

# CONNECTION THROUGH PROJECTION

## A quantitative study of consumer evaluations of brand extensions performed by personal brands

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### ABSTRACT

*In a transforming media landscape, new ways for companies to build relationships with consumers emerge. Existing research points towards that brands with higher attachment and visibility in media give rise to more positive consumer evaluations. Combining this with the recognized successful strategy of launching a brand extension that is perceived as congruent, there is reason to assume a strengthening in evaluation effects. Firstly, the intention of the thesis was to shed light on differences between personal and corporate brands in terms of parasocial interaction and brand attachment. Secondly, the thesis will examine if these differences would give rise to higher consumer evaluations of a brand extension in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intentions. Finally, it was investigated whether the level of congruence of the brand extension strengthens the effects more for personal brands than for corporate brands. The results from this study support that personal brands are subject to stronger parasocial interaction and brand attachment than corporate brands. There is also a significant difference in effects on brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention between brands when a brand extension is performed. However, a congruent brand extension did not strengthen the effects.*

### KEYWORDS

Personal brands, corporate brands, parasocial interaction, brand attachment, brand extension, congruence, brand attitude, perceived quality, purchase intention

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# 1. Introduction

*This chapter presents relevant definitions followed by an introduction to the study and the purpose, delimitations and the expected contribution. Lastly the disposition of the thesis is outlined.*

## 1.1 Definitions

<b>Brand</b>	The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a " <i>Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.</i> " (American Marketing Association).
<b>Personal brand</b>	(Thomson 2006) refer to a human brand as " <i>any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communication efforts</i> ". In this thesis, human brands are referred to as personal brands.
<b>Corporate brand</b>	In this thesis, a corporate brand is defined as any brand that would not fall under the definition of a personal brand.
<b>Brand attitude</b>	An attitudinal construct that shows the customer's attitude toward the brand (Spears, Singh 2004).
<b>Perceived quality</b>	According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived quality is rather defined as the opinions of the consumers than the actual quality when it comes to the judgement about the overall excellence or superiority of a product.
<b>Purchase intentions</b>	An attitudinal construct that shows the customer's intention to buy the brand (Spears, Singh 2004)
<b>Brand extension</b>	Aaker and Keller (1990) define brand extension as the event when a current brand name is used to enter a completely different product class. They also refer to line extensions, which is when a current brand name is used to enter a new segment in its product class. In this thesis the choice fell upon defining brand extensions broader, incorporating both of these definitions in its meaning.
<b>Parasocial interaction</b>	An illusion of a face-to-face relationship between a spectator and a media performer (Horton, Wohl 1956).
<b>Brand attachment</b>	Brand attachment is defined according to the definition of Whan Park et al. (2010): the strength of the emotional bond between the individual and the brand.

### **Congruent**

When alignment or conformity occurs with the normative expectations on a situation, it is referred to as congruent. Brand-congruent thus refers to something that corresponds to the perceptions or expectations on a brand. As the concept of perceived fit is similarly measured by brand concept consistency and product feature similarity (Tsan-Ming Choi et al. 2010), this thesis refers to congruency and perceived fit as conceptually the same.

### **Incongruent**

The opposite of congruent, namely misalignment with the expectations or perceptions on a situation or a brand.

## **1.2 Background and problem area**

This study supports that personal brands enjoy the benefits of a stronger brand attachment more than corporate brands do. For personal brands that are subject to the phenomenon of parasocial interaction, even larger differences will appear between these two types of brands. The combined effects of these phenomena pertaining to personal brands will lead to consumer evaluations of a brand extension in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intentions being more positive than for a corporate brand performing the same brand extension. Aaker and Keller (1990) and Czellar (2003) support that the strategy of performing a brand extension perceived as congruent with the brand schema in consumers' minds would receive stronger evaluations than one perceived as incongruent. These results were replicated in the study. It was therefore of interest to go one step further and investigate whether this strategy applied to a brand extension performed by personal brands which, enjoying higher brand attachment and stronger parasocial interaction, could possibly experience even more positive evaluations compared to corporate brands. Data did not support this but provides a springboard for future research to investigate.

The importance of having a strong brand is larger than ever in a society where we choose brands as a determination of our social identity and self concept (Solomon 2003). A well-known persona that is the subject of marketing communication efforts can be considered a personal brand. Such a brand evokes strong feelings of attachment which when prolonged could lead to a stronger consumer-brand relationship (Thomson 2006). The more exposure of the personal brand in media, the stronger the media spectators will evaluate the brand according to the exposure effect (Laroche et al. 1996). Aligning with research on parasocial interaction, a phenomenon describing the illusion of a relationship between a media performer and a media spectator (Horton, Wohl 1956), there are benefits to reap when the media performer is considered a friend of the media spectator (Auer 1992). A high degree of

parasocial interaction would lead to positive effects much like the effects of word-of-mouth communications, indicating that parasocial interaction has an impact on how consumers shape attitudes and intentions (Colliander, Dahlén 2011). This would subsequently imply that personal brands possess characteristics desirable for corporate brands as well. With the emergence of new technologies, the marketing industry is under transformation and has made the consumer an active, central participant in the process, bringing the customer closer to the company (Singh, et al. 2008). Through new platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs etc., you can now always stay updated on what your friends, colleagues or favorite celebrities are up to. In order to stay relevant, companies thus have to develop new strategies for reaching their customers, where one could be to study and adopt success factors of personal brands coming into existence in the new media landscape.

A common way for companies to reach new audiences is to launch brand extensions, a choice of expansion with several marketing advantages and synergy effects, where the aim is to transfer perceptions of the parent brand to the extension (Aaker, Keller 1990). Research has been conducted on the effects of a brand extension on corporate brands (Aaker, Keller 1990) (Czellar 2003), but is poor when it comes to the effects on personal brands. If a personal brand attaches consumers more strongly to it, it could possibly result in differences with regards to the effects of a brand extension. In today's society, brand extensions for personal brands are commonly undertaken and often show successful results. Therefore, a further understanding of what provides such brands with advantages could be of great use for all kinds of brands. One success factor according to Aaker and Keller (1990) is when the new item of the brand is highly consistent with the parent brand. A personal brand compared to a corporate brand, and a congruent brand extension compared to an incongruent one would thus separately be evaluated more positively. Since many companies perform brand extensions today and it has been shown to be a significant and effective way of gaining market shares, it is of interest to investigate possible success factors for companies when performing a brand extension. The study would hopefully provide both corporate brands and personal brands with findings to consider before performing a brand extension and how to make it successful.

This study will use a deductive approach to quantitatively investigate differences between personal and corporate brands in terms of brand attachment and parasocial interaction. The purpose is also to find out if these differences will result in higher consumer evaluation in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intentions for personal brands

compared to corporate brands. Two fictitious brand extensions, one congruent for both the personal and the corporate brand and one incongruent for both brands, will be used as stimuli to examine if the level of congruence will strengthen the effects on the investigated variables. The 2X2 experimental design is performed using a fairly homogenous convenience sample of four groups representing female respondents within ages 18-30 years located in Sweden.

### **1.3 Purpose**

This thesis' overall purpose is to shed light on differences between personal and corporate brands in how consumers evaluate performed brand extensions. More specifically, the purpose is to (1) *investigate whether there is a difference in the strength of parasocial interaction and brand attachment between the two different types of brands*, (2) *to examine whether these underlying phenomena will result in higher evaluations of a performed brand extension in terms of brand attitude, purchase intention and perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands*. Moreover, the thesis will also (3) *investigate if a higher level of congruence of a brand extension strengthens the evaluation of the aforementioned variables for personal brands more than for corporate brands*.

### **1.4 Delimitations**

When attempting to shed light on the effects of a brand extension between personal brands and corporate brands, the study is limited to effects on brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention. These variables were assessed to provide a sufficient image of the effects that were intended to investigate.

Instead of letting the respondents imagine fictitious brands, which would have enabled a ruling out of unwanted effects, real brands have been selected in order to reveal actual brand attachment. The choice of using real brands also implied that they should be comparable in terms of brand awareness and popularity in Sweden in order to avoid skewed results.

For this study only well-known persona subject to marketing communication efforts, that many Swedes consider to be relatively famous, falls under the definition of a personal brand. The study is also limited to examining the cases when a current brand name is used for the brand extension. Applied to personal brands, it would mean that only the brand extensions where the well-known name (or stage name) of the personal brand is used for naming the brand extension. The brand extensions performed by the personal brand that this study

examines are cases where the media performer personally is the consigner of the commercial products launched. Cases where corporate brands make use of celebrities, or personal brands, to launch co-branded extensions are not comprised in this study, neither as brand extensions performed by corporate brands nor personal brands.

