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Article

The Impact on Audience Media Brand Choice Using Media Brands Uniqueness Phenomenon

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Abstract: While research on traditional media brands has increased in recent years, few studies examine news media brands and their brand strategies, particularly distinctive brand associations unrelated to media brand content and their impact on audience media brand choice and attention. Numerous studies highlight the significance of content as an element of the media brand and its vital role in audience selection. In a market where news and information are oversaturated and comparable, the dilemma for news media companies is what distinguishes them when the news content may be the same across all channels. Multi-platform consumption deludes and decreases brand associations, thus providing media brands with even more challenging brand differentiation and strong brand association management. The younger Generation Z prefers and uses more global and social media platforms than national media from the media audience perspective and future audiences. This audience consumes less national media than global and social media platforms. This is especially true of younger viewers, who are more focused on platforms and experiences. In a setting where cross-platform distribution stresses the significance of media brand associations and content experiences, the capacity of media brands to maintain brand preference and choice in a highly competitive market becomes increasingly crucial. According to the authors' analysis, data reveals that younger audiences consume less national media and prefer international media, which raises the spectrum of future domestic media audiences. Examining the unique characteristics of media brand associations that positively influence audience preference and media brand choices among younger audiences would not only answer some difficult questions for national media brands concerning how to attract younger audiences, but it would also lay the groundwork for meeting the needs of audiences for a unified media brand experience across numerous platforms, without sacrificing strong and unique media brand associations. This study focuses on national news media brands and analyses the attributes of news media brands, as well as their significance for the Generation Z audience in media brand choice and engagement. The study highlights the importance of content experience in defining the uniqueness of media brands and its effect on brand selection and audience consumption. The authors used linear regression analyses and the decision tree approach to predict the most significant correlations between media brand attributes and brand uniqueness.



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1. Introduction

Media consumption habits in the last few years have changed fundamentally. Three main tendencies challenge media brands to attract and grow their audiences, keep the strong point of differentiation, and maintain substantial media brand equity. The first one, digitalization and technology advancement, developed multi-platform on-demand content consumption in all audience groups. Growing social media platforms and content usage developed fragmented and oversaturated media content consumption. Generation Z, an audience aged 15–24 years more than other audiences, is platform- and experience-oriented in media consumption. As a result, the media content supply and demand became

oversaturated, and the point of differentiation decreased. The second one, multi-platform consumption, deludes and decreases brand associations, thus providing media brands with even more challenging brand differentiation and strong brand association management [1]. The third one, if we think from a media audience perspective, as well as that of future audiences, Generation Z prefers and exploits global media and social media platforms more than national media [2]. More news media companies are consumed on social media platforms, and the mobile environment follows a multi-platform trend. The younger demographic requires mobile, platform-independent, interactive, and on-demand media consumption [1,3]. To summarize, the media brand content is consumed on-demand via multiple platforms, creating an environment where brand associations delude and the point of brand differentiation is low. Moreover, the younger audience prefers global and social media, leaving the national media in an even more challenging position—how to build and maintain strong brand associations and uniqueness to attract the younger audience in the multi-platform consumption market.

The question then arises regarding how to build and maintain a strong and unique national media brand in an oversaturated multi-platform environment. The fundamentals of brand strength in the literature are described and analysed as brand equity. Scholars and researchers in the literature on brand equity fundamentals state that positive, favourable, and unique brand associations are the basis for strong brand equity [4]. Feelings, thoughts, experiences, and beliefs in consumers' memory related to a brand are brand associations [4,5]. Unique brand associations help consumers differentiate a particular brand from other products available [6]. Brand associations and knowledge are substantially influenced by experiences formed during usage and service interactions [7]. If strong, favourable brand associations are fundamental for substantial brand equity and uniqueness is part of it, then analyses of media brand associations and their impact on brand uniqueness are crucial to understanding how national media can build and strengthen their brand and brand uniqueness in the multi-platform environment described previously. If we focus on national media and, particularly, news media brands, the strong and credible news media brands are fundamental today because of the importance of trust against fake news and propaganda and because of their business models where content creation and journalism are financed by advertisers' investments, which always follow where the audience is [8]. The scholars agree that substantial brand equity is the basis for credibility [9]. Therefore, strong and favourable brand associations and uniqueness are fundamentals for strong media brand equity [4]. The research reveals that brand equity is a growing and evolving notion and that it is a crucial component of successful brand development in the contemporary, interactive, internet-based communication marketplace [10]. Today, the customer experience is not a more direct or indirect product encounter; instead, it is a non-linear, mobile, and multi-platform experience with products or brands in extremely diverse surroundings [3,11].

In addition, the authors argue that technological advancement and digitalization influence the customer experience with brands and that this experience plays a more significant role in developing distinctive brand associations and, hence, brand preference. In contrast, the current multi-platform and on-demand marketplace, where the point of parity is high and brand associations delude, promotes the opposite [11].

The challenge for media owners is managing a brand in this marketplace. How do we make media brands distinctive in a multi-platform environment and strengthen strong and favorable brand associations to build solid brand equity? Brand associations are the attributes of a brand that come into consumers' minds when the brand is discussed [4,5]. Furthermore, the more crucial question is what is media brand uniqueness in multi-platform on-demand distribution and consumption environments? Suppose content consumption changes significantly and influences how media brands establish their brand associations. In that case, new analyses or theories are required to explain how positive and favorable associations arise in audiences' minds and how these associations contribute to media brand uniqueness. The literature and brand equity theories confirm that uniqueness and strong favorable associations are crucial for strong brand equity development.

Moreover, if more and more media brand content consumption happens outside media brand platforms, more likely via social media platforms, especially for the younger audience, then new aspects of media branding outside its own platform should be determined and applied. The new media brand uniqueness model must be applied in the multi-platform and on-demand-driven consumption market.

However, if the younger audience is multi-platform and experience-driven, the helpful question arises: How can content consumption and associations developed by these consumption moments be significant in creating and building uniqueness? Furthermore, if content across national news brands is similar or even more the same, how can consumption experience bring significant value to positive, favourable, and unique brand associations? These aspects provide the decisive and actual goal for this research—how and whether consumption experience contributes to positive, favourable brand associations and how these associations contribute to news media brand uniqueness. The research focuses on national news media brands in Latvia and Generation Z, a media audience aged 15–24.

This paper is arranged as follows. In Section 2, the authors introduce the brand equity concept, brand associations and uniqueness, and media brand theoretical framework. Then, the methodology is described in Section 3. In Section 4, the authors respond to the research questions: (1) What are the most significant consumption experience-related media brand attributes for Generation Z? (2) How do these attributes contribute to strong, favourable and unique news media brand associations? (3) Which associations significantly contribute to the development of news media brand uniqueness? In this section, the authors test the research hypothesis. Section 5 discusses media brand changes and OI aspects, and Section 6 concludes with this paper's crucial results for practice and future research.

2. Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Brand Uniqueness and Associations

Brand equity is crucial to marketing communication and its effects as a target or conduit for achieving other objectives [10]. A comprehensive and unified model of brand equity is required to comprehend the impact of distinct communication forms on brand development and substantial brand equity. Consumer-based brand equity is concerned with how customers view the brand [12]. Keller (1993), Aaker (1991), and Kapferer (1992) are the three recognised models of customer-based brand equity [12].

Branding literature is dominated by two conceptualisations of customer-based brand equity with fairly distinct elements. Aaker classified the assets and liabilities associated with brand equity into five categories: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets [5]. Keller distinguished between two essential brand characteristics, viewed as a point of differentiation from brand equity and equivalent to brand equity's assets and liabilities as defined by Aaker: brand awareness and brand image [4]. The brand's image demonstrates its association types, with varying degrees of abstraction that cause the diverse response to brand equity [4]. Keller defined attributes in two main groups: product- and non-product-related attributes can be types of brand associations that summarize specific information [4]. Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and has positive, strong, and unique brand associations in his or her mind. Keller's differentiation refers to the consumers' brand knowledge memory structure, which includes brand awareness and image [4]. Numerous academics concur that customer-based brand equity influences how clients respond to a brand's marketing and marketing outcomes [13].

One of the most significant brand assets is the knowledge of a particular brand that consumers remember and apply in the brand selection or purchasing situations. According to associative network memory theories, this information generates brand-related associations [4,14]. These connections serve two key functions. The first is a signal to recall a brand name under consideration from memory. The second purpose is to facilitate the evaluation and selection of brands [15]. The use of brand associations in purchase or selection situations will impact the client's preference for a specific brand. Therefore, brand

knowledge is an essential element of customer-based brand equity [4–6]. As mentioned previously, three desirable characteristics of brand associations are favorability, strength, and uniqueness [4]. Over time, customers develop distinct associations with a brand. Some associations pertain to the brand's attributes and benefits, whereas others reflect the customers' unique experiences with the brand [16]. Multiple associations may be advantageous since they enable buyers to recall the brand based on a limited number of signals and situations, hence improving the brand's memory accessibility. According to the semantic memory associative network model, information on a brand may be associated with knowledge about a product category and other brands within the category [17]. The brand gets increasingly representative of its product category as the number of associations increases. Therefore, for a brand to be appropriately classified as a member of the product category, it must share several commonalities or shared associations. However, it must also have unique associations to stand out [18]. Consensus on the attributes of a brand is vital to its strength [19]. Moreover, the quantity, valence, and uniqueness of the consumer's association with the brand influence the consumer's reaction to the brand [20]. Uniqueness can affect the impact of favorability and the number of associations. When consumers see a brand as unique, its favourable impression and number of associations may increase. Individuals who perceive strong agreement with relevant others are more responsive to the influence of associations on brand strength [21]. Several scholars stress the significance of unique brand associations and propose utilising the set of unique brand associations relative to other brands in the product category as a measure of brand equity. The benefits of brand uniqueness include consumer preference, brand equity, and new product acceptability. [22]. A distinctive brand image facilitates a brand's capacity to command a price premium over competing brands with comparable product quality. Consumer choice theory illustrates that consumer selection procedures neglect the attributes of all brands within a consideration group [23]. A strategy for achieving brand differentiation is to cultivate perceptions of brand uniqueness. There are two ways to develop brand uniqueness. The first is when a consumer believes that a brand offers something that other brands do not or that the brand is unique. The second is brand superiority, which occurs when a buyer is aware that several brands possess the same attribute but considers one brand to be superior [24]. In both instances, investing in uniqueness is only of long-term benefit if sustainable; otherwise, brands would be unable to maintain or acquire a devoted customer base [6]. It is also essential to distinguish between unique/novel attributes and unique associations. The exclusive nature of a brand's unique attributes renders comparisons with other brands inappropriate. Unique associations are discovered from the perspective of a single customer and occur when a consumer links only one brand with a particular attribute, regardless of whether other brands possess the feature. It reflects how the consumer perceives the brand instead of what it gives. Many studies recognized the importance of unique brand associations from the customers' point of view. If media brands are experience brands and multi-platform content consumption improves and diversifies the consumption experience, then the question of how varied consumption experiences influence media brand associations and how unique audience associations are generated arises. It is particularly important to consider that media brands operate in a highly saturated market. The larger the number of brands in a market, the lesser the level of uniqueness among those brands [22]. Determining the brand associations that significantly contribute to brand uniqueness will answer the question of how media brands may create and sustain their uniqueness and, consequently, brand equity and preference.

