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**NEWS MEDIA BRANDING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
MEDIA BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

Summary of the Doctoral Thesis



**RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**  
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# **DOCTORAL THESIS PROPOSED TO RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY FOR THE PROMOTION TO THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SCIENCE**

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## **DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

I hereby declare that the Doctoral Thesis submitted for the review to Riga Technical University for the promotion to the scientific degree of Doctor of Science (Ph. D.) is my own. I confirm that this Doctoral Thesis had not been submitted to any other university for the promotion to a scientific degree.

Linda Saulīte (signature)

Date: .....

The Doctoral Thesis has been written in English. It consists of an Introduction, 4 chapters, Conclusions, 56 figures, 43 tables, 10 appendices; the total number of pages is 217, not including appendices. The Bibliography contains 291 titles.

## ABSTRACT

The media industry has experienced significant transformation due to digitalization. The development of various technological platforms, especially social media platforms, has created new habits in consuming media content and news. Analysing audience content consumption based on generations, the data confirms that the younger the audience, the more media and news content is consumed on social media platforms. For the audience aged 15–24 years (Generation Z), media content and news consumption depend on the platform and time, with a preference for global and social media and much less time devoted to national news media and their content. Consequently, significant challenges arise for the national news media regarding the possibilities of securing and attracting an audience in the future and advertising revenue. Although the development of platforms has created an opportunity for media and news media to reach audiences and distribute content quickly and efficiently, it has increased competition with the platforms and their content. On-demand content consumption contributes to decreasing media brand associations and a corresponding decrease in news media brand equity. From a branding perspective, building and maintaining strong national news media brand associations is challenging to ensure brand distinctiveness and equity in the platform environment, especially for audiences aged 15–24.

The topicality of the Doctoral Thesis research is related to the challenges national news brands face in the existing media content consumption environment. The research aims to ascertain how to develop and strengthen the brand uniqueness and brand equity of the national news media in the current media business environment as perceived by Generation Z and to develop a methodology for strengthening the brand uniqueness and brand equity of the news media.

To achieve the goal of the Thesis, news consumption trends and their impact on news media brand attribution are analysed. Brand equity and brand uniqueness theories are used to create a theoretical framework for assessing national news media brand uniqueness and its impact on brand equity. The research answers how and which news media brand attributes contribute to the development of brand uniqueness and brand equity, as well as how uniqueness affects news media brand equity. The developed methodology of news media branding was applied and approved in national news media branding approaches based on the research results.

The Doctoral Thesis has been written in English. It comprises an introduction, four chapters, conclusions, recommendations, and a list of references of 291 sources. It has been illustrated with 43 tables and 56 figures. The volume of the Thesis is 217 pages, excluding 10 annexes.

## Contents

ABSTRACT .....	4
Introduction .....	6
1. News media and the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment .....	16
1.1. News media in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment.....	18
1.2. Brand of news media in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment.....	20
2. News media brand associations and uniqueness in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment.....	25
2.1. Brand uniqueness as a brand associations construction.....	25
2.2. News media brand attributes as news media brand uniqueness and brand equity framework .....	29
3. The research of new media brand uniqueness and brand equity in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment .....	30
3.1. Importance of news media attributes and strength of news media brand associations.....	33
3.2. News media brand attributes and brand uniqueness in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment .....	35
3.3. News media brand uniqueness impact on brand equity as perceived by Generation Z.....	39
3.4. The summary of quantitative research results: news media brand attributes, brand uniqueness and equity as perceived by Generation Z .....	42
4. The methodology of news media branding in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment.....	45
4.1. The methodology of news media brand uniqueness and equity development in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century media business environment.....	45
4.2. Approbation of the methodology of news media branding within Latvian companies.....	47
Conclusions and recommendations .....	48
List of references .....	54

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment is characterised by extensive digital transformation: the rapid development of e-commerce, the transformation of marketing into digital marketing, the digital banking and virtual financial instruments in the banking sector, and brand new categories such as online resource-sharing platforms and others. Digital transformation is changing the business paradigm by creating new categories of companies that have never been seen before. Digitalisation has a significant impact on the internal and external processes of companies. As a result of the digital transformation, the media business environment has undergone significant changes. Currently, the content of almost all media is available and consumed in digital form, and the traditional form has become secondary or is gradually disappearing. The most vital factors contributing to the transformation of the media business environment are the generational changes in media consumers or audiences, their expectations, and content consumption habits, which also shape the change in demand. Digitisation has changed the production, storage, distribution, and consumption of content from analogue to digital and fundamentally changed media content consumption habits. This influences the demands of the consumer or audience, the value of the media brand and branding, and the appeal of media to advertisers and investors alike.

Following audience traffic and content consumption channels, a growing amount of advertising spending went into the digital environment in 2022, reaching 56 % of total advertising spending worldwide. The globally projected increase in advertising spending in the digital environment in 2022 compared to 2021 is 15 %. About 30 % of digital advertising spending goes to search engines and the same percentage to social media platforms. In 2021, 25 % of overall advertising expenditures in the Latvian advertising market were allocated to national digital media, a 10 % increase from 2020. In 2022, it was estimated that digital advertising would account for close to 50 % of the total advertising market in Latvia. Like the worldwide advertising market, national media advertising volume is smaller because most of the spending (more than half) is allocated to search engines and social media platforms. In the face of intense competition and content saturation, media branding and its significance within the digital media environment are more crucial than ever. The success of media brands in the

digital environment is a crucial factor in the overall sustainability of the media industry. In the 21st century, where advertising is a major source of funding for media organisations, the ability to attract and retain audiences and establish a strong and visible brand in the digital environment is essential for the viability of the media industry. This requires developing and implementing innovative brand management strategies and presents challenges for media organisations in the current media business environment. National media on the market must compete fiercely with a powerful newcomer – platforms – for audiences and advertising money. Consumer-produced content is another part of a competition that is unprecedented. Consequently, powerful and distinguishable media branding is important when it comes to attracting an audience, advertising, and investment. In contrast, the shift toward distributed news consumption has the opposite effect and undermines the attribution and recognition of news media brands, thus making the media brand less unique.

Nowadays, there are six generations on the market whose media consumption patterns are changing as a result of digitalisation. Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z are the most active consumers of digital media. Among the aforementioned mentioned generations, Generation Z influences and determines the media transformation the most. Already the biggest generation globally in terms of population size and fast becoming the most important consumer segment in many industries, this generation places greater emphasis on the content consumption experience than the media itself and the brand that produced the content. In the future national digital media will have to confront the difficulty of securing and attracting this specific audience while remaining appealing to advertisers and investors. Knowledge of Generation Z media consumption patterns and media branding for this audience is vital to the media industry because it is the foundation upon which the future development of the industry's business environment will be built. The literature review indicates that there has been an increasing interest among academics in studying Generation Z; however, much of this research has focused on various aspects of this generation rather than explicitly examining the relationship between news media branding and Generation Z. This gap in the literature is noteworthy given the growing importance of brand attribution and the significant role that Generation Z plays as a media audience.

Digitalisation is inherently accompanied by new approaches to how the media attracts and retains its audience and customer in the digital environment. It is reasonable to assume that news media organisations face both challenges concerning brand attribution and a pressing need to establish and maintain strong brands in the digital media environment to ensure their



viability. According to the literature, brand equity is established through the creation of strong, favourable, and unique brand associations. It is generally accepted as a measure of brand strength. However, research on brand equity measurement in digital media environments is limited, and there is a significant lack of academic literature on the topic of *news media* brand equity. The lack of academic research on the attributes of news media brands, particularly those related to the content consumption experience and their impact on brand and brand equity, further emphasises the importance of this Thesis research within the field of media branding.

In view of these factors, the purpose of this Doctoral Thesis research will be to examine national news media branding in the media business environment of the 21st century, with a focus on the Generation Z audience.

The **topicality** of this research is centred on the challenges national news brands face in the media business environment, including preference among younger audiences, low brand attribution, and a lack of distinctiveness. Given the influence of news media brands on factors such as credibility, audience loyalty, consumption volume, and financial performance, this research is relevant in terms of both marketing and economic considerations within the media industry.

The **research aim** is to ascertain the most appropriate ways to build brand uniqueness and strong brand equity for news media within the current media business environment as perceived by Generation Z.

To achieve the goal, the following **objectives** are set:

- To identify and evaluate news media brand attributes that create strong, favourable news media brand associations for Generation Z.
- To examine the impact of each attribute on the uniqueness of a news media brand as perceived by Generation Z.
- To assess the impact of news media brand uniqueness on brand equity as perceived by Generation Z.
- To develop a methodology of news media branding in the 21st century media environment, which helps to strengthen news media brand associations, uniqueness, and brand equity.

The **research questions** are:

1. What are the most important attributes of news media brand which create strong and favourable associations with news media brand by Generation Z?

2. How and which attributes of news media brand contribute to developing news media brand uniqueness as perceived by Generation Z?

In this research, the author understands the term "uniqueness" as customer perception of the brand being superior or more distinctive compared to competitor brands that can be formed either through unique brand attributes, unique associations, or a combination of both. (See pp. 79–88 of the Doctoral Thesis).

3. How does news media brand uniqueness impact news media brand equity as perceived by Generation Z?

The **research object** is a news media brand and news media brand equity as perceived by Generation Z.

The **research subject** is the impact of news media brand uniqueness on news media brand equity.

The following **hypotheses** are established:

H1. The combination of category-shared and experience-related attributes of news brand significantly influences news media brand uniqueness.

H2. Content consumption experience-based attributes of news media brand significantly influence news media brand uniqueness.

H3. News media brand uniqueness significantly influences news media brand equity.

The Doctoral Thesis employs generally accepted theoretical **research methods**, such as analysis and synthesis, deduction, analysis and compilation of information, grouping, comparison, graphical representation, and quantitative data processing, including statistical analysis. The informative base of the study consists of scientific literature, international and local publications, methodological literature, information and reports produced by national and international institutions of the European Union, the Republic of Latvia, and other relevant materials. The theoretical framework of the research is based on an academic literature review – a narrative literature overview using conceptual review, document analyses methods, and a review of theories to determine the theoretical framework for the Thesis research, establish the existence of the research topicality, justify the relevance of the study, and identify gaps in the literature so that the Thesis research objectives can be formulated. Quantitative research is based on a survey method. Multiple linear regression and decision tree tests are used to test hypotheses and answer research questions using SPSS and RapidMiner software.

The Doctoral Thesis **research theoretical background** is based on academic literature on brand equity, customer-based brand equity (Farguhar, 1989; Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993;

2009; Kapferer, 1992; Vázquez, 2002; Netemeyer, 2004; Pappu, 2005; Clow & Baack, 2005; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2006; Shamim & Butt, 2013; Farjam & Xu, 2015), brand experience (Brakus, 2009; Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Schmitt, 1999), brand uniqueness concepts (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Krishnan, 1996; Netemeyer, 2004; Aaker, 1996; Sharp & Dawes, 2001; Christodoulides, 2010; Romaniuk & Gaillard, 2007; Zaggl & Hagenmaier & Raasch, 2018), media theories and media branding (Doyle, 2010; 2015; Picard, 2005; 2008; 2011; 2018; Jenkins, 2008; Kung, 2008; Chan-Olmsted, 2006; 2007; 2011; 2015; Siegert, 2011; 2015; Ots, 2008), media brand equity (Bakshi *et al.*, 2014; 2016; Malmelin & Moisaner, 2014; Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008; McDowell, 2004; Fichter, 2008; Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004; McCauley & Nesbitt, 2003; Nienstedt *et al.*, 2012; Victoria-Mas *et al.*, 2018; Chan-Olmsted *et al.*, 2013; Ots & Wolff, 2008; Oyedeji, 2007; Siegert *et al.*, 2015) analyses, secondary data analyses on media consumption trends in Latvia, and Generation Z news media usage trends.

**Limitations** consist of several aspects. The study does not examine the media business environment from the perspective of advertisers, investments, or other stakeholders. Due to the limited scope of the Doctoral Thesis, issues about the application of various types of investments and media business development activities were not addressed. The scope of the Doctoral Thesis is limited to the analysis of the content consumption experience attributes of news media brands. The author consolidates various content-related factors into a single attribute: content that matches the audience's interests. This study focuses on Generation Z as a news media audience, as this generation has the greatest impact and influence on media transformation among the eight distinct generations that make up media audiences today.

The Doctoral Thesis's research **scientific novelty**:

1. For the first time, a new approach for *grouping news media attributes* is presented, which could be applied to measuring news media brands' uniqueness and brand equity. It contributes to further research on news media branding in a new media environment.
2. Based on the Thesis research, the *methodology of news media branding* is developed and validated within Latvian companies, which includes media brand experience as a dominant characteristic that helps news media brands strengthen brand associations in the current media environment and determines the significance of news media attributes and impact of uniqueness on brand equity.

