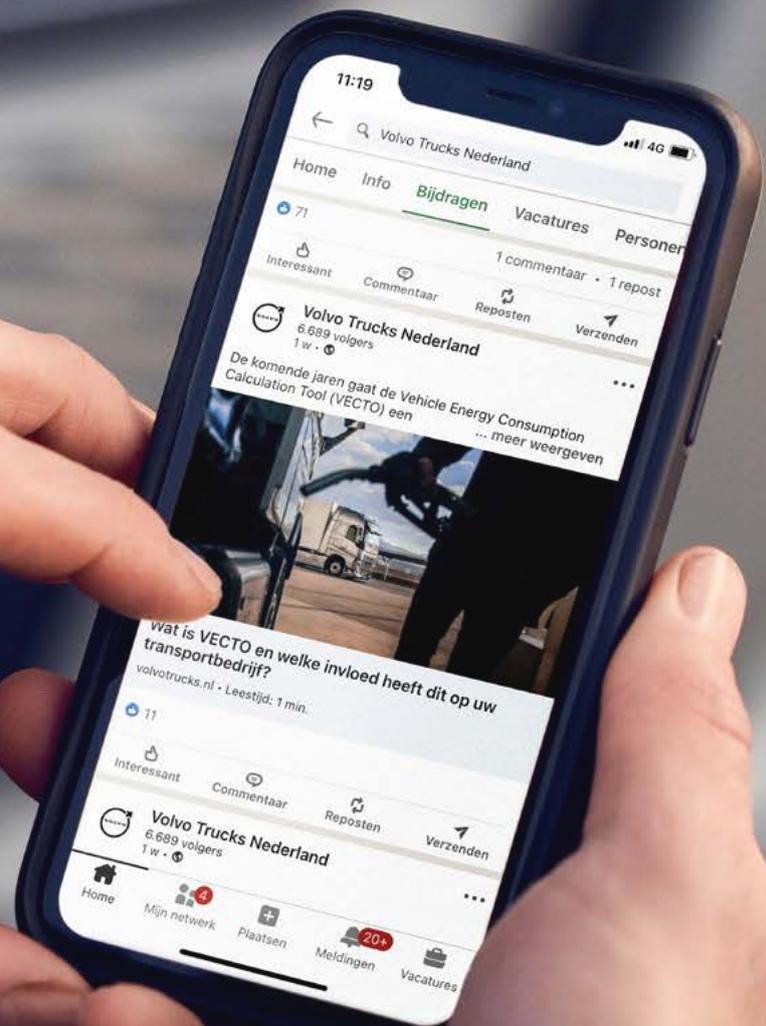


V O L V O

Master Thesis Industrial Design Engineering

Exploring the effect of localised imagery on interactions with branded content

Casper Hazebroek - S2611783
August 2023



UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Branded content is what the user came to read, see or experience and results in “[propel]ing [the] brand into the hearts and minds of prospects, customers, and others.”

Hollebeek and Macky (2019)
Conceptualisation of Digital Content Marketing



Exploring the effects of localised imagery on interactions with branded content

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Sometimes, you need a bit of luck.

Besides my studies, I spend time on content creation and distributing it on social media. It leaves me fascinated how brands create and market their content.

Content marketing may seem like a different field than Industrial Design Engineering (IDE). It is about how to market a product or brand, rather than designing it. Brands are everywhere nowadays, also by their presence in online environments. The content distributed could affect the perceived brand's image. For this reason, a brand should 'design' it carefully. How does a brand do that? I have always been curious about that.

On an ordinary day, I was scrolling through job vacancies. Searching by the words 'content marketing', a vacancy for an internship at Volvo Trucks NL pops up. My heart made a little jump. Learning more about content marketing, at an automotive brand. Is there something more I could wish for?

At that time, I was searching for a place to perform my thesis. Yet, the vacancy was meant for an assisting intern. I found it hard to think what to do, as an internship is usually not part of the IDE master programme. I played with open cards, seeking to discuss possibilities. I am grateful to say that Volvo Trucks NL has offered these. From this moment of writing, I am working on my thesis developed together with the company.