2.2. Brand Experience and Associations

As previously discussed, unique brand associations are the elements that help consumers differentiate one brand from the others on the market [25]. The academic agreement suggests that emotional and cognitive cues from experience-based associations generate brand associations [26]. According to the research conducted by Shamim and Butt on the relationship between brand experience and brand equity, brand attitude, and brand

credibility, brand experience directly affects all three of these variables [8]. In addition, brand experience has a substantial effect on brand equity and other variables, such as brand associations and brand awareness [26]. In addition, the authors note that technology advancement and digitization have a substantial effect on brand associations and consumer experiences. Building and sustaining strong, favourable, and distinctive brand connections demand managing and measuring consumer experiences with the brand in unheard-of ways. Moreover, the authors present a model that quantifies non-product-related customer experiences as brand associations. In addition, the authors note that technology advancement and digitization have a substantial effect on brand associations and consumer experiences. Building and sustaining strong, favourable, and distinctive brand connections demand managing and measuring consumer experiences with the brand in unheard-of ways. Moreover, the authors present a model that quantifies non-product-related customer experiences as brand associations. The concept of "brand" is universal, independent of context. What changes online is the brand's expression [27]. It is therefore anticipated that the manner in which brand equity is built online differs from that in conventional contexts. Online brand equity is a sort of intangible asset that is co-created by consumer interactions with the online brand. This definition has three crucial components. Online brand equity, like other kinds of consumer-based brand equity, is an intangible asset that reflects the relationship between a brand and its consumers. Second, per the new logic for marketing, in which consumers and marketers coproduce brand meaning, brand equity is cocreated as opposed to being unilaterally "forced upon" customers through associations [27]. Thirdly, this intangible asset emerges from online (e.g., digital experience) and offline (e.g., fulfilment) consumer encounters with the online brand [27].

Therefore, theories that identify, determine, and study the relationships between the concepts that drive media brands are still being created. Media brands rely on consumer marketing techniques, such as branding, to separate themselves from the competition [11] in the face of intense media development and growing industry competitiveness. Due to the audience's consumption, interaction, and response to a media brand, the audience becomes an essential component of media brand association formation, product development, and content distribution. Consequently, it is anticipated that the function of the audience in developing media brand associations and strength has shifted with relation to new aspects. The power of audiences on media brands is greater than ever before. Interactivity and accessibility across many consumption touchpoints led to new techniques of interacting with media content, which enhanced the effect of the consumer experience and led to the formation of associations between media brands. In a competitive, fragmented, and dynamic environment with abundant information and media content, it is reasonable to expect that these non-product-related associations are gaining importance. According to the authors, this brand-consuming experience offers tremendous differentiation and uniqueness in the oversaturated media market. It is important to discuss media branding analyses, particularly for news media companies, which are fundamentally distinct from non-media businesses [28]. The theories that describe the ties between consumer brands and their respective consumers may not adequately explain the relationships between media brands and their audiences. More study reveals that the delivery vehicle or platform on which the audience consumes media products is crucial to the content experience, particularly when news media or the continuous production of media products is highlighted. For decades, the driving force behind media brands, particularly news media brand strengths, has been content and quality. Given audiences' rising importance and influence in media branding, the challenge lies in determining how media brands can engage, measure, and build audiences to establish solid and distinctive brand associations, resulting in stronger media brands. Growing audience fragmentation, an increase in distribution channels, and technological advancements that allow the platform to adapt to the urgent requirements of the audience all contribute to a setting in which the value of a media brand or channel is diminished. The brand identity of the content source (media brand) becomes less significant [1,4]. This signifies a substantial shift in media brands. What attributes

of strong media brands create, sustain, and strengthen media brands across the various touchpoints of on-demand consumption when content consumption across several platforms deludes brand associations? What distinguishes news media brands if the majority of their content is identical? There is compelling evidence that the previous models for packaging and delivering news no longer appropriately connect with the global audience that is now coming of age. Young consumers' news consumption habits drastically differ from preceding generations [29]. This is particularly crucial for a younger, platform- and experience-focused audience. The importance of media brand and content experience grows in a world where multi-platform delivery is expanding. How a media brand can ensure its preference and usage in a highly competitive market is a difficult task. The authors do not minimize the importance of media content as a brand attribute; instead, they hypothesize that consumption and non-content-related brand associations have grown increasingly significant in the interactive marketplace, especially among younger audiences. Most disruptive innovations consist of new technologies. Technology is not the only thing that changes and innovates with time. Now, innovations emerge from consumer trends. Additionally, technical advances frequently result in expanded customer freedom and choice. Customer preference is now innovation [30]. More research on media industry-specific variables is needed to understand open innovation's multiple complexities [30]. Open innovation techniques now appear to be primarily content-driven [31] and adopted by individual actors, primarily from a creative standpoint [32]. To comprehend innovation in the media brand market, it is worthwhile to examine the preferences and behaviours of younger audiences toward national media brands, with a particular emphasis on news brands, whose significance has been emphasized.

2.3. The Generation Z and News Media

Thirty-two per cent of the world's population, or 2.47 billion individuals out of a total of 7.7 billion, are Generation Z members, including those born between 1996 and 2010 and whose oldest members are only 25 [33]. Numerous studies have been undertaken on this generation, and most agree that they will bring about significant changes in all industries, including media and news media consumption. Generation Z is unique since they are the first to have grown up exclusively in the digital world. They are tech-savvy, prioritise mobile, and have high expectations for how they should spend their time online. Recent research from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2019) indicates that younger viewers differ from older demographics in terms of what they do and their fundamental attitudes regarding what they seek from the news [34]. This generation is primarily motivated by progress and life satisfaction, reflected in their news preferences. They still need and desire to get news, but they do not necessarily view traditional media as the best or only option.

In essence, news brands and young people view the role and value of news differently. This audience wants news brands to create products that are useful, entertaining, and enjoyable [34]. The results suggest that Generation Z heavily utilises mobile technologies and social media networks. Unsurprisingly, they employ on-demand media and favour customised material. The difficulty for news brands is that these companies and their products play a minor role in this generation's lives.

The Reuters investigation also uncovered three critical factors influencing the generation's perception of the news media. These are the consumption moment, the consumer, and the medium [34].

In realisation, Generation Z has little interest in news brands, preferring social media platforms and other mobile applications for amusement and socialisation. This does not imply that youth consumers have no appreciation for established companies. Most of them turn to a top news brand for breaking news or when something needs to be confirmed, although their parents frequently influence their brand preference, and they virtually always consume news digitally [2,34]. Reuters research suggests that the majority of young people passively receive news on social media platforms and mobile devices, where they

spend the most time. This shift from traditional news sources to social media affects news consumption and general attitudes.

However, the news is essential to their life and is increasingly available via social media platforms and mobile devices. Hence, strong news media brands are necessary for direct and focused news consumption. When news consumption is more devoted, direct access to news media websites is noted more frequently. Indeed, many customers, particularly younger ones, said they began to rely more on credible sources in the past year [2,34]. One factor is that young people's awareness of credible news sources and the value of quality journalism has increased over time. Interestingly, Generation Z prefers media organisations founded before the year 2000 twice as much as new media companies [34].