Different types of media personalities and the potential of consumers perceiving parasocial interaction with them were assessed in the choosing of a brand representative for personal brands. As stated by Colliander and Dahlén (2011) and Ballantine and Martin (2005), bloggers are one example of media performers that generate strong parasocial interaction, whereby Blondinbella stood out as the perfect option due to her blog being one of the most popular in Sweden, combined with commercial successes in various product categories. As aforementioned, the corresponding corporate brand needed to be comparable in popularity to the chosen personal brand, as well as appealing to a similar target audience and comparable in perceived price and quality. Also, it was important that the chosen brands could perform the same brand extensions at the same level of credibility. Hoyer et al. (2008) argue that the perceptions of the parent brand have a larger impact for low-involvement purchases than high-involvement, which makes low-involvement purchases interesting for the study. As fast fashion brands tend to perform better than the average brand due to their ability to adapt to trends, combined with brand extensions being an effective strategy for fast fashion brands (Tsan-Ming et al. 2010), such a brand was considered suitable, as a fictitious brand extension thus would be probable. Thus, this led to the choice to use the clothes chain ZARA as a comparable brand with corporate characteristics. The Spanish originated brand has over 1900 stores spread across 87 countries, with 4 stores in the Stockholm region (Inditex 2014).

To add another dimension to the analysis, the study also examines the use of a congruent brand extension as a strategy for a successful evaluation. This implies that the stimuli, e.g. the products launched in the fictitious brand extensions, had to be established as congruent or incongruent. There is research stating that moderate incongruence could give rise to more positive evaluations than a completely congruent option (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989). Previous research has not managed to create absolute measure for the level of congruence (Sjödén, Törn 2006). As the concept of moderate incongruence appeared vague and subjective, one brand extension perceived as congruent and one perceived as incongruent were used in the experiment, i.e. two brand extensions conceptually as far apart as possible. The congruence of brand extensions could be measured in several ways (such as distribution channels, communication efforts, perceived quality etc.) but the study focuses on the brand



characteristics perceived as congruent for both of the chosen brands, which in turn indicates what would be a congruent brand extension. The same reasoning is applied for the incongruent options. As there is research claiming that congruent brand extensions give rise to positive evaluations (Aaker, Keller 1990) (Czellar 2003), this has not been tested in the hypotheses.

## **1.5 Expected contribution**

Findings from the study will hopefully lead to an increased apprehension of personal brands, which aims to clarify the phenomena of parasocial interaction and brand attachment. The study will provide a springboard for future research, as the transforming media landscape increases the importance of these phenomena.

Furthermore, the study aims to contribute as inspiration for further research on the effects that parasocial interaction and brand attachment has on personal brands performing brand extensions. This will hopefully also be of practical relevance for corporate brands in their decision of how to form their communication strategy and media presence.

The study also aims to contribute to the existing research on what makes brand extensions successful, which will be done by combining one strategy for a prosperous brand extension with one brand type that is more positively evaluated than an other. The combination of a congruent brand extension that is performed by a personal brand will hopefully give rise to a strengthening effect of the consumer evaluations.

## **1.6 Disposition**

The introduction in chapter 1 includes background, problem formulation, the purpose of the study, as well as relevant definitions. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical background as well as exhibiting the hypotheses. Chapter 3 demonstrates the methods used in the study as well as discussing the reliability and validity. In chapter 4, the results are reported and analyzed, followed by discussions and implications in chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 comprises the list of references and chapter 7 contains appendices.

## 2. Theoretical framework

*The second chapter describes the theoretical framework for the thesis. It is divided into three sub-sections to facilitate overview; parasocial interaction and brand attachment, evaluations of brand extensions and lastly congruence vs incongruence. The subsections are followed by the formulation of hypotheses, which are summarized at the end of the chapter.*

### 2.1 Parasocial interaction and brand attachment

The research of Laroche et al. (1996) describes the “exposure effect”, namely that the more exposure an object receives, the more positively an individual will evaluate the object. The exposure effect is fundamental in the process of forming and transforming attitudes towards a brand. This is coherent with theory on parasocial interaction, which is originally defined by Horton and Wohl (1956) as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship between a media spectator and a media performer. This is supported by Rubin et al. (1985) who has defined parasocial interaction as “*interpersonal involvement of the media user with what he or she consumes*”. This has implications that media users imagine media performers as friends, with the desire to meet them or to seek guidance from them. Auter (1992) state that parasocial interaction is developed by every encounter with the media performer. The higher the frequency of these encounters, the stronger the feelings that develop will be. There are several media personalities that generate strong parasocial interaction, including politicians and TV personalities among others, in other words persons with high visibility in media (Klimmt et al. 2006). There are benefits to reap from an established parasocial interaction according to Auter (1992), for example that a higher degree of parasocial interaction among politicians increases the possibility of affecting the voters’ attitude and behavior. Bloggers are another example of media performers that typically generate strong parasocial interaction due to the high frequency of encounters (Colliander, Dahlén 2011). Readers follow bloggers and their everyday life which when prolonged works to develop a one-way relationship between the reader and the blogger (Ballantine, Martin 2005). The strength of the relation can be to such an extent that the spectator considers the media performer a real friend and as part of their actual life. Such a relationship includes expectations on the media performer and potential distrust if deceitful acts are undertaken, much like any friendship (Colliander, Erlandsson 2013). In cases where the degree of parasocial interaction between the media performer and the spectator is high, communication from the media performer will have an impact on the spectator much like the effects of word-of-mouth communications. There are thus

implications for a connection between parasocial interaction and how consumers shape their attitudes and intentions (Colliander, Dahlén 2011).

As argued by Thomson (2006), when strong relationships are formed with “human brands” this strong attachment could lead to a stronger consumer-brand relationship when prolonged. The construct of attachment is based on the relationship and the emotional bond between an individual and a target object (i.e., brand, person) (Bowlby 1977). Strong attachment to an object can lead to outcomes such as a desire to be close to the object, distress and mourning when losing or being far from it, as well as a feeling that refuge is offered from the attachment object (Sperling, Berman 1994). Consumers have also shown a willingness to distribute thought and money towards the attachment object due to a desire to defend and invest in it (Feeney, Noller 1996).

Research regarding exposure effects and the way consumers form attitudes toward brands are coherent with theories of parasocial interaction, which explains the formation of strong relationships with a media performer. This effect is thus expected to be stronger for personal brands compared to corporate brands. As brand attachment is based on the relationship to an object or a person, there are also reasons to believe that consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands than towards corporate brands.

**H1a:** *Parasocial interaction is stronger between consumers and personal brands, than it is for corporate brands*

**H1b:** *Consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands than towards corporate brands*

## **2.2 Evaluations of brand extensions**

Strong brands have never been more important than they are today, in a society where the things we buy define who we are. The choice of brands enables others to establish a perception of who we are, as well as allowing us to determine our social identity and self-concept (Solomon 2003). A brand is generally defined by and applied to products, firms and services. Celebrities can also be brands as they can be professionally managed and have other features similar to brands (Thomson 2006).

It is difficult to launch a successful brand extension, but the ones that manage often have a few factors in common. According to Aaker and Keller (1990), success is facilitated if consumers hold positive attitudes and beliefs towards the parent brand. These positive attitudes work in favor of the forming of positive attitudes towards the brand extension. This corresponds with the research of Dahlén et al. (2003), which states that for a brand extension to be positively evaluated, brand awareness should be combined with positive associations towards the brand, since brand awareness in itself has no value. Research by Czellar (2003) recognizes that consumers have formed attitudes based on earlier experiences towards both the parent brand and the extension category. These attitudes stem from both affective and cognitive dimensions, where the affective is made up of feelings and emotions associated with a brand name or category, and the cognitive is the knowledge the consumer possesses about the category and the brand. When the extension is then performed, it will be evaluated in the minds of consumers according to their attitudes towards the parent brand and the extension category.

Aaker (2012) refers to perceived quality as a brand association that should be perceived as a brand asset due to its ability to drive financial performance as well as how it is often linked to other aspects of how consumers perceive the brand. Sunde and Brodie (1993) posit that one of the factors influencing the evaluation of a brand extension positively is when the perceived quality of the original brand is high. This corresponds with research of Martínez Salinas and Pina Pérez (2009), which states that the higher the perceived quality of a brand, the better the brand image after the extension. Taylor and Bearden (2002) indicate that perceived value is a tradeoff between perceived quality and perceived price. If the perceived quality is larger than the perceived price, it will add to consumer's willingness to buy. The purchase intentions are thus being influenced by perceived quality, with price as a factor that negatively influences them both. The research of Fedorikhin et al. (2008) states that for parent brands where consumers have high levels of attachment, consumers are more willing to purchase and pay more for its extensions. This is partially driven by consumers' proneness to evaluate the extension as part of the parent brand family, where the extension is seen as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with the brand (Whan Park, MacInnis 2006).