Like I said, sometimes, you need a bit of luck. I would like to think of my thesis as the perfect personal experiment. Is the field I want to work in? Also, I will discover whether I have room to express my creativity and can put my skills as a designer into practice.

I am happy to have made this jump.



Sometimes, you need a bit of help.

Bringing this study to a start, conducting, and guiding it in the right direction was not possible without certain people.

First, I would like to thank my primary supervisors. Eveline, as supervisor from my study, who kept triggering my curiosity with her endless enthusiasm, and knowledge on design science. Charles, as supervisor from Volvo Trucks NL, who gave me perspective on the possible impact of this study, as well as critical reflections.

Second, I would like to thank my colleagues from marketing and communication at Volvo Trucks NL. Rik, for helping me conduct and reflect on the A/B tests. Larah, for the freedom and given responsibility for distribution of branded content. Eline, who like me recently joined the company, for speaking openly about this step in life. I cannot fail to mention Danielle, for insights about content management on a global and local level. Also, I would like to thank all other people within Volvo Trucks NL and Volvo Trucks EU for their insights and participation in this study.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my family, girlfriend, friends, and housemates. For the execution of this study, my life changed a bit. I had to move out of Enschede. Their listening ear made this change in life bearable and made me take things more easy.

Casper Hazebroek

's-Hertogenbosch, August 8, 2023



A brief summary.

The communication of a brand to the outer world is a complex managing process in the online marketing management of international brands.

Given the rise of online media, branded content now is an important mediator between brands and individuals. Moreover, consumer culture has become more globally oriented. However, people can be global in one domain, but local in another. As a result, it is an ongoing challenge for international brand management to choose between standardisation and localisation in their marketing mix.

Associations consistent with consumers' cultural identity induce a more favourable attitude towards the brand. Also, identity-consistent information is perceived as more relevant. Additionally, branded content has become more visual. Visual-based marketing is more effective than text-based marketing, as it is better in engaging users, simulating experiences, and conveying meaning. Therefore, addressing the identity of the viewer in visual branded content is a crucial aspect to consider, as 70% of consumers prefer to learn about products through content.

This study explores the effects of localised branded content, compared to standardised (i.e., globally oriented) branded content. The research is conducted in collaboration with an international brand that acquaints itself with online marketing and improving personal relevance. The primary focus is on applied imagery, and how interactions with branded content are affected by congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and the imagery. It supports the symbolism of the identity of the viewer.

The academic contribution of this study lays in the focus on imagery. Studies about the effectiveness of online content are primarily about verbal content, whereas little is known about imagery applied in branded content. Given this lack of knowledge, this study has an explorative approach as found in design science. The aim is to discover how congruity can be achieved, what theories apply to this concept, and what effect it has on interactions with branded content. As a result, these aspects allow for practical implications for the online marketing management of the brand.

The following steps were taken. To explore the current state, a literature review was conducted to explore relevant theoretical concepts, fundamental to understand the need of personal relevance in online marketing and how the identity of the viewer can be addressed. In addition, the brands' content strategy, imagery, and visions on the localisation of imagery are discussed. Then, by having assessed the cues to cultural identity on imagery, branded content with image variants is tested and distributed on social media. By the statistics of these tests, it will be reflected upon the interactions and differences in effectivity by locally and globally imagery. The findings suggest that locally culturally oriented imagery fosters more interactions than globally culturally oriented imagery.



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ready for
the ride?

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Introducing the context and the research.

This report is the result of the master thesis in Industrial Design Engineering, conducted for Volvo Trucks NL.

This first chapter will elaborate on the company, the context and motivation of this study, followed by the methodology of this study.

This chapter contains the following sections:

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1.1 Background

Volvo Trucks is part of the larger organisation Volvo Group. Other brands belong to this group as well, such as Volvo Penta, Renault Trucks and Mack (figure 1).