The news media influence political, economic, and social processes and play an essential role in modern society. Information, content credibility, and source reputation crises have resulted from the expansion of information sources, aggregation platforms, and social media. Increasing levels of fake news and misinformation have boosted the demand for credible media brands in the digital marketplace. Media products are more pervasive and incorporated into people's daily lives than most industries [29]. The news sector is dramatically reshaped by the increasing digitisation of news [34]. The changing environment of the news media has posed a problem for media brands: how to create and sustain brand preference and usage in a fiercely competitive business. Mainly when, as is commonly the case, the news content across media platforms is the same or at least similar. This raises the crucial question of whether those who wish to build media brand equity should continue prioritising content enhancement alone. The positive effects of brand equity on a variety of media outcomes, ranging from the media's trust or credibility to media brand perception, highlight the importance of branding and media brand management [9]. Higher customer-based brand equity increases the credibility of media brands with their audiences [9]. Many scholars agree that news media branding is ideal for differentiation and uniqueness [1,11,35]. News media brands offer enhanced value propositions [11] regarding the content, interaction, and consumption experience their audiences might anticipate [36]. News media brands can be viewed as indicators of credibility and quality [37,38]. Additionally, media brands increase product value [39]. In addition, the dynamic online environment and shifts in content consumption behaviours need the discovery of innovative strategies for establishing strong brand associations, mainly when targeting a younger demographic. The significance of consumer experience in establishing powerful and positive brand connections has previously been established. As news media brands are naturally distinct from non-media brands, media branding studies must focus on news media brands [29]. Recent scholarly research confirms that consumer experience influences brand associations; consequently, a reinvention of the customer experience is required in the context of brand equity. Unanswered is the question of how the type, strength, and uniqueness of all brand associations created by different communication platforms affect brand strength. Increasing the variety of communication platforms where brands and consumers interact, such as social media platforms, instant messaging applications, mobile content usage, and digital content consumption, will necessarily involve indirect consumer and non-brand-related experiences for creating brand associations. In a new, interactive, and customer-driven market, the association between these factors would aid brands in comprehending their uniqueness and establishing substantial brand equity. Additionally, researchers concur that technology advancement and convergence have resulted in new opportunities and challenges for brand marketing and equity building in a changed interactive marketplace, where consumer experience and interaction with brand content play an increasingly critical role. The authors of this research also argue that brand equity is the customers' response not only to brand marketing activities but also to every brand encounter, as touchpoints and multi-platforms have become closer, more frequent, and accessible. Therefore, the authors contend that developing brand associations through customer experience encompasses marketing, brand communication, and all aspects of a brand's interaction with the consumer. Customer-based brand equity studies regarding

news media are few, both in marketing and mass communication literature; therefore, the research on how media brand uniqueness is formed through media brand associations and consumption experiences would significantly contribute to the need for news brand equity and uniqueness model in a multi-platform oversaturated marketplace. Only one previous study, by scholar Oyedeji [9], has been conducted in this field, and it refers to television channels and brand equity as a predictor of message credibility. The majority of earlier investigations are descriptive and do not attempt to create an a priori model that can be used to forecast the effects [40,41]. In a recent work by María Victoria-Mas, Ivan Lacasa-Mas, and Frederic Marimon (2018), confirmatory factor analysis was used to analyze news media brand associations—functional associations, experiential associations (tone and packaging), and symbolic associations construct news media brand customer-based equity [41].

2.4. Research Framework

Those theories exploring the relationship between consumer brands and their consumers may not sufficiently explain the relationship between media brands and audiences. In conclusion, media brands are distinct from consumer brands in terms of supply and demand, impact, and relationship with the audience, and they operate in a highly competitive, vastly oversupplied, and platform-driven interactive market. Therefore, news media, which are low-engagement products with high societal significance in terms of political, economic, and cultural influence and compete with a substantial amount of information supply across the market, are crucial for revising and implementing branding strategies applicable to this new environment. Exploring the associations that positively influence audiences' media consumption and engagement would provide a crucial foundation for understanding how to meet audiences' needs for a seamless media brand experience across multiple platforms without sacrificing and weakening strong associations with the media brand. The research aims to define how the media brand experience forms media brand associations that significantly contribute to brand uniqueness and, therefore, media brand equity and audience choice. With a particular focus on the younger generation, which is more experience and platform-driven, the authors aim to research the significance of non-content-related or experience-based brand attributes and how those attributes correlate with brand uniqueness.

The research questions are:

What are the most significant consumption experience-related media brand attributes for Generation Z?

How do these attributes contribute to strong, favourable, and unique news media brand associations? Which associations significantly contribute to the development of news media brand uniqueness?

Suppose client experience with the product is one of the essential factors in generating strong and positive brand associations from the standpoint of a media brand. In that case, non-content-related associations are essential for establishing and maintaining brand favorability and uniqueness. This will be the hypothesis explored in this investigation.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Non-content-related media brand attributes significantly contribute to the development of brand uniqueness.*

The research aims:

Investigate the significance of the news media brand attributes that create strong, favorable and positive news media brand associations for Generation Z.

When assessing the correlation, determine which attributes significantly contribute to news media brand uniqueness.

The research objectives are:

To investigate the significance of news media brand attributes for Generation Z.

To examine the effect of attributes on the development of strong, favourable, and positive news media brand associations.

To examine the effect of each association on the uniqueness of a media brand and investigate which associations significantly contribute to a news media brand's uniqueness.

This research proposes new implications for media brand uniqueness in the multi-platform and on-demand-driven consumption market, with younger audiences in focus. This work aims to contribute to media branding in a multi-platform environment and define the role of experience in building media brand uniqueness. While most studies in media branding literature focus on content as a media brand differentiator, there is a gap in the literature on how uniqueness is built via non-content-related attributes. In an increasingly interactive multi-platform environment where social media platforms dominate the model of the uniqueness of national media brands and how brand uniqueness is developed through content experience associations is vital. The results of this study will significantly contribute to understanding media branding in a multi-platform environment and give a practical understanding of how brand attributes, especially experience-related, contribute to brand uniqueness and, therefore, more substantial brand equity.

3. Materials and Methods

For conducting the present research study, the authors have adopted the positivism philosophy as it benefits the investigator to identify the actual content of the research study. Human interests are mainly autonomous of the researcher and excluded from the positivism ideology [42]. This concept enables the author to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between the research variables. In this work, the authors have utilized a deductive methodology to examine existing theories and model new aspects of branding theory elements. The deductive method is linked to quantitative research and positivism philosophy [42]. The authors acquired information regarding the research variables of media brand attributes and uniqueness using the deductive method. Using a deductive approach, provide recommendations to strengthen the brand's uniqueness in a multi-platform context, thereby illustrating the quantitative data relevant to the research questions. The authors used an explanatory research design to more precisely consent to the evidence and tactics related to the research issue.

A quantitative survey will be employed to examine brand attributes comprehensively, as brand associations are attribute-based. Brand associations are the attributes of a brand that come into consumers' minds when the brand is discussed [4,5]. After analyzing media attributes' significance for each news media brand selected, the correlations between brand associations and brand uniqueness will be determined. Considering the consumer experience, brand associations, and uniqueness importance in the branding discussed in the literature review, decision-making tree modelling methodology and regression analyses will answer how brand uniqueness forms from brand associations and which brand associations play the most significant role in media brand uniqueness development. The research will critically evaluate the findings of a quantitative investigation to determine the strongest correlations between brand associations and uniqueness, focusing on consumption-related experience associations. Linear regression analyses were used to confirm or not the hypothesis of this research. The proposed study design would survey 15- to 24-year-old consumers to understand the importance of 14 media brand attribute-based associations and their correlation. The second data consists of statistical studies to identify how brand associations contribute to media brand uniqueness. As a result, recommendations for media branding concepts to establish and strengthen media brand uniqueness, vital for brand usage and preference, will be provided.

3.1. Research Sample and Data Sources

The research population for this study comprised all people in Latvia aged 15–24 years. Eligibility criteria outline research participants' traits to be included in the population sample [43,44]. In this study, the participants' criteria were a particular age group and

people living in Latvia. To answer the research questions and reach the research goal, quantitative research was carried out by defining the research sample. The research sample was designed using official data of a defined population in Latvia in 2021. The population is 173,659 people aged 15–24 living in Latvia.

$$X = Z\alpha/2 \times p \times (1 - p)/MOE^2 \quad (1)$$

Formula 1. Sample size calculation formula [45].

The formula $Z\alpha/2$ is the critical value of the normal distribution at $\alpha/2$, with a confidence level of 95%, α is 0.05 and a critical value of 1.96. MOE is the margin of error, p is the sample proportion, and N is the population size. The author chooses a 95% confidence level and 4.9% margin of error. Typically, a margin of error is calculated for one of three degrees of confidence: 99 per cent, 95 per cent, or 90 per cent. The level of 99 per cent is the most conservative, while the level of 90 per cent is the least conservative. The 95 per cent confidence level has been the most usual. Ninety-five per cent of the time, the “actual” percentage for the entire population will be within the margin of error surrounding a poll’s reported percentage if the confidence level is 95 per cent. The margin of error corresponds to the 95% confidence interval radius. Based on the formula and statistical practice, the research sample was defined as $n = 400$, with an error margin of 4.9%. The respondent sample was distributed accordingly to ensure a representative sample across country proportions between respondents living regions, demographics, and gender. A total of 15–24-year-olds were separated into 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds based on age parameters. This is because respondents in the broader age range of 15 to 24 varied substantially regarding education, interests, and media usage patterns. The corresponding sample size design verifies natural distribution in all populations and protects against data’s uneven representation. Skewness and kurtosis tests were performed to test data distribution for dependent variables and measured factors. Coefficients for both tests range from -1.0 to $+1.0$, indicating acceptable data distribution for further analysis. The first respondent criteria were to identify whether the respondent uses news media in the Latvian language at least once per week—the reason behind the criteria was to reach those respondents who were regular Latvian news media users. As the respondents had to answer ten end-choice and multiple-choice questions representing their news media brand experience, only media users were selected to be able to evaluate their media consumption experience. Therefore, from the perspective of the news media audience, the user who consumes media at least once per week can be considered a regular media user.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

To reach the research objectives to determine and evaluate consumption experience-related news media brand attributes that create favorable news media brand associations for Generation Z, examine the effect of each association on the uniqueness of a media brand, and propose new implications of media brand distinctiveness to attract and keep Generation Z audience in the multi-platform and on-demand driven consumption market, the quantitative survey were developed accordingly. The survey questions were based on choice scenarios and could be divided into two parts. Part D’s questions surveyed the sample size structure and applicability to the respondents’ group. The respondents were asked how often they use particular news media brands to determine respondents who use particular news brands once per week. For example, if for question D2, the respondent chose answer less often, the survey was finished for this person as not applicable to the criteria. After the respondents were correctly characterized and weighted, the ten questions A1–A10 were applied to measure the following:

- Respondents’ choice and usage of particular news media, questions A2–A4;
- The frequency of usage; the news media access points, questions A7; A8;
- The engagement with particular news media, question A4;

- The importance of 14 selected media brand attributes and evaluation of these attributes towards selected news media brands and used and engaged news media brands, questions A1; A9;
- The importance of 14 selected media brand attributes and evaluation of these attributes to not use and engage with news media brands, question A10;
- Respondents’ evaluation of selected news media brands regarding brand importance (equity) to the respondent, question A5;
- Respondents’ evaluation of selected news media brands, in terms of the level of uniqueness and distinctiveness, question A6.

