and that a straight-line relationship exists between each pair. A matrix of scatterplots for the symbolic and functional group accordingly were created. These can be seen in appendix 6, it is evident that no non-linearity was present and thus the assumption of linearity was satisfied. (4) Multicollinearity was checked for using Pearson's correlation as reported above. The assumption was satisfied, which has been reported in appendix 6.

Conclusively, it can be reported that no serious violations of the assumptions were noted and thus we could proceed with the two-way MANOVA. The output firstly generates descriptive statistics that we look at to gain an overview of the dataset. Looking at the summarising table 6, it reveals that the data collection was completed with no data missing in any of the four groups. It can be seen that the mean for the symbolic brand setting was lower for experimental group 2 which is the incongruent condition, while the mean for the functional brand setting was higher in experimental group 4, which also was the incongruent condition. In other words, when the symbolic brand was displayed in an incongruent context, the ratings were lower on all the dimensions of brand equity. When the functional group was displayed in an incongruent context, the ratings were instead higher on all dimensions. Notably, in the symbolic brand case, the mean difference for the dimension acceptability was very small (4.47 in experimental group 1 in comparison to 4.49 in experimental group 2).

The mean for brand equity, the sum of all the items which were viewed on table 6 shows a similar tendency: the incongruent group for the symbolic brand has a slightly lower mean at 4.69 compared to 4.90 of the congruent group. The functional brand has a slightly higher mean at 4.44 for the incongruent condition while slightly lower mean score at 4.13 of the congruent group.

*Table 6. Descriptives overview*

Experiment Group		Perceived Quality	Brand Associations	Brand Esteem	Brand Acceptability	Overall Attitude	Customer-Based Brand Equity
(1) Symb. - Con.	N Valid	55	55	55	55	55	55
	N Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	5.09	4.81	4.78	4.49	5.36	4.90
	Std. Deviation	.938	1.001	1.093	.879	1.119	.828
(2) Symb. - Incon.	N Valid	53	53	53	53	53	53
	N Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.78	4.76	4.44	4.47	5.01	4.69
	Std. Deviation	1.186	1.006	1.070	1.059	1.275	.949
(3) Func. - Con.	N Valid	59	59	59	59	59	59
	N Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.18	3.86	3.95	4.20	4.44	4.13
	Std. Deviation	1.131	.934	1.190	1.199	1.320	.993
(4) Func. - Incon.	N Valid	54	54	54	54	54	54
	N Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.43	4.31	4.42	4.38	4.65	4.44
	Std. Deviation	1.056	1.010	1.249	1.018	1.214	.941
Total Sample	N Valid	221	221	221	221	221	221
	N Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.61	4.42	4.39	4.38	4.86	4.53
	Skewness	-.510	-.341	-.600	-.156	-.480	-.267
	Kurtosis	.308	.249	.266	.804	-.227	-.291

Looking at the results of the four groups presented in table 6 above, the standard deviation indicates that there was no particular pattern throughout the groups. The standard deviation values were slightly higher for the functional brand group compared to the symbolic brand, the

answers were thus somewhat more widespread. This indicates that there was a higher degree of consensus among the respondents of the symbolic brand conditions.

Based on the results of all groups combined, the skewness of the groups indicate that the answers are skewed to the left of the centre point. This shows that we have a larger amount of positive data results. According to theory Pallant (2013), the skewness should not be greater than +/-1.0 as it then might impact parameter estimates and cause a drift from normal distribution. Looking at table 5, the skewness ranges from -0.600 as reported for brand associations, to -0.156 as reported for brand esteem. No values are lower than -1.0 indicating acceptable values.

When looking at the kurtosis, Hair et al. (2010) suggest that it indicate whether the data contains a high or low level of outliers in comparison to a normal distribution. Positive values of kurtosis indicate a more peakedness while negative ones reveal a flatter curve (Burns & Burns, 2008). When examining the kurtosis, an acceptable range should be between -3 and +3. In our case, the kurtosis ranges between -0.291 to 0.804, suggesting that they are all within the accepted range.

*Table 7. Multivariate Tests – all cases*

<b>Multivariate Tests<sup>a</sup> - Wilks' Lambda</b>				
Effect	Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Brand Image	.837	8.296 <sup>b</sup>	.000	.163
Congruence	.973	1.194 <sup>b</sup>	.313	.027
Brand Image*Congruence	.959	1.802 <sup>b</sup>	.114	.041

a. Design: Brand + Congruence + Brand \* Congruence

b. Exact statistic

Table 8. Two-way MANOVA output – all cases

Test of Between-Subjects Effect				
Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Brand Image	Perceived Quality	18.646	.000	.079
	Brand Associations	27.680	.000	.113
	Brand Esteem	7.337	.007	.033
	Brand Acceptability	1.779	.184	.008
	Overall Attitude	14.687	.000	.063
	CBBE	16.880	.000	.072
Congruence	Perceived Quality	.051	.821	.000
	Brand Associations	2.168	.142	.010
	Brand Esteem	.174	.677	.001
	Brand Acceptability	.274	.601	.001
	Overall Attitude	.179	.672	.001
	CBBE	.136	.713	.001
Brand Image *Congruence	Perceived Quality	3.647	.058	.017
	Brand Associations	3.538	.061	.016
	Brand Esteem	6.640	.011	.030
	Brand Acceptability	.496	.482	.002
	Overall Attitude	2.722	.100	.012
	CBBE	4.318	.039	.020

The Levene’s test statistics, which can be found in appendix 6, shows an associated probability (Sig.) higher than the significance level of 0.05 in all cases. This shows that there is a homogeneity of variances, our group variances can be treated as equal. Next, the multivariate test indicates whether there are statistically significant differences among the groups. Here we look at the Wilks’ Lambda value, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). We obtained a significance value of 0.000 for the main effect of brand, however both the main effect of congruence and the interaction effect of brand\*congruence reports values of  $p > 0.005$  and thus show no significance for difference among the groups, see appendix 7 for complete output.

In this initial MANOVA, we can thus only see a statistical significance on the dependent variables with the independent variable brand image. This is the case for all dependent variables except for brand acceptability which reports  $p = 0.184$ . Based on this, it seems as though all of the hypotheses need to be rejected as no main effect of congruence and interaction effect were not significant as reported by the Wilks’ Lambda. However, notably, looking at the outcomes of the tests of between-subjects effect, two of the dimensions report statistically significant results for the interaction effect. We can see that brand esteem and customer-based brand equity report  $p$ -values  $< 0.05$ . This is in line with the  $F$ -statistic that departs further away from the value 1, which is the value that produces statistically insignificant results. It is therefore encouraging to follow up with a second MANOVA and screening for subjects with high familiarity. The tables below show the results of these tests. After the screening, the sample size reduced to 91 subjects (descriptive can be found in appendix 8). This follow-up MANOVA showed a significant multivariate effect the interaction between brand image and congruence but not on the main effect of congruence. Still, hypothesis H2<sub>a-f</sub> will be examined further below.