The Volvo Group operates in more than 190 markets. It is one of the world's leading manufacturers of trucks, buses, construction machinery and marine and industrial engines.



Volvo Trucks NL (VTN) is located in Beesd, near Utrecht. The company represents and imports Volvo Trucks into the Netherlands. There are about eighty employees. They engage in ranging activities, from managing servicing contracts to instructing technicians to sales and marketing. The company is connected to the regional dealerships as well as the brand's headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Trucks from Volvo Trucks come in a variety (figure 2). This ranges from heavy-duty vehicles for interstate travel and construction to lightweight trucks for local distribution. Various fuels, including diesel, gas, and battery electricity, are used to power the trucks.



Volvo FL



Volvo FE



Volvo FMX



Volvo FM



Volvo FH

1.2 Research motive

Mobility is evolving with the times. The shift to less-polluting modes of mobility is the most significant trend.

Vehicles have long been powered by fossil fuels. The need to switch to more environmentally friendly cars and fuels is brought on by the changing climate (UNEP - UN Environment Programme, 2023). Industries are switching to less-polluting alternatives as a result. Battery electric vehicles (BEVs) offer an alternative (figure 3).

Businesses involved in logistics and transportation are discussing whether they should, or are being forced to, adapt to these new vehicles. The way these vehicles operate differs from how diesel trucks are typically operated. The time required to charge BEVs, for example, has an impact on the infrastructure and the logistics planning process (Nieuwenhuis and Wells, 2012). In other words, businesses must change the way they operate in order to use a BEV in their ongoing processes. There are questions and concerns about BEV due to the novelty of these vehicles. As a result, it is important to be properly informed.

VTN has taken note of this need and adapted its online marketing strategies to it. The company creates and distributes informative branded content on digital platforms (e.g., website and social media). The content targets a Dutch audience and contains relevant information on a variety of topics. VTN's ultimate goal is to foster interactions between those seeking information and the branded content created by the company. By offering valuable content, the brand is propelled into the heart and mind of the viewer (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). In light of this, brand attachment may result by interactions with branded content.

Because the company attempts to address current issues in a local context, this strategy somewhat resembles how a global brand adapts to a local market. The marketing management of Volvo Trucks, meanwhile, continues to struggle with determining what should be localised and what should not. Furthermore, it is unclear how localisation differs from standardisation in terms of how users interact with branded content.