3. A new approach to *understanding of news media brand uniqueness* is established within the Thesis research based on analyses of unique attributes and the perceived uniqueness of a news media brand.
4. For the first time, the approach of evaluating the impact of *non-content-related brand attributes* and brand uniqueness on news media equity is revealed.
5. The relationship and impact between news media brand attributes, brand associations, and brand equity have been found by exploring the theoretical aspects of news media brand equity.
6. The approach to measuring the *strength of news media brand associations* based on the significance of brand attributes, usage, engagement, and frequency is developed.
7. The Thesis research provides an approach to *strengthen news media brand attribution* in the current media environment, which is essential for media business, as the developed methodology of news media branding supports the growth of the attractiveness of advertising spending to national news media.

**The practical contribution** of the Doctoral Thesis research to the media business environment:

1. The methodology of news media branding enables business owners and managers to assess, measure and implement brand attributes to establish, maintain and develop strong and distinctive news media brands in the 21st century media environment.
2. The research results allow practitioners to understand better and pay attention to the significance of content consumption experience: content packaging, branding, assessability and audience engagement with the content.
3. The developed methodology was assessed and integrated into news media branding strategies to strengthen national news brands and grow appeal to advertisers. References from the Chairman of the Board of Delfi.lv and the Commercial Director Tv3.lv confirming the practical contribution to the industry are included in Appendix 6 of the Thesis.
4. The research results have been approved and included in study materials of study programmes and courses devoted to marketing and digital transformation in higher educational institutions.

Theses put forward **for defence**:

1. Grouping of news media attributes by content and consumption experience-related characteristics makes it possible to identify and develop appropriate news media branding approaches.
2. The results of the analysis of the brand uniqueness development can help news media owners-managers and employees to develop a better understanding of the brand attribution development challenges and opportunities.
3. It is possible to create a methodology of news media branding suitable for national news media, which can be successfully used for news media brand uniqueness and brand equity development in the 21st century media business environment.

**Structure and volume** of the Doctoral Thesis. The Doctoral Thesis consists of an introduction, four main chapters, conclusions, and recommendations. The volume of the Thesis is 217 pages, excluding appendices. 56 figures and 43 tables illustrate the content of the Thesis. The Thesis has 10 appendices. The bibliography contains 291 reference sources.

**Chapter 1** of the Thesis defines the research area and examines the changes in the media environment resulting from digitalisation, digitalisation's influence on the media business environment and media, particularly news media content distribution and consumption. Based on an analysis of these patterns, it was established that Generation Z is the most typical digitalisation-characteristic media audience. This audience's primary content consumption trends were analysed, and generational significance was determined in media audience analyses. The effect of these changes on the media brand and branding was evaluated, resulting in two major trends among media brands: the necessity for a strong media brand and for maintaining the distinctiveness of media brands. As a result of these analyses, the research topicality, aim, and research questions were formulated with a focus on the Generation Z audience.

**In Chapter 2** of the Thesis, the formulated research problem was studied within notions of news media brand equity, the conceptual basis for brand distinctiveness, and the brand experience. The brand association framework was analysed based on brand association theories related to brand equity concepts. As a result of this analysis, a conceptual framework of news media brand associations and distinctiveness and their influence on news media brand equity and three research hypotheses were formulated. The theoretical foundation for the empirical study was designed after the second part of the Thesis.

**Chapter 3** of the Thesis explains the methods and methodology of the quantitative research. The data analysis of quantitative study and results are provided, along with the

explored and confirmed research questions and hypotheses. The importance of the news media attributes in establishing strong and positive brand associations was determined. The strength of brand association score assessment approach was developed. The influence of brand attributes on news media brand uniqueness was investigated. The impact of brand uniqueness on brand equity was assessed, examined, and verified. All research questions were addressed, and the three hypotheses were validated, except the first hypothesis, which was not validated for the news media brand tv3.lv.

**Chapter 4** of the Thesis presents the *methodology of news media branding*. It describes the Thesis research findings and proposed methodology approbation within the news media “Delfi” and the media and communication agency “Dentsu Latvia”. The Thesis research findings were presented, and an analysis of the proposed methodology was discussed with the Board of the Latvian Advertising Association and the media organisation “TV3 group”.

The research was conducted from 2017 to 2022, and data approbation was made by presenting the progress and results of the research at ten international academic conferences, in seven internationally recognised scientific publications indexed in SCOPUS database, and in conference proceedings and anonymously peer-reviewed scientific articles published in international journals and available in other databases and encyclopedias.

Topics of the Doctoral Thesis presented at **scientific conferences**:

1. *Riga Technical University 63rd International Scientific Conference "Scientific Conference on Economics and Entrepreneurship" (SCEE'2022)*, academic report "How To Make News Media Brand Distinctive In A Multi-Platform Environment?", October 13, 2022, Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia.
2. *26th World Multi-Conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics: WMSCI 2022*, academic report "What Is The Uniqueness Of Media Brand? The Audience Perspective", July 12–15, 2022, Orlando, Florida, USA.
3. *"Society of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity (SOI)"*, academic report "The Impact on Audience Media Brand Choice Using Media Brands Uniqueness Phenomenon", July 6–9, 2022, Swansea University, Wales, UK.
4. *"Scientific Conference on Economics and Entrepreneurship SCEE'2021"*, academic report "The Role Of Audience Segments On Media Consumption", – 62nd International Scientific Conference of Riga Technical University, October 14-15, 2021, Riga, Latvia.
5. *"Society of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity (SOI)"*, academic report "The Influence of Non-Product-Related Attributes on Media Brands'

- Consumption", Riga Technical University 2021, July 12–15, 2021, Online & Offline, Daegu, Korea.
6. *The 24th World Multi-Conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics (WMSCI 2020)*, academic report "Trends in Media Branding: Case of Latvia - the Younger Audience in Focus", September 13–16, 2020, Orlando, Florida, USA.
  7. *The 2018 AABS (Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies) Conference at Stanford University: The 100th Anniversary of Baltic Independence*, academic report "Media Digitalization Impact on Media Branding in Latvia", Stanford University, June 1–3, 2018, Stanford, USA.
  8. "Media Management in the Age of Big Data and High-tech" EMMA (European Media Management Association) conference, academic report "Is There A Future For Local Media Brands? Media Digitalisation Impact On Media Branding In Latvia. The Younger Audience In Focus", June 14–15, 2018, Warsaw, Poland.
  9. *2nd Riga Readings in Social Sciences (RRSS) "Baltic Sea Region: One Hundred Years On"*, academic report "Media Digitalisation Impact On Media Consumption In Latvia. Emerging Trends In News Consumption Among The Younger Audience (15-24-year-olds)", University of Latvia, Faculty of Social Sciences, November 22–23, 2018, Riga, Latvia.
  10. *The Baltic States at 99: Past, Present and Future. The 12th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe*, academic report "Media Digitalisation Impact On Media Branding In Latvia", University of Latvia, June 19–21, 2017, Riga, Latvia.

### **Approbation of the Thesis research results in publications**

#### **Scientific articles indexed in the Web of Science and/or Scopus database:**

1. Saulīte, L., & Ščeulovs, D. (2022). The Impact on Audience Media Brand Choice Using Media Brands Uniqueness Phenomenon. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 8(3), 128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc8030128>
2. Saulīte, L., Ščeulovs, D., & Pollák, F. (2022). The Influence of Non-Product-Related Attributes on Media Brands' Consumption. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 8(3), 105. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc8030105>

**Publications in conference proceedings indexed in Web of Science and/or SCOPUS:**

3. Saulite, L., Sceulovs, D. (2022). What Is the Uniqueness of a Media Brand? The Audience Perspective. In N. Callaos, E. Gaile-Sarkane, S. Hashimoto, B. Sánchez (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 26th World Multi-Conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics: WMSCI 2022*, Vol. II, pp. 125–129. International Institute of Informatics and Cybernetics. <https://doi.org/10.54808/WMSCI2022.02.125>
4. Saulite, L. (2022). The Role of Audience Segments on Media Consumption. Scientific –Conference on Economics and Entrepreneurship Proceedings, SCEE2021, 100–112. <https://doi.org/10.7250/scee.2021.0010>
5. Saulīte, L., Januševska, G., Andersone, I., & Ščeulovs, D. (2020). Trends in Media Branding: Case of Latvia – The Younger Audience in Focus. In: *The 24th World Multi-Conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics (WMSCI 2020): Proceedings*. Vol. 3, United States of America, Florida, 1–31 August 2020. Winter Garden, Florida: International Institute of Informatics and Systemics (IIS), 98-102. ISBN 978-1-950492-45-9.

**Publication (anonymously reviewed) in a journal with an international editorial board indexed in other databases:**

6. Saulite, L. (2022). News Media Brand Equity in a New Media Environment. *Economics and Business*, 36(1) 199–210. <https://doi.org/10.2478/eb-2022-0013>

**Encyclopedia articles/entries:**

7. Saulīte, L., Ščeulovs, D., & Pollák, F. (2022, July 20). The Media Brand Theoretical Framework. In *Encyclopedia*. <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/25328>

**Other activities and projects:**

Chair at Special Session 13. Challenges and New Perspectives of Business, Technology and Management, SOI & DEMI of the UNINA 2023 Conference, July 12–15, 2023, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy.

Project: ESF project "Strengthening the academic staff of Riga Technical University in areas of strategic specialisation" No. 8.2.2.0/18/A/017, dated 26.11.2022

19th Annual BMDA Conference "Is the World Really Burning-out? Mastering New Reality" October 7–8, 2022. Online.



## 1. News media and the 21st century media business environment

In addition to the changes in business models and processes, digital transformation significantly impacts how companies interact with their customers. With the increasing use of social media and other online platforms, companies can connect with their customers in real-time and gather valuable data on their preferences and behaviours. Digital transformation also has the potential to disrupt traditional industries and create new opportunities for companies that can adapt and innovate. As a result, digital transformation is a significant force shaping the business environment of the 21st century. The transition from traditional media platforms, such as television and print, to digital platforms, such as social media, streaming services, and online news websites, has been a significant effect of digital transformation on the media sector. This has led to a decline in traditional forms of advertising, such as print ads and commercial breaks on television, as more and more people consume media online.<sup>1</sup> The rise of social media and other digital platforms has also made it easier for individuals to create and distribute their own content, leading to increased content and viewpoints in the media business environment.<sup>2</sup> Traditional sources of news distribution, such as print newspapers and television news shows, have been overtaken by online platforms as part of the digital transformation of the media sector. This has led to the growth of online news media, as well as the use of social media and other digital platforms to distribute news and information.<sup>3</sup> The rise of digital news has had a few consequences for the media industry. One major concern is the spread of misinformation and fake news online, which can be difficult to distinguish from reliable sources.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the decline in traditional forms of advertising has made it difficult for news media to generate the revenue needed to support their operations, leading to a decline in the number of journalists and the quality of journalism. Digitalisation brings about a profound transformation in how

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<sup>1</sup> Dentsu Global. (2022). Dentsu Digital Ad Spends Forecast. [accessed July 23, 2022]. Available at <https://www.dentsu.com/news-releases/dentsu-ad-spend-forecast-july-2022-release>

<sup>2</sup> Wilding, D., Fray, P., Molitorisz, S. & McKewon, E. (2018). The Impact of Digital Platforms on News and Journalistic Content, [accessed September 3, 2021]. Available at <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2018-12/CMT%20News%20Report.pdf>, *University of Technology Sydney*, NSW.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Tsfati, Y., Boomgaarden, H. G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegthart, R., Damstra, A., & Lindgren, E.. (2020). Causes and consequences of mainstream media dissemination of fake news: literature review and synthesis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 44(2), 157–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>

audiences access and consume media content, particularly news.<sup>5</sup> Historically, people had access to news through direct contact with media organisations. In the 21st century, consumers increasingly arrive via "distributed" means of discovery – news is discovered via platform products and services such as search engines and social media platforms. Several researchers have found that this changed environment in how news and media content is delivered and consumed by audiences has influenced audiences' attribution of news media brands.<sup>6</sup> In the context of this research, news media brand attribution is whether people can remember where they get their news when the content arrives via different platforms other than directly from the media channel. Understanding news brand attribution is crucial for media and studies because news media brands are important source cues and heuristics for how people receive information.<sup>7, 8</sup> The news media brand enables media differentiation.<sup>9</sup> This allows consumers to differentiate between a specific brand and its competitors.<sup>10</sup> Numerous academics argue that low levels of brand attribution for news brands in the current media environment may endanger the industry's long-term economic foundations and that news brand attribution is crucial for information processing and media evolution.<sup>11</sup> How to create and maintain connections with an audience is now of paramount importance.<sup>12</sup> The content is distributed across different channels, reducing the original media brand's uniqueness.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, it is reasonable to suppose that media are both encountering difficulties in brand attribution and a growing need

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<sup>5</sup> Doyle, G. (2015). Multi-platform media and the miracle of the loaves and fishes. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 12(1), 49–65.