Table 9. Multivariate tests – selected cases

<b>Multivariate Tests<sup>a</sup> - Wilks' Lambda</b>				
Effect	Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Brand Image	.751	5.499 <sup>b</sup>	.000	.249
Congruence	.986	.233 <sup>b</sup>	.947	.014
Brand Image*Congruence	.758	5.287 <sup>b</sup>	.000	.242

a. Design: Brand + Congruence + Brand \* Congruence

b. Exact statistic

Table 10. Two-way MANOVA – selected cases

<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effect</b>				
Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Brand Image	Perceived Quality	14.758	.000	.145
	Brand Associations	15.468	.000	.151
	Brand Esteem	4.258	.042	.047
	Brand Acceptability	.722	.398	.008
	Overall Attitude	5.510	.021	.060
	CBBE	8.605	.004	.090
Congruence	Perceived Quality	.454	.502	.005
	Brand Associations	.679	.412	.008
	Brand Esteem	.684	.411	.008
	Brand Acceptability	.852	.358	.010
	Overall Attitude	.300	.585	.003
	CBBE	.750	.389	.009
Brand Image *Congruence	Perceived Quality	12.360	.001	.124
	Brand Associations	17.876	.000	.170
	Brand Esteem	19.362	.000	.182
	Brand Acceptability	5.400	.022	.058
	Overall Attitude	9.251	.003	.096
	CBBE	15.835	.000	.154

*Hypotheses 1<sub>a-f</sub>: Main effect hypotheses*

No statistically significant differences of congruence were found on the dependent variables. As such, all main effect hypotheses were rejected, ranging from H1<sub>a-f</sub>. This suggests that, for example, perceived quality does not differ depending on the context and its congruence.

However, the interaction effect reports statistical significance on all dimensions. In order to address our second set of hypotheses, where an examination needs to be conducted on the specific brand image groups, Pallant (2013) suggests a pairwise comparison. This way the results on the dependent variables can be considered separately for the two brand image types. This is shown in table 11 below.

Table 11. Pairwise comparisons

Dependent Variable	Brand Image	Congruence		Mean	Sig.
		Congruent	Incongruent	Difference	
Perceived Quality	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.645*	.050
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.645*	.050
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.951*	.004
		Incongruent	Congruent	.951*	.004
Brand Associations	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.677*	.020
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.677*	.020
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-1.005*	.001
		Incongruent	Congruent	1.005*	.001
Brand Esteem	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.811*	.014
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.811*	.014
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-1.187*	.317
		Incongruent	Congruent	1.187*	.317
Brand Acceptability	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.334	.341
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.334	.341
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.774*	.022
		Incongruent	Congruent	.774*	.022
Overall Attitude	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.656	.085
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.656	.085
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.945*	.012
		Incongruent	Congruent	.945*	.012
Customer-Based Brand Equity	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.625*	.032
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.625*	.032
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.972*	.001
		Incongruent	Congruent	.972*	.001

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

### Hypothesis 2<sub>a</sub>

The interaction effect for perceived quality reported  $F(12.36)$ ,  $p = 0.01$ , and partial eta squared = 0.124. Meaning that the difference on perceived quality is explained with 12.4% by the brand\*congruence interaction. Examining further, the MANOVA test accepts hypothesis 2<sub>a</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on perceived quality,  $p = 0.05$

with a mean difference of 0.645, as shown in the pairwise comparison. Additionally, the functional brand setting also reports significant value,  $p = 0.004$ . However, in this case the incongruent condition had a higher mean with a difference of 0.951 on perceived quality.

#### *Hypothesis 2<sub>b</sub>*

The interaction effect for brand associations reported  $F (15.633)$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , and partial eta squared = 0.170, meaning that the difference on brand association is explained with 17% by the brand\*congruence interaction. Examining further, the MANOVA test accepts hypothesis 2<sub>b</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on brand associations,  $p = 0.02$  with a mean difference of 0.677, as shown in the pairwise comparison. Additionally, the functional brand setting also reports significant value,  $p = 0.001$ . However, in this case the incongruent condition also had a higher mean with a difference of 1.005 on brand associations.

#### *Hypothesis 2<sub>c</sub>*

The interaction effect for brand esteem reported  $F (19.362)$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , and partial eta squared = 0.182. Meaning that the difference on brand esteem is explained with 18.2% by the brand\*congruence interaction. Examining further, the MANOVA test accepts hypothesis 2<sub>c</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on brand esteem,  $p = 0.014$  with a mean difference of 0.811, as shown in the pairwise comparison. Additionally, the functional brand setting also reports significant value,  $p = 0.000$ . However, in this case the incongruent condition also had a higher mean with a difference of 1.0187 on brand esteem. Notably, this dimension shows strongest effect.

#### *Hypothesis 2<sub>d</sub>*

The interaction effect for brand acceptability reported  $F (5.4)$ ,  $p = 0.022$ , and partial eta squared = 0.058. Meaning that the difference on brand acceptability is explained with 5.8% by the brand\*congruence interaction. However, examining further, the MANOVA test rejects hypothesis 2<sub>d</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on brand acceptability,  $p = 0.330$  with a mean difference of 0.334, as shown in the pairwise comparison. This suggests that there was no difference on brand acceptability for symbolic brands caused by congruence. Instead, the functional brand setting reports significant value,  $p = 0.022$  and again the incongruent condition had a higher mean with a difference of 0.774 on brand acceptability.

#### *Hypothesis 2<sub>e</sub>*

The interaction effect for overall attitude reported  $F (9.251)$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , and partial eta squared = 0.096. Meaning that the difference on overall attitude is explained with 9.6% by the brand\*congruence interaction. However, the MANOVA test rejects hypothesis 2<sub>e</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on overall attitude,  $p = 0.085$  with a mean difference of 0.656, as shown in the pairwise comparison. This suggests that there was no difference on overall attitude for symbolic brands caused by congruence. Instead, once again the functional brand setting reports significant value,  $p = 0.012$  and the incongruent condition had a higher mean with a difference of 0.945 on overall attitude.

### *Hypothesis 2<sub>f</sub>*

The interaction effect for CBBE reported  $F(15.835)$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , and partial eta squared = 0.154. Meaning that the difference on CBBE is explained with 15.4% by the brand\*congruence interaction. Examining further, the MANOVA test accepts hypothesis 2<sub>f</sub> that a symbolic brand in a congruent context has a positive effect on CBBE,  $p = 0.032$  with a mean difference of 0.972, as shown in the pairwise comparison. Additionally, the functional brand setting also reports significant value,  $p = 0.001$ . In this case, the incongruent condition also had a higher mean with a difference of 0.972 on CBBE. Finally, all the results are shown in the table below.