Table 1 details the question’s structure and answers design, using the semantic differential scale approach and extending the standardized approach from a 5- or 7-point scale to a 10-point scale to increase accuracy for selected sample size respondents. The semantic differential technique was developed by Charles E. Osgood, who designed it to measure the connotations of words or concepts [46]. Attitudes are often measured using self-report measures, such as the semantic differential, in which a person scores the target on bipolar evaluative dimensions, such as how good/bad or favourable/unfavourable it is. When using a semantic differential scale, the researcher must calculate and provide Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency reliability. Internal consistency reliability refers to the extent to which items on an instrument are consistent within themselves and with the overall instrument. Cronbach’s alpha measures the internal consistency reliability of an instrument by assessing how each item in the instrument relates to each other and to the overall number of questions [47]. The authors performed Cronbach’s alpha test to ensure data validity. All tests are described further in this article’s data and analyses section.

Table 1. The sample size distribution. Latvia, May 2022.

		Planned	Achieved
		Count	Count
All respondents		400	400
How often do you read news in the Latvian language, e.g., visiting news portals, using their mobile apps or seeing their posts on social media?	Several times a day	0	111
	At least once a day	0	129
	Several times a week	0	84
	At least once a week	0	76
	Less often	0	0
Age groups	15–19	200	192
	20–24	200	208
Gender	Male	200	194
	Female	200	206
Region grouped	Riga region	200	199
	Other	200	201
Region detailed	Rīga	0	157
	Pierīga	0	42
	Vidzeme	0	71
	Kurzeme	0	57
	Zemgale	0	40
	Latgale	0	33
Settlement type	Rīga	0	157
	Large city	0	69
	Small town	0	119
	Rural area	0	55

As seen in the mentioned data table, the first respondent criteria were to identify whether the respondent uses news media in the Latvian language at least once per week—the reason behind the criteria was to reach those respondents who were regular Latvian news media users. As the respondents had to answer ten end-choice and multiple-choice questions representing their news media brand experience, only media users were selected to be able to evaluate their media consumption experience. Therefore, from the perspective of the news media audience, users who consume media at least once per week can be considered regular media users.

As categorized in Table 2, 16 variables were tested for each media: 14 attributes, brand importance, and uniqueness. The selected fourteen media brand attributes represent content-related and non-content-related media brand associations, such as consumption-related associations. The following Table 2 groups attribute. The selected media brand attributes can be a product or content-related and non-product or non-content-related. Different media attributes form the perceived value of the media, which is known to influence consumers’ brand attitudes. Entertainment, informativeness, and irritation are relevant media attributes [48]. Consumers also evaluate the media’s credibility [9] and product involvement [1,11]. This study defines brand attitude as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner toward the brand [49]. All brand attributes form brand associations. The non-content-related brand associations were measured and connected to comprehend how content consumption experience influences media brand associations and whether these attributes contribute to brand uniqueness.

Table 2. The media brand content-related and non-content-related brand attributes.

Content Related	Non-Content Related
1. The content matches my interests	4. My friends use it too
2. Credible	5. Engage celebrities in their projects
3. I like their authors, journalists	6. Look distinctive, unique
	7. Users can engage in content creation
	8. Use attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, videos
	9. Post interesting content on social networks
	10. In social media, use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories etc.
	11. Leading news media
	12. Look nice, attractive
	13. Present on platforms which I use (e.g., Youtube or my favourite social networks)
	14. Their posts often generate a lot of views, reactions, and reposts

The eight news media brands in the Latvian language were selected for this questionnaire, based on monthly and weekly media audience data with the highest number of real users in all measured populations 7–74 years old from 1 January 2022–31 January 2022 [50]. One news media brand rebranded as tv3.lv from skaties.lv. Consequently, the audience data is displayed per the new brand identities. The brand identified in the survey during data collection is tv3.lv. The research survey was conducted online in Latvian from 1 April 2022 to 7 May 2022. As mentioned in the previous section, the target group was people aged 15–24 who read news online in the Latvian language at least once a week using any platform (e.g., news portal, mobile app, or social media). The fieldwork was conducted using the global market survey company Intra Research’s proprietary online panel database.

Table 3 shows the complete fieldwork report where the seen number of invitations sent out was 3588, non-response was 2809, started interviews 779, screened out or respondents not applicable (for example, not in particular age group or using news media

in the Latvian language less than once per week). The quota-fills count was 68 respondents that fit in the already fulfilled age or demographic sample group. Drop-outs reached 127, and complete interviews reached 400 respondents; the research survey calculated the necessary sample size.

Table 3. Survey fieldwork report, Latvia, May 2022.

Number of invitations	3588
Non-response	2809
Started interviews	779
Screened-outs	184
Quota-fulls	68
Drop-outs	127
Complete interviews	400

Data distribution analyses were performed to ensure data validity, and the normal distribution of data ensured quantitative survey and data reliability. Additionally, the respondent sample was distributed accordingly to ensure a representative sample across country proportions between respondents living regions, demographics, and gender. A total of 15–24-year-olds were separated into 15–19- and 20–24-year-olds based on age parameters. This is since respondents in the broader age range of 15 to 24 varied substantially regarding education, interests, and media usage patterns [2]. The corresponding sample size design verifies natural distribution in all populations and protects against data’s uneven representation. The following table shows the sample size distribution between respondent gender, sub-age group, region, and settlement type. This distribution allows for confirming the respondent weights accurately. The following table describes the distribution.

3.3. Data Analysis Methods

To fulfil the research objective, different statistical tests have been applied. The software of SPSS and RapidMiner has been used to run the tests efficiently. All invalid responses were purged, and SPSS software was used to prepare and analyze the data. Three tests are specifically used: correlation analyses, linear regression model, and decision tree model. The analyses were performed in 2 steps to answer the research questions and test the research hypothesis:

Step 1: In the first phase, to answer the research question about the most significant consumption experience-related media brand attributes for Generation Z, the cross-table in Excel format was utilized to determine the mean of all 14 media brand attributes among the selected news media brands (question A1). Respondents measured all attributes on the 10-point scale, where 1 was very poor, and 10 was excellent for each news media brand. For questions A2–A4, a similar cross-table approach was used to determine the mean of each news media brand’s consumption and engagement.

The means for each news media usage frequency, access point, and brand attribute valuation were determined to measure brand engagement and frequency (questions A7–A9). Calculations based on cross-tables were used to evaluate each news media brand’s appraisal on a uniqueness scale and brand equity (importance) (questions A5–A6). This first step of analysis lets the determine what each news media brand means in different evaluation aspects: 14 brand attributes, perceived uniqueness, and brand equity. Additionally, consumption frequency, access points, and engagement. This allows to answer the questions in which media brand attributes build favourable and positive brand associations, and the determination of the means will validate the selection of the attributes with the highest means in the subsequent statistical studies for the decision tree technique. The means comparison will assist studies of media brands and their respective brand attributes and

provide information regarding the significance of each attribute for the selected audience. The first step justifies the selection of 3 news media brands with the highest mean levels in all media attributes, uniqueness, and brand equity (importance) for the next step for statistical analyses to build correlation models between media attributes (associations) and uniqueness and test the hypothesis. Based on data, to answer the question of how these attributes contribute to the strong, favorable, and unique news media brand associations, the authors analyzed the significance of each news media attribute, as well as each news media attribute evaluation by the audience; then, brand attribution formation score and brand attribute power scores were calculated for each news media brand.

Step2: In Step 2, linear regression analyses were used to test the hypothesis regarding whether non-content-related media brand attributes significantly contribute to the development of brand uniqueness. The decision tree method was performed to answer the research question of how these associations contribute to the development of news media brand uniqueness. Two correlation models were used for all research analyses: linear regression and decision tree techniques. Regression was carried out to determine the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables of the dependent variables research [51]. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between independent and dependent variables to analyze the data. For this step, the data set under consideration for this research, the dependent variable, was news media brand uniqueness and distinctiveness.

On the other hand, independent variables are all 14 brand attributes. Therefore, the dependent variable was brand uniqueness and distinctiveness, the factors respondents answered in question A6, on a 10-point scale, where 1 is similar to other news media brands and 10 means unique and distinctive. All independent variables were mentioned on the 10-point scale, where 1 was very poor and 10 was excellent. Media attributes were considered significant when statistical significance was lower than 0.05. Cronbach’s alpha tests were performed to ensure reliability for all media attributes. This test, developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951, measures reliability or internal consistency [47]. This test supports seeing if semantic differential scale surveys are reliable. These questions measure latent variables—hidden or unobservable variables, such as a person’s conscientiousness, neurosis, or openness. These are very difficult to measure in real life. Cronbach’s alpha will tell how closely related a set of test items are as a group. None of the media attributes was lower than 0.9 of this coefficient, ensuring applicability for the models. For the total model strength evaluation, R-square coefficients were applied. The value of R-square determines that the independent variables can determine the dependent variable. R-square values close to 0.5 were considered high or good for regressional tests in the social sciences to value the model strength.

Additionally, before modelling, a correlation analysis of the attribute ratings was performed to exclude closely related model factors. Multicollinearity exists anytime an independent variable in a multiple regression equation is substantially associated with one or more additional independent variables. Multicollinearity is an issue since it diminishes the statistical significance of an independent variable. The summary of data reliability and validity tests is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of statistical tests to ensure model quality and reliability.

Coefficients and Tests	Reasoning	Criteria
Cronbach’s Alpha tests	Reliability	No lower than 0.9
Significance	To determine the significance of media attribute	Lower than 0.05
R2	Model strength	Close to 0.5, higher than 0.3
Accuracy coefficient	Model strength (decision tree)	Higher than 70%

Decision-tree models were performed to establish the correlation between media attributes and media brand uniqueness. Models used respondents base: Delfi N = 340,

TV3.lv N = 226, and LSM N = 199. Linear regression was performed to test this research hypothesis. For linear regression, SPSS software was used.

