Article

The Influence of Non-Product-Related Attributes on Media Brands' Consumption

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Abstract: This paper outlines the importance and role of non-product-related brand attributes, e.g., user imagery and usage imagery, in local news media content consumption by a younger audience aged 15–24. Due to technological developments, new media content consumption patterns have emerged. New dynamic, interactive, and multiplatform marketplaces have changed how media brands deliver content and how audiences consume it. The main catalysts of change are multiple platforms, on-demand content consumption, and social media platforms. The increasing use of global social networks offers media brands possibilities to distribute content and connect with their audiences, all while creating new challenges and competition in local media. These changes have brought about possibilities of broadening media audiences, as well as challenges, e.g., because of decreasing media brand associations and preference being given to social media platforms and global media brands. Generation Z's traditional media consumption patterns are below average. This audience segment prefers mobile access and online media content on various platforms, uses social media more than other age range audiences, and chooses global media and social media platforms over national media brands. These dynamics increase the challenges for local news media brands in attracting and growing a future audience, as Generation Z consumes fewer national media content in their local or national language, and what they do consume is through the medium of social media. The authors analyse media consumption trends in Latvia and determine how media brands increase their equity and the consumption of media regarding younger audiences. This research was designed to understand media consumption trends via secondary information analyses and employs a quantitative survey to identify non-product-related brand attitudes. The research question of this paper is concerned with defining how media brand associations affect content consumption and engagement. We used regression analyses to predict the most significant correlations between brand attributes and content consumption and concentration. The study focuses on national news media brands.

Keywords: media branding; news media brands; media brand attributes; consumer-based brand equity

1. Introduction

1.1. The Paradigm Shift in Media Consumption and Its Impact on Media Branding

Information supply and demand have been transformed in many sectors as a result of digital transformation processes and advancements in technology [1]. It should be noted that digital transformation has advanced the expansion of all industries with the use of bridging swift and manageable technology platforms, while also giving uncomplicated access to the required data and information. This transformation has also influenced media organisations shaped by digitalisation and the global expansion of social media platforms. Over the past few years, two features have dominated academic work on the effect of digital transformation on media companies and brands. They are multiplatform media

content and information consumption on demand and the high dispersion of the media audience because of the expansion of social media platforms and the growth of content access spots.

1.2. Development of Content Consumption Patterns and the Subsequent Impact on Media Brands

Technological evolution has caused notable developments in audience media content consumption behaviour. The volume of connected devices has increased the focus on consumption of content, not on devices, platforms, or content access spots [2]. 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 outlet [3]. Significant trends in media content usage include an increasing amount of time spent in the online environment, consumption on mobile devices, time-shifted viewing, and on-demand consumption [3,4].

The most significant developments that affect how media content is supplied, delivered, and used are:

(a)   The move from consuming information and content on classical media channels to an online environment;
(b)   Multiplatform media content consumption on demand;
(c)   Content consumption via social media platforms.

These developments have led to new methods of content distribution and the convenience of access points on different platforms. They have also created new ways of media content consumption concerning the amount, distribution, consumption channels, consumption device, time, and attitude. The new channels have appeared due to technological expansion. New chances for content distribution, consumption, and branding have emerged thanks to the evolution of social media platforms. The increasing use of global social networks offers media brands possibilities to distribute content and connect with their audiences; however, this has created new obstacles and competition for national media. The on-demand use of content and the diversification of access points and platforms offer media brands both possibilities and challenges [5]. The growing multichannel and media marketing setting has created a new challenge for media branding [5]. For media brands, this means that they have to ensure that their delivery and content are synergistic over inconsistent media and platforms and, at the same time, make the most of each medium's unique characteristics.

The expansion of technology has caused notable changes to the content consumption behaviour of audiences.

This paper is arranged as follows. In Section 2, the authors introduce the brand equity concept and media brand theoretical framework. Then, the methodology is described in Section 3. In Section 4, the authors respond to the research questions: (1) How has digitalisation changed media consumption and what are the main differences in different age groups? (2) How have media consumption changes impacted media brands? (3) What are the most significant non-product-related associations of the brand that favourably impact media consumption by Generation Z? Section 5 discusses media brand changes and OI aspects and concludes with this paper's crucial results for practice and future research.

2. Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Need for Brand Equity—Advancement in Technology and a Changed Communication Market

We have witnessed increasing interest in the brand equity concept in recent decades, as this is crucial to researchers, academics, and business managers. There are increasing efforts to introduce and define brand equity and research it in the changing marketplace where brands and audiences meet. The advancement of technology and the introduction of the internet changed the way the world interacts and communicates, which is directly related to brand communication with the audience. This new environment has completely changed the audience's impact on brands' marketing efforts and communication. Thus, much research from the last 20 years has been dedicated to determining how brands

and branding can or should be managed in the current multimedia environment [2,3,6]. Established approaches to branding that focus on mass media methods appear unsuited for a market where social media networks have replaced brand platforms and networks, and the audience has access to a vast quantity of information about companies, brands, and products. Therefore, new outlooks and viewpoints are needed to understand branding principles in this swiftly changing communication and audience context [7]. Entirely new perspectives should be developed in branding to build, develop, and maintain a strong brand.

Although researchers and marketers have approached the concept differently over the last 30 years since the concept was first introduced, there is a consensus that brand equity should be determined through marketing outcomes distinctively assigned to a brand [8]. Thus, brand equity is connected to the fact that different effects are seen in the marketing of a service or product due to its brand versus if that brand did not associate with that same product or service [8,9]. If we consider the changed communication marketplace, where the audience could encounter a lot of information regarding products and services on various platforms, then is it correct to assume that, from today's perspective, brand equity relates to the outcome that results from any encounter with a product or service, regardless of its marketing or of brand content unrelated to the marketing. There are many different perspectives on brand equity, but academics agree that brand equity can be described from a financial or a marketing point of view. In the marketing point of view, two definitions of brand equity prevail. These is firm-based brand equity or consumer-based brand equity. Consumer-based equity is about consumer awareness and perception of the brand that is directly influenced by company marketing activities [9,10]. Firm-based brand equity focuses on the financial value directly influenced by the brand and brand strength [11]. Among other perspectives, the concept of a brand as a construct of the audience's mind and associations is gaining attention from brand equity experts in both the academic and business worlds.

2.2. Consumer-Based Brand Equity

The audience, i.e., consumers, increasingly control the new media and information environment [7]. As a result, consumers have more options and can choose from different media and platforms. Audiences also have greater options about whether and how they want to consume content. Many authors in the marketing literature state that one of the benefits of substantial brand equity is consumers' response, behaviours, and marketing communication effectiveness. For example, consumers may be more willing to accept further communications from a brand, respond to this communication more openly or favourably, and have a more remarkable ability to recall the brand communication or have related cognitive or perceptual responses later. Therefore, brand equity plays a principal role in marketing communication and its effects, either as an aim or as an intermediary to other targets [12].

A comprehensive and cohesive brand equity model is needed to understand how individual communication types impact brand building and substantial brand equity. Consumer-based brand equity concentrates on how consumers perceive the brand [13]. The three acknowledged models of customer-based brand equity are those of Keller (1993), Aaker (1991), and Kapferer (1992) [9].

Two conceptualisations of brand equity between customers with moderately different aspects predominate the branding literature. Aaker divided brand equity assets and liabilities into five categories: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets [8]. Keller differentiated between two crucial brand elements, perceived as a point of difference from brand equity and equivalent to the assets and liabilities of brand equity defined by Aaker: brand awareness and brand image [9]. Brand awareness defines the power of the brand node in consumer memory and the facility with which the brand leaps to the consumer's mind, while the brand's image reveals brand association types with varying degrees of abstraction that form the

differential reaction to brand equity [9]. The types of brand associations that condense concrete information can be categorised into product- and non-product-related attributes [9]. Customer-based brand equity happens when the consumer is familiar with the brand and has some favourable, solid, and unique brand associations in their memory. The authors draw attention to the unique brand attributes that are key elements in building substantial consumer-based brand equity. The difference in Keller's model is related to the consumer's brand knowledge memory structure, which embodies brand awareness and brand image. Many scholars agree that customer-based brand equity influences how customers react to the brand's marketing and therefore influences the brand's marketing effects.