*Table 12. Summary of results*

	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Results</b>
H <sub>1a</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on perceived quality compared to an incongruent context.	Rejected
H <sub>1b</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on brand associations compared to an incongruent context.	Rejected
H <sub>1c</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on brand esteem compared to an incongruent context.	Rejected
H <sub>1d</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on brand acceptability compared to an incongruent context.	Rejected
H <sub>1e</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on overall attitude compared to an incongruent context	Rejected
H <sub>1f</sub>	A congruent context has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity, compared to an incongruent context.	Rejected
H <sub>2a</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and perceived quality.	Accepted
H <sub>2b</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand associations.	Accepted
H <sub>2c</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand esteem.	Accepted
H <sub>2d</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and brand acceptability.	Rejected
H <sub>2e</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and overall attitude.	Rejected
H <sub>2f</sub>	A symbolic brand image in a congruent context has a positive effect on the relationship between congruence and customer-based brand equity.	Accepted

## 6 Discussion

Initial examination of the data set suggests no difference in customer-based brand equity under any of the four conditions. What we could see was an effect caused by the type of brand image instead, which shows that the symbolic brand has a greater effect on the dimensions of customer-based brand equity. However, this effect was not hypothesised in the current study as it is the context congruence that is the main effect which we studied. Previous research has reported a variety of effects caused by either congruity or incongruity, however these studies measured other concepts than customer-based brand equity ones. The applied theory in this study might explain why we did not reach similar results. Nonetheless, a follow-up test was performed as we believe that this apparent lack of correlation can be attributed to those respondents who were not familiar with the brand. Keller (1993) discuss that brand awareness is related to the ability of a consumer to identify a brand, or brand name, under different conditions. He further argues that awareness is a necessary precondition to proceed with other evaluations, such as the other dimensions of brand equity, of the brand. This data thus needs to be interpreted with caution. We are aware that screening respondents reduces the sample size, which reveals a limitation. However, this limitation highlights the importance of the dimension of brand awareness as argued by Keller (1993) and therefore conforms to his theory.

Looking at the new output, the results offer valuable implications for our hypotheses and the importance of brand-context congruence. Still, the main effect is rejected. Nevertheless the interaction effect allowed for a further pairwise examination of the separate conditions. We then reject the hypotheses that a symbolic brand image in a congruent has a positive effect on brand acceptability and overall attitude. Malär et al. (2011) state the fact that consumers of symbolic brands create emotional attachments to the brand. We therefore maintain that the subjects in this sample set, who have high familiarity with the brand Bang & Olufsen, might hold an attachment to the brand making the constructs of attitudes and acceptability more robust and therefore making these dimensions not as easily affected for symbolic brands. Suggesting that the other constructs are more easily affected. Given that our results are based on a limited number of respondents, due to the screening of subjects, the analysis from such results should be treated with caution. This error could be a consequence due to the smaller sample size, and further test with larger samples might indicate different results.

Looking at hypotheses 2<sub>a</sub>, 2<sub>b</sub> and 2<sub>c</sub>, all were accepted and therefore suggesting that the congruence of the brand-context impacts the way these dimensions are perceived by the customers. The acceptance of hypothesis 2<sub>a</sub> proposes that there is a difference in effect in perceived quality in the two settings. This suggest that the context influences customer's subjective impression of a product's quality in relation to its purpose. A congruent context generated a higher perceived quality of the symbolic brand. Additional findings that the result generated is that for the functional brand an incongruent context resulted in a higher perceived quality. These results propose that the nature of the context has a different effect on the dimension depending on the type of brand. According to theory regarding perceived quality, elements such as brand name,

packaging, design, advertisement and other brand identities are cues of information communicating the unobservable quality (Gill & Dawra, 2010). Our result consequently suggest that the context also is a cue of information for the customer and therefore part of the brand identities forming a favourable perceived quality in the minds of the consumers. Unlike the other cues mentioned in earlier research however, this cue of information is not directly controllable for the company.

Looking at 2<sub>b</sub>, we also saw significant results for the symbolic brand image in a congruent context. These results offer compelling implications for the relation between congruence and brand associations. It also goes in line with Keller and Lehmann's (2003) findings that what builds brand associations is the exposure of the brand in different channels. The perceived experiences by the consumer with such exposures affects this dimension. The results also widen the later findings by Keller and Lehmann (2003), where they propose that the brand image is shaped by the network of associations in the consumer's mind. For the symbolic brand, where the score increased with congruence, the argued symbolic website New York Times seemed to have substantiated the associations of Bang & Olufsen further. An additional finding in this testing was that the functional brand Logitech seemed to generate more positive brand associations when placed in more symbolic context. These findings imply that the congruence between the brand and the context in our experiment functioned as an either affirmative or boosting association for the brand. Measures of brand associations include brand personality, which is linked to emotional and self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 1996b). It is further argued to be the basis for the relationship to the brand as well as its differentiation from competitors. We can deduct from the reported values, the additional finding that the functional brand was affected by the context to a larger extent than the symbolic brand, although both of the brands experienced an increase in brand associations with the symbolic website. The functional brand thus became the subject for the previously suggested spill over effect, where any pre-existing association to the website affected the associations to the brand positively, while endorsed the already positive association to the symbolic brand. These values strengthen Malär et al. (2011) argument on stronger relationships with symbolic brands.

Hypothesis 2<sub>c</sub> which also was accepted suggest that there is a difference in effect in the brand metric esteem in both of the tested settings. A congruent context generated a higher brand esteem for the symbolic brand. How the brand was regarded by the customers was thus affected by the context and differed depending on type of brand image. This strengthens Keller's (1993) argument of symbolic brand as a status symbol and complements this finding by suggesting that the context of the symbolic brand also can have an effect. Following Lehmann, Keller, and Farley (2008) this implies that the two mentioned congruence between the brand and the context resulted in a higher perceived quality, as corroborated by our previous findings for hypothesis 2<sub>a</sub>, but also higher perceived popularity. Ultimately, this leads to a position of higher regard in the consumer's mind. An additional finding was that whilst an incongruent context resulted in a higher brand esteem for the functional brand. This we believe to be by virtue of the context, which was once again New York Times, that had a positive effect on both brands.