In addition to linear regression, the decision tree technic was performed to find the correlation between media attributes and brand uniqueness. A decision tree is supervised machine learning used to categorize or make predictions based on how a previous question was answered. A model is a form of supervised learning, meaning that the model is trained and tested on a data set containing the desired categorization. Similarly, the dependent variable is brand uniqueness. On the other hand, independent variables are all 14 brand attributes. All independent variables were on mentioned 10-point scale, where 1 was very poor, and 10 was excellent. For dependent variables for brand uniqueness, the factors respondents answered in question A6, on a 10-point scale, where 1 was similar to other news media brands and 10 meant unique and distinctive. In this research, the continuous variable decision tree was applied. A continuous variable decision tree is one where there is not a simple yes or no answer. It is also known as a regression tree because the decision or outcome variable depends on other decisions farther up the tree or the type of choice involved. A continuous variable decision tree benefits from the fact that the outcome can be predicted based on multiple variables rather than on a single variable, as in a categorical variable decision tree. Continuous variable decision trees are used to create predictions. The tree structure's simple flowchart is one of the fastest methods to identify significant variables and relationships between two or more variables. The media attributes significance based on weight coefficients. These dependent variables were remodelled in binominal form (yes/no unique) to the valuations 8–10 in the mentioned scale and assigned a "unique" value.

On the other hand, independent variables evaluate 14 brand attributes of particular news media. Similar data accuracy of model strengths coefficients was applied. The media attributes significance based on weight coefficients. For model strength, the accuracy coefficients were applied—the choice of attributes, based on weighted means, the higher choice. For decision tree modelling, RapidMiner software was used.

Both models were built and analyzed for the one news media brand with the highest means of evaluated media attributes.

4. Results

4.1. Significance of Media Brand Attributes

As described in the previous section, to reach the research objective, the first analysis of quantitative survey data determined the means of each attribute for each news media brand and analyzed the importance of each attribute to the audience. First, the importance of each of the 14 attributes of the audience where measured. As summarized in Table 5, the two content-related attributes, *content that matches my interest* and *credibility*, are the news media attributes with the higher importance, with mean values measured at 7.4 for *content much my interest* and 7.7 for *credibility*. This, of course, supports the factor of content as the news media product and credibility of the news media as the basis or hygiene factor in choosing the brand. If the main reason for consuming news media content is to be kept updated, these two attributes are primary for building positive and favourable brand associations, but let us look at how consumption-related attributes contribute. As the research focus is on non-content-related or, in this study, defined as consumption-related attributes, the significance of non-content-related attributes is determined. It is seen that the following highest important attribute is *news media presence on social media platforms the audience use*. This attribute was weighted 6.9 by the audience, 7.4 for the female demographic group, and 7.0 for the 15–19 years old audience. This confirms that being available on multi-platforms and on-demand is highly important for the news media brand.

Table 5. The significance of each news media attribute, as evaluated by the audience, 15–25 years old, Latvia.

		Content Matches My Interests	Credible	I Like Their Authors, Journalists	My Friends Use It Too	Engage Celebrities in Their Projects	Look Distinctive, Unique	Users Can Engage into Content Creation	Use Attractive Special Formats, e.g., Blogs, Podcasts, Videos	Post Interesting Content on Social Networks	In Social Media, Use Relevant Features, e.g., Video, Live Stories etc.	Leading News Media	Look Nice, Attractive	Present on Platforms Which I Use (e.g., Youtube or My Favourite Social Networks)	Their Posts Often Generate a Lot of Views, Reactions, Reposts
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
All respondents		7.4	7.7	6.3	5.7	5.8	6.2	5.6	6.1	6.5	6.2	6.5	6.6	6.9	6.0
Age groups	15–19	7.4	7.8	6.3	5.7	5.9	6.4	5.6	6.2	6.7	6.1	6.3	6.6	7.0	6.1
	20–24	7.4	7.6	6.2	5.7	5.7	6.1	5.6	6.0	6.4	6.3	6.7	6.7	6.8	5.9
Gender	Male	6.9	7.0	6.0	5.6	5.6	6.2	5.5	5.7	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.2	6.3	5.7
	Female	7.8	8.3	6.5	5.7	6.0	6.3	5.7	6.5	7.1	6.5	7.0	7.0	7.4	6.3
Region	Riga region	7.3	7.8	6.3	5.6	5.7	6.1	5.5	5.9	6.3	6.1	6.6	6.7	6.9	5.8
	Other	7.4	7.5	6.2	5.7	5.9	6.3	5.7	6.3	6.8	6.4	6.5	6.5	6.9	6.2

The following two higher-rated attributes of importance are *looking nice and attractive*, evaluated at **6.6** on average, *posting interesting content on social networks*, with **6.5** mean, and *leading news media* at **6.5** on average. This gives a basis for the assumption that content itself and the look of how content is presented is essential for this audience. Delivering this content on-demand is essential, as well. Having *leadership associations* is highly valued by this audience, especially for the age group 20–24. *Look distinctive and unique* was valued as **6.2** importance, with an even higher mean in the age group 15–19 years old—**6.4**. Two attributes with the lowest importance mean are pretty surprising, as, in the literature analyzed before, these attributes were often presumed to the higher importance. These two are: *my friend used too*, with a **5.7** importance mean, and *users can engage in content creation*, with a **5.6** importance score.

To summarize, news media’s content and credibility are the more critical factors. However, how the audience experiences the content is highly significant. Being present on social media platforms, having an attractive, unique, and nice content delivery form, and leadership associations are essential attributes for news media brands in a multi-platform environment to create strong, positive, and favourable brand associations.

4.2. Media Brand Access Points

If social media presence is significant, it is worth investigating how the audience reaches a particular media brand. Data from survey question A8 let us analyze the media brand consumption points. Table 6 shows the audience-stated media brand access points. Direct news media access was proportionally highest for all mentioned news media brands. News media brands nra.lv and la.lv had the highest direct website content consumption percentage of 79% and 70%, respectively. The next more usual access point was Facebook. Facebook, as a news media brand content consumption point, is for news media brands tv3.lv, with 51%, very close to this news media brand direct website access rate (58%), and la.lv, with 47%. The mobile app as an assessing point is the next access point for almost all news media, closely followed by Instagram as an access point. After direct website visits, the authors assume that the audience access points are distributed between social media platforms and other access points. This confirms that multi-platform and on-demand content consumption were present for this audience, and the danger of a decrease in brand associations is quite significant, as more than four platforms can be used.

Table 6. Evaluation of news media brand access points among audiences aged 15 to 24 in Latvia in 2022.

	Delfi.lv	Diena.lv	Jauns.lv	La.lv	Lsm.lv	Nra.lv	Tv3.lv	Tvnet.lv
Another social platform	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%	3%	2%	1%
Facebook	37%	38%	32%	47%	37%	34%	51%	39%
Instagram	19%	22%	15%	20%	21%	20%	27%	17%
Mobile app	31%	28%	28%	20%	21%	17%	34%	23%
Tiktok	18%	38%	15%	17%	9%	15%	22%	19%
Twitter	7%	28%	11%	13%	11%	15%	11%	11%
Website	66%	53%	68%	70%	67%	79%	58%	68%
Youtube	6%	19%	9%	7%	5%	5%	21%	9%

This evidence significantly supports the validity of the research aims. It is evident that news media branding on their own website is simple and effective brand management, but since brand access points are so frequently outside the news media brand platform, how can we build these brand connections and distinctiveness? What does it take to be a unique and strong brand outside your own platform and deliver these associations across multiple access points? What are the strengths of the news media brand for association formation outside of their platform?

4.3. Brand Associations' Formation Power Score

The brand attributes are fundamental for strong, favorable brand associations. The previous section analyzed and determined the most significant ones. However, brands need the power to format these attributes to the audience. Therefore, not only is determining which ones are most important but there is also a need to analyze how strong each news media formats these associations. Therefore, brand associations are attribute-based, and those attributes' strengths define the brand associations' strengths [4,5,8,16].

Nevertheless, how the attributes are delivered to the audience is essential. In order to have a chance to form associations, the audience should have to be in contact with those brand attributes. The more frequent the brand contact, the stronger associations become. Strength and favorability develop from brand engagement. The more engaged the audience is with the brand, the more favourable these associations are [4,20,24]. Before analyzing each news media brand's attribute strength, the authors developed the brand association formation score to determine its power to contact and engage the audience with their brand to form strong and favourable associations. Therefore, three measures are analyzed to build a score: brand usage, frequency, and brand engagement. The news media brand was then measured by giving the score depending on its brand usage, frequency, and engagement. The brand is assigned a score between 1 and 8; eight news brands have been investigated. A score of 8 is awarded to the brand with the highest usage. If second place is in usage, a score of seven is awarded. As follows, the least used will be scored 1 point. The brand association formation power score is determined by the total scores of the three measured elements with the higher totals.

Using data from survey questions A2–A4, the author analyzed each news media usage, frequency, and engagement in this study, defined as following the news media brand on social media platforms. Different social media platforms are highly used content access points; therefore, the audience, as follows, is crucial for the news media brands. Additionally, the frequency of news media brands is crucial. As discussed before, the news media product is low involvement and continuous. Therefore, attracting the audience daily and weekly is essential from a news brand management perspective, as is attracting advertising and strengthening brand associations. The strengths of brand associations depend on brand frequency. The more a brand is used, the stronger the associations become.

For the first data used, the authors analyzed brand consumption. The most used news media brands by this audience were delfi.lv, tvnet.lv, tv3.lv, and lsm.lv. These brands have the highest percentages of recent use and following on social media.