Research thus implies that in cases where strong relationships are formed by a high degree of parasocial interaction and attachment between the consumer and the brand, the brand

extension will be evaluated more positively in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention.

**H2a:** *A brand extension will result in a higher brand attitude for personal brands compared to corporate brands*

**H2b:** *A brand extension will result in a higher perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands*

**H2c:** *A brand extension will result in a higher purchase intention for personal brands compared to corporate brands*

## **2.3 Level of congruence and perceived fit**

Aaker and Keller (1990) posit that if consumers perceive the new item in a brand extension to be highly consistent with the parent brand, this high perceptual fit affects consumer evaluations of the extension positively. This corresponds with findings of Czellar (2003), which also states that the perception of fit affects the attitude towards the extension.

The positive evaluations caused by perceived fit are explained by research of Garbarino and Edell (1997) which examines the influence of cognitive effort on choice outcomes. They argue that a choice that requires less cognitive effort to evaluate will lead to a more positive evaluation than one that takes more effort to evaluate. They also refer to research on process-induced effect of Brown and Stayman (1992) who found that a product perceived as strongly incongruent with the activated brand schema received a negative evaluation, whereas one that was perceived as congruent will be evaluated in the same way as the activated brand schema. Akhter et al. (1994) refer to the brand schema as a set of expectations about the brand that provide a structure for interpreting and understanding the information connected to the brand. Brown and Stayman (1992) concluded that once a brand schema had been activated, consumers became unwilling to alter them.

Fedorikhin et al. (2008) refer to prior research of Olsen (1996) indicating that affection for a person can be transferred to a brand, similar to attachment research stating that the same holds from one object to another if the latter is perceived to be a member of the former. Depending on the degree to which the extension is perceived to be a member of the parent brand family, the transfer of emotions will vary. If the extension is at a high level of perceived fit, it will more easily be connected to the parent brand family. If consumers then hold a strong emotion-

based attachment towards the parent brand, these feelings will more easily be transferred to the extension. On the other hand, if the extension fits the parent brand poorly, the level of attachment does not matter, as consumers find it more difficult to categorize such an extension to the same category as the parent brand. This is due to the consumer's tendency to quickly categorize when the fit is low and thus not recognize the extension as belonging to the parent brand. The result could then instead of a transfer of the feelings from the parent brand to the extension be a process more focused on the actual attributes of the extension.

Taylor and Bearden (2002) also state that when an extension is perceived as similar to the parent brand, the associations consumers hold regarding the parent brand is often transferred to the extension. Relevant associations of the core brand will be used to evaluate the perceived quality of the extension, which consumers otherwise refer to the pricing to decide. With these associations to use as a diagnosis, other external quality factors, such as price, has less impact on the perceived quality. This corresponds with the findings of Garbarino and Edell (1997), which state that more respondents were willing to pay a premium for a brand that demanded less effort to evaluate, which also turned out to be the preferred brand. When the cognitive effort increased the extent of negative effect also increased.

Existing research states that a congruent brand extension will be evaluated more positively compared to an incongruent brand extension. Combined with findings of the positive effects arising from a strong brand attachment and parasocial interaction, there is reason to believe that a congruent brand extension would strengthen these effects.

**H3a:** *A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of brand attitude for personal brands more than for corporate brands*

**H3b:** *A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of perceived quality for personal brands more than for corporate brands*

**H3c:** *A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of purchase intention for personal brands more than for corporate brands*

## 2.4 Summary

When a brand extension is performed, the evaluation of the extension in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention is mainly linked to how consumers perceive the original brand. Theory states that parasocial interaction and strong brand attachment lead to an enhanced consumer-brand relationship and an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand. These two phenomena explain the fact that the consumer's evaluation of a personal brand is higher compared to a corporate brand and implies that an extension would be evaluated more positively if performed by a personal brand. A congruent brand extension is another variable that positively affects consumer evaluations of brand extensions. This laid the foundation for examining whether a higher degree of congruence of the extension would strengthen the effects on the brand attitude, the perceived quality and the purchase intention. Following is a summary of the posed hypotheses.

**TABLE I**  
**Summary of hypotheses**

<b>H1a</b>	<i>Parasocial interaction is stronger between consumers and personal brands, than it is for corporate brands</i>
<b>H1b</b>	<i>Consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands than towards corporate brands</i>
<b>H2a</b>	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher brand attitude for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H2b</b>	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H2c</b>	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher purchase intention for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H3a</b>	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of brand attitude for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>
<b>H3b</b>	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of perceived quality for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>
<b>H3c</b>	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the evaluation of purchase intention for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>

### 3. Methodology

*In this chapter, the formation of the chosen approach and the experimental design of study are described. Furthermore, the methodology episode declares a review of the pre-study and the main study, followed by a description of the variables used in the main study. To sum up, there is a discussion about the reliability and validity of the thesis and also a description of the tools used in the analysis.*

#### 3.1 Chosen approach

Since existing theory has been the foundation for building the hypotheses, a deductive scientific approach was applicable (Bryman, Nilsson 2002). Furthermore, the study was conducted on a quantitative basis since the academic view of social reality to the effect that it is an external and objective reality (Bryman, Nilsson 2002). The purpose of the study is to find results that will shape a platform for further research in this topic and work as a decision-making basis for marketing departments; therefore it is of a good reason to use quantitative research that has a higher possibility of reaching more credible conclusions within larger-scale behaviors (Bryman, Nilsson 2002). Since the intention was to establish positive effects for personal brands compared to corporate brands, as well as to find out if these effects are strengthened if the brand extension is congruent, the causality between independent and dependent variables will be the focus of study. Research is therefore performed with a causal angle (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005).

#### 3.2 Design of study

The study was conducted using three pre-studies followed by a larger main study. Pre-studies were performed in order to determine what brands should be selected as personal and corporate, as well as to shed light on what characteristics were perceived as typical and untypical for both brands. Furthermore, the pre-studies aimed to confirm that the choice of one mutually congruent and one mutually incongruent brand extension for both brands would be suitable to use in the main study, as well as to test and establish the phenomena of parasocial interaction and brand attachment for the chosen brands.

The main study was performed through a quantitative experiment with four different respondent groups. Two of the groups were exposed to a brand extension performed by the corporate brand ZARA, where one of the two groups was exposed to a congruent brand extension (makeup) and the other to an incongruent (ink cartridges). The two remaining



groups were exposed to the same type of brand extensions but performed by the personal brand Blondinbella. When all of the groups had been shown the manipulations, they were asked to answer the same set of questions in a survey. The design of the main study was hence a 2x2-experiment with two manipulated variables, i.e. the characteristics of the brand (*personal* or *corporate*) and the type of brand extension (congruent or incongruent), which was intended to measure cause-effect relationships appropriately. The manipulated brand extension is the setting mainly in order to test the degree of congruence but chosen to test the differences between personal and corporate brands as well. Positive effects of performing a congruent brand extension is replicating existing research and is not tested in hypotheses.

In the first two hypotheses differences in the dependent variables *parasocial interaction* and *brand attachment* are tested for the independent variables, *personal* and *corporate brands*. The rest of the study is built upon the cause-and effect relationship between the independent variables (*type of brand* and *type of brand extension*) and the dependent variables (*brand attitude*, *perceived quality* and *purchase intention*).

### **3.3 Pre-study**

To find the most relevant brand extensions for the two chosen brands and the establishment of parasocial interaction and brand attachment, theory was complemented with three pre-studies. The first study was conducted quantitatively in order to discover perceived differences between personal and corporate brands and to find out which brands to use in the main study. The second qualitative pre-test aimed to find one brand extension that was perceived as congruent for both the personal and the corporate brand, as well as one that was perceived as incongruent. This laid the foundation for the third pre-study which was performed quantitatively in order to verify the two different types of brand extensions to use in the main study and also to establish that parasocial interaction and brand attachment are more present for a personal brand than for a corporate brand.

The pre-studies were thus conducted in order to:

- 1) Choose one personal and one corporate brand to use in the main study
- 2) Establish typical and untypical characteristics for the chosen brands
- 3) Establish one brand extension as credibly brand-congruent and one brand extension as credibly incongruent

4) Ensure that there are indications that consumers experience stronger brand attachment and parasocial interaction towards personal brands than towards corporate brands

### **3.3.1 Pre-study 1 - The choice of brands**

In pre-study one, the purpose was to establish the differences between personal and corporate brands and also to find two representative existing brands to use in the main study. The survey was distributed via social media and was responded to by a convenience sample of 132 respondents of 80.6% females with an age range stretching from 21 to 27 years. Some different brands were examined in order to find two brands that could be perceived as equal in terms of brand awareness, product category and perceived price level. The real brands Blondinbella and ZARA were found to be of quite the same characteristics and credible representatives of personal and corporate brands and would therefore be used through the whole study. Furthermore, pre-study one provided confidence in the testing procedure as well as a deeper understanding of the difference between personal and corporate brands. It also helped to understand and improve flaws within the formulation of questions and measures.