The hypotheses 2<sub>d</sub> and 2<sub>e</sub> deriving from the brand metrics acceptability and overall attitude were rejected. Both of these brand metrics are taken from Research International's Equity Engine. The tests suggested that there was a difference in acceptability and overall attitude considering the nature of the congruence of the context were rejected. They showed a p-value of 0.30 for acceptability and 0.12 for overall attitude. In other words, even though the means show a similar tendency similar to the other tests where a congruent context generated a higher score in comparison to an incongruent, the difference was not substantial enough to be verified statistically significant. As previously discussed, this could be attributed to the emotional values attached to the symbolic brand Bang & Olufsen, making the opinions and thoughts towards the brand more robust and therefore not as easily affected. This is strengthened by Kristinamurth and Raj's article (1991) that suggests that consumers' brand loyalty look different depending on what type of brand image a brand has. Nonetheless, it is also noteworthy to address that acceptability is proposed to originate from more sources than just the brand itself (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). For the current experiment no such interaction possibility was provided, and subjects could thus not confirm the acceptability of the brand to a larger extent.

Still, an additional finding is that our experiment found significance for the functional brand, and the same pattern for the symbolic context as previous tests could be detected in both of these tests. This suggests that the context had an effect on the status of the functional brand among a wider social context. Being presented in an incongruent context, the brand was perceived by the consumers as being more acceptable and more status appealing in comparison to being presented in the congruent context. As Gardner and Levy (1955) suggest, brand image is an important factor of the overall status of a brand. Our result therefore implies that the brand image of the functional brand might be influenced by the incongruent brand-context.

A similar result could be distinguished in the test regarding overall attitude where an incongruent context generated a higher score in the general opinion of the functional brand. This result strengthens Hwang, Yoon, and Park's (2011) finding of the website having a brand attitude effect on the brand. Our result doesn't however specify that it is solely positive like the authors claim but depends on the type of congruence between the website and the functional brand. The results regarding attitude are strengthened by Homer's (1990) research that argues that advertisement in low-involvement situations have a bigger effect on brand attitude. He suggests the reason for this is that there are less cues regarding low-involvement brands which leads to an advertisement taking on a bigger role comparing to a high-involvement brand where there already are previous cues. Because functional brands can be considered to be of lower involvement than symbolic brands, we argue that the advertising displayed, took on a larger role in shaping the brand attitude in this case, whereas there already were previous cues considering the symbolic brand. As a result of this, the context affected the brand attitude in the case of functional brand and did not affect the brand attitude in the case of the symbolic brand.

The hypothesis 2<sub>f</sub> derives from the other hypotheses, as the sum of the other assets previously mentioned and tested (Aaker, 1991). The testing of this hypothesis provides an indication that brand-context congruence affects the value customers associate to a brand. Keller (1993) argues

that customer-based brand equity results from differences in customer response as a consequence of customer's knowledge about a brand. We therefore suggest that the brand-context congruence, whether congruent or incongruent, has somewhat shaped the knowledge the respondents held for the brands and consequently generated differences in the perceptions and reflections of the brand. Positive customer-based brand equity creates less vulnerability towards competition (Keller, 1993). Ultimately, the findings substantiate the important notion that ad-website congruence does affect the customer-based brand equity. Therefore, even though digital marketing efforts might have many benefits such as higher brand recall, brand recognition, and attention (Chun, Song, Hollenbeck, & Lee, 2014), it is important to consider the consequences of brand-website mismatch, as customer-based brand equity is shown to have long-term effects from a brand perspective (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991).

What we have observed is an additional finding suggesting that brand-context incongruence generates better customer-based brand equity on all dimensions. A first look at the data suggests a reversed effect on the two brand images depending on the condition of the congruence, where congruity has a positive effect on the symbolic brand while incongruity has a positive effect on the functional brand. However, examining the outcome more carefully we suggest that it is not an opposite effect, but rather two different effects depending on the brand image (i.e. symbolic vs. functional) in line with the main effect. In the second pre-study, we asked a group of 60 respondents to indicate congruence between our chosen brands and different websites. Bang & Olufsen, which was previously classified as a symbolic brand, was matched with New York Times. This implies that New York Times also falls under similar associations as a symbolic brand, we therefore suggest that New York Times can be interpreted and connected to a symbolic brand image. Having this in mind, if instead consider the condition, what can be said is that the 'symbolic context' had a positive effect on both brand images. The values support the importance of investigating the congruence conditions based on the brand concept as it implies significantly different outcomes and consequently strategies to be considered. This implies that similar to a symbolic brand, New York Times appealed to the consumers' self-expression, self-image identification, and prestige (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Therefore, we further investigated each setting and it is interesting to note that we propose two effects, which we chose to call (1) the endorsement effect and (2) the spill-over effect.

As previously noted, in the symbolic brand setting, i.e. the brand-context match using Bang & Olufsen, the accepted mean differences show a higher score under the congruent condition. These values correlate favourably with Russel (1998) and further support the idea that a successful placement action should be carried out with a good fit and the fact that the placement functions as a form of endorsement for the brand. This seems to be the case for the symbolic brand, as being matched with the 'symbolic context' generated higher scores. As proposed by Lee and Shen (2009), the data we found also points to a relation with the processing load undertaken by the recipient when exposed to the scenarios. Where an incongruent condition violated the recipients' expectations which consequently led to higher processing load and lower perceptions towards the brand and the ad. Likewise, the data is also in good agreement with Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter (2005), who on the one hand found that incongruity for ad-website context generates better attention from the viewer, which could not be substantiated

with the experiment we conducted. However, they further investigated the congruent relationship and found, though it was less attention-catching, it produces more favourable perceptions of the brand. Important to highlight is that our data support these previous findings only for the symbolic brand concept, whereas the functional brand concept disclose different values leading to the second effect, the spill-over effect.

The functional brand setting, using Logitech, showed values that were higher for the incongruent setting. This concurs well with Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) argument that in circumstances where two objects of judgment are associated, as Logitech with either one of the websites, if the viewer holds a pre-existing attitude to one, these perceptions spill over to the other object. For our case, we saw an increase when Logitech was placed in the incongruent setting with New York Times, which as previously discussed is proposed to have traits connected to symbolic brands. We therefore believe that the setting with the symbolic context created favourable pre-existing attitudes, making Logitech the subject for the spill-over effect. This motivation is consistent with Petty and Cacioppo (1981) findings. We previously discussed the emotional attachment that symbolic brands produce, while functional brand concepts have a sole utilitarian relationship with the consumer (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Taking this into consideration, our experiments are consistent with Petty and Cacioppo's (1981) logic that when a consumer has low personal involvement with a brand, which is the case for functional brands, the surrounding context becomes more meaningful for the viewer. The credibility and the attractiveness of the source will affect the perception of the brand. In our experiment the respondents were prompted to pay close attention to the website, which was followed up by an evaluation of the brand Logitech. Thus, creating a setting where the surroundings were of importance. This further fit well with Furnham, Gunter, and Walsh (1998), whose previous findings suggested the context as a mood-setter for the viewer, which produces pre-disposed opinions and thoughts. Continuing we examine each hypothesis separately.