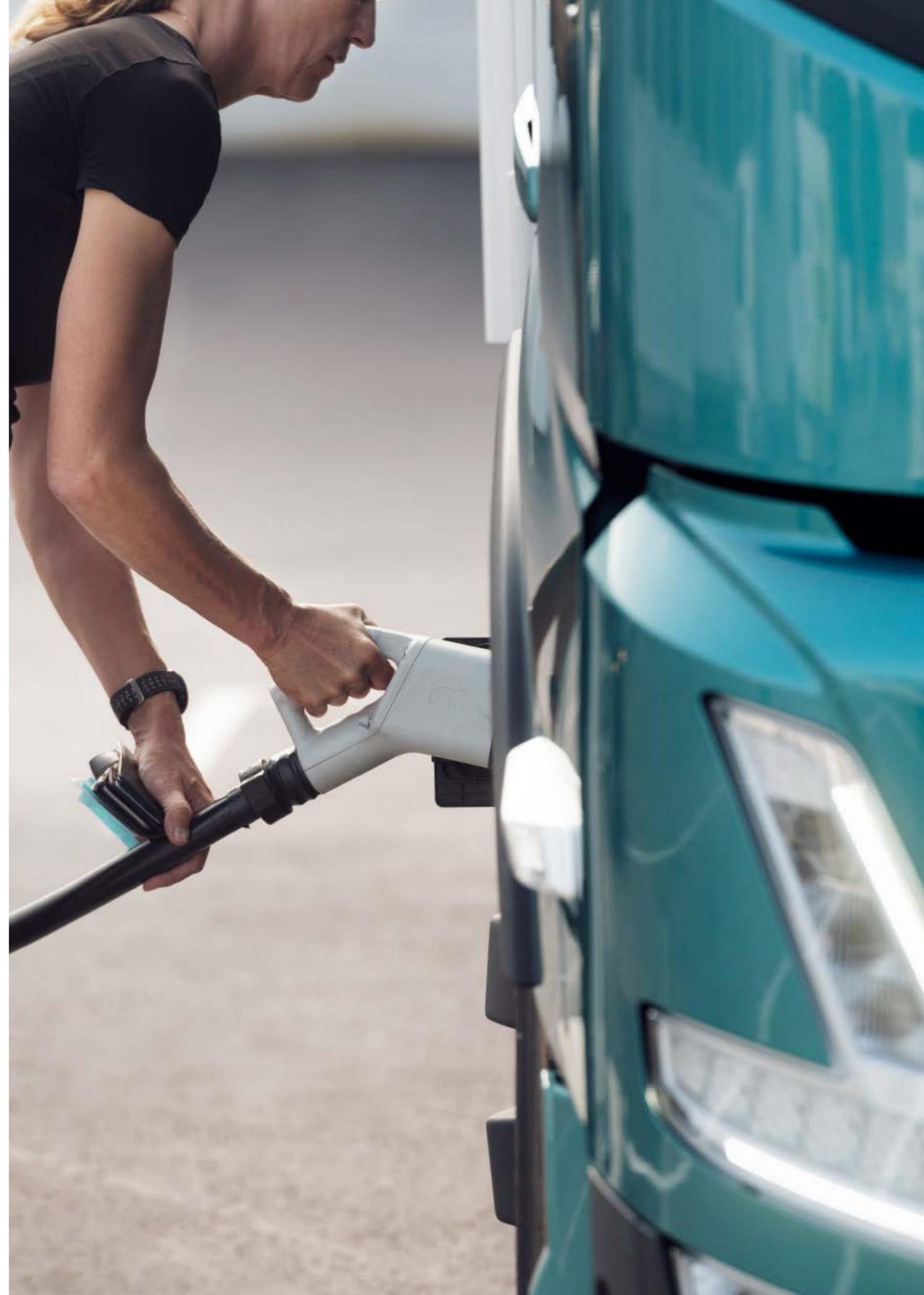


Figure 3 Electric Volvo-trucks (European variants)

1.3 Research objective

In this study, it will be explored how applied imagery mediates interactions with branded content. It will be reviewed how interactions are affected by localised imagery as opposed to standardised imagery.

In the distribution of branded content on social media platforms, imagery is included. According to Chan et al. (2023), visual marketing is more effective in conveying meaning, engaging users, and simulating experiences. As a result, imagery is believed to have a substantial impact on marketing efforts. In addition, 80% of all impressions made by people are based on their visual perception (Zeiss, 2022). As a result, humans rely heavily on the visual to obtain, express, and transfer information (Ma and Fan, 2022).

It stands out that the applied imagery (figure 4, bottom) has a global orientation as opposed to a local orientation. The company does, in fact, target a local audience with its branded content. However, neither the country nor the intended audience seem to be represented by the imagery. Representing the target audience could enhance the perceived meaning and experience of the branded content to the viewer. Ultimately, brand engagement is driven by experience (Waqas et al., 2021) and interactions with branded content improve brand attitude, brand equity, and brand loyalty.

As a result, it is important to take into account the viewer's sense of self-identity formed through the imagery. It will make it seem the branded content is more relevant to them. The ability of the audience to identify with the branded content should encourage interactions. Congruence between the viewer's and the imagery's cultural identities can help achieve this.

As a result, the question is raised:

Could congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and imagery applied in branded content affect interactions with this content?

Indication of results

The primary focus in this study will be on exploring how congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and the imagery affects interactions with branded content. Considerations are how the concept of self-identity could play a role in digital content marketing (DCM) and how it can be addressed through imagery.