### **3.3.2 Pre-study 2- Typical and untypical characteristics**

Pre-study one was followed by a qualitative second pre-study where the aim was to find features that were perceived as typical and untypical for both ZARA and Blondinbella. To find out what people think as congruent and incongruent with the two brands, ten individuals were asked to independently list some words that characterized both Blondinbella and ZARA. They were also asked to make a list of words that did not characterize either ZARA or Blondinbella. The most frequent conformable words were shown to be *trendy*, *feminine*, *elegant* and *beautiful*. The most frequent words that did not characterize Blondinbella or ZARA were *masculine*, *boring*, “*unsexy*”, *technical* and *mechanical*.

### **3.3.3 Pre-study 3 –Determining congruency of brand extensions and establishing existence of parasocial interaction and brand attachment**

The third pre-study aimed to find one brand extension that was perceived as congruent for both of the brands, as well one that would be perceived as mutually incongruent. Furthermore the aim was to establish that personal brands have indications for stronger brand attachment and parasocial interaction compared to a corporate brand.

The third pre-study was of a quantitative nature and conducted using the online survey tool *Qualtrics*. It was distributed through social media and thus selected as a convenience sample.

The study consisted of two surveys, one for Blondinbella and one for ZARA with a sample of 20 applicable respondents respective 21. The surveys were made up of three parts, one for testing the brand extensions' degree of congruence, one for testing the degree of the respondent's attachment towards the brand, and one for testing the degree of parasocial interaction between the respondent and the brand. All questions were designed according to a seven-degree Likert scale (Malhotra 2008). Below is a summary of the findings from pre-study three.

**TABLE II**  
**Results from pre-study three**

*(Scale from 1= does not correspond, to 7= corresponds completely)*

<b>Degree of congruence</b>	<b>Blondinbella</b> $\mu_B (\sigma_B)$	<b>ZARA</b> $\mu_Z (\sigma_Z)$
Likeliness that the brand would perform the brand extension		
- <i>Collection of makeup</i>	6.20 (1.07)	6.24 (1.51)
- <i>Ink cartridges</i>	1.74 (1.68)	1.10 (0.35)
Appropriateness that the brand would perform the brand extension		
- <i>Collection of makeup</i>	5.26 (1.62)	5.52 (1.55)
- <i>Ink cartridges</i>	1.95 (1.46)	1.10 (0.46)
Suitability that the brand would perform the brand extension		
- <i>Collection of makeup</i>	5.37 (1.58)	5.57 (1.53)
- <i>Ink cartridges</i>	1.80 (1.08)	1.05 (0.35)
<b>Brand attachment</b>		
I consider the brand to be <i>friendly</i>	4.84 (1.80)	3.24 (1.39)
I am <i>captivated</i> by the brand	3.79 (1.53)	3.52 (1.43)
I am <i>delighted</i> by the brand	3.95 (1.50)	3.52 (1.87)
<b>Parasocial interaction</b>		
I feel sad when the brand makes a mistake	4.45 (1.87)	3.71 (1.50)
Gender of respondents	100% female, 0% male	100% female, 0% male
Number of respondents	20	21
Mean age of respondents	22	24

The findings from pre-study two of the typical and untypical characteristics of the brands enabled the creation of one congruent (collection of makeup) and one incongruent brand extension (ink cartridges). Two different stimuli texts were then developed and exposed to two different samples of respondents in order to establish the congruence respectively incongruence of the brand extensions (see appendix). The three items used to measure congruence all reported satisfying results. A makeup collection was perceived as congruent for both the personal ( $\mu=6.20$ ,  $\mu=5.26$ ,  $\mu=5.37$ ) and the corporate brand ( $\mu=6.24$ ,  $\mu=5.52$ ,  $\mu=5.57$ ), where means were all above the midpoint of the scale. The second brand extension had quite low means for both brands, thus the ink cartridges were confirmed as incongruent for the personal brand ( $\mu=1.74$ ,  $\mu=1.95$ ,  $\mu=1.80$ ) and the corporate brand ( $\mu=1.10$ ,  $\mu=1.10$ ,  $\mu=1.05$ ). Although the means are lower than for the first brand extension, they are still considered to be on a level still implying that respondents perceive them credible.

The purpose of pre-study three was also to measure brand attachment and aimed to establish a credible difference in attachment between a personal brand and a corporate brand. The two samples were asked to rank ten statements (*affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delighted, captivated, connected, bonded and attached*) about their emotional attachment towards the brand they were exposed to. The statements containing the items *friendly, captivated* and *delighted* were shown to be the most applicable and useful for testing brand attachment for the chosen brands.

Furthermore, pre-study three was performed in order to measure the parasocial interaction and to establish that the parasocial interaction between a consumer and a brand differ when it comes to a personal or corporate brand. The two respondent groups were asked to rank three statements about their relationship with the brand; “*xxx seems to understand the things I want*”, “*I would like to meet xxx in person*” and “*I feel sorry when xxx makes a mistake*”. The last question reported a credible difference between the personal ( $\mu=4.45$ ) and the corporate brand ( $\mu=3.71$ ), while the first two questions did not. They were thus replaced with two more credible questions in the main study.

### **3.4 Main study**

The three pre-studies combined with academic findings and praxis laid the foundation for the creation of the main study.

#### **3.4.1 Design of experiment**

Data was collected using the online survey tool *Qualtrics*. In accordance with chosen research design the experiment was comprised of four different groups where the two independent variables, i.e. type of brand and type of brand extension, were manipulated in different ways for the groups:

1. Personal brand and a congruent brand extension
2. Personal brand and an incongruent brand extension
3. Corporate brand and a congruent brand extension
4. Corporate brand and an incongruent brand extension

The existing personal brand (Blondinbella) and the existing corporate brand (ZARA) were thus each tested with a congruent and incongruent brand extension. All four surveys started with a short, objectively stated description of the brand which was followed by a fictitious brand extension that were of identical formulation for both brands. Following the stimuli text was a set of 22 identical questions for all respondent groups, where the first questions were intended to check manipulated variables.

#### **3.4.2 Collection of data**

A convenience sample was used since the study did not aim to make a generalization about a wider population (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). In order to ensure similarity between each group the subjects were randomly assigned which experiment they were exposed to (Malhotra 2008). The experiment was distributed through online social media and via email to students at Stockholm School of Economics. All respondents were females of approximately the same age ( $\mu = 23.03$ ,  $\sigma = 2.33$ ) and many settled in Stockholm, thus a fairly homogenous sample and not representative of a whole population (Malhotra 2008). In order to prevent using a too homogenous sample, the survey was also distributed to individuals living in different parts of Sweden. Therefore, the sample can be argued to be adequate for the population that is examined in this study. Also, Lynch Jr (1982) states that a homogenous sample could sometimes be preferable to use in a study since it facilitates the discovery of possible flaws in theory. The four surveys were answered by a total of 273 respondents, all inside the range of

18-30 years old, considered to be an appropriate target group for both brands. None of the subjects thus deviated in terms of age. As the surveys were named after the brands, it is possible that the respondents were somehow interested in the brands. Thomson (2006) states that the consumer must be somehow attracted to the brand in order to enable brand attachment to form, which in combination with theory emphasizing that both brand awareness and positive brand associations need to be present in order for a brand extension to be positively evaluated (Dahlén et al. 2003), the sample has been sorted by two control questions. The control questions were based on the respondent's brand awareness and impression of the brand. The risk of already familiar and interested respondents as the only ones taking the survey was thus not an issue. This resulted in that data from a sample of 156 subjects has been analyzed and was used as the base for the results of the investigated hypotheses.

### **3.4.3 Design of experiment questions**

All questions in the study were formed with a semantic differential scale with a seven-point rating scale where the endpoints were bipolar labels with opposite meaning (Malhotra 2008). The respondents were asked to rate how well the statements corresponded with their feelings on that scale throughout the study. In order to create measurements that measure what it was intended to cover and to reduce random errors, multiple-item indicators have been used through the study in the maximum extent possible (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). Furthermore, to investigate whether the various indicators for each measure would be reliable if averaged to form an index, Cronbach's alpha was calculated and reported for the entire sample. Cronbach's alpha has also been tested separately for each of the four groups to see if there was any group for which the index would not be a reliable measure. If this was the case, a decision was made not to make an index.