Put together, our findings demonstrate that the brand-context congruence cannot be generalised for any brand but should be considered carefully with attention to the brand image. This implies different theoretical consequences of brand equity as dependent on the brand image where congruity is beneficial for one while incongruity is better for the other. We believe that the findings are thus rather confident, as examining only one brand could have led to a misguided analysis and conclusion.

## 7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how the effect on customer-based brand equity differs depending on the brand-context congruence. The interest in this research area emerged from the current events of undesired ad placements as caused by targeted advertising efforts, and was explored using symbolic and functional brand image. What was found was that two different effects of congruence on customer-based brand equity emerged depending on brand image type. We coined these; the endorsement effect, and the spill-over effect. These effects suggest that a symbolic brand should be placed in a congruent context, as the image is then endorsed, while a functional brand should be situated in an incongruent context as the presence in a more status-related context produced spill-over effect. Although the effect had greater impact on the functional brand, as the symbolic brand rejected positive effects on two dimensions, showing that the functional brand is more sensitive to the brand-context match. Thus, the brand-context congruence was shown to have an impact on the different brand dimensions. However, what was found initially, was that for there to be an impact, brand awareness was a necessary precondition to influence the consumers. This became evident in the first round of tests which rejected all hypotheses. The data thus provides interesting findings on the importance of brand awareness, as the absence of brand awareness showed that the consumers were not impacted in their evaluation of the customer-based brand equity.

A key contribution of these results is the finding that the brand image held a focal role in the outcome of the congruence effect. The research has highlighted that congruence should not be viewed as an isolated condition, but rather that it is an effect that should be treated in relation to the type of brand. These findings implicate a role for the brand image type. We have devised a strategy that the brand type is a first step to the alignment process between a brand and a website. Neglecting this aspect might lead to misinterpretations of the effect. As such, considerable insight has been gained with regard to the customer-based brand equity motors in an online environment. This implies that the congruence of the context can have an effect on a higher managerial level than what has earlier been researched. It is important to acknowledge that customer-based brand equity has consequences in an online setting as well. Therefore, digital marketing efforts should be considered with broader scope rather than for singular aspects such as brand awareness, click-through rates, or advertisement attention. As our findings suggest that the marketing activities may affect the brand on more than one aspect.

### 7.1 Theoretical Implications

Our findings have advanced the understanding of congruence and subsequently encouraged a stream of brand-context congruence. Two effects of the dynamics in this relationship have been proposed that highlight the importance of the brand image in this situation. As such, a notion of original content has been managed to be produced to the body of knowledge on digital marketing and brand management. In particular, an implication has been presented on a definition

of the effects, the previously presented endorsement effect and spill-over effect. This conceptualisation contributes by linking the brand image to a corresponding context to induce the effect.

The constitution of these findings is promising as they open the door for researchers to explore a gap in the literature on digital marketing and brand equity that has not yet been considered. The implication that there exist opportunities for co-creation of customer-based brand equity in the online environment, and the notion that the effect differs depending on brand image suggests that the context itself might also be affected by this phenomenon.

Lastly, the findings of this study encourage the utilisation of Aaker's customer-based brand equity in an online context as well, as it managed to show meaningful results. The importance of brand awareness as a pillar for customer-based brand equity has also been substantiated, as no effect was found using respondents with no familiarity of the brands.

## 7.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of the study suggest that an awareness of the congruence between brand and context is not only a recent topic that has made the headlines but also important to consider from a brand managerial perspective. We have provided insights on the dynamics between digital marketing efforts and brand equity management. Considering the online scape where the number of actors is constantly growing, new business models are emerging and the scope of information is becoming larger (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011), companies must seek new ways to reach consumers. One way to do this is the use of targeted advertising. When reflecting upon this growing usage of this technique and the results of our study, we stress the importance of being careful in the usage of digital algorithms and similar technologies. This considering that the brand-context congruence seems to influence how consumers perceive the brand, and thus may impact the brand's image as well as customer-based brand equity. Based on our results, we suggest that companies should be managing targeted advertising closely to ensure to not appear in undesired contexts. Most notably, even though it has been shown that targeted advertising can reduce costs and generate higher attention of the brand (Johnson, 2013), the fact is that those consumers who are exposed to targeted advertising are so because of their browsing-history, meaning that they are targeted with advertisements from brands who they are familiar of. This means that the precondition of brand awareness is likely to be met, and considering our results, these are the consumers who will be affected by the brand-context congruence. It is thus important to highlight that these exact consumers are the ones who should be targeted with greater care, as they will be more attentive the marketing communication.

Encouraging findings are implied on how to capitalise on the growing competitive online environment; we suggest two managerial situations for generating better customer-based brand equity and nurturing the brand image. The two effects of brand-context congruence provide guidance on how to manage and situate a brands' online marketing efforts depending on the brand image. It is suggested that online advertising should be considered as a combined effort in the

management of brand equity. For this co-creating of increasing brand equity to happen however, we stress the importance of knowing the brand identity. Considering that the context has an impact on how the brand is conceived, it is of utter importance to have an insight of how the perceptions of the brand is today as the effect of the context differs.

Another implication is that placing any brand, regardless of symbolic or functional brand image, in a symbolic context endorses the brand equity. We therefore argue that companies, in order to build brand equity should, in the extent possible, look for contexts with symbolic traits rather than looking at for example number of visits or click-rates. However, from our results we also suggest that brands with low penetration rates, should shift their focus on building brand awareness considering it is the pillar stone for this brand equity to appear. Therefore, this type of brand does not necessarily need to pay the the same level of attention of brand-context congruence comparing to brands with higher brand awareness.

### 7.3 Limitations

Even though the study was conducted with the purpose constantly in mind, certain limitations were unavoidable. This was mainly due methodological trade-offs. One of the main limitations of the research we believe to be the sampling method which is non-random. A different sample of respondents might have affected the overall result. We however argue considering that our sampling included a specific population based on a psychographic segmentation, this sampling approach was found to be sufficient. However, we are aware that our finding does not achieve external validity and therefore cannot be used to draw conclusions about other settings.

Furthermore, as our experiment was conducted at one time only due to the limited timeframe of the thesis, makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding the influence the congruence has in a long-term perspective. Considering that brand equity can be seen as a long-term goal, we cannot draw conclusions regarding some dimensions that are considered important for brand equity, for example brand loyalty. We however argue that brand equity is not only a long-term strategy but also tactical taking into account that marketing activities have an effect on it and short-term dimensions are considered as well. Therefore, even though we cannot imply that brand-context congruence has long-term effects, we argue that the short-term effects that we discovered are of importance.