<sup>6</sup> Kalogeropoulos, A., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). News brand attribution in distributed environments: Do people know where they get their news? *New Media & Society*, 21(3), 583–601, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818801313>

<sup>7</sup> Iyengar, S., & Hahn, K.S. (2009). Red media, blue media: evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. *Journal of Communication* 59(1): 19–39.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, J. (2007). The messenger overwhelming the message: ideological cues and perceptions of bias in television news. *Political Behavior* 29(4): 441–464.

<sup>9</sup> Athey, S., Mobius, M.M., & Pál, J. (2017). The Impact of Aggregators on Internet News Consumption. *Microeconomics: Search; Learning; Information Costs & Specific Knowledge; Expectation & Speculation eJournal*.

<sup>10</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2006). *Competitive Strategy for Media Firms* (0 ed.). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781135617141>

<sup>11</sup> Kalogeropoulos, A., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). News brand attribution in distributed environments: Do people know where they get their news? *New Media & Society*, 21(3), 583–601, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818801313>

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, G. (2015). Multi-platform media and the miracle of the loaves and fishes. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 12(1), 49–65.

<sup>13</sup> McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory*, 6th. ed (6th. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

to sustain and establish strong brands in the media environment of this century. The author of the Thesis states that because of digitalisation, the transformation of media organisations, particularly news media, is driven by two factors: how media content is distributed and consumed by audiences and the subsequent influence on media brand attribution. Scholars are increasingly focusing on platforms as important digitalisation drivers, concurring that the media industry is facing new demands imposed by those platforms.<sup>14</sup> Both practitioners and academics agree that significant changes in how media content is produced, distributed, and consumed are behind the most substantial changes in the media environment. In well-established media and audience relationships, a third participant has emerged during the 21st century in the form of platforms, which have become a significant channel of media content distribution and consumption. The expansion of platforms has been a fundamental catalyst for media content distribution and consumption. Digitalisation and the convenience of access have increased audience time spent on different platforms (digital technologies that emerged due to digitalisation). The audience, particularly the younger audience, demands a content consumption experience that is mobile, modular, variable and does not depend on a particular platform, device, or media channel.<sup>15</sup> Scholars agree that multi-platforms have not only created new ways of distributing media content but have also created a previously unheard-of media content consumption pattern: on-demand content consumption, which is a fundamental change in the media environment of this century. Now platforms have entered this well-established communication flow and brought several significant consequences to the media environment. The author of the Thesis concludes and offers adjustments to the media element of Laswell's model<sup>16</sup>, defining it as the transformed media environment of the 21st century due to the emergence of platforms and areas of change within this research focus.

### **1.1. News media in the 21st century media business environment**

The scholars agree that the most significant change to news media is news consumption via platforms. According to Reuter's research (2017), the biggest change has been the growth of news accessed via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Over half (51 %) of

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<sup>14</sup> Vial, G. (2019). Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. *The journal of strategic information systems: incorporating International Information Systems*, 28(2).

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*; New York University Press: New York, NY, USA.

<sup>16</sup> Lasswell, H. D. (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. In L. Bryson (Ed.), *Communication of ideas*, 37–51. New York: Harper and Row.

the research sample respondents in the United States now get news via social media – five percentage points up from 2016 and twice as many as accessed in 2013.<sup>17</sup> As previously mentioned, a significant shift for media is that creative output is not merely the content itself but also the platforms on which it emerges.<sup>18</sup> According to secondary data analyses, younger groups are much more likely to use social media and digital media as their primary news source. A third of 18–24 year olds (33 %) now say social media platforms are their primary source of news – that is more than online news sites (31 %) and more than TV news and printed newspapers put together (29 %).<sup>19</sup> The younger audiences differ from older generations in what they do and their fundamental attitudes regarding what they desire from the news.<sup>20</sup> According to secondary data analyses and literature review, the author argues that news media have an entirely different media audience – Generation Z, born in a digital age. This generation is the largest globally<sup>21</sup> in terms of population and, getting the most important consumer segment in many industries, places greater emphasis on the content consumption experience than the media itself and the brand that produced the content. Knowledge of the media consumption patterns of Generation Z and media branding for this audience is crucial for the media industry, as it serves as the foundation for the future development of the media business environment. The younger audiences require mobile, platform-independent, interactive, and on-demand media consumption. Their social media platform usage has been growing yearly, exceeding the use of national news media in the online environment.<sup>22</sup> Numerous kinds of research show that the younger generation prefers to use global or international media brands over national news media (see Appendix 1 of the Thesis).<sup>23</sup> Many scholars conclude that for younger audiences,

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<sup>17</sup> Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D., Nielsen, R. K. (2017). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3026082>

<sup>18</sup> K ng, L. (2017). Reflections on the ascendancy of technology in the media and its implications for organisations and their leaders. *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 4(1), 77–81. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jmi.v4i1.3171>

<sup>19</sup> Newman, N., Fletcher, R., & Kalogeropoulos, A., & Levy, D., & Nielsen, R. K. (2017). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3026082>

<sup>20</sup> Galan, L., Osserman, J., & Parker, T. & Taylor, M. (2019). How Young People Consume News and the Implications for Main-stream Media; *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, Oxford University: Oxford, UK

<sup>21</sup> United States Census Bureau: International Data Base World Population by Age and Sex/Web [accessed on September 20, 2022], available [https://www.census.gov/datatools/demo/idb/#/country?COUNTRY\\_YEAR=2022&COUNTRY\\_YR\\_ANIM=2022](https://www.census.gov/datatools/demo/idb/#/country?COUNTRY_YEAR=2022&COUNTRY_YR_ANIM=2022)

<sup>22</sup> Dentsu Aegis Network Latvia. (2021). *Consumer Connection System Latvia*, consumer media usage proprietary research, 2012–2021.

<sup>23</sup> Kalmus, V., Masso, A., & Lauristin, M. (2013). Preferences in media use and perception of inter-generational differences among age groups in Estonia: A cultural approach to media generations. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 11(1), 15–34. [https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.11.1.15\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.11.1.15_1)

the source of content (or brand of media) or news is less significant. Based on the literature review and secondary data analysis (Appendix 1), it can be concluded that various content access points and platforms increase the significance of the news consumption experience, especially for Generation Z. Before digitalization, it was clear that news consumption was limited to the dedicated moment when the audience turned on a television or radio station or opened a newspaper.<sup>24</sup> The author of the Thesis summarizes that younger audiences consume news, but they do so online, on-demand, and via multiple platforms, thereby elevating the significance of news content and the experience of content consumption.

## **1.2. Brand of news media in the 21st century media business environment**

While news consumption is increasing among all age groups, trust in the news has declined over the years.<sup>25</sup> The latest data on audience attitudes and behaviour towards news media in European Union (EU) countries shows that although social media platforms and online news are widely used as news sources or channels for audiences, the trust in those channels is low. Globally, trust in news is also declining.<sup>26</sup> Academics debate the reasons behind the declining trust in news. Media trust is often discussed in the relevant literature alongside related concepts such as media credibility and trustworthiness.<sup>27, 28</sup> The vital reason for this is that the implication of the shift to distributed consumption (or news consumption via multi-platforms and on-demand) through search, social, and aggregators relates to the decreasing level of attribution and recognition for news media brands. Numerous studies confirm that the attribution of sources or news media brands is increasingly low in a multi-platform media environment. Literature analyses demonstrate that the transformed media environment has implications for news media brand and brand attribution.

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<sup>24</sup> Galan, L., Osserman, J., Parker, T., & Taylor, M. (2019). How young people consume news and the implications for mainstream media. *Flamingo and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, Oxford University, UK.

<sup>25</sup> European Parliament. Directorate General for Communication. & Ipsos European Public Affairs. (2022). *News & media survey 2022*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/023298>

<sup>26</sup> Fisher, C. (2016). The trouble with 'trust' in news media, *Communication Research and Practice*, 2:4, 451–465, DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2016.1261251

<sup>27</sup> Engelke, K., Hase, V., & Winterlin, F. (2019). On measuring trust and distrust in journalism: Reflection of the status quo and suggestions for the road ahead. *Journal of Trust Research*, 9. 66–86. 10.1080/21515581.2019.1588741.

<sup>28</sup> Otto, K., & Köhler, A. (2018). Trust in Media and Journalism. In: Otto, K., Köhler, A. (eds) *Trust in Media and Journalism*. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20765-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20765-6_1)

## News media brand associations and uniqueness in the media environment

Brand and brand strength are related to brand equity models, widely recognised as definitions and structures of brand power in the consumer's mind. Media brands add thoughts and emotions needed to enhance the value of a product beyond its product category and functional attributes.<sup>29</sup> Brands provide information about the quality of content experience and credence of good media content.<sup>30</sup> The scholars agree that brands primarily assist customers in navigating the vast media titles and programmes available and that media brands are market signals. They express the credibility and quality of media products and advise consumers on what to expect from a particular programme, title, or product.<sup>31</sup> From an audience perspective, a media brand is a construct that carries the audience's cognitive, emotional, stylistic, conscious and unconscious associations.<sup>32</sup> As analysed by numerous authors, the impact of news consumption via platforms is decreasing trust in news. Since news content on social media platforms coexists with numerous other sorts of information, audiences cannot always be relied upon to distinguish between content generated by news media, that of individual users, and the platform itself. This, in turn, might make it harder for people to develop and maintain clear brand associations to ensure high brand attribution.

The literature review demonstrates that one of the most fundamental shifts that changed the media environment is that multi-platform and on-demand content consumption dilutes news media brand associations.<sup>33, 34, 35</sup> Multi-platform content delivery weakens brand associations

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<sup>29</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2005). *Competitive Strategy for Media Firms: Strategic and Brand Management in Changing Media Markets* (1st ed.). , Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410617408>

<sup>30</sup> Krebs, I., & Siegert, G. (2015). 20 Years of Research on Media Brands and Media Branding, Springer Books, in: Siegert, G., Förster, K., Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Ots, M.(ed.), *Handbook of Media Branding*, edition 127, 33–49, Springer, Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany

<sup>31</sup> Siegert, G., Förster, K., Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Ots, M. (Eds.) (2015). *Handbook of Media Branding*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0>

<sup>32</sup> Förster, K. (2015). An Audience-Centered Perspective on Media Brands: Theoretical Considerations, Empirical Results and 'White Spaces'. In G. Siegert, K. Förster, S. M. Chan-Olmsted, & M. Ots (Eds.), *Handbook of Media Branding* (pp. 281–293). Springer International Publishing. [http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0\\_19](http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0_19)

<sup>33</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S. (2011). Media Branding in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities 2.0. *Int. J. Media Manag.*,13, 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2011.568305>

<sup>34</sup> Siegert, G., Förster, K., Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Ots, M. (Eds.) (2015). *Handbook of Media Branding*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0>.

<sup>35</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Shay, R. (2015). Media Branding 3.0: From Media Brands to Branded Entertainment and Information. In: Siegert, G., Förster, K., Chan-Olmsted, S., Ots, M. (eds) *Handbook of Media Branding*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0_2)

for news media brands.<sup>36</sup> The content source (media brand) becomes less relevant, particularly when the content itself has unique brand associations.<sup>37</sup> Many media consumers no longer care which media brand distributes the material to them; it is all about the consumption experience, which determines consumer brand loyalty among rival content providers.<sup>38</sup> The current media environment promotes a high point of parity, and the brand's point of differentiation is low.<sup>39</sup> The Thesis author concludes that the impact on news media brands is decreasing media brand associations and uniqueness within the research scope. As a result, news media are enduring a decline in brand strength and uniqueness in a multi-platform environment.

### **News media brand equity**

Increasing efforts are being made to introduce and define brand equity as the definition and structure of the brand strength construct. There is agreement that brand equity is key for brand uniqueness and differentiation among competitors.<sup>40, 41</sup> The three acknowledged models of customer-based brand equity are those of Keller (1993), Aaker (1991), and Kapferer (1992).<sup>42</sup> Aaker and Keller define brand equity from a consumer perspective based on consumers' memory-based brand association. Keller (1993) argues that positive brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in his or her memory. This occurs when consumers sense that a brand has attributes and benefits that satisfy their demands and consider these attributes to be unique from those of competitors and that they are maintained over time as part of the brand's image. In the news media brand context, positive brand equity occurs if media attributes are perceived as beneficial to the audience and create and hold strong and unique brand associations. In that case, investigations of how brand associations are established and strengthened are essential.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.452–487.

<sup>37</sup> Keller, K. L. (2009). Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15:2–3, 139–155, DOI: 10.1080/13527260902757530

<sup>38</sup> Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand Experience: What is It? How is it Measured? Does it Affect Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.3.052>

<sup>39</sup> Keller, K. (2009). Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. *Journal of Marketing Communications*. 15. 10.1080/13527260902757530.