## **3.5 Measures**

The respondents were exposed to one of the four surveys where the basis for investigation and analysis was the following measures: *congruency*, *parasocial interaction*, *brand attachment*, *brand attitude*, *perceived quality* and *purchase intention*. All measures were recorded on a seven-point semantic differential scale, where 1=completely disagree, and 7=completely agree, with the exception of brand attitude which is measured in a slightly different way.

### **Congruence**

To measure congruence, appropriate questions were gathered from Ratneshwar and Shocker (1991). Three items describing the brand extension for each brand were used: *The likeliness that the extension would be undertaken*, *the appropriateness that the extension would be undertaken*, and *the suitability that the extension would be undertaken*. Responses to the three items were averaged to form an index for both the congruent and the incongruent brand extension since the Cronbach's alpha was measured to 0.950.

### **Parasocial interaction**

Russell et al. (2006) used nine items to measure the parasocial interaction phenomenon. In accordance with Colliander and Erlandsson (2013) and due to space limitations, the three items that seemed to be most suitable for the study were used. Pre-study three and further research resulted in the following chosen items: *I miss Blondinbella when I'm not on her blog/ I miss ZARA when I do not see it in media*, *I like to compare my ideas with what Blondinbella/ZARA expresses* and *I feel sad when Blondinbella/ZARA makes a mistake*. Responses to the three items were averaged to form an index since the Cronbach's alpha measured to 0.757.

### **Brand attachment**

The brand attachment phenomenon can be measured using ten items describing the respondent's emotions towards the brand as are used by Thomson et al. (2005). In accordance with the procedure for measuring parasocial interaction, three of the most applicable ones for the study were chosen. Results from pre-study three indicated the most suitable items to be: *I consider the brand to be friendly*, *I am captivated by the brand* and *I am delighted by the brand*. Responses to the three items did provide a sufficient Cronbach's alpha for the entire sample of 0.783, but when calculating Cronbach's alpha split on the four different respondent groups, it turned out that the corporate brand did not show sufficient Cronbach's alpha for the three items (0.579 and 0.552) and is thus not a reliable measurement if indexed for the corporate brand. The personal brand received higher figures and could thus be reliably indexed (0.815 and 0.753). If the last statement, of how *captivated* respondents were by the brand, had not been included, all four groups would receive a higher Cronbach's alpha. Since the measurement had already been downsized, a decision was made to use the three items separately in order to measure brand attachment for both personal and corporate brands.

### **Brand attitude**

As mentioned above, the measurement of brand attitude was slightly different from the other measures. Instead of *completely disagree/completely agree* as endpoints, brand attitude was measured by three statements where the endpoints were the following: *bad/good*, *negative/positive* and *unsatisfactory/satisfactory* (Dahlén, Lange et al. 2005). Brand attitude was recorded, just like the other measures, on a seven-point semantic differential scale. Cronbach's alpha was measured to 0.947 and the three items were thus averaged to form an index for both the personal and the corporate brand.

### **Perceived quality**

In order to measure the variable perceived quality a triple statement measure was taken from Kirmani and Wright (1989). The questions were the following: *The products are of high quality*, *the products are good* and *the products are better than average*. The Cronbach's alpha was measured to 0.938, which implied the possibility of forming an index of the items.

### **Purchase intention**

In order to measure purchase intention, items used by Dahlén et al. (2011) were applied: *I am interested in the products*, *I would like to try the products* and *I would like to buy the products*. Responses to the items were averaged to form an index for both brands, Cronbach's alpha measured to 0.949.

## **3.6 Credibility of the study**

It is of importance to evaluate the reliability and validity of the study in order to show that the study is credible. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) state that a reliable measure is not needed to be valid, but a valid measure is always also reliable.

### **3.6.1 Reliability**

A reliable measurement refers to the extent to which the results can be repeated and are stable over time, as well as a minimization of random errors (Malhotra 2008). In order to make the measurements as stable as possible over time, the initial survey was pre-tested with the aim to see if the questions were understood as intended and if the adapted multi-item scales seemed appropriate for the study. This was conducted before launching the final survey in order to ensure identical result if the study was performed once again. Due to time restrictions of the



thesis however, no re-test has been conducted, which is the only reliable way to ensure stability in the measurements (Malhotra 2008).

The internal reliability was established by the use of approved multiple-item scales (Bryman, Nilsson 2002). The use of secondary research for theory and scale selection has mostly been from well-cited books and journal articles, already ensured of high reliability. Furthermore, some of the multiple-item scales for the independent variables were adjusted in order to be more suitable for the study (Söderlund 2005), both in terms of size and applicability. The multiple indicators were tested through a calculation of Cronbach's alpha in order to ensure that they capture the underlying construct and correlate positively (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). Items were indexed only if the Cronbach's alpha was higher than the minimum level of 0.7 because then they are considered to be of high internal consistency (Söderlund 2005). By undertaking these measures to ensure reliability, the overall reliability of the study is considered to be high.

### **3.6.2 Validity**

According to Malhotra (2008), high validity in a study means that it measures what it was intended to measure. Following is a discussion about the internal and external validity.

Internal validity refers to the extent to which it can be inferred that a causal relationship exists between the independent and the dependent variable (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). Applied to this study, internal validity thus corresponds to the degree that the type of brand and the type of brand extension affects the consumer evaluation in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention when a company performs a brand extension. High validity was ensured by having the four groups of respondents being approached in the same manner and exposed to identical surveys besides the manipulated variables. The stimuli text describing the manipulated variables was designed to differ minimally between groups, as well as the use of approved multiple-item scales are measures undertaken in order to ensure high validity.

A factor that could influence the internal validity negatively is the nature of the survey, being conducted online. Because of this, external factors such as respondents' time restraints or environmental differences are uncontrolled. Two factors that could influence the responses are transient personal factors (for example mood) and the variation in people's response set

(i.e. how respondents answer survey questions. If two subjects hold the same opinion, some tend to use the extreme ends of the response scales while others centre the answers around the midpoints) (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). Respondents had one week to complete the survey, where longer time would have increased the risk of environmental changes over time to be incurred in the results, but now supposedly reduces the risk of specific changes. With these considerations in mind, the internal validity could thus be argued to be sufficiently high.

The use of real, well-known brands ensures a high ecological validity of the study (Colliander, Erlandsson 2013), which refers to the extent that the results from the study are applicable in real life. Also, to strengthen the validity of the study, it was of importance to use two scenarios that were feasible to happen in reality. In order to find out whether the fictitious brand extensions could possibly happen, it was investigated twice (pre-test three and main study) and both types of extensions showed sufficiently high mean values as to be interpreted as probable. Since the experiments were tested for a blogger and a fashion clothes chain, the specific brand extensions could not be of use for other brands or industries. The study could however be tested on other brands or industries, as long as the brand extension is considered to be congruent or incongruent with the brand or industry for which it is relevant.

The survey was randomly assigned between the respondent groups in order to increase the internal validity. Also, the narrow target group of the sample makes the results only generalizable for Swedish females between ages 18-30 years. As respondents had certain geographical spread it can be argued that the chosen sample is seen as adequate for the population that is examined in the study. Transferring the results to a larger population should still be performed with caution. The target audience was the most suitable to examine for the study, since brand awareness and brand impression must be rather high in order for parasocial interaction and brand attachment to form. External factors that could affect the responses could therefore be reduced. With all of these considerations regarding the validity of the study, it is concluded to be sufficient.

### **3.7 Tools for analysis**

The collected data was processed in the statistical program SPSS where Cronbach's alpha was computed as well as independent sample t-tests and univariate variance analyses.

## 4. Results

*In this chapter, the results of the statistical tests conducted in SPSS will be scrutinized.*

*Firstly the results from the manipulation check will be presented, followed by table of the results from the main study. Individual results will then be reported according to the structure of the hypotheses. Lastly there is a summary of the tested hypotheses and their outcomes.*

### 4.1 Manipulation check

A manipulation check was conducted in order to ensure that the extensions were perceived as either congruent or incongruent. The three-item question battery regarding the perceived congruence of the brand extensions showed a sufficient Cronbach's alpha that enabled the creation of an index. For this check, the results were merged according to which type of extension is being examined, with the aim of increasing the sample size and decreasing the risk of brand-specific outcomes. Results revealed that the extension of ink cartridges was perceived as incongruent ( $\mu_i = 1.59$ ,  $\sigma_i = 0.87$ ) but not as incongruent for it to never occur, while the extension of a makeup collection is on a level that is interpreted to be congruent ( $\mu_c = 5.46$ ,  $\sigma_c = 1.27$ ). These turned out to have a statistically significant difference between them ( $\text{diff.} = 3.87$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and it was thus established that the brand extension of a makeup collection was perceived as congruent and the extension of ink cartridges was perceived as incongruent. See appendix for data.