These mentioned limitations restrict our ability to draw general statements regarding brand-context congruence. However, we argue that our findings propose implications that might be beneficial for companies that aim to build brand equity online.

### 7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The topic of context-brand congruence is a recent concern considering that it is lately that targeted advertising has been observed during the recent events of companies occurring in undesired contexts. Thus, the understanding of the consequences of these events is still fairly low.

Because of this we see that it could be useful to understand to what extent the congruence conditions have an impact on brand equity. From our research, we can only determine that there is a difference. By doing this, our theoretical contribution of endorsement/spill-over effect can be strengthened. This would be done by testing the brand equity in natural setting, I.e. under none of the congruent setting, just the brand itself.

Another suggestion for future research to gain understanding of the phenomenon would be to test the contexts further. Considering that the brand image of the context seemed to have an impact on consumers' perceptions on the other brand, we propose that testing this further could provide implications. From our finding, we find ourselves asking, how come an effect seems to have emerged from the website to the brand image. Is it because the consumer chooses to voluntarily expose themselves to the website but do not choose the targeted advertising that influences or could it be physical attributes such as the simple notion that the website takes a bigger place than the advertisement and therefore the consumer is more attentive to the website. Likewise, we would also recommend testing this brand-context relationship on the website instead, to investigate the effects it has on the context.

Lastly, considering our research limitation we see an opportunity to look at the brand-context congruence with a long-term perspective to see the effect on brand loyalty. If the brand loyalty is effected by this or for example if previous consumers react differently than new, it further strengthens why congruence is of importance. Because Keller (1993) argues that brand loyalty is the end result and equivalent to brand equity, we see that studying the concept from a consumer loyalty perspective, can further create theoretical implications.

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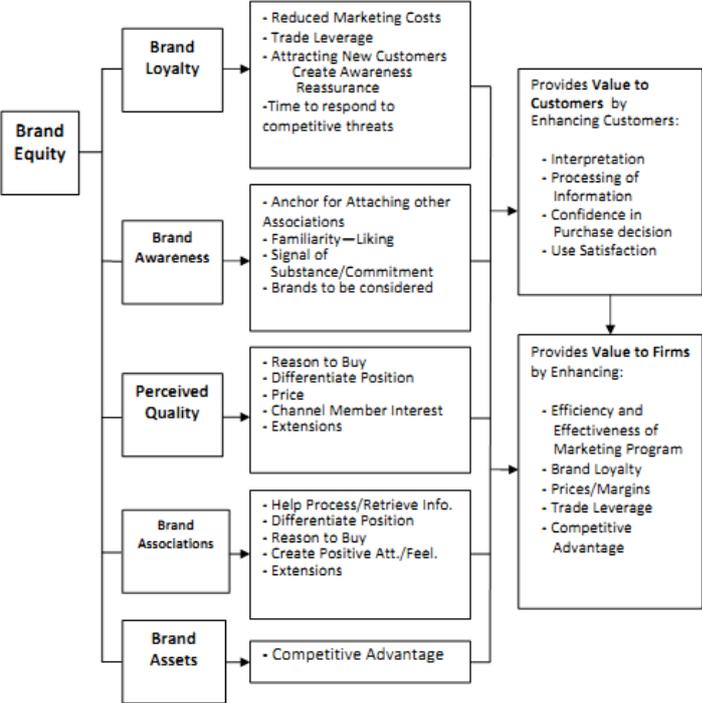
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# Appendix

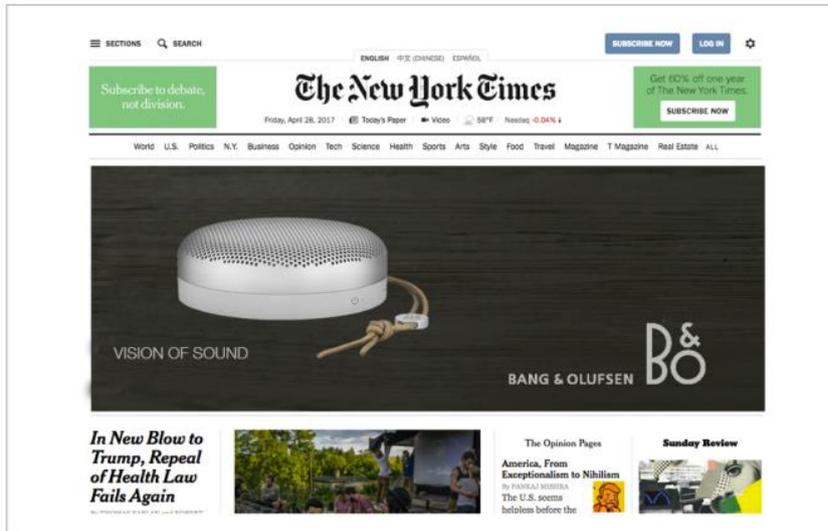
## Appendix 1 - Brand Equity Dimensions (Aaker, 1991)



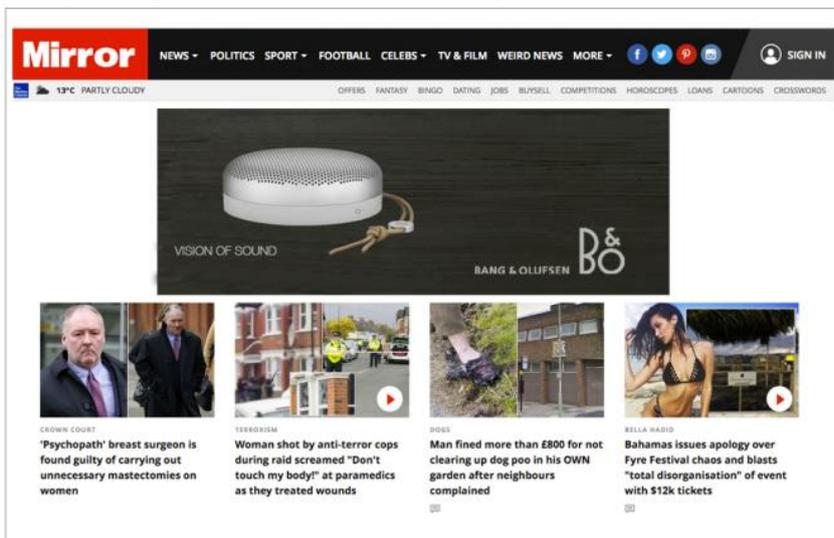
## Appendix 2 – Experiment Scenarios

*Our examples of targeted advertising placed in a context. These made up the four conditions that was displayed for the respondents.*