Nevertheless, we hypothesise that, in a new, intensive, and oversaturated online communication marketplace where customers have access to immediate, on-demand, and multiplatform-fuelled multiperspective brand information, brand marketing efforts should be widened and should include interacting with customers in any brand content. The main difference is that, 20 years ago, companies were in control of their marketing and brand messages via chosen channels; today's marketplace allows customers to choose when, where, and what to do with the brand content even more, so the audience has become a part of brand marketing, whether intentionally or, often, unintentionally. The authors believe that this stresses the importance of the consumer experience of multiple communication platforms as a crucial part of brand equity development. Scholars and business managers have researched and confirmed the consumer experience with a brand product or service and its impact on a positive brand–customer relationship. However, a multiplatform and interactive marketplace where customers experience brand content—marketing or nonmarketing—has a new dimension in the consumer experience aspect. Today's interactive environment expands the definition of consumer experience as consumers can see, read, and watch intentional or unintentional brand content anywhere. Even if it is not directly product-related or brand-advertised, every content consumption experience can be attributed to brand associations. This suggests that the consumer experience today is not only product-related or service-related but also related to the medium, audience, and context. The research focuses on whether the consumption experience, especially non-product-related, has more significance in forming brand associations.

2.3. Consumer Experience and Brand Equity

A dynamic, interactive marketplace has changed the way consumers and brands communicate and developed a competitive environment with a growing amount of marketing activities for goods and services. As a result, branding has evolved from recognising to building and establishing an emotional bond with the consumer. This emotional bond may create a unique brand value for consumers. Therefore, the brand story should be presented and communicated through an interactive approach to build and strengthen a unique brand image in customers' minds, which creates a unique customer experience [13].

The importance and effect of consumer experience have been well researched and confirmed in academic work. Holbrook and Hirschman stated that consumer experiences include hedonic attributes such as fun, fantasies, and feelings [14]. Schmitt and Rogers have also comprehensively described the consumer experience from emotional and rational perspectives [15]. Brand experience occurs when consumers approach or accept brands [16]. The brand experience should be communicated through all contact points to amplify the effect [13]. Shamim and Butt's work provides detailed analyses of how brand equity, attitude, and credibility are shaped by brand experience [17]. This emphasises that consumer experience plays a crucial role in brand equity development.

Furthermore, it confirms that new touchpoints and branding are created to deliver a seamless, appropriate, and positive consumer experience through a multiplatform and interactive marketplace. Suppose that the consumer experience is crucial for substantial brand equity. In that case, the focus is on how this experience influences the development and enhancement of positive, solid, and unique brand associations in a dynamic, interactive

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marketplace and whether indirect and non-product-related consumer experiences have become more important in this marketplace than before.

2.4. Consumer Experience and Brand Associations

Consumer feelings, thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and emotions related to a brand are together termed brand associations [8,9]. A brand association can also include brand attitudes, emotional elements, and objective benefits [9,18]. As agreed before, unique brand associations are elements that help consumers distinguish a particular brand from other brands obtainable on the market [18].

Brand association can be described as a concept or correlation established by a brand in a customer's mind. Scholars agree that emotional and cognitive clues based on experience-based associations lead to brand associations [14]. In addition, experience with the brand or service builds experience-based associations [19]. Shamim and Butt's research on how the brand experience or the consumer experience influences brand equity and brand attitude and credibility proved that brand experience directly influences all of these elements [17]. Furthermore, brand experience substantially influences brand equity and other elements such as brand associations and brand awareness [14].

Brakus and Keller agree that brand-connected experiences are likely to become a part of a consumer's long-term memory in the form of brand associations. These associations can significantly build attitudes such as brand preference, credibility, satisfaction, and loyalty [17,19]. Biedenbach and Marell's study results show that experience influences brand association more than brand awareness [20]. However, the literature provides only a small number of studies investigating the relationship between brand experience and brand equity [21]. Therefore, it is essential for future scholars to focus on the relationship between a brand or consumer experience and brand equity. Brand experience or consumer experience and brand equity relations are essential concepts in branding where brand equity is a long-term way of building brands, whereas brand experience is compounded and comprehended by consumers. The literature confirms that brand equity is a growing and developing concept and is an essential part of solid brand building in a new, interactive, internet-based communication marketplace. In this marketplace, the customer and audience have more control through consuming, engaging, and responding to brands' communication and marketing efforts as technological advancements in recent years have changed the communication marketplace. Interactive, digital, multiplatform, and multichannel communication prevails in all aspects of branding. Although the customer-based brand equity model introduced 30 years ago seems to fit the changing marketplace ideally, the consumer experience has changed. Today's consumer experience is no longer a direct or indirect product experience but a nonlinear, mobile, and cross-platform experience with a product or brand in very different environments.

While the literature research confirms a correlation between positive brand associations and brand equity, the previously discussed correlation between brand experience or consumer experience and brand equity points to the need to manage and operate brand equity building in a more complex process. If the literature review shows that brand experience plays a crucial role in brand equity building, this branding stage should be measured with the same importance as consumer thoughts, feelings, and knowledge about the brand—which can usually happen before brand or product consumption.

Furthermore, the authors believe that technological progress and digitalisation affect brands' consumer experience and play a critical role in brand associations.

Therefore, building and maintaining strong, favourable, and unique brand associations involves managing and measuring consumer experiences with the brand in ways never before conducted. In addition, the authors propose a model where consumer experience, especially non-product-related, is measured as part of brand associations. If consumer experience influences brand equity, the conceptualisation approach of consumer-based brand associations suggests an effective way to measure and deliver the consumer's signs.

Furthermore, by managing the brand associations via marketing communications and activities, the brand has the opportunity to build the desired brand image, thereby strengthening brand equity [9]. This is especially important for digital marketing, which has received less academic study and is enriched by different kinds of communication elements and activities that were not even possible several years ago. Furthermore, as mentioned above, consumers are playing a more significant role in creating the meaning of brands in the new interactive marketplace.

Recent scholarly works confirm that consumer experience impacts brand associations and, therefore, a reinvention of the consumer experience in the brand equity context is needed. The question of how the type, strength, and uniqueness of all brand associations produced by different communication platforms influence brand strength should still be explored. Increasing the number of communication platforms where brands and consumers meet, such as social media platforms, instant messaging apps, mobile content usage, and digital content consumption, will make indirect consumer and non-brand-related experiences essential for developing brand associations. The correlation between these would help brands with understanding and building strong brand equity in a new, interactive, and customer-led marketplace. Furthermore, scholars agree that technological advancement and convergence have brought about both new opportunities and challenges for brand marketing and brand equity building in a changed interactive marketplace where consumer experience and interaction with brand content play an increasingly critical role.

2.5. Consumer Experience and Medium: The Importance of Media Brands

With more and more content and information being accessed via different platforms and channels, the consumer experience becomes more and more significant. In this case, a question arises about the significance of the medium as an aspect of media brands or vehicles of brand messages to the audience. Technology's advancement and the digital environment have fundamentally changed the environment where brands, consumers, and content meet. Famously, in 1964, Marshall McLuhan invented the phrase "the medium is the message" in his work *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* [22]. This means that the content and the medium are intertwined, so the central message or effect is not in the content it carries but in the way it is presented [22]. Each medium is a unique type of environment whose extensive use transforms people and culture. The idea is that changes to a communication medium have a far more profound effect than anything that occurs on the communication channel or at the message level of the media.

McLuhan states that communication media tend to shape the content and character of the message [23]. McLuhan's theory is still practical today for analysing building brand associations in the customer-led interactive medium marketplace. Medium theory focuses on the medium rather than what it conveys or how the audience receives information. A medium is not simply radio, TV, newspaper, etc. Instead, it is the symbolic environment of any communication action. The medium theory focuses on each medium's particular characteristics or each type of media [24]. This means that the focus is on specific features and how they make the medium different from other media. What variables of the medium, rather than the content, differentiate one brand from another and form the basis for customer choice? Without diminishing the role of content, long-lived medium theory and brand equity—elements discussed previously—take into account the growing customer impact on how and where communication is experienced. Translating medium variables to today's branding theories and brand elements, the authors define these variables as non-product-related brand attributes that create strong, unique, and favourable media brand associations.

The idea of media brands being both product brands and generators of consumer brands' culture and communication is an important research field. It adds complexity to the study of media and media branding, powerful platforms that power social life, debate, and consumer participation [25]. This provides important research on how changes in the environment influence media brands and how non-content-related brand attributes build

media brand uniqueness. If the content itself is only a part of the audience experience, then non-content-related variables or associations become more significant, especially in the oversupplied, multiplatform-fuelled media products market.