<sup>40</sup> Capron, L., & Hulland, J. (1999). Redeployment of Brands, Sales Forces, and General Marketing Management Expertise following Horizontal Acquisitions: A Resource-Based View. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(2), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299906300203>

<sup>41</sup> Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1–22. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252054>

<sup>42</sup> Kapferer, J. N. (1992). *Strategic brand management: New approaches to creating and evaluating brand equity*. New York: The Free Press.

The types of brand associations that condense factual information can be categorized into product- and non-product-related attributes.<sup>43</sup> From a branding and brand management standpoint, the studies of the brand association formation process, particularly in the new media environment, and its impact on brand equity constitute crucial research. An exciting paradox is that even though a media environment provides more contacts or touchpoints with the brands, oversaturation and multi-platforms decrease news media brand association. The scholars highlight the market advantages enjoyed by news media outlets with high customer-based brand equity.<sup>44, 45, 46</sup> According to most academics, audience satisfaction and consumption positively correlate with news media companies' customer-based brand equity,<sup>47</sup> media credibility, news quality, and audience loyalty.<sup>48</sup> In addition, media brand studies demonstrate that brand equity can assist a company in attracting advertisers and achieving its commercial objectives.<sup>49</sup> Many scholars agree that news media branding is considered an ideal tool for differentiation and distinctiveness.<sup>50 51</sup> News media brands offer enhanced value propositions about the content, interaction, and consumption experience their audiences might anticipate.<sup>52</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>43</sup> Keller, K. L. (1993) Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 1–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1252054>

<sup>44</sup> Bakshi, M., & Mishra, P. (2016). Structural equations modelling of determinants of consumerbased brand equity of newspapers. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 13(2), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ha, L., & Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2004). Cross-media use in electronic media: The role of cable television web sites in cable television network branding and viewership. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48(4), 620–645.

<sup>46</sup> Nienstedt, H. W., Huber, F., & Seelmann, C. (2012). The influence of the congruence between brand and consumer personality on the loyalty to print and online issues of magazine brands. *International Journal on Media Management*, 14(1), 3–26.

<sup>47</sup> Ha, L., & Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2004). Cross-media use in electronic media: The role of cable television web sites in cable television network branding and viewership. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48(4), 620–645.

<sup>48</sup> Oyediji, T. A. (2007). The Relation Between the Customer-Based Brand Equity of Media Outlets and Their Media Channel Credibility: An Exploratory Study. *Int. J. Media Manag.*, 9, 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241270701521725>

<sup>49</sup> Malmelin, N., & Moisaner, J. (2014). Brands and branding in media management – Toward a research agenda. *International Journal on Media Management*, 16(1), 9–25. doi:10.1080/14241277.2014.898149

<sup>50</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Cha, J. (2007) Branding Television News in a Multichannel Environment: An Exploratory Study of Network News Brand Personality, *International Journal on Media Management*, 9:4, 135–150, DOI: 10.1080/14241270701632688

<sup>51</sup> Doyle, G. (2015). Brands in international and multi-platform expansion strategies: Economic and management issues. In *Handbook of media branding* (pp. 53–64).

<sup>52</sup> Ots, M. (2008). *Media Brands and Branding*, Jönköping. International Business School: Jönköping, Sweden ISBN 91-89164-82-2.



media brands increase product value.<sup>53</sup> News media brands serve as formative characteristics of media communications and influence the process of news elaboration. Credible news media brands evoke stronger arousal responses, enhancing the efficiency of knowledge storage and retrieval.<sup>54</sup> Focusing on brand associations and how they develop is crucial if media brands are to successfully confront high competition and a low point of differentiation. To remain relevant and competitive, national news media brands must adapt to the changing media environment by adapting to digital platforms and social media and understanding younger audiences' changing preferences and habits. The way the audience develops news media associations has fundamentally changed due to the changing media environment. This refers to the overall experience of consuming news on a particular platform, including usability, design, and overall user experience. In Fig. 1.1, the author proposes the novelty of this research and illustrates the changes in news media brand associations development due to digitalization.

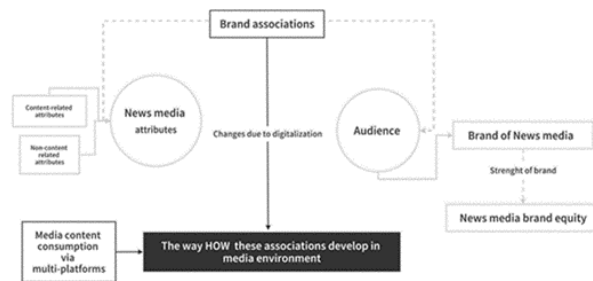


Fig. 1.1. Effect of digitalization effects on news media brand associations construct, based on theories of news media brand equity (Aaker,<sup>55</sup> Keller<sup>56</sup>), (created by author, novelty of this research).

One major challenge for news media brands is building and maintaining strong brand attribution. In the current media environment, where sources and platforms are abundant for accessing news and information, it can be difficult for media brands to stand out and establish themselves as reliable and trustworthy sources. This requires a strong brand and a clear and

<sup>53</sup> McDowell, W. (2011). The brand management crisis facing the business of journalism. *International Journal on Media Management*, 13(1), 37–51.

<sup>54</sup> Laaksonen, S. M., Falco, A., Salminen, M., Aula, P., & Ravaja, N. (2019). Brand as a cognitive mediator: Investigating the effect of media brands as a structural feature of textual news messages. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPB-01-2017-1394>

<sup>55</sup> Aaker, D. (1991). *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalising on the Value of a Brand Name*; The Free Press: New York, NY, USA.

<sup>56</sup> Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57 (1), 1–22.

consistent message that resonates with audiences. Another challenge is developing and maintaining media brand distinctiveness. The content consumption experience shapes how audiences perceive and remember a media brand. Media branding in the digital age requires a strategic and proactive approach that considers the changing media environment and the preferences and habits of audiences.

## **2. News media brand associations and uniqueness in the 21st century media business environment**

Scholars agree that brand associations formed through different brand attributes – product or non-product related, positively affect brand equity. The author of the Thesis proceeds to question how different content consumption experiences influence news media brand associations and how unique audience associations are formed. This prompts the author of the Thesis to conclude that not only quantity, consensus, and valence of the brand associations are essential for the brand, but also the brand uniqueness from an audience point of view is crucial. From a branding perspective, this requires careful research into the audience perspective and involvement of brand associations and brand uniqueness development, particularly regarding news media and younger audiences.

### **2.1. Brand uniqueness as a brand associations construction**

Brand uniqueness is defined as *"the degree to which customers feel the brand differs from competing brands – how distinct it is relative to competitors"*.<sup>57</sup> Based on the literature review, the Thesis author concludes that there is no unified terminology for the term, as many academics use distinctiveness to describe brand uniqueness. In contrast, others even use point of difference.<sup>58, 59, 60</sup> Nevertheless, the idea and concept are the same – the brand or company or individual distinctiveness compared to other brands or companies. The literature identifies

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<sup>57</sup> Netemeyer, R., Krishnan, B., Pullig, C., Wang, G., Yagci, M., Dean, D., Ricks, J., & Wirth, F. Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Business Research*, 2004, 57, 209–224. 10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00303-4

<sup>58</sup> Keller, K. L. (2009). Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15:2–3, 139–155, DOI: 10.1080/13527260902757530

<sup>59</sup> Romaniuk, J., Sharp, B., & Ehrenberg, A. (2007). Evidence concerning the importance of perceived brand differentiation. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 15(2), 42–54.

<sup>60</sup> Sharp, B., & Dawes, J. (2001). What is differentiation and how does it work? *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17(7–8), 739–759.

brand uniqueness as one of the essential concepts in consumer behaviour and a crucial aspect of brand equity, which allows products to distinguish themselves from a vast array of similar competitors.<sup>61, 62</sup> Distinctiveness benefits consumer choice, brand equity, and new product acceptability.<sup>63</sup> These benefits show that enhancing the perceived uniqueness of a brand is an effective and crucial strategy for sustaining and enhancing brand performance. The author of the Thesis believes that when developing the concept of uniqueness, two aspects should be considered: uniqueness versus perceived uniqueness and optimal level of uniqueness.

### **Brand uniqueness versus perceived uniqueness**

Firstly, it is essential to note that differentiation and distinctiveness are frequently confused and used interchangeably. Unique attributes in and of themselves do not bring value to the consumer in the sense of difference. Instead, they facilitate easy and automatic brand recognition across all consumer touchpoints. There are two ways to develop brand uniqueness. The first is a consumer's perception that a brand offers something other brands do not, or brand uniqueness. The second is brand superiority in which the consumer is aware that other brands possess the same attribute but perceives one brand as superior.<sup>64</sup> Developing consumer impressions of a brand's distinctiveness is only one method for achieving brand differentiation.<sup>65</sup> Academics and practitioners handle uniqueness ideas differently. One alternative emphasis is distinctiveness, which suggests that a consumer links only one brand with a given attribute instead of shared associations in which numerous brands relate to the attribute.<sup>66</sup> The second one is a unique attribute belonging only to a particular brand. When approaching brand uniqueness, distinguishing between unique brand attributes or features and perceived uniqueness or unique associations is essential. Firstly, distinguishing between novel/unique attributes and unique associations is essential. Unique attributes are exclusive to

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<sup>61</sup> Christodoulides, G., & de Chernatony, L. (2010). Consumer-based brand equity conceptualisation and measurement: a literature review. *International journal of market research*, 52(1), 43–66.

<sup>62</sup> Netemeyer, R., Krishnan, B., Pullig, C., Wang, G., Yagci, M., Dean, D., Ricks, J., & Wirth, F. (2004). Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 209–224. 10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00303-4

<sup>63</sup> Aaker, D. A. (1996) Measuring Brand Equity across Products and Markets. *California Management Review*, 38, 102–120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/41165845>

<sup>64</sup> Sharp, B., & Dawes, J. (2001). What is Differentiation and How Does it Work? *Journal of Marketing Management*. 17. 739–759. 10.1362/026725701323366809.

<sup>65</sup> Pechmann, C., & Ratneshwar, S. (1991). The Use of Comparative Advertising for Brand Positioning: Association Versus Differentiation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(2), 145–160. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489551>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 145–155.

a specific brand, making comparisons to other brands inappropriate. Unique associations or perceived uniqueness are discovered from the perspective of a single customer and occur when a consumer associates only one brand with a particular attribute, regardless of whether or not other brands possess that characteristic. It reflects what the consumer perceives as opposed to what the brand gives.<sup>67</sup> Thus, unique associations are not obligatory to involve the existence of a unique attribute of a particular brand. Brand uniqueness can be formed either through unique brand attributes, associations, or a combination of both. Brand associations can be either shared with competitors or unique to the brand. Shared attributes and associations are category-relevant or category-characteristic functional.<sup>68</sup> Unique attributes are the ones that own a particular brand only compared to category brands. Perceived uniqueness suggests that the consumer links just one brand with a particular attribute, even though numerous brands may provide the same attribute. The apparent brand distinctiveness may result from a specific experience with that brand's offering or exposure to advertising that communicates the unique attribute.<sup>69</sup> The element of a brand that distinguishes it from other brands is its perceived uniqueness.<sup>70</sup> It means having a solid point of difference. It represents the degree to which a brand is noticeable, recognisable, and memorable in comparison to competing brands.<sup>71, 72</sup> Obtaining perceived uniqueness for brands is even more crucial. Establishing innovative, unique characteristics can be expensive, time-consuming, and challenging to produce in a way that competitors cannot replicate. *The Economist* (2009) states that uniqueness is rare, and it is not easy to produce a continual stream of products with unique characteristics.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, distinguishing between those is crucial when defining and building brand distinctiveness.

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<sup>67</sup> Romaniuk, J., & Gaillard, E. (2007). The relationship between unique brand associations, brand usage and brand performance: analysis across eight categories, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23:3–4, 267–284, DOI: 10.1362/026725707X196378

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 267–280.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 267–280.

<sup>70</sup> Dwivedi, A., Nayeem, T., & Murshed, F. (2018). Brand experience and consumers' willingness-to-pay (WTP) a price premium: Mediating role of brand credibility and perceived uniqueness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 44, 100–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.06.009>

<sup>71</sup> Keller, K. L. (2008). *Strategic brand management : building measuring and managing brand equity* (3rd ed.). Pearson/Prentice Hall.