### Group 1 - Symbolic brand in a congruent context



### Group 2 – Symbolic brand in an incongruent context



### Group 3- Functional brand in a congruent context

**Mirror** NEWS - POLITICS SPORT - FOOTBALL CELEBS - TV & FILM WEIRD NEWS MORE -     SIGN IN

13°C PARTLY CLOUDY OFFERS FANTASY BINGO DATING JOBS BUYSELL COMPETITIONS HOROSCOPES LOANS CARTOONS CROSSWORDS



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**TERRORISM**  
**Woman shot by anti-terror cops during raid screamed "Don't touch my body!" at paramedics as they treated wounds**



**SPES**  
**Man fined more than £800 for not clearing up dog poo in his OWN garden after neighbours complained**



**BELLA HADID**  
**Bahamas issues apology over Fyre Festival chaos and blasts "total disorganisation" of event with \$12k tickets**

Group 4- Functional brand in an incongruent context

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**The Opinion Pages**  
**America, From Exceptionalism to Nihilism**  
By PANKAJ MISHRA  
The U.S. seems helpless before the

**Sunday Review**



## Appendix 3 – Questionnaire

### My relation to (Brand)

- I am very familiar with the brand
- I have heard about this brand before
- I have never heard of this brand before

### My relation to (Website)

- I am very familiar with the brand
- I have heard about this brand before
- I have never heard of this brand before

### In comparison to alternative brands, (Brand)

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
has high quality	<input type="radio"/>						
is the best	<input type="radio"/>						
has consistent quality	<input type="radio"/>						
one of the leading brands	<input type="radio"/>						
growing in popularity	<input type="radio"/>						
innovative	<input type="radio"/>						

Please read the statements below and choose the alternative that represents your opinion the most:

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
Logitech has a personality	<input type="radio"/>						
Logitech is interesting	<input type="radio"/>						
I have a clear image of the type of person who would use Logitech	<input type="radio"/>						
Logitech is different from competing brands	<input type="radio"/>						
Logitech is basically the same as competing brands	<input type="radio"/>						
Some characteristics of Logitech come to my mind quickly	<input type="radio"/>						
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of Logitech	<input type="radio"/>						
I have difficulty in imagining Logitech in my mind	<input type="radio"/>						

Please read the statements below and choose the alternative that represents your opinion the most:

	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Mostly Agree	Completely Agree
I hold <input type="text"/> in high regard	<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="text"/> has earned a strong reputation	<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="text"/> respects me	<input type="radio"/>						
You never go wrong selecting <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="text"/> is accepted by friends, family, and associates	<input type="radio"/>						
Almost no one dislikes <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>						
I have positive associations with <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>						
When I think of <input type="text"/> I have positive thoughts	<input type="radio"/>						

My opinion of  (BRAND)

Bad	<input type="radio"/>	Good						
Negative	<input type="radio"/>	Positive						
Undesirable	<input type="radio"/>	Desirable						
Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	Favorable						

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Rather not specify

Age

15      20      25      30      35      40      45      50      55      60      65

Pull the slider to determine age

Lastly, which brand did you see in the ad of the survey?

- Bang&Olufsen
- Logitech

And on what Website was the ad displayed?

- Mirror
- New York Times

## Appendix 4- Age Distribution

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
15-19	6	2,7%
20-24	105	47,5%
25-29	85	38,5%
30-34	6	2,7%
35-39	2	0,9%
40-44	1	0,5%
45-49	4	1,8%
50-54	4	1,8%
55-59	5	2,3%
60-64	1	0,5%
65-69	2	0,9%
Total	221	100%

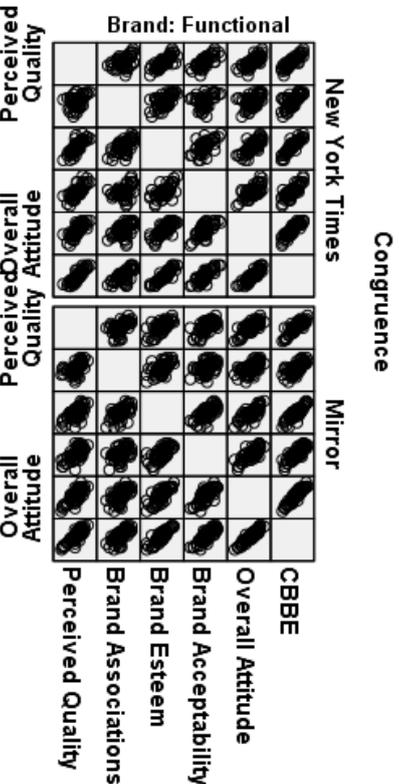
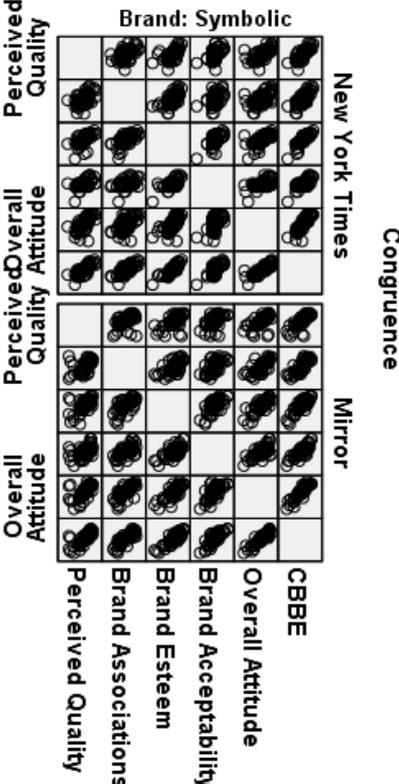
### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	221	19	65	26,56	8,541
Valid N (listwise)	221				

## Appendix 5- Gender Distribution

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
MALE	91	41 %
FEMALE	129	58 %
OTHER	1	1 %
TOTAL	221	100 %

# Appendix 6 – Assumption tests



### Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a</sup>

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Perceived Quality	,516	3	217	,671
Brand Associations	,782	3	217	,505
Brand Esteem	,860	3	217	,463
Brand Acceptability	2,052	3	217	,108
Overall Attitude	,381	3	217	,767
CBBE	,574	3	217	,633

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + Brand + Congruence + Brand \* Congruence