It is uncertain whether traditional branding approaches from consumer brand perspectives can be applied to media branding. Media brands and products have been of academic interest for many years, but from the brand's perspective, media brands have received less attention in relation to management, audience, and social and cultural influence [26,27]. Although the effectiveness of marketing and brand advertising is often researched, media brands differentiate themselves from consumer brands in various ways. Furthermore, the characteristics of media products vary considerably since they experience significantly different business environments [25]. Picard defined two major categories of media products and services:

1. Single-creation media products;
2. Continuous-creation media products.

Single-creation media products are creative ideas-driven products based on unique individual content, such as movies, music, games, or books [25]. The core competence of media brands producing single-creation products is content creation. Their brand management aspect is often project-driven brand management. Due to each product's uniqueness, media companies must invest significantly in marketing and sales activities to capture consumers' attention, inform them about the content of the product, and convince them to consume it [25]. As a result, the market for these products is risky and experiences high failure rates. From a consumer point of view, these products could be categorised as high-involvement products.

Continuous-creation media products are concept-driven products that demand the ongoing creation of changing content, provided within a context that exhibits continuity. Magazines, newspapers, television series, and news media are examples of the continuous creation of media products. Managing these products requires structured and coordinated processes and process management approaches. The main differences from the perspective of the media brand lie in the focus: media brands producing single-creation products focus on managing failure, whereas media brands with continuous-creation products focus on enhancing their products and processes and lean on the success already achieved [25]. Producers of continuous-creation products can focus on enhancing content within ongoing products by researching audiences' likes and repositioning any similar and substitutable products. This distinction between media products is significant as a different focus from a branding perspective could be applied. This research focuses on news media, as news media are different from consumer goods, and other media products such as news media are society-influencing products that generate income by fulfilling their normative role [7]. Today, the news media play a crucial role in everyday life, influencing political, economic, and societal processes. The increasing volume of information sources, aggregate platforms, and social media has created information and content creditability and source reputation crises. Increasing levels of fake news and disinformation have led to demand for high-equity media brands within the digital marketplace. Media products are more visible and much more integrated into the daily lives of individuals than in many other industries [25]. The increasing digitisation of news is fundamentally reshaping the news industry. The changing news media environment has created a problem for media brands: how to build and maintain brand preference and usage in a highly competitive marketplace. Especially if the news content is, as in many cases, identical or at least similar across media outlets. This raises the important question of whether those seeking to build media brand equity should continue focusing on improving content only. The demand has been present for media brands to continuously create news media products for years—improving content according to audience preferences and product positioning. Whether in the interactive, digital, or oversaturated content market, is it enough that consumer experience extends beyond direct product experience?

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The importance of branding and media brand management is also reflected in the positive effects of brand equity on various media outcomes, from the media's trust or credibility to media brand perception [28].

Higher levels of brand equity based on customers increase the credibility of media brands with their audiences [28]. Therefore, a direct impact of customer-based brand equity on media brand credibility suggests that news media that take purposeful brand-building actions and consequently increase their brand equity may find a corresponding improvement of their credibility with audiences. This outcome highlights the need for news media organisations to focus on brand building through content-related and non-product-related attributes. Furthermore, the interactive online environment and the changes in content consumption behaviours mentioned above require new ways to build strong and positive brand associations, especially if the focus is on a younger audience. The importance of consumption experience in building strong and favourable brand associations was previously confirmed.

The application of general branding principles to media branding is a recent development. Therefore, theories that recognise, determine, and explore the relationships between the concepts that influence media brands are still evolving. However, in the face of intense media expansion and increasing competition in the industry, media brands rely on consumer marketing principles, particularly branding, to differentiate themselves from the competition [7].

It is crucial for media branding studies to focus specifically on news media brands, as they are inherently different from nonmedia brands [25]. Theories explaining the relationship between consumer brands and their consumers may not sufficiently explain the relationship between media brands and audiences. More and more studies show that the delivery vehicle or platform where the audience consumes media products is crucial for the content experience, especially if the focus is on news media or the continued creation of media products.

It is confirmed that the news media have a significant influence in today's fragmented, interactive, nonlinear marketplace. If news media differ from the production of other media brands from an economic perspective, it is in the fact that news media brands operate a fixed-cost economics [7]. Fixed-cost economic media types are broadcasting services, movies, TV programming, and news media. Unit-cost media examples are books, magazines, newspapers, and physical forms of recorded media [7].

To conclude, news media today can be described as low-involvement, continuous creation of products operating in fixed-cost economics where media brand and the consumer experience highly influence consumer behaviour. In addition, news media operate in a highly competitive environment. Interestingly, Picard [25] stated that media companies face less direct competition than other companies. Nevertheless, media products have faced intense competition in the last 10 years: information and news clutter, social platforms' role, and dominance have changed consumer roles and behaviour.

One of the media's unique properties is that, in multiple reuses of media content, particularly for the continuous creation of media products, this content value is perceived as more worthy than the original use [29]. The value of the media product has been broadly studied from a financial and economic point of view, but the area of media content reuse and value impact on brand equity has not been explored in depth. This is a significant aspect of media branding in a new, digital, and interactive marketplace. If we assume that media brand associations and brand equity influence consumer experience across all access points, how do news readership, shares, and engagement with news brand content influence brand associations? If the value increases with multiple reuses, how can media brands take advantage of this fact to build strong, positive, and unique brand associations? To summarise, media brands differ from consumer brands in terms of supply and demand aspects, impact, and relationship with the audience and operate in a highly competitive and significantly oversupplied multiplatform-fuelled interactive environment. Therefore, news media, which are low-involvement products with high importance in society in terms

of political, economic, and cultural influence and compete with a considerable amount of information supply across the marketplace, are important for revising and implementing branding strategies applicable in this new environment.

Due to digitalisation and convergence, media boundaries have dissolved and are no longer effective [7]. In addition, the audience is fragmented and divided into smaller and smaller target groups. This is an example of the law of diminishing returns, whereby more choice does not directly lead to more consumption. The result is a zero-sum market where the number of brands within a product category increases while the number of potential customers remains the same [30]. Obtaining a market share from direct competitors is the only way to attract more customers [30,31]. This reinforces the importance of strong media brand equity to compete in the marketplace.

2.6. Multiplatform Consumption as Catalysts for Media Brands

As discussed above, technological advancements have brought about profound changes to brand building in a new interactive online marketplace. The fundamental catalyst of these changes is the availability of content distribution and consumption. New ways of distributing and consuming media content through different channels and platforms have created unique challenges for media branding. The multiple platforms are also behind the importance of media branding today. Multiple platforms as catalysts that allow the audience to access media content on different platforms, at different times, and in different formats, with social media platforms increasingly becoming the point of media consumption and experience, have determined the three main aspects of media branding [2–4,7]. These are:

- The audience's growing relevance as a component of the media brand;
- The growing significance of point of consumption and content consumption experience for brand associations;
- The diluting of media brand associations due to multiplatform content consumption.

The consumption of media content on-demand and via social platforms has increased the importance of audiences as a part of media branding. Given the audience's interactivity (consumption, participation, and reaction to a media brand), the audience has become a crucial part of media brand association forming, product development, and content distribution. Therefore, it is assumed that the audience's role in forming media brand associations has changed. Undoubtedly, today's audience has more power to shape media brands than ever before. Interactivity and accessibility, through different ways of experiencing media content, have increased the impact of the experience of consumption, forming associations between media brands. It is possible that these non-product-related associations are becoming increasingly important in a highly competitive, fragmented, and interactive marketplace characterised by information and media content oversupply. We propose that the brand consumption experience can be a point of distinctiveness in an oversaturated media market.

Moreover, multiplatform consumption dilutes brand associations [2,3,7]. On the one hand, with respect to content delivery, there is more contact between brands and better receptivity to consumer needs when media brand content is obtainable through multiple platforms [2]. On the other hand, multiple delivery channels and platforms can weaken brand associations for media brands [2]. The increasing fragmentation of audiences, the emergence of distribution channels, and the progress of technology that allows the time and platform to shift in response to the audience's immediate needs have all combined to create an environment in which the value of media brands or channel branding may be diminished. Additionally, Keller stated that, as there is more dynamism in content across multiple platforms, the brand identity of the content source (media brand) becomes less relevant, particularly when the content itself has unique brand associations [12]. According to Jenkins, audience access to more content distributors has increased the proportion of media brand users who do not care about where their media content comes from [3]. According to Barkus and Schmitt, 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 [19]. These findings correlate with the impact of consumer experience on brand equity within other industry sectors.