In order to more precisely assign frequency scores, the authors used data from the survey's A7 question regarding audience response for each media usage frequency. A total of five choices were given: several times a day; at least once a day; several times a week; at least once a week; or less often than once a week. The scores were assigned from the highest to lowest amount of audience visits to the particular news media several times a day, adding at least once a day and once a week. A news media with a higher percentage of audience with these three frequency behaviours would be assigned the score of 8, with the following then assigned according to described scoring approach. As seen on Table 7, the higher frequency of the audience visits was for delfi.lv and tv3.lv—69%, followed by tvnet.lv—66%; la.lv—62%; lsm.lv—60%; jauns.lv and diena.lv—59% and nra.lv—53%. The highest proportions of the audience that use and follow social media are for brands delfi.lv and tv3.lv. The authors of this study define this as engagement. The delfi.lv news media brand is the leader in all aspects, in terms of ever used, used recently. Despite following the next, tvnet.lv in the ever used and used recently categories, tvnet.lv was only fourth after lsm.lv and tv3.lv in terms of engagement. The engagement scores were assigned based not on the audience following these brand percentages but a higher percentage between audience usage and following. This allows determine more precisely between usage and following on social media. The higher proportion of followers from the brand audience, the higher engagement with the brand. Delfi.lv leads with 46%, followed by tv3.lv with a

high 36% in third place, in terms of usage; then, lsm.lv with 31% leaves tvnet.lv, and the second-used brand was only in fourth place with 28%.

Table 7. The brand associations formation score summary for each of the 8 news media brands, audience 15–24 years old, Latvia, 2022.

	Tvnet.lv	Delfi.lv	Jauns.lv	La.lv	Nra.lv	Lsm.lv	Tv3.lv	Diena.lv
Consumption score	7	8	4	2	1	5	6	3
Frequency score	6	8	3	5	1	4	8	3
Engagement score	5	8	4	1	2	6	7	3
Brand associations' formation power score	18	24	11	8	4	15	21	9

The power score lets us analyze the brand strength to deliver associations to the audience. In this aspect, the two strongest brands are delfi.lv with 24 scores, highly scored in all three elements, and tv3.lv with 21 scores. The research data clearly show that consumption volume is not the only aspect defining brand association formation strengths. For example, being the second-most used brand, tvnet.lv was only third in frequency and fourth in engagement.

On the other hand, despite being the third-most used brand, tv3.lv was number one in frequency and second engagement, thus reaching a high power score. This analysis can support news media brands in finding their improvement points and regarding how to deliver and form associations with this audience, considering associations formatting points—their media brand access points. Furthermore, access points are many and very frequently on multi-platforms—further, the analyses how this correlates with the strength of each brand attribute.

4.4. Brand Attributes' Power Score

After analyzing the importance of media attributes and formation power scores, the analyses of the attribute strengths for each news media brand were measured. The authors used data from survey question A9, which asked respondents to measure on a scale of 1 to 10 for each news media in 14 media attributes. As seen in Table 8, *credibility* and *content much my interest*, two higher evaluated media brand attributes, attribute—*content much my interests*, delfi.lv leads with 6.7, then lsm.lv 6.6, and tv3.lv with 6.5. *Credibility* is the first and most important attribute of lsm.lv's lead, with a high 7.1 score, then delfi.lv and tv3.lv follow with 6.7. If we look at content-consumption-related attributes, the most important one is *present on the social media platform I use*, of which tv3.lv rated the highest—6.4, followed by delfi.lv and lsm.lv—6.2. The next most important attribute are *looking nice and attractive*; the highest evaluations go to delfi.lv and tv3.lv—6.7, followed by lsm.lv—6.5. The next most important attribute to the audience is *posting interesting content on social media platforms*; the highest evaluation goes to tv3.lv, followed by delfi.lv—6.5 and lsm.lv—6.4. *The leading news media* attribute the higher score evaluated to lsm.lv—6.9, then delfi.lv—6.8 and tv3.lv—6.7. For *looks distinctive and unique*, the highest attribute evaluation was for tv3.lv—6.5, followed by lsm.lv—6.4 and delfi.lv—6.3. On average, the higher evaluation of all attributes was for tv3.lv—6.5, delfi.lv—6.4, and lsm.lv—6.3.

The matching scoring is applied to each news media brand's attribute strengths to consider the audience's importance for each attribute. First, each attribute importance score was assigned from values 1 to 14, as there were 14 media attributes measured. The most important one received a score of 14, and the least significant received a score of 1—each attribute has a score. Then, each news media brand was assigned a score depending on the rating level for each attribute. For example, a score of 8 was granted to the news media brand with the highest score in this attribute evaluation, as eight news media brands were analyzed. The brand score was then multiplied by the attribute score to determine the strength of the news brand in this attribute, as seen in Table 9.

Table 8. News media attribution evaluation by audience 15–24 years old, mean calculations, Latvia, 2022.

	Delfi.lv	Diena.lv	Jauns.lv	La.lv	Lsm.lv	Nra.lv	Tv3.lv	Tvnet.lv
Credible	6.7	6.1	5.7	5.9	7.1	6.0	6.7	6.2
Leading news media	6.8	5.8	5.7	5.8	6.9	5.4	6.7	6.3
Content matches my interests	6.7	5.8	5.7	5.8	6.6	5.4	6.5	6.2
Look nice, attractive	6.7	5.7	5.6	5.6	6.5	5.5	6.7	6.0
Their posts often generate a lot of views, reactions, reposts	6.6	5.6	5.7	5.6	6.3	5.6	6.5	6.1
Post interesting content on social networks	6.5	5.7	5.8	5.5	6.4	5.6	6.7	6.0
Engage celebrities in their projects	6.3	5.7	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.4	6.6	5.8
I like their authors, journalists	6.2	5.6	5.6	5.5	6.3	5.3	6.4	5.8
Look distinctive, unique	6.3	5.5	5.5	5.3	6.4	5.3	6.5	5.7
Present on platforms which I use (e.g., Youtube or my favourite social networks)	6.2	5.4	5.3	5.3	6.2	5.3	6.4	5.7
Use attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, videos	6.2	5.6	5.3	5.1	6.1	5.3	6.3	5.6
In social media, use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories etc.	6.4	5.4	5.3	5.1	6.0	5.2	6.3	5.7
My friends use it too	6.5	5.4	5.4	4.9	6.1	5.1	6.3	5.7
Users can engage into content creation	5.9	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.6	5.2	6.3	5.5

Table 9. The news media assigned attribute importance calculation ratings to 15- to 24-year-old audiences, Latvia, 2022.

Attribute	Attribute Mean, Importance	Importance Score Assigned
The content matches my interests	7.4	13
Credibility	7.7	14
I like their authors, journalists	6.3	8
My friends use it too	5.7	2
Engage celebrities in their projects	5.8	3
Look distinctive, unique	6.2	7
Users can engage in content creation	5.6	1
Use attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, videos	6.1	5
Post interesting content on social networks	6.5	10
In social media, use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories etc	6.2	7
Leading news media	6.5	10
Look nice, attractive	6.6	11
Present on platforms which I use (e.g., Youtube or my favourite social networks)	6.9	12
Their posts often generate a lot of views, reactions, reposts	6.0	4

To evaluate each news media brand’s attribute score, the authors examine the news brand attribute power scores by multiplying the attribute score by the brand score to determine the strength of the news brand in this attribute.

Scoring the attribute and brand evaluation accordingly, the study shows that lsm.lv led with the highest power score in *credibility*, closely followed by delfi.lv and tv3.lv. As described in Table 10, The second-most important attribute, *content much my interest*, delfi.lv, had the highest score among others, followed by lsm.lv and tv3.lv, accordingly. In order to directly analyze the content-related attributes, the highest score was lsm.lv with 259 scores, followed by delfi.lv with 250 scores and tv3.lv with 240 scores. The weights

and evaluation of experience-based attributes, non-content-related attributes, or how the audience consumes the media brand product, i.e., content, adds another valuable aspect to this study. The highest experience-based attribute score was evaluated for the tv3.lv brand, followed by delfi.lv and lsm.lv with 471 scores, which was a directly opposite sequence to that of the content-related score. Adding all attributes scores for each brand, the highest total brand’s attribute power score was for tv3.lv with 781 scores, second was delfi.lv with 771 scores, and third was lsm.lv with 730 scores. The second-most visited news brand in Latvia tvnet.lv, with the second-highest unique users’ audience volumes, comes only in fourth place both in content- and experience-related brand attributes. The authors state that this lets us assume that news media brand content consumption is not enough to create strong and favorable brand associations and build brand uniqueness and equity. This confirms that even news brands with high monthly users need to ensure brand engagement to increase brand association formation scores and attribute power scores. Lsm.lv had higher content-related attribute scores with high credibility, but the low-frequency score cannot strengthen the experience-related attributes enough to keep the leading position in the total attribute power zone. The tv3.lv consumption score was lower than that of delfi.lv and tvnet.lv, which succeeded in having the highest experience-based attributes scores and had the highest total attribute power score of the news media brand. Again, even with lower consumption, the news media brand may have stronger and more favorable brand associations if the association formation score is high and, therefore, let form and strengthen experience-based attributes. Delfi.lv, the news brand with the highest monthly audience in all age groups, including 15–24 years old, with the highest formation power score and second highest content relation attribute scores, lost to tv3.lv in experience-based attributes scores, thus landing in second place for the total attribute power score.

Table 10. The media attribute power scores to a 15- to 24-year-old audience in Latvia in 2022.

	Tvnet.lv	Delfi.lv	Jauns.lv	La.lv	Nra.lv	Lsm.lv	Tv3.lv	Diena.lv
Consumption score	7	8	4	2	1	5	6	3
Frequency score	6	8	3	5	1	4	8	3
Engagement score	5	8	4	1	2	6	7	3
Brand associations’ formation power score	18	24	11	8	4	15	21	9
Content-related attribute score	175	250	72	96	63	259	240	140
Non-content related attributes score	360	521	229	127	174	471	541	274
Total attributes power score	535	771	301	263	237	730	781	414

The attribute power scores in this study should only be considered suggestive since scoring was based solely on mean ranking and did not account for the mean level of each attribute relative to other attribute means. In addition, the authors applied brand scores based on ranking without considering the variance in attribute means between brands. Sometimes the attribute evaluation resulted in a slight difference between brands, such as 0.1 or 0.4, but the rating focused on the brands’ order. Nonetheless, this equation significantly influenced how media branding attributes influence brand association formation. First, the authors do not explicitly claim that experience-based attributes are more significant than content-based attributes; the existing scoring mechanism does not allow this assumption. However, the presented studies suggest the importance of frequency and engagement in forming associations. Second, experience-based attributes are essential for establishing strong, favourable, and positive brand associations. The next question is how these attribution power scores contribute to brand uniqueness. Does the higher total attribute power score correlate with higher brand uniqueness?