<sup>72</sup> Netemeyer, R., Krishnan, B., Pullig, C., Wang, G., Yagci, M., Dean, D., Ricks, J., & Wirth, F. (2004). Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 209–224. 10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00303-4

<sup>73</sup> The Economist. (2009). *Unique selling proposition*. The Economist Group Limited, London, [accessed August 1, 2022]. available at <https://www.economist.com/news/2009/11/18/unique-selling-proposition>

The content as a category fundamental shared attribute has not decreased in significance. Technologies fundamentally change content availability and consumability. Therefore, content availability and similarity face challenges as news media brand differentiators. The author of the Thesis questions how a set of attributes, including shared and unique, contribute to media brand distinctiveness. This assumption is well-rooted in many findings, including the fundamental optimal distinctiveness theory.<sup>74</sup>

### **Optimal brand uniqueness**

Many scholars also highlight the importance of the optimal balance of brand attributes and associations between shares or category primary and unique associations and unique attributes, which forms brand uniqueness. The theory of optimal distinctiveness proves that the critical factor in brand choice is attractiveness from within the attribute's choice set. It is crucial to ensure the brand is recognised for category-relevant features before focusing on its distinctiveness.<sup>75</sup> This indicates that unique associations may be a transitory effect of situation-specific accessibility with a shared association.<sup>76</sup> Scholars agree that brands should first clearly define a frame of reference within the category needs and ensure strong shared attributes are in place. The scholars name it a point of parity.<sup>77</sup> Only then should points of difference or unique associations be developed. Successful positioning combines links to a product category and distinctive attributes.<sup>78</sup> Strong consumer experiences can establish critical differentiating associations and affect perceptions of distinctiveness relative to competitor products.<sup>79</sup> Consumer experience positively and significantly impacts perceived distinctiveness.<sup>80</sup> Many scholars' works prove that consumer experience with a brand has a positive effect and

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<sup>74</sup> Leonardelli, G. J., Pickett, C., & Brewer, M. B. (2010). Chapter 2 – Optimal Distinctiveness Theory: A Framework for Social Identity, Social Cognition, and Intergroup Relations. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 43, 63–113.

<sup>75</sup> Keller, K. L. (2008) *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity*. 3rd Edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.

<sup>76</sup> Keller, K. L. (2008) *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity*. 3rd Edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.

<sup>77</sup> Keller, K. L., Sternthal, B., & Tybout, A. (2002). Three questions you need to ask about your brand. *Harvard business review*, 80(9), 80–125.

<sup>78</sup> Punj, G., & Moon, J. (2002). Positioning options for achieving brand association: A psychological categorization framework. *Journal of Business Research*. 55. 275–283. 10.1016/S0148-2963(00)00165-X.

<sup>79</sup> Romaniuk, J., & Gaillard, E. (2007). The relationship between unique brand associations, brand usage and brand performance: analysis across eight categories. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23(3–4), 267–284.

<sup>80</sup> Dwivedi, A., Nayeem, T., & Murshed, F. (2018). Brand experience and consumers' willingness-to-pay (WTP) a price premium: Mediating role of brand credibility and perceived uniqueness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 44, 100–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.06.009>

significance on brand strengths outcomes.<sup>81, 82 83</sup> Emotional and cognitive clues based on experience-based associations lead to brand associations<sup>84</sup> and play a crucial role in brand equity development.<sup>85</sup> Experience is the ideal basis for brand differentiation.<sup>86</sup> This confirms, from a media standpoint, the significance of this consumption experience or consumer experience with the news in the context of news media as content consumed in an online environment.

## **2.2. News media brand attributes as news media brand uniqueness and brand equity framework**

The media richness theory proposes that audiences choose communication technologies based on the attributes of the medium.<sup>87</sup> Expectancy – value theoretical framework, uses and gratification models, customer-based equity framework adapted to the media aspect, study the link between media and audiences by "exploring the relationships between the media's attributes and the roles they provide".<sup>88</sup> According to this view, an object possesses various attributes towards each person who builds an attitude. In the media context, different scholars approach brand attribute categorization differently while mostly agreeing on several categorizations. It is possible to define product-related attributes as functional or utilitarian. In contrast, non-product-related attributes are consumer or consumption experience and user

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<sup>81</sup> Huang, C. (2017). The impacts of brand experiences on brand loyalty: Mediators of brand love and trust. *Management decision : MD*, 55(5), 915–934.

<sup>82</sup> Ebrahim, R., Ghoneim, A., Irani, Z., & Fan, Y. (2016). A brand preference and repurchase intention model: the role of consumer experience. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(13–14), 1230–1259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2016.1150322>

<sup>83</sup> Ramaseshan, B., & Stein, A. (2014). Connecting the dots between brand experience and brand loyalty: The mediating role of brand personality and brand relationships. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(7–8), 664–683. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2014.23>

<sup>84</sup> Beig, F. A., & Nika, F. A. (2019). Brand Experience and Brand Equity. *Vision*, 23(4), 410–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972262919860963>

<sup>85</sup> Shamim, A., Butt, M. M. (2013). A critical model of brand experience consequences. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 25, 102–117.

<sup>86</sup> Schmitt, B. H., & Rogers, D. L.(2008). *Handbook on Brand and Experience Management*; Edward Elgar Publishing: Northampton, MA, USA.

<sup>87</sup> Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information Richness: A New Approach to Managerial Behavior and Organizational Design. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Cummings, L. L., Staw, B. M. (eds.), JAI Press, Homewood, IL, 191–233.

<sup>88</sup> Nguyen, A. (2008). The contribution of online news attributes to its diffusion: An empirical exploration based on a proposed theoretical model for the micro-process of online news adoption/use. *First Monday*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v13i4.2127>

imagery,<sup>89</sup> hedonic associations often connected with experience, not product features. Based on literature analyses, Fig. 2.2 shows the scholars' classification of news media brand attributes grouped by the author of the Thesis in a summarised concept of two main attribute groups: product-related (content-related) and non-product-related (non-content-related) news media brand attributes.

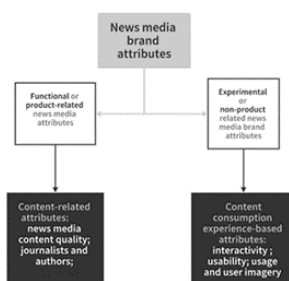


Fig. 2.2. Grouping of news media attributes based on scholars' classification in academic studies (created by the author, novelty of this research).

Considering that academics agree that consumers seek distinctiveness in hedonic brand attributes as experience-based, the Thesis author concludes that perceived uniqueness and its impact on brand equity in news media brand construct should be validated. The author of the Thesis concludes that in addition to the need for news brand association management in a new media environment, the significance of branding and media brand management is reflected in the positive effects of brand equity on various media outcomes, ranging from media trust or credibility to media financial performance.

### 3. The research of new media brand uniqueness and brand equity in the 21st century media business environment

The author of the Thesis designed and implemented quantitative research to achieve research objectives, answer research questions, and test hypotheses based on a theoretical framework derived from the review of the literature. For the present quantitative research study, the author of this Thesis has employed a survey as the quantitative research method. The research design is employed to address the research questions and test hypotheses for this study. A quantitative survey was employed to examine brand attributes comprehensively, as brand

<sup>89</sup> Victoria-Mas, M., Lacasa-Mas, I., & Marimon, F. (2018). Assessing the consumer-based brand equity of news media firms: A new validated scale. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 15(3), 214-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1522199>

associations are attribute-based. The detailed quantitative research analyses are based on the developed theoretical framework – customer-based brand equity model and brand associations framework and a review of the literature on brand distinctiveness and the consumer experience effect on brand outcomes and brand equity (see Fig. 3.1).

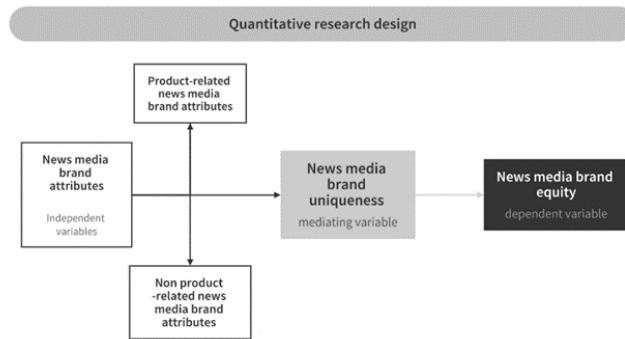


Fig.3.1. The conceptual framework of the quantitative research – survey (created by the author).

Firstly, after analysing the significance of media attributes for each news media brand selected, the strength of strong and favourable brand associations will be determined.

Secondly, the impact of brand associations on brand uniqueness will be determined. Considering the consumer experience, brand associations, and the importance of distinctiveness in the branding discussed in the literature review, the decision tree method and multiple linear regression analyses answer how brand distinctiveness forms brand associations and which brand attributes play the most significant role in its development. Multiple linear regression analyses were used to confirm or not the hypotheses of this research. The proposed study design would survey a 15 to 24 year old audience to understand the importance of 14 media brand attribute-based associations and their impact on uniqueness and brand equity.

The third part of the data will consist of statistical studies to identify how brand associations contribute to media brand uniqueness and how uniqueness impacts brand equity as perceived by Generation Z.

This research aims to conceptualize customer-based brand equity based on a definition elaborated by a marketing author (Keller, 1993) applied to national news media brands. The author summarised the quantitative research (survey) process in three steps according to the first three objectives (see Fig. 3.2).



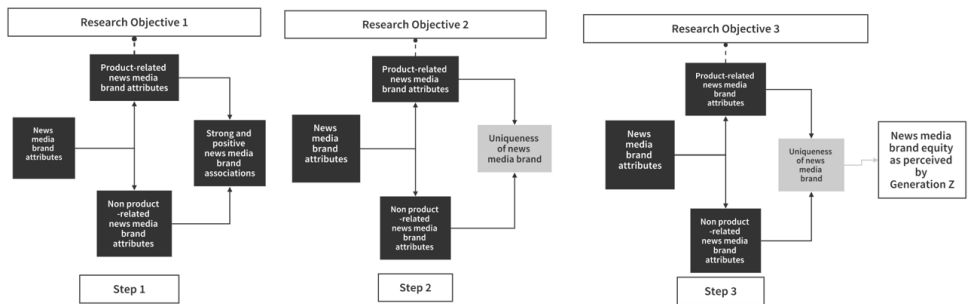


Fig. 3.2. Quantitative research steps according to research objectives determined by the author of the Thesis (created by the author).

In the Thesis research context, Generation Z is an audience aged 15–24 years, as the audience's interest in news increases with age. Therefore, Generation Z representatives younger than 15 years are beyond the scope of the Thesis research. Quantitative research was carried out from April 1 – May 6, 2022. In this study, the participants' criteria were a particular age group and people living in Latvia. As the respondents had to answer ten end-choice questions representing their news media brand experience, only media users were selected to be able to evaluate their media consumption experience. Therefore, from the perspective of the news media audience, a user who consumes media at least once per week can be considered a regular media user. Appendix 3 details the question's structure and answers design, using the semantic differential scale approach. 16 variables were tested for each media: 14 attributes, respondents perceived news media brand equity and brand distinctiveness. The selected fourteen media brand attributes represent content-related and non-content-related media brand attributes. The non-content-related brand association were measured and connected to comprehend how content consumption experience influences news media brand associations and whether these attributes contribute to news media brand distinctiveness. Accordingly, a more comprehensive exploration of these attribute groups was applied, and content attributes were consolidated under three content-related attributes characterising news media brand attributes. The eight news media brands in the Latvian language were selected for this questionnaire, based on monthly and weekly media audience data with the highest number of real users in all measured populations aged 7–74 from 1 January 2022 to 31 January 2022.<sup>90</sup> To fulfil the research

<sup>90</sup> Gemius, S. A. (2022). gemiusAudience, 2022-00-01–2022-01-31 (7–74 y.o.).Latvia. Available online: <https://rating.gemius.com/lv/> (accessed on 5 March 2022).

objectives, different statistical tests have been applied. The software of SPSS and RapidMiner was used to run the tests efficiently. Three tests are specifically used: excel cross-table mean analyses, multiple linear regression tests, and decision tree tests. The analyses were performed in 3 steps to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

### 3.1. Importance of news media attributes and strength of news media brand associations

Firstly, the importance of each of the 14 brand attributes of the audience were measured. The more critical attributes are the content and credibility of the news media (see Table 3.1). However, how the audience experiences the content is highly important. Being present on social media platforms, having an attractive, unique, and nice content delivery form, and leadership associations are essential attributes for news media brands in a new media environment to create strong and favourable brand associations.

Table 3.1  
The importance of each news media brand attribute, as evaluated by the audience, age 15–24, Latvia (created by the author)

News media attributes	Attribute importance evaluation by respondents, mean
Content matches my interests	7.4
Credible	7.7
I like their authors, journalists	6.3
My friends use it too	5.7
Engages celebrities in their projects	5.8
Looks distinctive, unique	6.2
Users can engage in content creation	5.6
Uses attractive, special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, video	6.1
Posts interesting content on social media	6.5
In social media, uses relevant features, e.g., video, live stories, etc.	6.2
Leading news media	6.5
Looks nice, attractive	6.6
Present on platforms which I use, e.g., YouTube or my favourite social media	6.9
Their posts often generate a lot of views, reactions, reposts	6.0

#### Media brand content access points

The author analyses the audience-stated media brand content access points. Direct news media webpage access was proportionally highest for all mentioned news media brands. News media brands nra.lv and la.lv had the highest direct website content access percentage of 79 % and 70 %, respectively. The next more usual access point was Facebook. Facebook, as a news media brand content access and consumption point, is for news media brands tv3.lv, with 51 %, very close to this news media brand direct website access rate (58 %), and la.lv, with 47 %.