## 4.2 Summary of data

The hypotheses were tested using independent samples t-test and univariate variance analyses of which the results are listed in Table III below. For extra results, see appendix.

**TABLE III**  
**Results of independent samples t-test**  
**Personal or corporate brand**

Variable	Personal brand $\mu_p (\sigma_p)$	Corporate brand $\mu_c (\sigma_c)$	Diff. $(\mu_p) - (\mu_c)$	Statistics
<b>Parasocial interaction</b>				
- <i>Index</i>	3.07 (1.65)	2.52 (1.16)	0.55	$t = -2.41, p < 0.05$
<b>Brand attachment</b>				
- <i>Friendly</i>	6.36 (2.25)	3.33 (1.67)	3.03	$t = -9.63, p < 0.01$
- <i>Delighted</i>	5.42 (2.18)	3.77 (1.60)	1.65	$t = -5.43, p < 0.01$
- <i>Captivated</i>	4.66 (2.31)	3.94 (1.98)	0.72	$t = -2.09, p < 0.05$

**Results of univariate variance analyses**  
**Influence of the type of brand on dependent variables**

Variable	Personal brand $\mu_p (\sigma_p)$	Corporate brand $\mu_c (\sigma_c)$	Diff. $(\mu_p) - (\mu_c)$	Statistics
<b>Brand attitude</b>	4.17 (1.51)	3.88 (1.62)	0.29	$F(1, 152) = 4.45, p < 0.05$
<b>Perceived Quality</b>	4.27 (1.18)	2.81 (1.78)	1.46	$F(1, 152) = 45.89, p < 0.01$
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	3.16 (1.58)	2.87 (2.02)	0.29	$F(1, 152) = 3.22, p < 0.05$
				<b>Blondinbella</b> 100% female, 0% male
				<b>ZARA</b> 100% female, 0% male
Gender of respondents				
Number of respondents				
- <i>Congruent brand extension</i>				30
- <i>Incongruent brand extension</i>				43
Mean age of respondents				
- <i>Congruent brand extension</i>				21
- <i>Incongruent brand extension</i>				21

The two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between any the independent variables (*type of brand* and *type of brand extension*) for any of the dependent variables (*brand attitude*, *perceived quality* and *purchase intention*). No post-hoc tests were thus performed.

### **4.3 Individually reported results**

#### **A stronger parasocial interaction between consumers and personal brands**

There was support found in the data for a significant difference between personal and corporate brands in terms of parasocial interaction (diff.=0.55,  $p<0.05$ ). This means that *H1a fails to be rejected, namely that parasocial interaction is stronger between consumers and personal brands, than it is for corporate brands.*

#### **Consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands**

Data supports that there is a significant difference between personal and corporate brands in the strength of brand attachment (diff.= 3.03,  $p<0.01$ , diff.= 1.65,  $p<0.01$ , diff.= 0.72,  $p<0.05$ ). *H1b is not rejected, so consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands than towards corporate brands.*

#### **The effects on brand attitude for a personal brand performing a brand extension**

The results indicate that there is a significant difference in brand attitude between personal and corporate brands (diff.= 0.29,  $F(1, 152)=4.45$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). *Thus H2a, that a brand extension will result in a higher brand attitude for personal brands compared to corporate brands, fails to be rejected.*

#### **The effects on perceived quality for a personal brand performing a brand extension**

The results indicate that there is a significant difference in perceived quality between personal and corporate brands (diff.= 1.46,  $F(1, 152)=45.89$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). *Thus H2b, that a brand extension will result in a higher perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands, fails to be rejected.*

#### **The effects on purchase intentions for a personal brand performing a brand extension**

Support was found in the data for the difference between purchase intentions between personal and corporate brands (diff.=0.29,  $F(1, 152)= 3.22$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). *Data thus supports H2c, that a brand extension will result in a higher purchase intention for personal brands compared to corporate brands.*

#### **The strengthening effects of a congruent brand extension on brand attitude for a personal brand**

The analysis did not show any significant interaction effect on brand attitude between a congruent brand extension and a personal brand. *So there is no empirical support for H3a, that a higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the pre-examined effects on brand attitude for personal brands compared to corporate brands, which thus is rejected.*

**The strengthening effects of a congruent brand extension on perceived quality for a personal brand**

Likewise, there was no significant interaction effect on perceived quality between a congruent brand extension and a personal brand. *Thus H3b, that a higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the pre-examined effects on perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands, is rejected.*

**The strengthening effects of a congruent brand extension on purchase intention for a personal brand**

Neither did data show any significant interaction effect on purchase intention between a congruent brand extension and a personal brand. *H3c is therefore rejected, which is that a higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will strengthen the pre-examined effects on purchase intention for personal brands compared to corporate brands.*

## 4.4 Summary of findings

Below there is a summary of the tested hypotheses, their results and short interpretations.

**TABLE IV**  
**Summary of main findings**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Short interpretation</b>
<b>H1a</b>	Failed to be rejected	<i>Parasocial interaction is stronger between consumers and personal brands, than it is for corporate brands</i>
<b>H1b</b>	Failed to be rejected	<i>Consumers experience stronger brand attachment towards personal brands than towards corporate brands</i>
<b>H2a</b>	Failed to be rejected	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher brand attitude for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H2b</b>	Failed to be rejected	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H2c</b>	Failed to be rejected	<i>A brand extension will result in a higher purchase intention for personal brands compared to corporate brands</i>
<b>H3a</b>	Rejected	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will not strengthen the evaluation of brand attitude for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>
<b>H3b</b>	Rejected	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will not strengthen the evaluation of perceived quality for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>
<b>H3c</b>	Rejected	<i>A higher degree of congruence of a brand extension will not strengthen the evaluation of purchase intention for personal brands more than for corporate brands</i>

## 4.3 Extra findings

One of the extra findings that were of importance for the study was that the level of congruence was revealed to have significant influence on the dependent variables. It was shown that a congruent brand extension compared to an incongruent one had significantly higher means for brand attitude (diff.=1,86,  $p<0.01$ ), perceived quality (diff.=0.93,  $p<0.01$ ) and purchase intention (diff.= 2.02,  $p<0.01$ ). Data subsequently shows that a congruent brand extension is evaluated more positively compared to an incongruent one, thus the data corresponds with theory.

Another finding was that a brand extension performed by a personal brand was perceived to have higher quality compared to a corporate brand both when the brand extension is of congruent and incongruent characteristics. A t-test was performed and significant difference of means for the congruent respective the incongruent brand extension between the personal and the corporate brand were 1.13 ( $t=-4.672$ ,  $\text{sig}<0.01$ ) and 0.93 ( $t=-4.864$ ,  $\text{sig}<0.01$ ) for perceived quality. The other two variables also showed higher means for the personal brand, but not a significant difference.

When testing brand attachment, the largest difference between types of brands holds for the question of how *friendly* respondents perceive the brand to be ( $\text{diff.}=3.03$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This works in favor of the personal brand that is perceived to be very friendly ( $\mu=6.36$ ) as opposed to the corporate brand ( $\mu= 3.33$ ), which is only considered moderately friendly. The least difference between brands holds for the question of how *captivating* the brand is ( $\text{diff.}=0.72$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Table III also showed that measures of brand attachment received higher scores for all items than the index of parasocial interaction.

Also worth noting is that the effect size is higher for the type of brand than for the type of extension when it comes to perceived quality (Partial Eta Squared: type of brand 0.232 vs. type of extension 0.121). This indicates that there are higher positive effects on the perceived quality from when the brand extension is performed by a personal brand than when the brand extension is congruent.

See appendix for results from extra findings.



## 5. Discussion and implications

*This chapter starts with a discussion of the results according to the structure of the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter. Next, the study will be scrutinized from its limitations and will lastly move on to topics for further research and a discussion of the practical application of the results.*

### 5.1 Discussion

The thesis' overall purpose was to shed light on differences between personal and corporate brands in how consumers evaluate performed brand extensions. More specifically, the purpose was to investigate whether there is a difference in the strength of parasocial interaction and brand attachment between the two different types of brands, as well as to examine whether these underlying phenomena will result in higher evaluations of a performed brand extension in terms of brand attitude, purchase intention and perceived quality for personal brands compared to corporate brands. Moreover, the thesis also investigated if a higher level of congruence of a brand extension strengthens the evaluation of the aforementioned variables for personal brands more than for corporate brands. From this, it can be concluded that a personal brand will receive a more positive evaluation when performing a brand extension no matter the level of congruence. When adding the dimension of whether the level of congruence reinforces these effects, no interaction effect was found between the type of brand and the type of extension, even though there is reason to assume so. The discussion that follows will further develop the reasoning behind these results by relating the results to theory.