4.5. Media Brand Uniqueness

Before proceeding to the following research step on how these associations contribute to news media brand uniqueness development, the authors analyzed how the respondents evaluated each news media brand in uniqueness. In survey question A5, the audience evaluated each news media brand on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “Very similar to other news media” and 10 means “Unique, distinctive”. The authors analyzed the means for each media brand to calculate the ranking and comparison between media brands. Table 11 summarizes the evaluation of all news media brands. News brand tv3.lv had the highest mean—6.3. The respondents evaluated this media as the most unique and distinctive, especially in the age group between 20–24. The tv3.lv brand had the highest indicative attribution and indicative experience-based attribution power scores. In the next step, the authors used linear regression analyses and decision tree modelling to analyze how these attributes contribute to brand uniqueness. However, already at this stage, it is possible to assume that strong and favourable experience-based attributes, frequency, and engagement are crucial for forming brand uniqueness. The subsequent highest uniqueness evaluation means were assigned to delfi.lv and lsm.lv—6.1. Both these news brands had the second/third-highest attribution power scores. Even the lsm.lv frequency had lower scores, high content, and non-content-related attributions correlated with high evaluation in brand uniqueness. Delfi.lv was a strong favorite in all attribute aspects and brand uniqueness. The authors state that the correlation studies were conducted in the subsequent research stage; however, it was based on the assertion that experience-based attributes, engagement, and frequency positively influence news brand distinctiveness. Tvnet.lv, the second-most used news media brand in Latvia by all audience age groups, lands in only fourth place in both brand attribute power score evaluation and uniqueness. Similar ratings were given to the distinctness of four other news brands, with a mean score of 5.3. Intriguingly, despite obtaining the lowest brand attribute scores in content-related and overall attribute power scores for nra.lv, nra.lv, jauns.lv, la.lv, and diena.lv all received comparable uniqueness ratings.

Table 11. News media uniqueness, as evaluated by a 15- to 24-year-old audience in Latvia, 2022.

		Tvnet lv	Delfi lv	Jauns lv	La lv	Nra lv	Lsm lv	Tv3 lv	Diena lv
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
All respondents		6.1	6.8	5.7	5.4	5.3	6.7	6.3	5.5
Age groups	15–19	6.1	6.7	5.6	5.5	5.0	6.7	5.9	5.6
	20–24	6.2	6.8	5.8	5.3	5.5	6.7	6.7	5.5
Gender	Male	6.3	6.8	6.1	5.4	5.2	6.3	6.0	5.9
	Female	6.0	6.7	5.4	5.4	5.4	7.0	6.6	5.3
Region	Riga region	6.0	6.9	5.3	5.1	5.0	6.9	5.9	5.3
	Other	6.3	6.6	6.1	5.8	5.8	6.5	6.7	5.8

To summarize the findings from this research phase, the author states that news brand usage is insufficient for building strong, favourable, and unique brand associations. Being able to shape and develop strong and positive associations between usage frequency and engagement is crucial. Content-related attributes are the basis of news brand choice and significantly influence brand importance, even when the frequency is lower, as in the case of lsm.lv brand, the highest evaluated in brand attributes. The authors state that experience-based or non-content-related attributes are crucial for forming brand uniqueness and importance in a multi-platform environment where the brand access points exceed four. The audience demands content delivery via social platforms and requires content to be delivered appropriately, attractively, and on-demand. Therefore, experience-based solid attributes deliver more vital media brand attributes.

A great example is a tv3.lv brand, where the highest experience-related attribute score ensured the highest uniqueness evaluation from the audience, despite being in third place in content-related attribute evaluation. The highest experience-based attribute significance evaluated by the audience is for attributes—*post interesting content on social media and use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories, etc., leading news media, look nice, attractive, distinctive, present on platforms that I use (e.g., Youtube or my favourite social networks)*. Despite the assumption that younger audiences highly value user engagement in content creation and the influence of peers is significant, the media brand attributes “Users can engage in content creation, My friends also use it”, and “The media involves celebrities in content creation” received the lowest importance ratings from the audience. The significance of a media attribute is determined, but how these associations interact with one another and in what order determines the uniqueness of a brand. As evidenced by the research, the significance of attribute power can impact brand uniqueness. Therefore, the authors aimed to use linear regression and the decision tree technique to build a media brand uniqueness model and find the highly correlated news media brand attributes for media brand uniqueness. This research justifies the selection of one media brand with the highest mean levels of all media attributes and uniqueness for the next step of statistical analysis to develop correlation models between media attributes (associations) and uniqueness. The media brand uniqueness model will describe how brand associations lead to unique associations in the target audience’s minds.

4.6. Media Brand Uniqueness Model

In Step 2, linear regression analyses and the decision tree method were performed to answer the research question—How do these associations contribute to the development of news media brand uniqueness?—and test the research hypothesis. Two statistical models were used for all research analyses: linear regression and decision tree techniques. The authors chose one media brand with the highest evaluation scores in attribute strength and uniqueness to build media uniqueness models—delfi.lv. The basis for each model was respondents who ever used the responding news media brand. Accordingly, delfi.lv N = 340. Before modelling, multicollinearity analyses were performed to exclude closely related model factors.

Delfi.lv Brand Uniqueness Model

To test the hypothesis, the authors performed linear regression analyses to see whether and how non-content-related media attributes correlated and developed brand uniqueness. The linear regression-obtained analyses and significance details data are described in Table A1 in Appendix A. Linear regression analyses confirmed the hypothesis that non-content-related brand attributes significantly contributed to brand uniqueness. Four media brand attributes correlated with brand uniqueness, significance or p -value below 0.05. These attributes are one content-related attribute and three non-content-related attributes, thus confirming the research hypothesis that non-content-related brand attributes significantly contribute to brand uniqueness. The attribute with the highest significance (0.011 p -values) to brand uniqueness was *look distinctive and unique*. The contribution to uniqueness is high (0.187 unstandardized B) if these associations are strong and favourable. For example, the following attribute playing significance is the *I like journalists, authors* content-related attribute (p -value 0.026, unstandardized B 0.164) and *users can engage in content creation*, which is a non-content-related brand attribute (p -value 0.022, unstandardized B 0.146) that correlates with brand uniqueness. Table A1 illustrates the linear regression analyses, significance of each media brand attribute, and impact on delfi.lv uniqueness. One of the media brand attributes—the presence of the platforms I use—showed a high significance level (0.009); however, the contribution regarding uniqueness presented with -0.183 , leading the authors to believe that this attribute can negatively influence media brand uniqueness.

The first media brand uniqueness model shows delfi.lv attribute correlation to the development of delfi.lv uniqueness association. The decision tree model shows how different brand attributes contribute to news media brand uniqueness. The decision tree method shows how one attribute contributes to the next and forms audience choice accordingly. The decision tree algorithm belongs to the family of algorithms for supervised learning.

In contrast to other supervised learning algorithms, the decision tree approach can be utilised to tackle regression and classification issues. A decision tree aims to develop a training model capable of predicting the class or value of the variable of interest by studying simple choice rules learned from prior data (training data). In machine learning, classification is a two-step process, the learning and prediction steps. The model was developed based on the learning step's training data (media attributes evaluation). The model predicts the response to the given data in the prediction step. It is also known as a regression tree since the decision or outcome variable is dependent on previous decisions or the type of option involved. One continuous variable decision tree benefit is the ability to predict the outcome based on several variables, as opposed to a single variable, as in a categorical variable decision tree. Predictions are made using decision trees using continuous variables. The tree structure's simple flowchart structure is one of the fastest methods for identifying significant variables and relationships between two or more variables. The media attributes significance based on weight coefficients. These dependent variables were remodelled in binominal form (yes/no unique) to the valuations 8–10 on the mentioned scale and assigned a "unique" value.

On the other hand, independent variables evaluated 14 brand attributes of particular news media. Similar data accuracy of the model strength coefficients described was applied. The media attributes significance based on weight coefficients. For model strength, the accuracy coefficients were applied—the choice of attributes, based on weighted means, the higher the choice. For decision tree modelling, RapidMiner software was used. The root node is the node that starts the graph. A regular decision tree evaluates the variable that best splits the data [52]. So, in this research, the root node is the media attribute that is more likely to be a starting point for the audience to form associations of brand uniqueness with attributes of increasing significance in association formation. The root node, or starting point, is the basis for building uniqueness, and the following attributes increase in weight as uniqueness is formed.

None of the attributes are less significant, but each has a unique association-forming effect on significance. For instance, the root node is vital but has the least weight in forming uniqueness and does not determine whether or not uniqueness is generated. This is not the case with other attributes with greater weights. Other attributes increase in significance during the formation process of associations. The overall importance of an attribute in a decision is computed in the following way. Go through all the splits for which the feature was used and measure how much it has reduced the variance or Gini index compared to the parent node. The sum of all importance is scaled to 100 [52]. This means that each importance can be interpreted as a share of the overall model importance. The model weighs each attribute weight based on given attribute evaluation data in this decision process. In the delfi.lv model, four attributes were selected as more significant to form media brand uniqueness. As seen in Table 12, four attributes contribute to brand uniqueness.

Table 12. Significant delfi.lv brand attributes that contribute to brand uniqueness, weights, and RapidMiner.