This new aspect of the media branding field requires new strategies in media branding and attention to building and strengthening media brand equity in a changing environment. From a branding standpoint, this emphasises the significance of bolstering media brand associations to ensure that brand messages are not limited to certain platforms, such as news media web pages, but are accessible to audiences wherever they choose to consume their material. Multiplatform usage and content consumption on-demand weaken brand associations and enhance the audience's role in creating associations. The content consumption experience is an important part of media brand associations and, therefore, strong brand equity, as we can see in Figure 1.
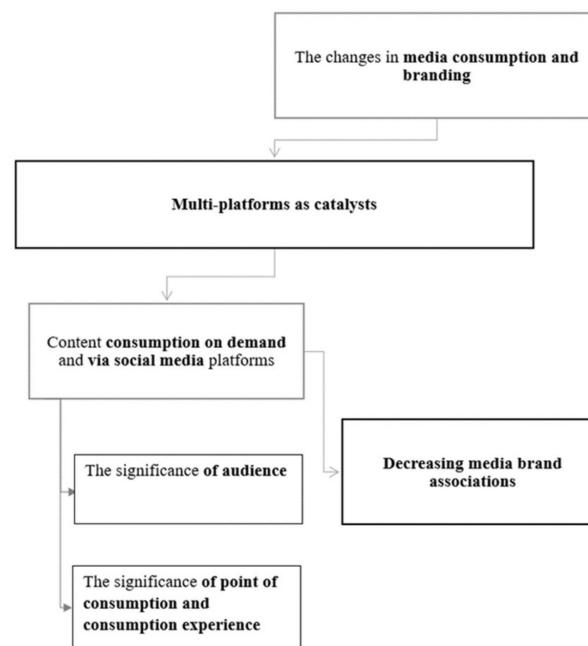

Figure 1. Consumption changes and their effect on media branding.

These three developments point to the importance of the strength of media brands across all audiences. Building strong, positive, and unique media brand associations is essential in this changed, interactive, fragmented, and saturated marketplace. Chan-Olmsted noted the dominance of content consumption on demand. From this perspective, on-demand branding could respond to how consumers perceive the value of concrete media platforms at different times and settings [2]. Thus, media content can be designed, merged, and distributed through multiple platforms to be appropriate to the audience's needs [2]. This confirms that increasing content consumption on-demand and the interactivity of the media supply and demand market can improve the consumption experience as part of building media brand associations.

Only in recent years has the question about the significance of brand associations other than content related arisen. This shift towards necessity and new aspects of news media branding has been exciting and entirely new. For decades, content and content quality have been the driving force of media brands, especially news media brands. However, previously analysed shifts in media consumption and technological developments require building strong non-content-related brand associations across all distribution and consumption points. This shift is especially significant because the new generation entering every industry encompasses all sectors and aspects of life, including the media market. This is Generation Z, which does not know and has never experienced the world of information consumption without digital and multiplatform elements.

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2.7. Generation Z and the News Media

Generation Z, which includes persons born between 1996 and 2010, and whose oldest members are only 25, accounts for 32% of the world's population, or 2.47 billion people out of a total population of 7.7 billion [32]. Much research has been conducted on this generation, and many agree that these people will bring about many changes across all industries, including media and news media consumption. Generation Z are different from other generations because they are the first to grow up wholly in the digital era. They are tech-savvy and mobile-first and have high standards for spending their time online. More extensive research recently conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2019) found that younger audiences are different from older groups in terms of what they do and their core attitudes about what they want from the news [33]. This generation is primarily driven by progress and enjoyment of their lives, which also translates into what they look for in the news. They still need and want to consume news, but do not necessarily see traditional media as the best or only way to achieve that.

To summarise, news brands and young people have different perspectives on the role and value of news. This audience expects news brands to make their product helpful, engaging, and fun [33]. The data indicate that Generation Z is very reliant on mobile technology and spends a lot of time on various social media networks. Not surprisingly, they use media on demand and prefer personalised content. The challenge for news brands is that these brands and their products play a minor role in the lives of this generation.

The Reuters study also revealed three key aspects that determine this generation's attitude to news media. These are the moment of consumption, the person, and the medium [33]. These inform our takeaways:

(i) The news experience should be easy and accessible, such as on Facebook, Netflix, or other social media platforms. Social media networks are a growing platform for content consumption, including media and news media. Generation Z is more likely to turn to social media networks and messaging apps (57%). Generation Z's news sources include Facebook (37%), Google (33%), and YouTube (31%) to obtain trending news. Facebook is equally popular as a first destination for the older generation, while Instagram has become the first news destination for younger audiences in the last few years [33]. This again confirms the importance of tangible media brand equity for all audiences.

(ii) News media brands must provide stories in a way that it is in line with the expectations of this audience and deliver them in moments when they are open to the news. This calls for using formats native to mobile and social media platforms. The influence of the news consumption moment on what a person is looking for in the news is critical when determining the role and effects of news media consumption.

(iii) How news media deliver their stories may need to change, including addressing negativity, stereotypes, diversity, and how news brands present themselves and their content on third-party platforms.

Digitalisation has created new relationships with news media, especially for Generation Z. First, multiplatform development has created new content distribution and consumption challenges for media brands, particularly for news media brands—first of all in terms of access points and the social media platform experience for the audience, which is especially significant for Generation Z. The second is moments of consumption or consumption experience. Before digitalisation, it was clear that media and news media consumption were limited to the dedicated moment when the audience turned on a television or radio station or opened a newspaper [33]. Digitalisation and multiple platforms now allow us to extend this experience to multiple moments with different audience needs, platforms, and expectations. The authors theorise that Generation Z's relationship with news media depends on the moment. In that case, the person and the medium, then the significance of understanding the moment and medium as part of media brand associations confirms the role of the consumption experience, especially for Generation Z. This means creating more native formats for mobile and social platforms and integrating this approach

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into assets and platforms. Third, visual formats and on-demand audio podcasts resonate greatly with this audience. News formats should be more visual and easier to consume to attract the interest of a younger audience.

News formats, tone of voice, and content are valued by the news brand depending on the consumption moment, the medium, and the individual [33]. By efficiently addressing these three variables, news brands can successfully generate resonant content and increase engagement with younger audiences. Influencing the type of content the audience might be looking for, these moments also relate to how and where the audience is accessing the news and, therefore, the medium [33].

To summarise, Generation Z is not particularly passionate about news brands, prioritising social media platforms and other mobile applications for entertainment and socialising. This does not mean that young consumers do not value traditional brands. Most of them have a leading news brand they turn to for breaking news, or when something needs to be verified, but their choice of brand is often impacted by early parental influence, and the format of consumption is almost always digital [4,33]. The Reuters research suggests that most young people keep up with the news passively by consuming it where they are most: on social media platforms and their mobile phones. This shift from conventional news sources to social media affects how they consume news and their overall attitudes.

However, the news is part of their lifestyles and is more often accessed through social media platforms and mobile phones. Strong news media brands play an important role in direct and dedicated news consumption. The more dedicated the news consumption, the more often direct access to the news media website is observed. Interestingly, many consumers—especially younger ones—say they started to depend more on reputable sources last year [4,33]. One reason for this is that young people have gradually become more aware of reliable sources of news content and the value of quality journalism. Interestingly, Generation Z favours news outlets established before 2000 twice as much as emerging media companies [33].

As a result, news brands have become increasingly concerned about 'attribution' or brand associations, ensuring that content is appropriately assigned to the brand that created it in a fragmented, multiplatform-driven global news environment [7,33].

The developments in media brand consumption in terms of consumption, brand associations, Generation Z's usage of news media brands, and the increasing importance of strong media brand equity underscore the need for analyses of strong brand attributes that contribute to media brand equity.

2.8. Theoretical Research Framework

Digitalisation and technological advancements have transformed media consumption. Due to accessibility, content is distributed and consumed across multiple platforms. At the same time, the convergence between different demand and supply channels facilitates the consumption of content. The content supply becomes more confusing as new media enter the market, saturating the market. Through digitisation and convergence, the boundaries between media have disappeared and no longer apply. Media brands focus on their audience to differentiate themselves from other products and services.

The question arises: What constitutes the uniqueness of a media brand, and do media brands fully understand and utilise audiences as part of brand associations? Given audiences' increasing role and influence in media branding, the question is how media brands can engage with, measure, and develop audiences to create solid and unique brand associations and, thus, stronger media brands.