This confirms previously discussed scholars' studies in literature and the fact that multi-platform and on-demand content consumption were present for this audience and the risk of a decrease in brand associations is quite significant, as more than four platforms can be used.

### **Strength of news media brand associations**

Brand attributes are fundamental for strong, favourable brand associations.<sup>91</sup> The author developed the brand association formation score to determine its strength in contacting and engaging the audience with their brand to form strong and favourable associations. Using data from survey questions A2–A4, the author analysed the usage, frequency, and engagement of every news media. The strength of news media brand associations' formation allows for analysing the brand's strength to deliver associations to the audience. In this aspect, the two strongest brands are delfi.lv with 24 scores, highly scored in all three elements, and tv3.lv with 21 scores. For detailed calculations approach of strength scores, see Appendix 3 of the Thesis. The research data clearly show that consumption volume is not the only aspect defining the strength of brand association formation. For example, although it was the second-most used brand, tvnet.lv was only third in frequency and fourth in engagement, therefore, low in brand association power score despite being the second-most used media. This supports the significance of engagement and frequency of the brand to develop strong associations.<sup>92</sup> The author used data from survey question A9, which asked respondents to measure 14 media attributes of each news media on a scale of 1 to 10. The matching scoring is applied to the strengths of each news media brand's attribute to consider the audience's importance for each attribute. The brand score was then multiplied by the attribute score to determine the strength of the news brand in this attribute. To evaluate the score of each news media brand's attribute, the author examines the scores of news brand attribute strength by multiplying the attribute score by the brand score to determine the strength of the news brand in this attribute. Adding all attribute scores for each brand, the highest total brand's attribute power score was for tv3.lv with 781 scores, second was delfi.lv with 771 scores, and third was lsm.lv with 730 scores. While detailed brand scores are described in Appendix 3, Table 3.2 summarises news media brand associations' strength scores, total content-related and content-non-related or experience-based associations in this research context as the novelty of this Thesis.

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<sup>91</sup> Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 1–22.

<sup>92</sup> Chan-Olmsted, S., & Shay, R. (2015). Media Branding 3.0: From Media Brands to Branded Entertainment and Information. In G. Siegert, K. Förster, S. M. Chan-Olmsted, & M. Ots (Eds.), *Handbook of Media Branding* (pp. 11–32). Springer International Publishing. [http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0\\_2](http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-18236-0_2)

Table 3.2

The **strength of news media brand associations'** scores to a 15 to 24 years old audience in Latvia in 2022 (created by the author, novelty of this research)

News media	tvnet.lv	delfi.lv	jauns.lv	la.lv	nra.lv	lsm.lv	tv3.lv	diena.lv
<b>Attribute scores</b>								
Frequency score	6	8	3	5	1	4	8	3
Engagement score	5	8	4	1	2	6	7	3
Consumption score	7	8	4	2	1	5	6	3
<b>Strength of brand associations' formation score</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The total strength of news media brand associations' score</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>781</b>	

The author concludes that this allows us to assume that news media brand content consumption or usage is insufficient to create strong and favourable brand associations and build brand distinctiveness and equity. It confirms the necessity for engagement, as discussed in the literature. Content experience is important in forming brand associations in a new media environment. This research step made it possible to answer the first research question. The next question is how news media brand attributes contribute to news media brand uniqueness and whether the higher total attribute power score delivers higher brand distinctiveness.

### 3.2. News media brand attributes and brand uniqueness in the 21st century media business environment

The author analysed the means for each media brand's uniqueness and equity based on survey results to calculate the ranking and comparison between media brands. Table 3.3 summarises the evaluation of all news media brands. The news brand tv3.lv had the highest mean – –6.3. The author used multiple linear regression analyses to test the first two hypotheses and decision tree tests to analyse how these attributes contribute to news media brand distinctiveness. However, even at this stage, it is already possible to assume that strong and favourable experience-based attributes, frequency, and engagement are crucial for forming brand distinctiveness. The subsequent highest distinctiveness evaluation means were assigned to delfi.lv and lsm.lv – 6.1. Both these news brands had the second/third-highest association strength scores. Even the lsm.lv frequency had lower scores, high content, and non-content-related attributions connected with high evaluation in brand uniqueness.

Table 3.3

News media uniqueness and equity, as evaluated by a 15 to 24 years old audience in Latvia, 2022 (created by the author)

	News media	tvnet.lv	delfi.lv	jauns.lv	la.lv	nra.lv	lsm.lv	tv3.lv	diena.lv
	Evaluation	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Brand uniqueness		5.7	6.1	5.3	5.3	5.3	6.1	6.3	5.3
Brand equity		6.1	6.8	5.7	5.4	5.3	6.7	6.3	5.5

Delfi.lv was a strong favourite in all attributes and brand distinctiveness. Tvnet.lv, the second-most used news media brand in Latvia, lands in only fourth place in both brand attribute power score evaluation and distinctiveness. Similar ratings were given to the distinctiveness of four other news brands, with a mean score of 5.3. To analyse how news brand distinctiveness impacts news media brand equity, the author analysed the mean for each media brand to calculate the ranking and comparison between media brands. The data shows (see Table 3.4) that the news media brand is evaluated with higher brand equity of delfi.lv with a mean of 6.8. The following brand is lsm.lv with a slightly lower mean – 6.7, and the tv3.lv brand follows with a mean of 6.3.

Delfi.lv delivers the highest brand equity evaluation with the highest consumption, frequency, and engagement score. Delfi.lv also received the highest evaluation in content-related attributes, coming only slightly after lsm.lv in credibility evaluation by the audience. It is possible to assume the relationships between content-related attribute strengths and brand equity and leadership by analysing the brand attribute: *leading news media*. The highest evaluation for this attribute is for lsm.lv, delfi.lv and tv3.lv. Lsm.lv received the second-highest brand equity evolution 6.7; even the brand attributes power score landed lsm.lv in third place after Delfi.lv and tv3.lv. The third highest brand equity score is allocated to the tv3.lv brand – 6.3. Despite receiving the highest brand distinctiveness evaluation, if analysing brand equity within audience structure, there are significant variances in the evaluation of tv3.lv brand equity within age groups and the audience living region. The brand equity leaders delfi.lv and lsm.lv receive a much more even evaluation in all age groups and audience living regions. These insights assume that associations' evenness is essential to developing the brand equity. While this aspect is not broadly researched in the literature, this assumption can be strengthened by testing the first hypothesis of this research.

To summarise the findings from this research phase, news brand usage is insufficient to build strong, favourable, and unique brand associations and equity. Brand usage frequency and engagement are crucial to shaping and developing strong and positive associations. Content-

related attributes are the basis of news brand choice and significantly influence the brand equity even when the frequency is lower, as in the case of lsm.lv brand, the highest evaluated in brand attributes. The author states that consumption experience-based attributes are crucial to form the brand uniqueness and equity in a new media environment where media content access points exceed four. The audience demands content delivery via social platforms and requires the content to be delivered appropriately, attractively and on demand.

A great example is the tv3.lv brand where the highest consumption experience-related attribute score ensured the highest distinctiveness evaluation by the audience, despite being in third place in terms of content-related attribute evaluation. The highest experience-based attribute significance evaluated by the audience is for attributes: *post interesting content on social media; use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories etc.; leading news media; look nice, attractive, distinctive; present on platforms which I use (e.g., YouTube or my favourite social networks)*. The news media brand with the highest brand equity delfi.lv measured almost the highest scores in attribute evaluation but was not rated the highest in distinctiveness or leadership nevertheless receiving the highest brand equity evaluation mean. The author concludes that brand equity is built from the consistency in strength among all brand attributes. Not necessarily being the strongest one but consistent across all attributes. When a brand has more considerable differences among attribute evaluation or strength, the brand association can be unique or leading depending on the attribute, but consistency in attribute strength delivers more substantial equity. A shining example of the necessity to possess both the power to form and strengthen associations is the news brand tvnet.lv. According to monthly, weekly and daily audience data, Latvia's second most used news media is evaluated only fourth in terms of distinctiveness, importance and leadership. Lack of engagement scores, lower content-related attribute strength and experience-based attribute power deliver only the fourth place in terms of distinctiveness, equity, and leadership.

### **News media attributes contribution to brand uniqueness as perceived by Generation Z**

The author uses multiple linear regression to test hypotheses. The decision tree technique to answer the second research question to explain relationships between attributes and media brand uniqueness and find the highly significant news media brand attributes to it as perceived by Generation Z. The author selected three news media brands with the highest mean levels in all media attributes, uniqueness, and brand equity for the next step of statistical analyses between media attributes, brand uniqueness and brand equity. Statistical tests describe how brand associations contribute to distinctive associations in the audience's mind.

In this research step (Step 2), multiple linear regression analyses and the decision tree method were performed to answer the research question: How and which attributes of news media brand contribute to the development of news media brand uniqueness as perceived by Generation Z? Two statistical tests were used for all research analyses and testing hypotheses.

### **News media delfi.lv**

Four brand attributes that significantly contribute to delfi.lv brand distinctiveness are: *associations of special format use; distinctive and unique look; user engagement in content creations; and delfi.lv authors and journalists*. All associations increase in importance sequentially if some associations are not met in the audience's minds. The stronger and more favourably these attributes are built, the more substantial is the brand distinctiveness. The analyses confirm non-content-related attribute significance. Three of the four attributes are non-content-related attributes.

### **News media tv3.lv**

Four attributes significantly involved in forming the tv3.lv brand uniqueness are: *my friend also uses; attractive formats; content that matches my interest; and posts interesting content on social networks*. The highest weight is for the attribute *my friends use it too*. Similarly, as in the delfi.lv test, the content consumption experience-related attributes (non-product-related attributes) are essential, but the content-related attribute is the most significant even though all experience-based associations are strong and favourable. The evaluation of the tv3.lv attribute *posts interesting content on social networks* received the highest evaluation from the audience among other attributes of tv3.lv and the highest among other news media brands. The strength of this tv3.lv attribute could be the basis on which tv3.lv is evaluated as the most distinctive among other news media brands. The crucial part of the tv3.lv brand uniqueness is the user imagery attribute – *whether my friend uses the new tv3.lv brand*.

### **News media lsm.lv**

Five out of fourteen lsm.lv brand attributes have the highest weight to lsm.lv brand distinctiveness. These are: *looks distinctive and unique; my friends use it too; engage celebrities in their projects; I like their authors and journalists; present on platforms I use*. The lsm.lv news brand uniqueness is built via a distinctive look, authors and journalists, as well as associations that *my friends use this media too* and *lsm.lv engages celebrities in their content projects*, play a significant role in forming brand distinctiveness in the event that associations that lsm.lv is *present on different platforms* are not strong and favourable enough.

### 3.3. News media brand uniqueness impact on brand equity as perceived by Generation Z

In the third step of the research, a similar sequent statistical approach was used to answer the research question of how news media brand uniqueness impacts media brand equity. Multiple linear regression and decision tree tests were used to answer the third research question and test the third hypothesis. For this step, the data set under consideration for this research and the dependent variable is brand equity. On the other hand, the independent variables are all 14 brand attributes.

#### News media delfi.lv

Delfi.lv received the audience's highest brand equity evaluation scores. Similarly, the attributes with the highest significance rates were calculated. *Uniqueness, content, journalists and authors, attractive look, and leading news media associations* are significant in building brand equity. The delfi.lv brand uniqueness has the most significant impact on brand equity (see Fig. 3.3).

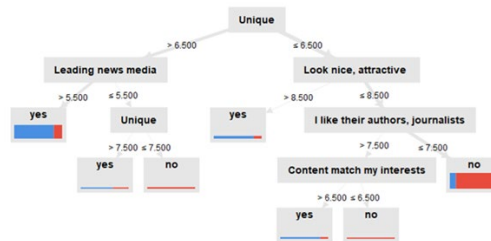


Fig. 3.3. The impact of delfi.lv brand uniqueness and attributes on delfi.lv brand equity (decision tree test, RapidMiner software).

If the audience perceives delfi.lv as unique, and these associations are strong and favourable, the strong and favourable associations of delfi.lv as *leading news media* are significant. If these associations are strong, substantial brand equity is built. If *leading news media* associations are weak, brand uniqueness associations again are significant. Strong brand distinctiveness leads to brand equity even with weak leading media associations. If they are weak, substantial brand equity is not built. As the test is developed with a high accuracy rate of 71.4 %, the author can confidently state that strong brand equity for delfi.lv highly contributed from brand uniqueness.