Attribute	Weigh
I like authors, journalists	0.293
Users can engage in content creation	0.244
Look distinctive, unique	0.236
Use attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, videos	0.228

The root node or attribute—use of attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, and videos—is essential but less critical than others for influencing uniqueness directly. If the audience has strong and favourable associations with this attribute, then the strength of the attribute-users can engage in content creation—is significant. If this attribute is strong, favourable, and associated with the audience of delfi.lv, the brand’s uniqueness will be formed. If these associations are not strong and favorable enough, brand uniqueness is not formed, and no other attributes will be able to form uniqueness.

To summarize, strong and favourable attractive special formats and user engagement directly contribute to uniqueness. Figure 1 illustrates the decision tree model and each attribute’s influence on brand uniqueness. On the other hand, if the audience does not have strong and favourable associations, then delfi.lv use attractive special formats, such as blogs, podcasts, and videos, then distinctive attributes, i.e., unique look, significantly influence uniqueness formation. If the audience associate delfi.lv look as distinctive and unique, the power of likeness of their authors and journalists associations significant. If these associations are strong and favorable, brand uniqueness is formatted. Thus, even delfi.lv did not have strong and favorable special interactive format associations, i.e., the strength of a distinctive, unique look and the authors could successfully build uniqueness associations. Authors’ and journalists’ associations are influential in building brand uniqueness if other experience-based associations are not strong enough. Only with the factor that distinctive and unique looks are strong and favourable enough. These associations are essential to forming uniqueness: user engagement in content, the distinctiveness of look and journalists, and authors.

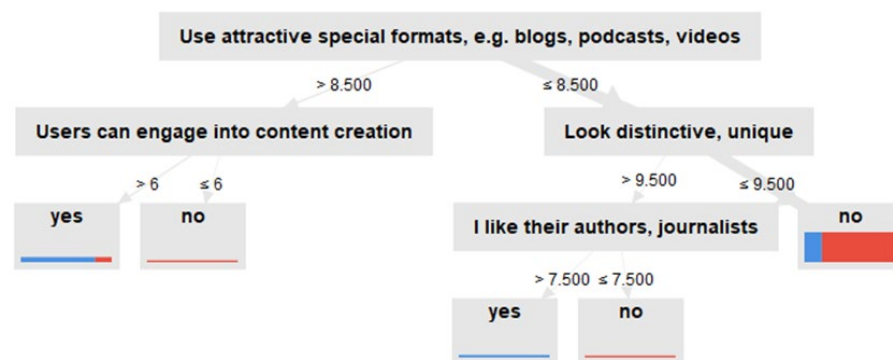


Figure 1. Delfi.lv brand uniqueness model. Decision tree, RapidMiner.

On the other hand, if distinctive, unique look associations are not strong and favorable, unique associations are not built enough, i.e., above 8+. This is because no other associations have enough weight for uniqueness formation. The model shows the importance of experience-based attributes and demonstrates content-related attribute power to form uniqueness, even though some experience-based attributes are not strong enough. Graph 1 illustrates the significance and order of the delfi.lv brand attributes in the audience’s decision-making process when evaluating the delfi.lv brand’s uniqueness.

The audience highly evaluated those attributes; however, others were evaluated higher. Nevertheless, the strength and favorability of these attributes formed delfi.lv uniqueness. The model represents a high accuracy rate—75.74%; the author states that the model predicts how delfi.lv uniqueness was influenced with 75.74% accuracy.

Interestingly, even the attribute users can engage in content was not evaluated by the audience is very high in importance; this attribute plays a significant role in forming delfi.lv brand uniqueness. Both in stated importance by the audience and from both models’ analyses, a distinctive and unique look is an important attribute that contributes to brand uniqueness, even though special formats are not strong enough. Authors’ and journalists’ associations are essential, too, especially if a special attractive format use and distinctiveness of look are not strong and positive enough.

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

5. Discussion: The Media Brands' Uniqueness Phenomenon and Open Innovation

News media brands face challenges and opportunities in adapting and developing new branding strategies in an interactive multi-platform environment. From content distribution and brand attribution to younger audience reach, engagement, and choice, the media brands require innovation and new brand management approaches.

5.1. Media Brand Uniqueness

Open innovation (OI) addresses the challenges experienced by news media brands in adapting to a digital and interactive environment [53]. By providing customer-driven services and customized aggregated news consumption via online platforms, technologically advanced competitors have dominated the traditional media field and advanced digital media consumption [54]. Social media platforms innovate more quickly, respond to audience wants more swiftly, and define content consumption and experience expectations. Researchers have recently begun investigating OI's relevance and uniqueness in news media [32]. In her recent study on open innovation in media innovation research, Klaß (2020) claimed that media innovation research is on the rise and that researchers have begun to examine media innovation from a media management perspective [55], consumer-centred [56], and business model [57] perspectives. The literature analysis and recent developments demonstrate efforts to examine media innovation from a business perspective; yet media innovation management remains an underdeveloped academic area [55,58,59]. This may be because theoretical frameworks regarding media innovation as an object of management research are still immature [53]. A component of the uniqueness of media brands and the role of audience experience with media brands contributes an intriguing element to media innovation from the audience's perspective. If non-content-related brand attributes highly influence brand uniqueness and, subsequently, brand equity, innovation in product and content distribution and delivery value chains can greatly boost media organisations' competitiveness and operational performance.

5.2. Audience and Open Innovation in Media Selection and Maintenance

If the audience's attention to one news media brand decreases, media innovation from a consumer-centric perspective would be helpful and warrant investigation. In the coming years, changes in media consumption patterns, the significance of news media brand equity, and the rise of a younger media audience will boost scholarly interest in and attention to media innovation. If current research in the media brand innovation field focuses more on open innovation from the product, process, positioning, and paradigm innovation [59,60] adding the audience's perspective regarding innovating new ways of media brand selection, preference, and choice would be a significant contribution to the media innovation aspect. The current study by the authors confirms the role of the audience in generating strong brand connections and, consequently, brand equity. Using insights from audience experiences with media brands across many channels, as well as the effect on brand strength, innovation from a product viewpoint, or introduction of an entirely new component to media innovation from a branding standpoint, would be beneficial.

Additionally, the research is conducted in a particular cultural place; hence, the model may not be confirmed in different cultural spaces. Additionally, the results apply to the Z generation; it is possible to achieve different results by studying other generations. Never-

theless, the analyses give a solid roadmap for measuring news media brand associations and their contribution to the distinctiveness of media brands in the online environment.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Implications

The research findings underscore the requirement for strong news media brand equity and highlight the value of brand attributes that are unrelated to content. In addition, the study results will identify the significance of news media brand attributes that contribute to the distinctiveness of news media brands. Interestingly, for a particular news media brand, the attributes that lead to brand distinctiveness are not necessarily the ones that receive the highest ratings from the audience when evaluating media brand attributes.

6.1.1. Practical Implications

The results are essential for evaluating and adapting media branding. The ability to disseminate content through many access points improves the audience's reach. Nonetheless, brand associations and, thus, brand equity are diminished with time. The results on news media brand associations, their power scores, and their contribution to the uniqueness of news brands can significantly improve content distribution and branding strategies for media brands in multi-platform contexts. In addition, the linear regression and decision tree analyses shed light on how and in what sequence brand connections form media brand uniqueness. The results illustrate the audience's expectations of news brands and, by extension, explain the audience's preference for and attention to various media brands. This is particularly true for younger viewers, who prefer experiences and platforms. Data can strengthen the national news brand's brand equity and distinctiveness, thus enhancing its credibility and trustworthiness. Mass media practitioners could precisely analyze particular media brand attributes, evaluate and audit them, and understand their brand's overall weakness and strength in forming brand associations in a multi-platform marketplace. The attribute analyses and association power scores allow media owners to access the guidelines for attribute audits. The uniqueness model guides how news media brand uniqueness forms, as well as an understanding regarding which attributes are more significant in forming brand uniqueness.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that the most significant media attributes contributing to uniqueness are those with the lowest declared importance from the audience. This means that media managers and owners should know the level of their most significant brand attributes and understand how less significant attributes form the uniqueness necessary for substantial brand equity. In addition, a new, interactive, multi-platform marketplace undoubtedly adds new aspects of media brand uniqueness.

6.1.2. Theoretical Implications

The literature on brands and branding adds a more comprehensive grasp of customer and brand relationship knowledge. From the perspective of open innovation, additional research would provide light on how the content-consuming experience enhances the innovation and competitiveness of media brands from the standpoint of brand uniqueness. In addition, open innovation offers a fresh viewpoint on the non-product-related attributes of media brands that influence media products' essential innovation processes and, consequently, their competitiveness in an interactive and multi-platform marketplace.

However, few academics have examined news media through the lenses of brand theory and consumer-centric brand equity. Growing technical opportunities, digitalization, alterations in consumer behaviour, and a rapidly transforming media brand landscape have made media branding research an intriguing and demanding area. Less commonly than experience-based branding, news media brand studies focus on content and information discourses. Therefore, these findings may contribute to the growing theories of media branding in the interactive multimedia marketplace, which demands entirely new characteristics regarding how news media brands reach their younger audience.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Delfi.lv brand uniqueness regression model and brand attribute importance, Coefficients a,b.

Attributes	Unstandartized B	Significance, <i>p</i> -Value
Credible	0.130	0.068
Leading news media	0.054	0.448
Content matches my interests	0.037	0.657
Look nice, attractive	0.078	0.334
Their posts often generate a lot of views, reactions, reposts	0.003	0.964
Post interesting content on social networks	0.094	0.207
Engage celebrities in their projects	−0.037	0.588
I like their authors, journalists	0.164	0.026
Look distinctive, unique	0.187	0.011
Present on platforms which I use (e.g., Youtube or my favourite social networks)	−0.183	0.009
Use attractive special formats, e.g., blogs, podcasts, videos	0.081	0.277
In social media, use relevant features, e.g., video, live stories etc.	0.018	0.803
My friends use it too	0.100	0.093
Users can engage into content creation	0.146	0.022

The coefficient a: dependent variable: delfi.lv Please evaluate these portals on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means "I just know them by the name" and 10 means "This medium is very important for me". **The coefficient b:** selecting only cases of which delfi.lv: Which of these news media you ever used? - checked.

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