The increasing fragmentation of audiences, the development of distribution channels, and technological advances that allow the time and platform to change according to the immediate needs of the audience all contribute to an environment in which the value of a media brand or channel is diminishing, and the brand identity of the content source (media brand) is becoming less important. This represents a significant shift in media brands. When content consumption across multiple platforms dilutes brand associations,

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the question becomes: What elements of solid media brands build, sustain, and reinforce media brands across the various methods of on-demand consumption? What are the differences between news media brands when the content is the same in most cases? This is especially crucial for a younger audience that is more platform- and experience-oriented. Associations with the media brand and the content experience become more important in an environment where multiplatform delivery decreases. The question is how the media brand can ensure its brand preference and usage in a highly competitive market. The authors do not understate media content as a critical brand element but hypothesise that consumption and non-content-related brand associations become more significant in an interactive marketplace, especially for younger audiences. Exploring the associations with national media brands that positively influence younger audiences' media consumption and engagement would therefore answer not only some challenging questions for national media brands on how to attract younger audiences but also provide a critical foundation for meeting audiences' need for a seamless media brand experience across multiple platforms without losing strong associations with the media brand. Audiences are increasingly transforming from passive to active consumers who play a role in the media brand.

Our research is based on the changes in media consumption discussed above and the challenge for media brands to maintain and establish brand attribution across all content distribution channels, especially among younger audiences. As cross-platform delivery of content and experiences fails to evoke brand associations, and the media brand becomes less relevant to most consumers, a strong and promotional media brand is critical to competitive success, with targeted media branding based on consumer-based brand equity providing a successful response to the changing media brand landscape and its needs. However, there are some gaps in the literature when it comes to explaining the impact of noncontent elements on media brands from a consumer perspective.

This research aims to define non-content-related media brand associations that build substantial media brand equity in a convergent and multiplatform marketplace, focusing on news media.

The research objective is to measure content-independent brand associations that increase media brand usage and engagement with younger audiences.

The research question is: What are the non-content-related media brand attributes that positively influence Generation Z's media brand consumption and engagement?

3. Materials and Methods

Growing online multiplatform content usage increases accessibility but also dilutes brand associations. This and the audience's impact on media brands necessitates revising the importance of brand elements and their impact in a fast-changing environment.

If the content consumption experience and audience are significant elements of building strong, positive, and unique brand associations, then the question arises of which brand attributes are the most important for Generation Z.

The brand associations' favourability, strength, and uniqueness impact the brand image and the audience's attitude towards the media brand. However, because of diluted media brand associations due to multiplatform content consumption and evolving global media brand usage, there is a need to revise media brand building to focus on younger consumers' consumption behaviour.

The authors employed secondary data to validate content consumption behaviour developments shaped by digital transformation and technological developments. The data were based on biennial quantitative consumer research from 2012 to 2021. The research was carried out in 65 countries. The research method was an online questionnaire with a length of 90 min. The questions focussed on people's media habits, attitudes, activities, preferred media and platforms, preferences, and media influence. The sample size of the research in Latvia was 3163, ensuring a nationally representative sample in line with sociodemographic factors and online reach. The fieldwork was carried out over two to three months and included data processing and interpretation [4].

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The authors employed quantitative survey research on consumer-based brand equity construction, media brand characteristics, and media consumption dynamics. The quantitative research with 300 respondents aged 15 to 24 years old, representing the Generation Z demographic group, was carried out from May to June 2018. The authors selected the national news media brands that were the most consumed by this audience to determine the non-product-related media brand attributes that favourably impact the use and associations of media brands [27]. The research used multiple choice questions to verify the audience's consumption and access to national media content. The research aims to find the media brand attributes that impact the selection of a particular media brand, then increase consumption and brand preference. First, the respondents graded the significance of particular brand attributes positively impacting content consumption and brand engagement on social media platforms. Multiple regression analyses were used for analyses. Then, the data were analysed. A correlation between critical and nonproduct attributes was established to detect variables to form a statistically significant relationship. The goal was to recognise variables that influence each other.

4. Results

4.1. Dynamics and Growth of Digital Content Consumption

First, the authors analysed content consumption changes regarding channels. The digital transformation and technology advancements have caused merging and coherence between different media platforms. Innovations and the availability of the internet have increased the number of consumers who access content digitally and daily. Internet users in Latvia grew by 3.2% in 2020 and are estimated to number 86.9% of the population. In the audience aged 16 to 24 years old, this percentage is 97.9% [4]. For this audience, the most popular activities are spending time on social media platforms, instant messaging apps, and different email platforms [4]. In addition, 81.7% of all internet users read news media and print or online magazine versions. Traditional media content such as TV, radio, and print have been transferred to digital formats. Time with online content and its consumption grew by 44% in 2021 (see Figure 2).
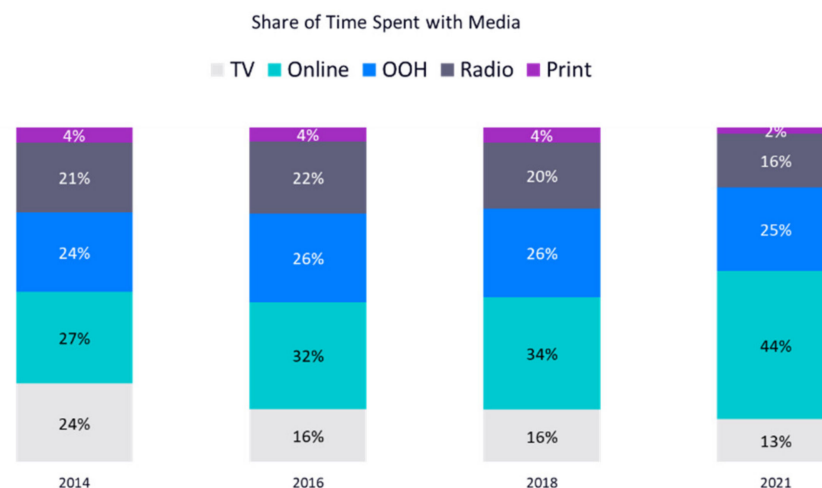

Figure 2. Dynamics of media consumption time from 2014 to 2021: ages 15–64, Latvia [4].

Content consumption behaviour has shifted from classic media such as radio and TV to digital content usage, as confirmed by data from all demographical audiences [4]. Despite decreasing time spent with classic media, the overall content consumption time increased yearly, reaching 7 h and 1 min in the most active age group, 40–49 years old, in 2021 [27]. The convenience of access increased consumers' time spent on different media platforms, but the consumption medium transformed from classic to digital media channels.

4.2. Multiplatform Content Consumption On-Demand

The evolution of technologies, accessibility, and the speed of the internet have shaped how audiences can access the media—whenever and everywhere [28]. With accessibility-supported changes in audience behaviour—content consumption on-demand, including TV content—time-shifted content consumption is growing in all age groups.

The possibility of reaching the audience watching linear TV daily decreased to 65% in 2021 [4]. The younger the audience, the more their TV content behaviour is less linear, more on-demand or in a time-shifted mode. This pattern in content consumption proves the audience's demand for platform and timing-independent consumption experience. According to the data, this trend applies to all demographic audience segments. The younger the audience, the more intense the on-demand consumption behaviour [4]. For Generation Z, 70% can be reached via time-shifted TV content compared with 51% of all 15–64 year olds. The shift in this audience behaviour has been significant in recent years (see Figure 3).
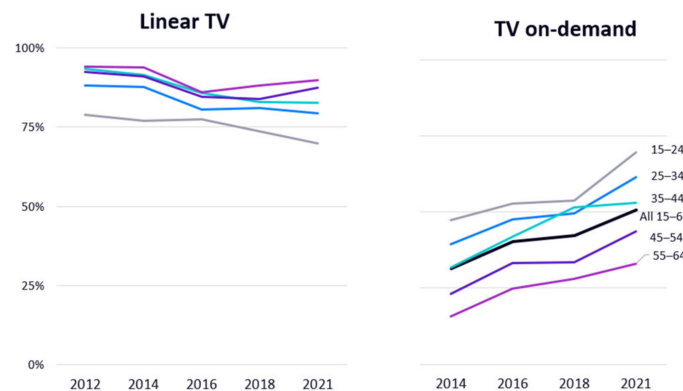

Figure 3. Weekly reach of age groups, comparing linear and on-demand TV content consumption, 2012–2021, Latvia, ages 15–64 [4].