Brand distinctiveness, content, authors, and attractive look are essential to delfi.lv media brand builders. When these associations are weak, no substantial brand equity can be formed. The multiple linear regression analysis shows the significance of delfi.lv media brand



uniqueness impact on brand equity. This confirms the decision tree test findings on brand uniqueness weight on brand equity. Credibility is the second attribute that strongly contributes to brand equity. P-value is 0.003, while unstandardized B is 0.179 and standardized B is 0.166 according to multiple linear regression test. By analysing the news media brand with the highest audience-reported brand equity, the author could determine how brand uniqueness evolves for this news brand and how brand distinctiveness and other attributes impact brand equity. The data also confirms the optimal uniqueness concept argued in Chapter 2 of the Thesis. These findings confirm the importance of the perceived distinctiveness of media brands and how unique associations form through newly created brand associations like content engagement, formats, and accessibility, developed by digitalization. When category-shared attributes like content and credibility are established, it is essential how this content is distributed via multiple access points. The research demonstrates a high significance between brand uniqueness and brand equity, *leading media* associations' role, and content-related attributes' significance. Credibility is the strong driver of brand equity. The research shows that content consumption experience is crucial for developing a strong and distinctive news media brand in a new media environment, confirming other scholars' findings on brand experience's role in different categories. From a brand management perspective, social media presence, employment of relevant formats, and user engagement are vital for brand differentiation. Content-related associations are unquestionably significant for the media brand choice. The form in which content is presented and distributed to the audience plays a vital role for Generation Z. Delivery and packaging bring so desired strong brand associations and confirm the consumption experience-related formation of uniqueness.

### **News media tv3.lv**

Three brand attributes impact the tv3.lv brand equity: *content matches my interests; unique; and I like their authors and journalists*. Just as data previously showed how the tv3.lv brand distinctiveness formed, in addition to these attributes, the authors and journalists should be part of strong and favourable association-building tactics. However, if the audience does not

have enough strong associations with the tv3.lv brand as distinctive, the attribute *content matches my interests* becomes significant (see Fig. 3.6).

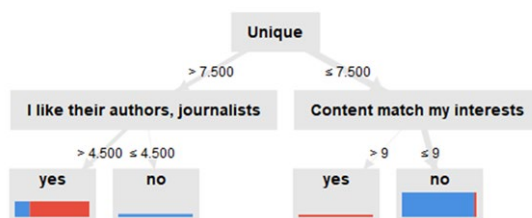


Fig. 3.6. The impact of tv3.lv brand uniqueness and attributes on tv3.lv brand equity (Decision tree test, RapidMiner software).

The strong and favourable associations of the audience about the tv3.lv brand, e.g., *the content is in line with my*, will strengthen the brand equity of tv3.lv. If these associations are not strong and favourable enough, neither *unique* nor *content matches my interest* build strong brand equity (see Fig. 3.6). The tv3.lv brand equity test demonstrates that even though brand distinctiveness can be built through consumption experience-based attributes, strong content-related or category-fundamental attributes are needed to build strong brand equity. According to the linear regression test, four tv3.lv brand attributes strongly correlate with brand equity: *uniqueness*; *content matches my interest*; *posts interesting content on social networks*; and *present the platforms I use*. Both tests confirm the significance of brand uniqueness to brand equity. Nevertheless, once again, significant are content experience-related associations for this audience – *brand presence on platforms the audience uses*; *content on these platforms and user imagery associations like – my friends use too*. Finally, similar analyses were performed for a third news media brand: lsm.lv.

## News media lsm.lv

Attributes that impact lsm.lv brand equity are: *content posts generate many views, reactions and reposts*; lsm.lv brand uniqueness, *users can engage in content creation*, and *leading news media* and use *relevant features on social media platforms* (see Fig. 3.7).

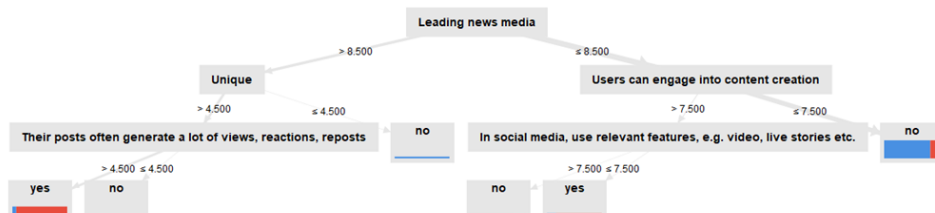


Fig. 3.7. The impact of lsm.lv brand uniqueness and attributes on lsm.lv brand equity (decision tree test, RapidMiner software).

Strong and favourable leading news media associations, brand distinctiveness and content popularity are vital elements of the lsm.lv brand equity. Consumption-related attributes such as formats and user engagement can also contribute to strong brand equity if previously mentioned associations are weaker. Multiple linear regression analyses show that the highest significance of lsm.lv brand equity is with its brand uniqueness. In addition, credibility associations are highly significant to strong brand equity. The lsm.lv brand distinctiveness is a crucial element for solid brand equity, and it is created via a distinctive look, lsm.lv authors and journalists, and whether the audience's friends use this media brand too, as well as a presence on different platforms and celebrity engagement.

### 3.4. The summary of quantitative research results: news media brand attributes, brand uniqueness and equity as perceived by Generation Z

**Consumption experience-related (non-product-related or non-content-related), content-related brand attributes, and news media brand uniqueness.**

The news media brand attributes with the highest weight to brand uniqueness among all three brands are: *my friends use it too* (the highest weight); *looks distinctive and unique* (second highest); *uses attractive, special formats*; and *I like their authors and journalists* (Appendix 4). Not all three brands have all those attributes contributing to brand distinctiveness, but all have at least three. Therefore, it assumes that at least three of those attributes should be present to form the brand distinctiveness. Moreover, it is essential to point out that unique attributes – *look*

*distinctive and unique* – are present in those attributes. Therefore, this confirms that combined with unique associations, unique attributes benefit overall brand uniqueness.

### News media brand uniqueness and attributes and news media brand equity

If similarly analysed distinctiveness and other attributes contribute to brand equity, the associations with the most significant weight to brand equity are *uniqueness* (the highest weight), *content that matches my interests* (second), *I like authors, journalists* and associations of *leading news media*. The influence of brand distinctiveness on brand equity is confirmed and explained, but two content-related attributes are also significant, and leadership associations are essential to building a strong brand equity (see Table 3.5). While forming experience-related attributes is significant, brand equity requires solid category or shared fundamentals in place, supporting numerous scholars' findings previously discussed in the literature review. In linear regression analyses, attribute *credibility* shows a significant contribution to brand equity. It is possible to confirm that brand distinctiveness is significant for building the brand equity; nevertheless, it can only happen if the category fundamental (category shared) or content-related attributes deliver strong and favourable associations. The quality of the content is a core element in maintaining a sustainable brand positioning in the market. The following tables summarise attributes present in news media brand analyses (see Tables 3.4 and 3.5).

Table 3.4

News media brand attributes contribute to **brand uniqueness** (decision tree method, multiple linear regression analyses, created by the author)

News media	delfi.lv	tv3.lv	lsm.lv
Decision Tree tests	4 attributes	4 attributes	6 attributes
I like authors, journalists	•		•
Users can engage in content creation	•		
Looks distinctive, unique	•		•
Uses attractive formats (video, blogs, etc.)	•	•	
My friends use it too		•	•
The content matches my interests		•	•
Posts interesting content on social networks		•	
Engages celebrities in their projects			•
Present on platforms I use			•
Multiple linear regression tests	3 attributes	3 attributes	2 attributes
Looks distinctive, unique	•		•
Users can engage in content creations	•	•	
I like authors, journalists	•		•
The posts generate a lot of views, reactions, and reposts		•	
My friends use it too		•	

The author summarizes the attributes contributing to news media brand equity and uniqueness impact (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5

News media brand uniqueness and attributes contributing to news media **brand equity** (decision tree method, multiple linear regression analyses, created by the author)

	5 attributes	3 attributes	5 attributes
Decision Tree tests	delfi.lv	tv3.lv	lsm.lv
Uniqueness	•	•	•
The content matches my interests	•	•	
I like authors, journalists			
Looks nice, attractive	•	•	
Leading news media	•		•
The posts generate a lot of views, reactions, and reposts	•		•
Users can engage in content creation			•
In social media, use relevant features			•
Multiple Linear regression tests	3 attributes	4 attributes	2 attributes
Unique	•	•	•
Credible	•		•
Leading news media	•		
Posts interesting content on social network		•	
The content matches my interest		•	
Present on social platforms		•	

Analyses also demonstrate that, while the brand distinctiveness of each brand is formed differently, consumption experience-related attributes significantly contribute to brand distinctiveness if the brand category's fundamental attributes are strong (Appendix 4). Another significant insight is that although the attribute *my friends use it too* is rated low in declared importance by the audience, it is vital when contributing to perceived uniqueness. The tv3.lv brand distinctiveness is significantly contributed to by the audience's experience with the brand's content (see Table 3.4).

The strength and favourability of associations are significant to brand distinctiveness and equity as analysed by the mean levels of all eight news brands. Moreover, it can also be assumed that evenness of strength and favourability of all brand attributes is essential. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the more audience has associations with the news media brand, the higher the brand distinctiveness and equity will be. The three brands with the strongest and most favourable associations also demonstrate evenness in all attributes, while tvnet.lv, the fourth news brand according to brand distinctiveness and equity, shows weaker and more uneven associations (see Appendix 3). The four other news media brands with weaker

and less favourable associations, lower brand distinctiveness and equity demonstrate uneven brand associations.

### **Summary of research hypotheses tests and results**

All three research hypotheses were confirmed in delfi.lv and lsm.lv analyses, whereas the first hypothesis was voided in tv3.lv analyses. Content-related attributes did not significantly contribute to tv3.lv brand uniqueness. While the content analyses are beyond the scope of this research, this highlights interesting aspects in further research of tv3.lv content ideology, given audience uses and gratification and expectations from this news brand. The author of the Thesis concludes that strong, favourable, and even news media brand associations contribute to brand uniqueness and equity, and content consumption experience-related associations (non-content-related) obtained via multiple platforms significantly contribute to news brand uniqueness. Even brand attributes contributing to the news media brand distinctiveness may differ across news media, category shared, or content-related attributes, and content-consumption experience attributes are significant to the news media brand uniqueness and brand equity.

## **4. The methodology of news media branding in the 21st century media business environment**

Quantitative research and secondary data sources confirm the significance of the content experience to news media brand distinctiveness. In light of the empirical study findings and insights from secondary data provided in Chapter 1 of the Thesis, the author developed a news media brand attributes assessment approach as the methodology of news media branding in the new media environment.

### **4.1. The methodology of news media brand uniqueness and equity development in the 21st century media business environment**

The methodology possesses attribute importance, effectiveness, tactical attribute development, and news media brand experience measurement that contributes to news media brand distinctiveness and equity.

The methodology consists of **seven steps** (see Fig. 4.1).

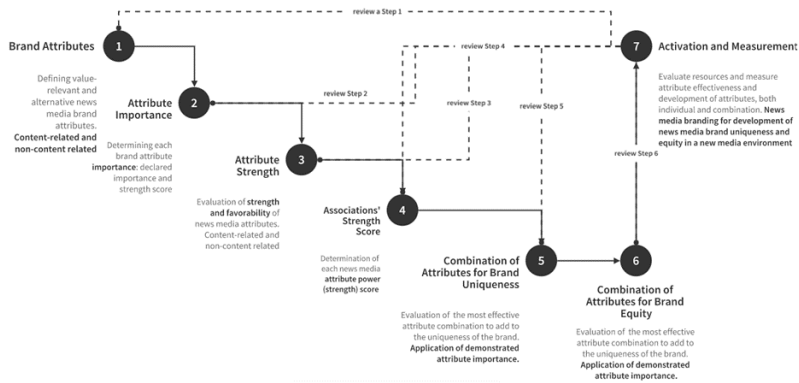


Fig. 4.1. The methodology of news media branding in the 21st century media business environment (created by the author, novelty of this research).

**Steps 1–3** determine and evaluate the importance and strength and favourability of the particular news brand attribute. This phase enables news media brands to analyse and understand which attributes are significant and which of their own attributes are strong, missing or need improvement. The focus should be paid on content consumption experience-based brand attributes or non-content-related (non-product-related) attributes.

**Steps 4–6** are about adjusting, adding significance and analysing the attributes that contribute to news media brand distinctiveness and equity. Finally, the Thesis research findings should be applied when an optimal combination of attribute strategies is selected. For example, some news media brands can decide to explore more attributes connected with user imagery and some usage imagery; nevertheless, a combination of content-related and content consumption experience-related attributes is vital, as content consumption experience significantly contributes to the news media brand distinctiveness and equity.