### Multivariate Tests<sup>a</sup>

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	,966	1204,261 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,966
	Wilks' Lambda	,034	1204,261 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,966
	Hotelling's Trace	28,269	1204,261 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,966
	Roy's Largest Root	28,269	1204,261 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,966
Brand	Pillai's Trace	,163	8,296 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,163
	Wilks' Lambda	,837	8,296 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,163
	Hotelling's Trace	,195	8,296 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,163
	Roy's Largest Root	,195	8,296 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,000	,163
Congruence	Pillai's Trace	,027	1,194 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,313	,027
	Wilks' Lambda	,973	1,194 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,313	,027
	Hotelling's Trace	,028	1,194 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,313	,027
	Roy's Largest Root	,028	1,194 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,313	,027
Brand * Congruence	Pillai's Trace	,041	1,802 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,114	,041
	Wilks' Lambda	,959	1,802 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,114	,041
	Hotelling's Trace	,042	1,802 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,114	,041
	Roy's Largest Root	,042	1,802 <sup>b</sup>	5,000	213,000	,114	,041

a. Design: Intercept + Brand + Congruence + Brand \* Congruence

b. Exact statistic

## Appendix 7. MANOVA output – all cases

### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Perceived Quality	26,732 <sup>a</sup>	3	8,911	7,615	,000	,095
	Brand Associations	33,476 <sup>b</sup>	3	11,159	11,456	,000	,137
	Brand Esteem	19,540 <sup>c</sup>	3	6,513	4,895	,003	,063
	Brand Acceptability	2,904 <sup>d</sup>	3	,968	,882	,451	,012
	Overall Attitude	27,393 <sup>e</sup>	3	9,131	5,978	,001	,076
	CBBE	19,036 <sup>f</sup>	3	6,345	7,323	,000	,092
Intercept	Perceived Quality	4704,937	1	4704,937	4020,669	,000	,949
	Brand Associations	4339,066	1	4339,066	4454,735	,000	,954
	Brand Esteem	4266,947	1	4266,947	3206,439	,000	,937
	Brand Acceptability	4240,638	1	4240,638	3861,930	,000	,947
	Overall Attitude	5222,025	1	5222,025	3418,868	,000	,940
	CBBE	4547,338	1	4547,338	5248,023	,000	,960
BrandImage	Perceived Quality	21,819	1	21,819	18,646	,000	,079
	Brand Associations	26,962	1	26,962	27,680	,000	,113
	Brand Esteem	9,764	1	9,764	7,337	,007	,033
	Brand Acceptability	1,954	1	1,954	1,779	,184	,008
	Overall Attitude	22,434	1	22,434	14,687	,000	,063
	CBBE	14,627	1	14,627	16,880	,000	,072
Congruence	Perceived Quality	,060	1	,060	,051	,821	,000
	Brand Associations	2,111	1	2,111	2,168	,142	,010
	Brand Esteem	,231	1	,231	,174	,677	,001
	Brand Acceptability	,301	1	,301	,274	,601	,001
	Overall Attitude	,274	1	,274	,179	,672	,001
	CBBE	,117	1	,117	,136	,713	,001
BrandImage * Congruence	Perceived Quality	4,267	1	4,267	3,647	,058	,017
	Brand Associations	3,446	1	3,446	3,538	,061	,016
	Brand Esteem	8,836	1	8,836	6,640	,011	,030
	Brand Acceptability	,544	1	,544	,496	,482	,002
	Overall Attitude	4,158	1	4,158	2,722	,100	,012
	CBBE	3,741	1	3,741	4,318	,039	,020
Error	Perceived Quality	253,931	217	1,170			
	Brand Associations	211,365	217	,974			
	Brand Esteem	288,771	217	1,331			
	Brand Acceptability	238,279	217	1,098			
	Overall Attitude	331,449	217	1,527			
	CBBE	188,027	217	,866			
Total	Perceived Quality	4976,056	221				
	Brand Associations	4566,188	221				
	Brand Esteem	4565,778	221				
	Brand Acceptability	4481,111	221				
	Overall Attitude	5572,360	221				
	CBBE	4745,202	221				
Corrected Total	Perceived Quality	280,663	220				
	Brand Associations	244,841	220				
	Brand Esteem	308,312	220				
	Brand Acceptability	241,184	220				
	Overall Attitude	358,842	220				
	CBBE	207,063	220				

a. R Squared = ,095 (Adjusted R Squared = ,083)

b. R Squared = ,137 (Adjusted R Squared = ,125)

c. R Squared = ,063 (Adjusted R Squared = ,050)

d. R Squared = ,012 (Adjusted R Squared = -,002)

e. R Squared = ,076 (Adjusted R Squared = ,064)

f. R Squared = ,092 (Adjusted R Squared = ,079)

## Appendix 8. MANOVA output – selected cases

Experiment Group		Perceived Quality	Brand Associations	Brand Esteem	Brand Acceptability	Overall Attitude	Customer-Based Brand Equity
(1) Symb. - Con.	N Valid	19	19	19	19	19	19
	Mean	5.77	5.59	5.49	4.95	5.97	5.55
	Std. Deviation	.607	.778	.548	.788	1.057	.522
(2) Symb. - Incon.	N Valid	25	25	25	25	25	25
	Mean	5.13	4.92	4.68	4.61	5.31	4.93
	Std. Deviation	1.210	1.082	1.120	1.216	1.322	1.079
(3) Func. - Con.	N Valid	28	28	28	28	28	28
	Mean	4.10	3.97	4.02	4.19	4.55	4.17
	Std. Deviation	1.224	.975	1.296	1.275	1.444	1.103
(4) Func. - Incon.	N Valid	19	19	19	19	19	19
	Mean	5.05	4.97	5.21	4.96	5.49	5.14
	Std. Deviation	.970	.796	1.007	1.024	.910	.808

### Pairwise Comparisons

Dependent Variable	Brand Image	(I) Congruence	(J) Congruence	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Perceived Quality	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.645	.325	.050	-.001	1.291
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.645	.325	.050	-1.291	.001
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.951*	.317	.004	-1.582	-.321
		Incongruent	Congruent	.951*	.317	.004	.321	1.582
Brand Associations	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.677*	.285	.020	.111	1.243
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.677*	.285	.020	-1.243	-.111
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-1.005*	.278	.001	-1.557	-.452
		Incongruent	Congruent	1.005*	.278	.001	.452	1.557
Brand Esteem	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.811*	.325	.014	.166	1.457
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.811*	.325	.014	-1.457	-.166
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-1.187*	.317	.000	-1.817	-.556
		Incongruent	Congruent	1.187*	.317	.000	.556	1.817
Brand Acceptability	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.334	.341	.330	-.344	1.012
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.334	.341	.330	-1.012	.344
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.774*	.333	.022	-1.437	-.112
		Incongruent	Congruent	.774*	.333	.022	.112	1.437
Overall Attitude	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.656	.377	.085	-.092	1.405
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.656	.377	.085	-1.405	.092
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.945*	.368	.012	-1.676	-.214
		Incongruent	Congruent	.945*	.368	.012	.214	1.676
CBBE	Symbolic	Congruent	Incongruent	.625*	.287	.032	.054	1.196
		Incongruent	Congruent	-.625*	.287	.032	-1.196	-.054
	Functional	Congruent	Incongruent	-.972*	.280	.001	-1.530	-.415
		Incongruent	Congruent	.972*	.280	.001	.415	1.530

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).