The same content consumption pattern is present in another classic medium, radio. This audience has stayed steady over the years, but a growing audience prefers to stream music on free or paid platforms—28% of all audiences streaming music daily in 2021. This is similar to TV content consumption trends—the younger the audience, the more intense the streaming consumption. For example, almost 55% of youngsters stream audio content weekly compared with other age groups whose consumption is below 21% (see Figure 4).
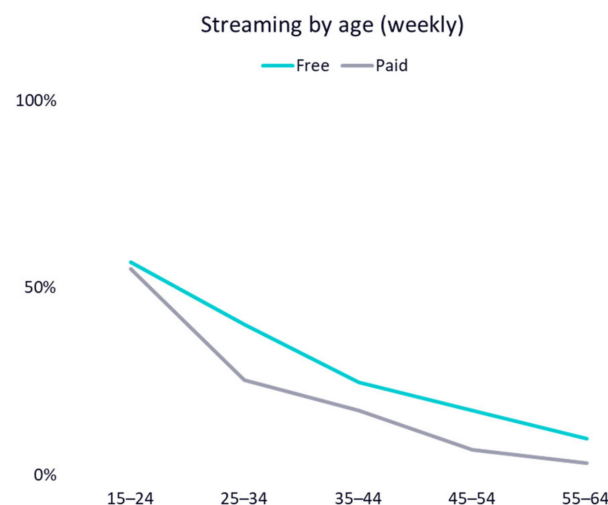

Figure 4. Audio content weekly audience reached by audience age, 2021, ages 15–64, Latvia [4].

4.3. Consumption of Content Consumption via Social Media Platforms

Technological advancement and the development of various social networking sites and platforms have transformed media content distributions and consumption.

The point of view determines the categorisation of media brands. The aspects of the product of the media brand vary greatly, and media brands have considerably different business environments. Two main categories of media products and services can be seen: single-creation and continuous-creation products [25]. The content delivery to the audience and consumption behaviour differ depending on the category; however, technological convergence and audience fragmentation affect all media brand products. Technological evolution has effected notable changes in audience media content consumption behaviour. The volume of connected devices has increased concentration on the consumption of content, not on devices, platforms, or content access spots. All of these developments deliver further opportunities to reach the audience. Multiple platforms ensure more access points and, therefore, more possibilities for brands to meet their audience and better respond to consumer needs [3]. Social networking sites provide opportunities to deliver content to a wider audience and enhance connections with current customers. As media products are experience goods, social media recommendations are significant to help media brands reach new audiences [34].

Social media platforms have provided new content delivery possibilities for media brands both in the aspect of platforms and timing. For example, in 2018, Facebook was the primary traffic source for many U.S. and European news media brands [35].

In Latvia, close to 51% of the national news media content was accessed through social media platforms over the past 5 years. News media have been experiencing increased nondirect and referral audience traffic at the expense of direct visits, especially from younger audiences [4]. Furthermore, 77% of the audience can be reached via social networking sites daily in 2021, compared with 65% in 2018.

Social media usage has been growing year by year and exceeds the usage of national media. For example, the share of audience visits to national media sites decreased by 12% over the past seven years, versus the share of audience visits for international media brands and social networking sites which increased by 14% over the same period (see Figure 5).
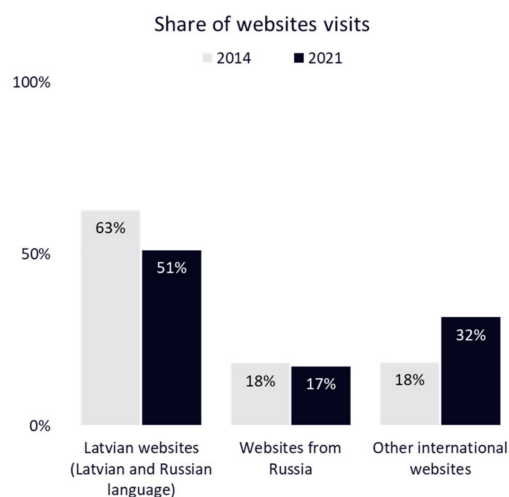

Figure 5. Share of audience traffic to websites. Ages 15–64, 2014 versus 2021 [4].

We can see that the share of visits to national news media has decreased in the past seven years, while the number of visits to global websites and social networking sites has grown notably. This confirms that social networking sites and platforms create great possibilities for media brands to deliver content and reach audiences but also cannibalise the national media audience.

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4.4. Content Consumption by Generation Z

To understand the media usage patterns of younger audiences, the authors analysed content consumption in this particular age group based on language and global platforms versus national brands. A younger audience, aged 15–24 years old, used traditional media less than average and showed a preference for online media content. This audience chose international media and social media platforms. International media brands had the highest share of audience visits from younger audiences (see Figure 6).
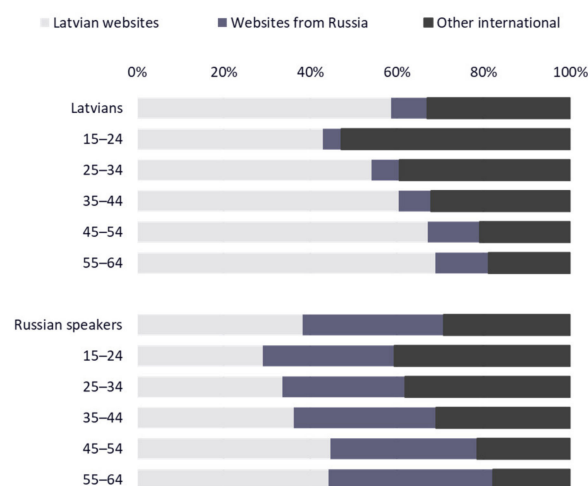

Figure 6. Audience media choice by language, ages 15–64, Latvia [4].

The younger the audience, the more they consume international media brands. However, there are significant differences among younger audiences worldwide. The top activity for this audience was video games, reaching 26%, followed by listening to music at 14%, and internet browsing and spending time on social networking sites at 12% and 11%, respectively. However, 10% of this audience named watching TV or movies at home as their top choice of entertainment [36].

The data show that Generation Z is more platform-oriented, consuming content on-demand in the digital environment. This audience spends more time on social media and consumes fewer national media. Youngsters still want the news media to link their environment to the world, but they do not think that classic media are the best way to achieve that. The news media brands are now fighting for attention, and there is high-level consumption of news through social media [33].

Furthermore, this is a crucial aspect of the impact of news and local brands as the medium and moment of consumption for this audience is more significant than for others. Audience behaviour puts at risk the future of national media brands. Finally, the authors analysed the role of the individual in media consumption.

4.5. The Role of Media Audience on Media Consumption

Today's audiences, especially younger ones, consume more media content online via multiple platforms that dilute media brand associations. Furthermore, they mainly consume international brands rather than national media brands. The question arises of how to increase national or local media brand usage, especially among younger audiences, and how to strengthen media brand associations on multiple platforms. The role of the audience should be examined because it is an integral part of a media brand [37]. An overview of the literature shows that media consumption presents social distinctions and that other individuals are measured based on their media consumption. Media consumption is a part of our lifestyle and social expression [38]. Therefore, different media consumption can be a means of characterising different social groups. Media audiences can be grouped by their attitudes, lifestyle, and beliefs into so-called social bubbles. It is natural for audiences to

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unfriend those with different outlooks and consume news confirming their own perspective [39]. Different features such as sociodemographics, living place, and education can influence our sense of belonging to a social bubble.

The authors used secondary data to analyse different audience segments to confirm this. If we take two more widely formed social bubbles, stability and tradition-led versus progress and open-minded, into consideration, there are differences across the age groups. Approximately 13% (158,000) belong to Latvia's stability and traditional audience bubble. On the other hand, 118,000 or 10% of all media audiences fit into the progress and open-minded bubble [39]. Age is the determining factor for belonging to a particular social bubble (see Figure 7).
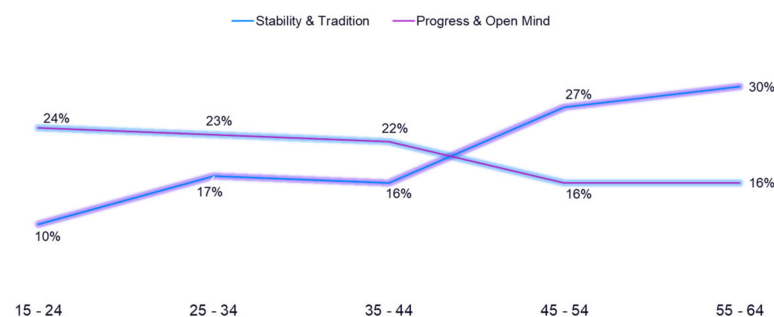

Figure 7. Social bubbles and age correlation, ages 15–64, Latvia [4].

Sources of information and content consumption patterns differ for audiences in different bubbles, and their social media behaviour validates their wants and worldview. The use and gratification theory notes that media audiences actively choose and consume the media that most satisfies their wants [40].