#### 5.1.1 Differences in parasocial interaction and brand attachment between brands

The major conclusion drawn from the study is that there is a difference in characteristics between personal and corporate brands. This difference upholds due to personal brands being subject to stronger brand attachment and parasocial interaction. Rubin et al. (1985) and Horton and Wohl (1956) refer to parasocial interaction as a relationship formed by a media spectator with a media performer or a media persona. This would translate into low figures for the degree of parasocial interaction for the corporate brand in our study, as no physical person is connected to the brand, though results from the main study exhibit an existence of parasocial interaction with the corporate brand. This would imply that there is reason to believe that the effects of parasocial interaction could be extended beyond an interaction with

a physical person and provide implications for corporate brands as well. A corporate brand with a strong media presence could perhaps experience similar effects as personal brands subject to parasocial interaction. On the other hand, there is a larger difference between corporate and personal brands when it comes to the reported means for brand attachment than for parasocial interaction. This could be explained if the definition of parasocial interaction of Rubin et al. (1985) and Horton and Wohl (1956) holds only for brands with a physical media performer, in which case the measurement does not make sense for the corporate brand.

The questions regarding brand attachment revealed higher reported means than the index of parasocial interaction for both the corporate and the personal brand. This could be explained by the items measuring brand attachment being easier for respondents to connect to any type of brand, than the questions regarding parasocial interaction. It was obvious that the measurement of how *friendly* respondents perceived the brands to be was the question that gave rise to the largest difference between brands. This outcome is not so surprising as the characteristic is intuitive when considering the physical person connected to a personal brand and less salient in its connection to describing a corporate brand. Where the lowest reported mean for both brands was found, as well as the least difference between brands, was for how *captivating* the brands were perceived to be. This is probably due to the vague understanding of the word in connection to a brand, regardless of whether it is personal or corporate.

### **5.1.2 More positive consumer evaluations when personal brands perform brand extensions**

Personal brands are subject to stronger brand attachment and parasocial interaction than a corporate brand. These two phenomena explain a more positive evaluation of a brand extension in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention compared to corporate brands. The use of a brand extension as the setting of testing whether personal brands will be more favorably evaluated is to enable a use of one stimuli text for the entire study. The brand extension itself will thus only be of impact on the dependent variables when testing for interaction effects between the type of brand and the type of extension. A before and after-test could have been performed to see whether pre-existing attitudes more easily were transferred to the brand extension for personal brands compared to corporate brands, as suggested by Fedorikhin et al. (2008). This was not conducted due to time restrictions of the thesis, however, but could be a topic for further research.

The results showed significant differences between personal brands and corporate brands in terms of brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention when a brand extension is performed. Thus, theory corresponds with the null-hypotheses H2a-c failing to be rejected. As many theories suggest Fedorikhin et al. (2008), Whan Park and MacInnis (2006), Sunde and Brodie (1993) and Martínez Salinas and Pina Pérez (2009), brands subject to stronger attachment will experience higher brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention. Among the three examined variables, the largest difference between a personal brand and a corporate brand has been found in how respondents perceive the quality to be after the brand extension. However, no theory has been found that could support the salience of effects on perceived quality compared to the other variables. One possible explanation could be that the manipulated brand extensions better correspond with the image of the personal brand chosen for the study than the corporate brand, which would thus have implications for the evaluation of the quality. Even though purchase intention is closely related to perceived quality (Taylor, Bearden 2002), the effects were not as salient. This could be due to limitations of this study.

The results of the study provide corporate brands with incentives to observe successes of personal brands. With a marketing industry under transformation, the customers are brought closer to the company (Singh, et al. 2008). Using new technologies and platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram, to develop a more active relationship with more attached consumers, corporate brands could possibly replicate the strong connections consumers experience towards personal brands. It is also a common strategy for advertisers to use human characteristics to describe a brand (Aaker 1997). Since personal brands have shown to be more positively evaluated compared to corporate brands, that strategy could thus be of relevance for corporate brands to consider. By establishing human characteristics for a corporate brand in the minds of consumers, similar advantages pertaining to personal brands could then possibly be achieved by corporate brands. Furthermore, the frequent use of co-branding, where corporate brands use famous persons in advertisements, could be their attempt to achieve the same advantages as this study establishes for personal brands. The discussion regarding how corporate brands could observe and learn from personal brands would be necessary to further investigate in order to draw conclusions.

### **5.1.3 Personal brands performing congruent brand extensions**

Theory from Aaker and Keller (1990) suggests that perceived fit, i.e. a congruent brand extension, will lead to more positive evaluations compared to an incongruent brand extension,

which support has been found for in this study. Theory and results from the study (see appendix) support that using the strategy of performing a congruent brand extension, as well as being a personal brand, separately gives rise to positive consumer evaluations. No interaction effect between the two independent variables was found, a strengthening of the consumer evaluation could therefore not be confirmed. This gap in existing research has thus not been filled in the study.

Even though the hypotheses regarding strengthening effects had to be rejected, what was found to be of interest was the fact that the variable *type of brand* affects the dependent variable *perceived quality* to a greater extent than the variable *degree of congruence*. This held only for perceived quality and not for the other two variables. The finding can, however, be interpreted as being more important for a company performing a brand extension to possess personal characteristics than to perform a congruent brand extension in order for a high perception of quality for the consumers. An explanation of why perceived quality was the only variable reporting this difference points towards a gap that further research on the topic could fill.

What has been confirmed is that perceived quality is significantly higher for personal brands performing a brand extension compared to corporate brands, even when the brand extension is of low degree of congruence with the parent brand. This is interesting when combined with the findings of Fedorikhin et al. (2008) stating that brand attachment does not matter when performing an incongruent brand extension, as the extension probably will not be recognized as part of the parent brand. The results from the main study have shown that a personal brand also has higher brand attachment after an incongruent brand extension. The findings by Fedorikhin et al. (2008) thus suggests that brand attachment could not be the explanatory factor for the higher perceived quality, so one possible conclusion is that the effect emerged only due to the strong parasocial interaction with the brand. The results of this study show that both brand attachment and parasocial interaction are higher for personal brands even if the brand extension is incongruent. This is not in line with the findings of Fedorikhin et al. (2008) and could be due to the limitations of this study.

#### **5.1.4 Conclusion**

From the results of this study there is support that personal brands enjoy stronger brand attachment and parasocial interaction than corporate brands do. This leads to personal brands

experiencing a more favorable evaluation of a performed brand extension than a corporate brand, which holds for the brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention regardless the level of congruence. The expected strengthening effect between the degree of congruence and type of brand was not significant and hence not supported.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Even though the study has been conducted thoughtfully to ensure high validity and reliability, there are certain aspects that have to be taken into account. Some are general and pertain to the nature of the study being quantitative, where it is difficult to come close to reality (Bryman, Nilsson 2002). The data is cross-sectional instead of using a time-series, which is proven to be stronger for the validity of the study (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005), but the choice was made due to the small magnitude of the study as well as time restraints. For the same reasons, a convenience sample was used when collecting the data, making the results less generalizable (Malhotra 2008). The survey was only sent out to female respondents within the range of 18-30 years and the number of respondents is quite few, where a larger sample could have shown larger effects. As the survey was conducted online, it was also difficult to judge the time spent answering the questions and how seriously they were taken, which could have had impact on the results.

The difficulties that arose when measuring the phenomena of brand attachment and parasocial interaction has to be considered when drawing conclusions from the study. Both of the phenomena are complex and in some aspects they are similar as well. In accordance with the work of Colliander and Erlandsson (2013), only three out of the nine parameters for parasocial interaction was chosen for the study. Considering the lack of space in the survey, the same reasoning was applied when selecting three measures out of ten measurements for brand attachment. This choice proved to make the results more obtuse, leading to an insufficient Cronbach's alpha for ZARA ( $0.552 < 0.7$ ) for the questions regarding brand attachment, which hence were not possible to index. This implies that the three questions are too widely dispersed and not enough to capture the essence of the phenomenon, which indicates the complexity of the measurement. The questions were analyzed individually due to their importance for the study. As for parasocial interaction, three items were averaged to form an index, but if all nine items would have been included, there is a possibility that the effects would have been larger as it would have better captured the width of the phenomenon.

The third pre-study also revealed the complexity of measuring parasocial interaction as two of the questions had to be exchanged due to widely dispersed answers.

### **5.3 Academic and managerial implications**

The thesis has resulted in a deeper understanding of the difference between personal and corporate brands when performing brand extensions, which open up for several research topics that could be investigated, as well as ways for corporations to include the results in their business.