**Step 7** is designing this new media branding to deliver a news media brand experience to audiences across various platforms. The step consists of tactics of attribute development, employment to create and maintain strong and favourable brand associations, selection of platforms where news media will be present; human resources and skills needed and applied; news media content packaging and branding, and measurement of effectiveness.

The final measurement step allows us to access and effectively understand where and why optimization of any previous steps is needed. In Step 7, it is possible to evaluate the effectiveness and possible optimization and required adjustment of attribute choice,

importance, or combination in previous steps. The review and optimization cycle is possible and continuous in any step of this methodology.

The Thesis author developed a methodology template presented in Appendix 5 that could support brand development, optimization, and re-evaluation as a roadmap for news media organizations. The proposed methodology of news media branding lets news media managers assess the media branding and adjust or invent any needed changes over time. In addition, the methodology makes it possible to explore the news media brand attributes and their importance from the audience's perspective and understand the news media strengths and weaknesses from a media brand attribute perspective. The proposed methodology enables a practice to understand, develop and measure the news media brand uniqueness in a new media environment. The methodology provides an *approach to strengthen the news media brand attribution* in the current media environment, which is essential for media business, as the developed *methodology of news media branding* supports the growth of the attractiveness of advertising spending to national news media.

#### **4.2. Approbation of the methodology of news media branding within Latvian companies**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed methodology, the findings and proposed methodology were presented, analysed and approbated in:

- the leading and biggest national news media JSC Delfi;
- communication and media agency Dentsu Latvia.

The usefulness and applicability of the Thesis research findings to national news media branding are confirmed by Mr Kuzikovs, CEO and Chairman of the Board of JSC Delfi, reference presented in Appendix 6 of the Thesis. The approbation of methodology by **Dentsu** Latvia confirmed the transferability of the findings and methodology to other industries and branding sectors (see Appendix 6). The representative of the news media company TV3 Group evaluated the branding methodology as significant. As a result, the research findings and proposed methodology were presented to the TV3 media representatives, and the methodology will be incorporated into news media tv3.lv branding strategies. Importance of the research results in **education** of the media industry participants, such as media, media brand managers, advertisers, audiences and others. The reference by the Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Advertising Association confirming the relevance and usefulness of the research results to the industry is provided in Appendix 6 of the Thesis.



## Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

1. The 21st century digital media environment requires new media brand equity-building approaches. To succeed, news media must establish a strong and consistent brand, especially within digital platforms. The lack of research on this topic highlights the importance of media branding research overall.
2. National media brands must compete fiercely with a powerful newcomer – platforms – for audiences and advertising money. Consumer-produced content is another part of a competition that is unprecedented. Consequently, powerful, and distinguishable media branding is important for attracting an audience, advertising, and investment. Digitization has significantly impacted media organizations and their relationship with audiences. A strong and distinctive media brand in the digital environment is important to attract audiences, advertising and investment. This is especially important in a media environment characterized by intense competition and the need to adapt to changing audience preferences.
3. Distributed news consumption deludes brand associations and is behind low news media brand attribution in multi-platform environments. This aspect stresses the significance of strong brand associations contributing to the news brand uniqueness and equity, ensuring vital news media qualities – credibility, audience loyalty, readership, and financial performance.
4. Content and credibility are the most important attributes of the news media brands to consider in order to build and maintain strong, positive brand associations with Generation Z. However, the audience's experience of the content is also crucial. The news media brands should focus on attributes such as their presence on social media, the attractiveness and uniqueness of their content delivery form, and leadership associations to establish favourable brand associations.
5. Generation Z, the audience of news content, values relevance and credibility when forming associations with news media brands. These attributes are considered the most important when evaluating news media brands. Additionally, a news media brand's presence on social media platforms commonly used by this audience is also a crucial attribute. Consumption of news content by Generation Z representatives is relevant to their interests and credibility when forming strong associations with news media brands.

6. Generation Z also values news media brand attributes such as appearance, presentation, and interesting content on social media. However, the attributes *my friends used it too* and *users can engage in content creation* were rated as having lower importance. These findings suggest that, while not prioritized by this audience, these attributes may still be relevant for news media brands seeking to establish unique brand associations.
7. The news media brand attributes with the most significant impact on uniqueness are: *my friends use it too; looks distinctive and unique; I like journalists, authors; and uses attractive, special formats*. The presence of at least three of these attributes is necessary for news media brands to establish their uniqueness, according to the research. While not all the studied brands may possess these attributes, they possess at least three.
8. It is important to note that the *look distinctive and unique* attribute is unique in itself. This suggests that having unique attributes can contribute to the overall uniqueness of a news media brand. Therefore, it is vital for the news media brands to consider unique associations and attributes to establish a unique brand. This research presents a new approach to understanding the news media brand uniqueness based on the analyses of unique attributes and the perceived uniqueness of a news media brand. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to a news media brand's distinctiveness and can be used for branding strategies.
9. Multiple linear regression analyses support the hypothesis that a combination of category-shared and experience-related attributes significantly influence the uniqueness of news media brands, except for tv3.lv. Therefore, it can be inferred that the tv3.lv brand's uniqueness is significantly influenced by the audience's experience with the brand's content.
10. The impact of non-content-related brand attributes related to the content consumption experience is significant to brand uniqueness when the brand's fundamental or product-related attributes are strong. Therefore, news media brands can differentiate themselves by focusing on attributes related to the audience's experience consuming content and developing strong fundamental or content-related attributes. It is important to note that each brand's uniqueness is formed differently, and news media brands should consider a range of attributes to establish the brand uniqueness.
11. Grouping news media attributes into categories based on content-related and non-content-related can facilitate news media brand owners and brand managers in identifying and developing effective news media branding strategies. The analysis of

- brand uniqueness development can provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of developing brand attribution, aiding news media owners, managers, and employees in building a strong and unique news media brand.
12. The news media brand attributes with the greatest influence on brand equity are brand uniqueness, content that matches the audience's interests, and associations with leading news media and the brand's authors and journalists. Uniqueness has the highest weight, followed by content-related attributes and leadership associations. These findings indicate that news media brands should focus on uniqueness, strong content-related attributes, and leadership associations to build strong brand equity.
  13. Brand uniqueness significantly impacts the news media brand equity. Specifically, uniqueness has the highest weight contributing to the brand equity of delfi.lv, and the second highest weight for the brand equity of tv3.lv and lsm.lv. These findings support the hypothesis that brand uniqueness is crucial in determining the news media brand equity.
  14. The approbation of the methodology confirms its practical utility and effectiveness, particularly in its ability to effectively categorize news media brand attributes for the purpose of branding.
  15. Content branding is essential for media brands, as it helps owners and brand managers of news media to differentiate them from competitors and establish a unique brand. While maintaining content on a single platform may not necessarily alter audience consumption habits, it can hinder a brand's ability to reach and engage with the audience. Thus, a multi-platform approach is advisable for news media brands to maximize their reach and strength.
  16. Parental and family habits and brand usage significantly influence the media choices of younger audiences (especially news media). This aligns with the findings of generation theory, which suggests that one generation's habits and expectations can impact future generations' media choices. Therefore, brands should not abandon the usage patterns and expectations of their current audience but should consider adding new ones to meet the requirements and expectations of future generations.
  17. Generation Z prefers high-quality, impartial news presented in a format that aligns with their individual content consumption preferences. Additionally, this demographic group tends to possess a heightened level of discernment in evaluating the credibility and trustworthiness of news sources. As such, it is crucial for news media organizations to

consider the characteristics and tendencies of Generation Z when developing strategies to address this audience.

18. The developed *methodology of news media branding* is suitable for national news media and can be effectively used to enhance the news media brand uniqueness and brand equity in the 21st-century media business environment. This methodology can help national news media brands to identify and prioritize important attributes, evaluate attribute strength and favourability, define an optimal attribute combination, and develop a brand experience approach that includes tactics for attribute development, platform selection, resource allocation, content branding, and measurement of effectiveness. It *strengthens news media brand attribution* and increases competitiveness of national media in attracting advertising volumes, ensuring sources of media financing and sustainable development of media business.
19. The successful approbation of the developed methodology by Latvian media business company representatives demonstrates its applicability and effectiveness for the national media industry and its potential for transferability to multi-platform branding strategies in other businesses from different industries. These findings suggest that the methodology of branding is a valuable resource for developing effective branding strategies in a variety of contexts.

## **Recommendations**

### **For news media managers, marketing, and brand managers**

1. To deliver a seamless and satisfying experience for younger audiences, news media need to pay attention to content consumption-experience-related brand attributes. These attributes, which relate to the experience of consuming news, should be prioritized to enhance audiences' overall satisfaction and build the brand equity. This may involve investing in user experience design and ensuring that content is easily accessible and enjoyable for all platforms.
2. The importance of the news brand and the strength and favourability of the news brand attribute should be analysed and determined. This enables news media brands to analyse and understand which attributes are significant and which of their own attributes are strong, missing or need improvement. The focus should be paid on consumption experience-based brand attributes.
3. Optimal attribute combinations should be applied in news media branding strategies. The media managers should analyse and apply a combination of content and non-

- content related brand attributes to develop and maintain the brand uniqueness and equity.
4. News media brand experience via attribute combination should be designed based on the proposed *methodology of news media branding*. The methodology blocks can help develop, create, and execute tactics of attribute development, employment to create and maintain strong and favourable brand associations, selection of platforms; resources needed and applied; content packaging and branding and, finally, measurement of effectiveness.
  5. The designed *methodology of news media branding* is the roadmap for brand development, optimization, and re-evaluation. It enables media brands to adjust or invent any needed changes over time. The observation of news media brand experience effectiveness on brand uniqueness and equity should be monitored over time via consumer surveys, company data sources via media metrics, audience behaviour data and company internal data, including financial and business data.
  6. Considering news media brand equity's impact on credibility, quality, audience loyalty and, therefore, the financial performance of the news media, the branding strategies should be incorporated in yearly business planning and media organizations' business development plans.
  7. News media brand management becomes increasingly complex, as it must be managed across multiple platforms, directly impacting brand attribution and distinctiveness in a digital, multi-platform environment. Thus, it is essential to analyse and apply the proposed branding methodology to develop demand for national news media, considering audiences and advertisers.

**For academics, researchers, and scholars in the media management field**

8. To understand the facets of media and news media brand equity and its impact on different brand outcomes, it is crucial to study and evaluate non-content-related brand attributes based on theoretical concepts of brand equity.
9. Consumer experience theories should be incorporated into the research of news media brand, and brand equity as content experience across various platforms significantly impacts media brand uniqueness and brand equity.
10. To effectively research brand uniqueness in the news media, it is recommended to utilize the brand distinctiveness and customer-based brand equity theories. This combination

allows for a comprehensive examination of the impact of a brand's unique characteristics and consumer perceptions on brand equity.

11. The brand equity aspects in the new media environment should be incorporated and developed in educational materials and study programmes focusing on brand management and media studies.
12. Consumer-based brand equity theories can be applied to examine the impact of content-consumption-related brand attributes on the distinctiveness and equity of a news media brand. These attributes, related to the content or product being consumed, can be studied through consumer experiences and perceptions. The resulting insights can inform branding and positioning strategies for news media organizations.
13. Brand distinctiveness is significantly influenced by experience with brand content across multi-platforms for younger generations. Therefore, theories exploring consumer experience should elaborate on generations' research and its impact on brand outcomes.
14. Brand uniqueness theories can be utilized to investigate the media brand distinctiveness, which is becoming increasingly important in the rapidly evolving media environment. These theories can transfer knowledge about the factors that contribute to a brand's uniqueness and how they impact its equity. This knowledge can be helpful for media organizations seeking to establish a strong and unique brand.

#### **For news media policy makers and editors**

15. The news media content, quality, credibility, authors and journalists, and other relevant industry attributes are vital for news brand success, audience use, and preference. Therefore, content policies and strategies should be developed, maintained, and observed over time.
16. The younger audience applies more critical thinking when considering news trustworthy. This audience needs the same quality, neutrality, and diversity of news as other demographic groups; the behaviour of how this audience approaches and consumes news differs from other demographic groups. Thus, multi-platform content distribution strategies should be developed with the same diligence and importance as news media content policies and strategies.
17. Credibility is the essential news media attribute defined by the audience. This news media attribute's precise strategy and integrity should be developed and executed daily to develop and maintain the news media brand equity.

18. While content, quality, credibility, and other content-related factors are essential and often used as a driving force in news media brand associations, close cooperation between the editorial office and media marketing or brand managers is suggested. How content is packaged and distributed has become an essential aspect of news media brand distinctiveness and equity in a new media environment.

#### **For social media managers, brand managers, and agencies**

19. The proposed branding methodology could be transferred to developing consumer experience in multi-platform, especially social media platform settings for brands from other industries.

20. Product-involvement, competition environment should be considered as the proposed methodology developed for a low-involvement brand operating in a highly competitive environment.

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