The audience belonging to the traditional bubble prefers television and radio, the more traditional media. On the other hand, the audience that belongs to the open-minded and progressive bubble has a preference for online content consumption and on-demand video and other media (see Figure 8).
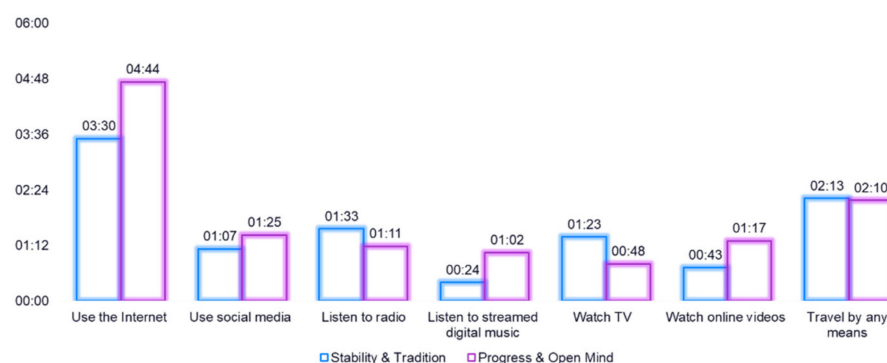

Figure 8. Content consumption preference based on audience social bubbles, ages 15–64, Latvia [4].

Audiences employ media as a representation of their personality to other people. Accessibility of content and media lets audiences communicate and distance themselves from particular social groups they do not want to belong to. Accordingly, differentiation is part of media usage. Increasing audience volume on social media sites and particularly social media platforms works as illustrative self-fulfilment. One of the ways to measure other people can be by media usage. Undoubtedly, audiences are a part of media brands and form their images and associations. However, this is a challenging process from the media owner's perspective. The following attributes of the audience image or user imagery become more vital in branding [39].

Research has confirmed that media consumption has changed due to digitalisation and becoming a more multiplatform, nonlinear process. Growing social media usage and content consumption via these platforms, diluting brand associations, and increasing the global platform preference of younger audiences raises the question of how local or national media brands can build strong brand associations to attract their future audience—Generation Z.

4.6. A Strong Correlation between User Imagery, Usage Imagery Attributes, Favourable Brand Image, and Increased Media Consumption by Generation Z

The quantitative research involving 300 respondents from the 15–24 age group confirmed that two non-product-related attributes positively influence brand associations A summary of the quantitative data of this research according to age, gender, and region is in Table 1.

Table 1. The quantitative data of the research, unweighted and weighted, according to respondents' age, gender, and regional data.

		Unweighted %	Weighted %
Age	15	5%	6%
	16	6%	5%
	17	8%	11%
	18	8%	8%
	19	10%	11%
	20	9%	10%
	21	12%	13%
	22	11%	14%
	23	13%	10%
	24	17%	12%
Gender	Male	41%	51%
	Female	59%	49%
Region	Riga	50%	28%
	Pierīga	13%	18%
	Kurzeme	10%	14%
	Vidzeme	15%	11%
	Zemgale	7%	13%
	Latgale	5%	15%
Living region	Riga	50%	28%
	Big city	18%	18%
	Town	19%	17%
	Rural	12%	36%

The authors chose to explain the findings based on one of the leading news media brands, Tvnet.lv, in the Latvian analyses. Tvnet.lv is a news media brand established 21 years ago with a unique daily audience of 199,832 visitors [38]. Furthermore, this news media brand is the second most widely used news media brand in Latvia by the 15–24-year-old audience [41].

The quantitative survey data confirmed a significantly positive correlation between user imagery and usage imagery attributes, a favourable brand image, and the growth of brand consumption. User imagery as an association type is what kind of person consumes the product or associates himself/herself with other consumers. Usage imagery is an association connected to where and when the product is consumed. These attributes can be established from individual experiences and exposure with brand consumers, or indirectly by brand communication or different channels, such as references or word of mouth [39]. Furthermore, user imagery associations of a representative consumer can be associated with demographic, psychographic, and other factors. Here, it can be confirmed that the audience's perception of the media brand and the feeling of similarity or belonging strongly influence the choice of the media brand.

The timing (day, month, and week) and context, i.e., location, are the basis of associations in a classical usage situation. This confirms that the consumption experience is critical to building brand associations and content experience correlations with brand strength.

Brand personality attributes can also be formed by the user and usage of image attributes. For example, the media brand consumer or audience community image gives rise to a more favourable, enduring, and unique media brand association. Likewise, audience engagement, connection, and associations with the media brand audience community increase their appreciation of the media brand. As for the younger audience, their peers' recommendation or word of mouth is a crucial builder of trust, and the user imagery attribute is a notable trust builder to the media brand.

Using SPSS software, Riga, Latvia, and multiple regression analyses (error margin up to 5.7%), the quantitative research data results and the model of the national news media brand Tvnet.lv validate that usage imagery association is a key element in building a positive attitude towards a media brand to reach an audience of 15–24 years old (see Figure 9).

	Suitable content to my interest	Trustable content	I like authors and content creators	My friends use this media	Media brand engage celebrities and influencers	Look distinctive and unique	Users can engage in content creation	Attractive special formats	Share interesting content on social media	Use appropriate formats on social media
Suitable content for my interests		0,81	0,73	0,55	0,64	0,62	0,56	0,56	0,54	0,49
Trustable content	0,81		0,73	0,55	0,59	0,54	0,46	0,53	0,51	0,45
I like authors and content creators	0,73	0,73		0,64	0,70	0,65	0,58	0,62	0,60	0,53
My friends use it too	0,55	0,55	0,64		0,69	0,58	0,53	0,56	0,60	0,54
Media brand engage celebrities and influencers	0,64	0,59	0,70	0,69		0,76	0,61	0,64	0,68	0,61
Looks distinctive and unique	0,62	0,54	0,65	0,58	0,76		0,69	0,70	0,65	0,62
Users van engage in content creation	0,56	0,46	0,58	0,53	0,61	0,69		0,71	0,68	0,66
Attractive special formats	0,56	0,53	0,62	0,56	0,64	0,70	0,71		0,75	0,79
Share interesting content on social media	0,54	0,51	0,60	0,60	0,68	0,65	0,68	0,75		0,80
Use appropriate formats on social media	0,49	0,45	0,53	0,54	0,61	0,62	0,66	0,79	0,80	

Figure 9. Correlation between brand image factors Tvnet.lv.

The highest the correlation the greener coloured coefficients. The lesser the correlation, the more red coloured coefficients. After the correlations of the variables, we used factor analyses and extraction methods to build an audience engagement model for the Tvnet.lv media brand. Figure 10 shows a strong correlation between format, distinctiveness, content, and consumption volume and preferences. The highest the correlation the greener coloured coefficients. The lesser the correlation, the more red coloured coefficients This shows that the highest correlations were between non-product-related attributes and consumption and between engagement of media brand content consumption and engagement (see Figures 10 and 11).

The model demonstrates the correlation between media brand uniqueness on different platforms and engagement. Colours in correlation coefficients applied to mark each of attributes correlations respectively. The consumption experience and audience image lead to media brand consumption and engagement. Thus, the attributes of audience imagery and usage imagery positively influence the brand. As a result, branding has evolved from recognising to building and establishing an emotional bond with the consumer. This emotional bond may create a unique brand value for the audience via dynamic and innovatory communication [14]. The researchers note that the brand story should be presented through dynamic, immersive approaches that generate a unique consumer experience to develop and establish unique brand associations. The comprehensive consumer experience is significant to establish a profound emotional bond with a brand, resulting in a powerful customer–brand relationship [14]. Customer experience has been employed to refine customised mass products [42]. Moreover, this helps with delivering genuine customer

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value [43]. Therefore, consumption experience is ideal for building brand differentiation and uniqueness [16].

Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factor		
	1 Format	2 Content	3 Uniqueness
In social media, use relevant features, e.g. video, live stories etc.	,872	,229	,212
Share interesting content is social networks	,759	,304	,319
Use attractive special formats, e.g. blogs, podcasts, videos	,735	,323	,353
Users can engage into content creation	,589	,278	,467
Credible content	,244	,909	,154
Content match my interests	,276	,760	,338
I like the authors	,342	,647	,424
Look distinctive, unique	,453	,354	,685
Engage interesting people, celebrities in their projects	,432	,428	,608

Figure 10. Rotated factor matrix, news media Tvnet.lv.