#### **5.3.1 Further research**

The study aimed to contribute to existing research and encourage for further research on the effects of parasocial interaction and stronger brand attachment pertaining to personal brands performing brand extensions. When performing such introductory research, a homogenous sample makes it easier to find flaws in theory (Lynch Jr 1982), but also limits the generalizability (Ghauri, Grønhaug 2005). Conducting the study on a larger, more heterogeneous sample both geographically and demographically could give rise to other interesting results and potentially find support for the rejected hypotheses. Using other brands would enable academia to find if parasocial interaction and the stronger brand attachment pertaining to personal brands have higher effect for brands in other categories. It could also be tested if there is a difference if conducting the study on a sample where male respondents are included. Results from this study could be used as a springboard for further research with other brands and industries to test whether the results hold for other industries, as long as the brand extensions are perceived as congruent or incongruent.

As there is little theory on how a brand subject to parasocial interaction can benefit from its effects, it is worth conducting more research, in order to fully comprehend the magnitude of the brand effects. It would be interesting to investigate if corporate brands could replicate the advantages of personal brands, either by the use of new media platforms (such as Instagram or Twitter), the use of human characteristics or by co-branding. It would also be of interest to investigate whether pre-existing attitudes are more easily transferred to the brand extension when parasocial interaction and attachment are high between the consumer and the brand. Furthermore, more research could be conducted on whether parasocial interaction actually have extra salient effect on perceived quality compared to brand attitude or purchase intentions, as indicated in the results of the thesis.

As both theory and data have separately shown significantly higher consumer evaluations for a personal brand and a congruent brand extension, it is implied that it would be logical to assume a strengthening effect between the two variables. Unfortunately the study failed to prove any interaction effect, but the study shed light on the possibility of such an effect and acts as a springboard for future research to examine whether some moderations would lead to the desirable outcome. Another academic application would be to examine if there is any interaction effect between the type of extension and the type of brand if a moderately incongruent extension is used instead of a completely congruent one, which according to Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) would give rise to a higher evaluation.

### **5.3.2 Practical application**

The results of the thesis are mainly applicable to corporations with low-involvement products targeting young women. The effects of parasocial interaction and brand attachment are desirable and should be accounted for, regardless of which type of brand. Since the study supports that personal brands are being more positively evaluated when performing brand extensions, corporations ought to include this when considering their surrounding marketing activities. It incentivizes a personal brand to enter new markets, since it possess a comparative advantage relative to a corporate brand. A corporate brand should therefore strive to achieve similar advantages and can learn from personal brands when considering marketing strategies. Even though the study did not support that personal brands would benefit even more from being congruent, congruency in itself turned out to be advantageous and should also be considered when launching a brand extension.

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## 7. Appendices

*This chapter comprises the four stimuli texts followed by the survey questions and more thorough results from the main study.*

## Stimuli texts

*Following is the set of different stimuli texts presented. Each text belongs to one of the distributed surveys.*

### **Stimuli text 1: Blondinbella makeup collection**

Isabella Löwengrip driver en av Sveriges största bloggar Blondinbella som vänder sig till unga tjejer. Bloggen handlar om allt från vardag och skönhet till självkänsla. Entreprenören Isabella Löwengrip har dessutom bland annat lanserat ett eget klädmärke, skrivit böcker och designat smycken.

Tänk dig nu in i följande scenario:

Blondinbella ska lansera en sminkkollektion med bland annat mascaror, ögonskuggor och foundations.

### **Stimuli text 2: Blondinbella ink cartridges**

Isabella Löwengrip driver en av Sveriges största bloggar Blondinbella som vänder sig till unga tjejer. Bloggen handlar om allt från vardag och skönhet till självkänsla. Entreprenören Isabella Löwengrip har dessutom bland annat lanserat ett eget klädmärke, skrivit böcker och designat smycken.

Tänk dig nu in i följande scenario:

Blondinbella ska börja sälja bläckpatroner både för utskrifter i svartvitt och i färg.

### **Stimuli text 3: ZARA makeup collection**

ZARA är en modekedja som gör trendiga kollektioner av kläder, skor och smycken till modeintresserade kvinnor och män i alla åldrar.

Tänk dig nu in i följande scenario:

ZARA ska lansera en sminkkollektion med bland annat mascaror, ögonskuggor och foundations.

### **Stimuli text 4: ZARA ink cartridges**

ZARA är en modekedja som gör trendiga kollektioner av kläder, skor och smycken till modeintresserade kvinnor och män i alla åldrar.

Tänk dig nu in i följande scenario:

ZARA ska börja sälja bläckpatroner, både för utskrifter i svartvitt och i färg.

## Survey questions

The questions from the survey "Blondinbella makeup collection" are attached below. The questions were identical for the other surveys. (Besides the alteration of brand name and brand extension)

Hur **troligt** är det att Blondinbella lanserar en sminkkollektion?

Ej troligt | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Mycket troligt

Hur **lämpligt** är det att Blondinbella lanserar en sminkkollektion?

Ej lämpligt | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Mycket lämpligt

Hur **passande** är det att Blondinbella lanserar en sminkkollektion?

Ej passande | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Mycket passande

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen är mitt **intryck** av varumärket Blondinbella:

Dåligt	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Bra
Negativt	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Positivt
Inte tilltalande	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Tilltalande

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen är min uppfattning att **produkterna är av hög kvalitet**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen är min uppfattning att det är **bra produkter**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen är min uppfattning att **produkterna är bättre än snittet**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen skulle jag vara **intresserad av produkterna**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen skulle jag vilja **testa en produkt**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Givet att Blondinbella släpper den nya sminkkollektionen skulle jag vilja **köpa en produkt**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Nu följer några frågor om hur din relation med varumärket ser ut

---

Jag saknar Blondinbella när jag inte är inne på hennes blogg

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Jag tycker om att jämföra mina idéer och uppfattningar med vad Blondinbella uttrycker

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Jag tycker det är tråkigt om Blondinbella begår ett misstag

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Jag skulle beskriva Blondinbella som **vänlig**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Jag skulle beskriva Blondinbella som **behaglig**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Jag skulle beskriva Blondinbella som **fängslande**

Stämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Stämmer mycket bra

Hur bekant är du med Blondinbella?

Inte alls bekant | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Mycket bekant

Mitt intryck av Blondinbella är

Dåligt | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Bra

Vad är din ålder? (siffror)

Vad är ditt kön?

- ☐ Man  
☐ Kvinna



## Extra results from main study

**TABLE V**  
**Results of independent t-tests**

**Manipulation check: level of congruence**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Congruent brand extension</b> $\mu_c (\sigma_c)$	<b>Incongruent brand extension</b> $\mu_i (\sigma_i)$	<b>Diff.</b> $(\mu_c) - (\mu_i)$	<b>Statistics</b>
<b>Congruence - Index</b>	5.46 (1.27)	1.59 (0.87)	3.87	$t = -22.55, p < 0.01$

**Differences in perceived quality between brands and type of extension**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Congruent brand extension</b> $\mu_c (\sigma_p)$	<b>Incongruent brand extension</b> $\mu_i (\sigma_i)$	<b>Diff.</b> $(\mu_c) - (\mu_i)$	<b>Statistics</b>
Personal brand	4.92 (1.77)	3.79 (1.63)	1.13	$t = -4.672, p < 0.01$
Corporate brand	3.29 (1.14)	2.36 (1.04)	0.93	$t = -4.864, p < 0.01$

**TABLE VI**  
**Results of univariate variance analyses**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Congruent brand extension</b> $\mu_c, (\sigma_c)$	<b>Incongruent brand extension</b> $\mu_i, (\sigma_i)$	<b>Diff.</b> $(\mu_c) - (\mu_i)$	<b>Statistics</b>
<b>Brand attitude</b>	5.04 (1.26)	3.18 (1.27)	1.86	$F(1,152)=86.08, p<0.01$
<b>Perceived quality</b>	4.00 (1.66)	3.07 (1.54)	0.93	$F(1,152)=21.01, p<0.01$
<b>Purchase intention</b>	4.12 (1.68)	2.10 (1.32)	2.02	$F(1,152)=73.44, p<0.01$

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Personal brand</b> $\mu_p (\sigma_p)$	<b>Corporate brand</b> $\mu_c, (\sigma_c)$	<b>Diff.</b> $(\mu_p) - (\mu_c)$	<b>Statistics</b>
<b>Brand attitude</b>	4.17 (1.51)	3.88 (1.62)	0.29	$F(1, 152)=4.45, p<0.05$
<b>Perceived Quality</b>	4.27 (1.18)	2.81 (1.78)	1.46	$F(1, 152)=45.89, p<0.01$
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	3.16 (1.58)	2.87 (2.02)	0.29	$F(1, 152)=3.22, p<0.05$

**Report of partial eta squared for perceived quality**

<b>Perceived quality</b>	<b>Partial eta squared</b>
<i>-Influence of the type of brand</i>	0.121
<i>-Influence of the type of brand extension</i>	0.232