Extraction Method: Generalized Least Squares.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 4 iterations.
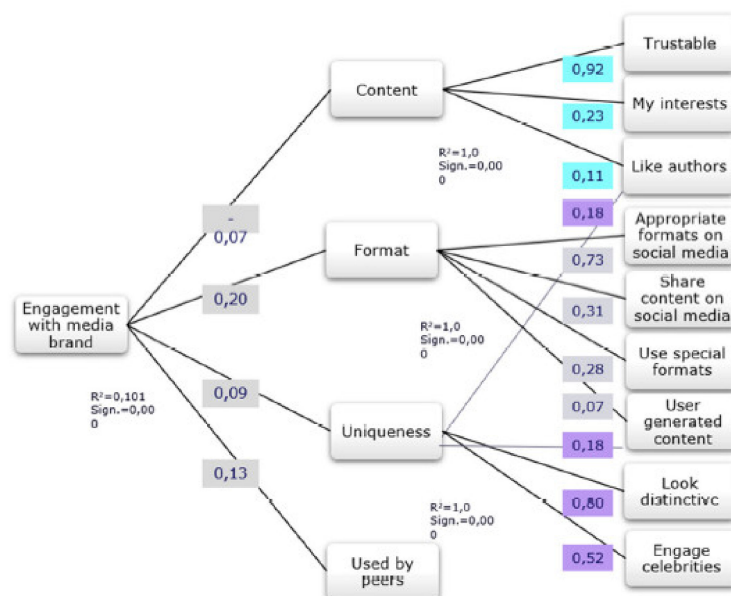78% of variance explaines
Significance 0,028

Figure 11. Audience engagement model, news media Tvnet.lv.

Thus, the initial results support previous scholars' findings that the audience becomes a crucial part of a media brand. Experience with the brand, including consumption experience on social media platforms, is a significant attribute of building solid and favourable brand associations.

The research shows the highest correlation between attractive format and content consumed, more often on social media networks. This positive content consumption experience or usage imagery correlates with and strengthens the associations of media brands. Uniqueness and distinctiveness rated highly, too, owing to peer associations or user imagery attributions. Favourable content consumption experience through different

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platforms, providing compatible content experience, and the use of platform-relevant formats lead to a favourable attitude toward media brands and increase audience content consumption, involvement, and loyalty. Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms are the prime platforms for younger audiences; media brands should be available and present on these channels to create relationships with the audience and build audience communities.

Furthermore, the media brands should apply a platform-related content delivery strategy. This means ensuring that the content format, message, and interaction are appropriate for a particular platform and audience needs. By doing so, media brands can build usage and user imagery associations by building the audience's sense of belonging and engaging in dialogue. Furthermore, the media brands should revise their appearance on social media. Having a brand page on a social media platform and distributing content is one way of building favourable brand associations. As the research has demonstrated, the main channels for updates, news, and information for a younger audience are social media platforms, search engines, and sharing content via messenger applications among peers. These findings on the importance of content consumption experience and user imagery can allow media brands to revise their social media presence and employ these platforms better to develop media brand associations outside of their own platforms. Acknowledging the brand image on social media platforms is pivotal to strengthening a brand [44] and, therefore, brand equity.

Currently, national news media brands employ social media platforms to create brand awareness, distribute content to engage with the audience, and increase traffic to media brands' own platforms. Efficient brand building outside brand platforms demands continuous community building on social and other networking platforms. This demands the appropriate presence of a media brand. This can be an innovative way of content creation, formatted to multiple platforms. The content should be easy to use and in line with platform-specific audience needs to create a content consumption experience that delivers sound brand associations. When engaging the audience via a multiplatform experience on a mobile, desktop, or other device, it is essential to ensure that the platform's visual and audio needs are met. Media brands should be aware of the accessibility and usability of the media brand page via desktop, mobile, and other screens. Formats such as video, live technologies, gif format, etc., should be deployed and used according to platform specifics. Brand relationships founded on social networks build brand trust, credibility, and loyalty [45]. A media brand must be in dialogue with the audience, employing different data sources and technologies for audience analyses. The brand data strategy is a crucial feature of media branding to create strong and positive user and usage imagery associations. National media brands should revise audience community strategies by providing effortless, format-wise, and engaging content to a younger audience via platforms they use constantly. Building a brand and branding the media content on multiple platforms requires analysing the most efficient formats for a particular audience, inspiring positive word-of-mouth, and incorporating audience strategies into media brand-building activities. National media brands have to be well-informed of the audience's trust in influencers to select an individual for their influencer strategy to build favourable brand associations. The right choice should ensure that the target audience has a sense of belonging or user imagery associations [39].

5. Discussion: Open Innovation and Media Brand Consumption

Open innovation (OI) is a way of addressing the challenges experienced by news media brands in adapting to a digital and interactive environment [46]. By providing customer-driven services and aggregated, customised news consumption via online platforms, technologically advanced competitors have dominated the traditional media sector and developed and enhanced digital media consumption [47]. Chesbrough's open innovation approach proposes a management solution to strengthen a company's innovativeness by defining a distributed innovation process based on knowingly directed knowledge circulation across organisational borders, using financial and nonfinancial instruments in accordance with the company's business model [48]. However, researchers have only

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recently begun exploring OI's appropriateness and distinct nature in news media [49]. They discovered that four publishers (including *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*) increased R&D, explored new forms of content commercialisation, and built innovation networks using externally exposed application programming interfaces [49]. Klaß (2020), in her recent work on open innovation in media innovation research, noted that research on media innovation is increasing, and scholars have started to study media innovation from media management [50], consumer-centred [51], and business model perspectives [52]. The literature review and recent developments show the efforts to address innovation in media from a business perspective; still, media innovation management remains an undeveloped academic field [50,53,54]. This may be because theoretical frameworks on media innovation as an object of management research are still immature [46]. Developments in media consumption patterns in this work lead us to believe that open innovation is an exciting topic for media brand managers and owners to deploy and fully integrate innovation from media branding perspectives, especially from a consumer-centric perspective.

6. Conclusions

The most striking observation from this analysis was the significance of the consumption experience in terms of format, platform, and audience. Content is a significant attribute, and brand equity has always been a strong focus of media publications. However, non-content-related attributes now have the same significance for Generation Z audiences in multiplatform and interactive consumption environments.

6.1. Implications

The research results support the need for strong news media, especially when a vast amount of information is available. The current attribution model is based on quantitative research, outlined to validate the data from a secondary data source and develop a case model for a practical application to media branding to reach younger audiences. In addition, the audience engagement model is built on one national news media brand and should integrate different media brands.

6.1.1. Practical Implications

The results are critical for reviewing and adapting media branding. The ability to distribute the content via so many access points increases the effectiveness of the audience reach. However, in the meantime, brand associations and consequently brand equity are diluted. The need to adapt to each platform's unique aspects could effectively improve the consumption experience and, hence, enhance audience memories that reinforce brand associations. Involving the audience in media content circulation and contributing to content involvement could build powerful user imagery attributes, audience associations and the desire to be a part of a particular media brand's audience. From a practical perspective, the results show that media brands understand the impact of consumer experiences on brand associations. The findings can contribute to a practical guide for branded media content across different social media platforms and establish an association with a specific media brand.

6.1.2. Theoretical Implications

The literature on brand and branding research contributes to a more thorough understanding of consumer and brand relationship knowledge. From an open innovation perspective, further research would contribute to how the content consumption experience improves the innovation and competitiveness of media brands from a brand equity perspective. Open innovation provides a new perspective on media brand non-product-related attributes that impact media products' essential innovation processes and, therefore, their competitiveness in an interactive and digitised marketplace.

However, few researchers have focussed on news media from brand theory and consumer-centric brand equity perspectives. Growing technological opportunities, digitali-

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sation, changes in consumer behaviour, and the fast-changing media brand landscape have made the media branding research field exciting and challenging. Therefore, the findings may make a valuable contribution to evolving media branding theories in the interactive multimedia marketplace.

6.2. Limitations and Further Research Targets

Further research should establish the possible relationship between the power of the media brand on its own platform and media brand power externally or brand power on other platforms and social networking sites. In addition, the authors believe that further research on the uniqueness of brand associations would be a significant step in determining the essential elements of media brand equity. An audience-centric approach and the analyses in the literature show that uniqueness and distinctiveness have become increasingly significant positive elements of brand equity.

However, the results need to be interpreted with caution because this research focuses only on one media product category—news media. Moreover, future studies should research how associations are influenced by perceived media value. One of the media's distinctive qualities is that the content value is viewed as more deserving than the initial usage in many reuses of media content, particularly for the continuous creation of media products [30]. The value of the media product has been broadly studied from a financial and economic point of view, but the area of media content reuse and value impact on brand equity has not been explored in depth. To summarise, the research findings may contribute to practical media branding on different social media platforms and the development of media branding theories in the multiplatform, interactive media marketplace.

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