If it turns out that this form of congruity leads to more interaction with branded content, this insight can be used to reconsider the content strategy and marketing activities. This account both the company and the brand. In the end, fostering more interactions should strengthen the position of Volvo Trucks as a pioneering brand.

Keywords

Digital Content Marketing; branded content experience; self-identity; congruity; localisation



One image may seem more familiar to the Dutch viewer, than the other.



1.4 Research methodology

The characteristics of design science are present in this study. This field of science is renowned for using knowledge from numerous scientific disciplines to develop practical solutions to challenges encountered in the real world. This method allows for comprehensive problem-solving, fostering innovative ideas and solutions that may not emerge from a single-discipline approach.

Design Science

Design science is a problem-solving paradigm (Hevner et al., 2004). This field of science aims to explore new alternatives to problem-solving. Additionally, it explains the explorative process and improves the problem-solving process (Holmström et al., 2009). Design science differs from other sciences in this way.

Behavioural science paradigm has its roots in natural science research (Hevner et al., 2004). In contrast, design science research has its roots in engineering and the sciences of the artificial (Hevner et al., 2004). The distinction is synonymous to explanatory and exploratory research. In explanatory research, the goal of the researcher is to develop an understanding of an existing phenomenon (Holmström et al., 2009). In contrast, in exploratory research, researchers create artificial phenomena or artefacts before evaluating them. The artifact then turns into a way of representing knowledge. Thus, the primary distinction between design research and behavioural sciences is how they view the world.

An equal distinction appears at the point where design science and marketing intersect. In design research, the researcher questions how things might work (Van Zeeland, 2020) - "does it work?" (Henseler, 2015). As marketing is an analytical science, the researcher asks how things work (Van Zeeland, 2020) - "is it true?" (Henseler, 2015).

However, these fields of science complement one another in how consumers and businesses can achieve their goals. Design science and marketing are referred to be "*the thumb and the indicator finger of this invisible hand*" by Henseler (2015). Additionally, the behavioural and design sciences have complementary characteristics. Hevner et al. (2004) argue that truth (justified theory) and utility (effective artefacts) are "*two sides of the same coin*".

In other words, it is beneficial to evaluate scientific research in light of its applications (Hevner et al., 2004). Design science is distinguished by the applicability of research findings to business applications (Gregor and Hevner, 2013). Therefore, it would be an appropriate approach for marketing strategies (Van Zeeland, 2020).

Abduction

This study makes use of knowledge from marketing and design science. Abduction enables the identification and connection of parallels between various knowledge domains (Holmström et al., 2009).

Abduction aims to propose an explanation for a phenomenon. Deduction and induction, on the other hand, look for explanations from firmly established premises and observations. It makes sense that people choose challenges and research questions that are well defined. However, some issues can be poorly constructed, both from a managerial and theoretical perspective

(Holmström et al., 2009). The lack of conclusive proof or theoretical support is acceptable when applying abduction. The researcher constructs his hypothesis through abduction based on instinct; the hypothesis' results are what the instinct indicates (Burks, 1946). The hypothesis includes a theoretical justification to maintain the quality. Otherwise, the abduction would not be logic (Burks, 1946). According to Hevner et al. (2004), the development of artefacts depends on existing kernel theories. These theories are typically derived from the social and scientific sciences. Later, when building artefacts, the researcher employs these theories (Gregor and Hevner, 2013).

Exploration

Design is the process of looking for a problem's best solution (Hevner et al., 2004). Designing is a creative and iterative process. The hypothesis serves as a starting point for further exploration on the effect of the described phenomena.

An artefact based on (multidisciplinary) knowledge is first produced by the researcher. Feedback is then provided by the artifact's evaluation (Hevner et al., 2004). The ill structured (theoretical) initial design cannot always predict the consequences from an artifact. Refinement through iterations enables the researcher to understand what works and what does not (Holmström et al., 2009). By doing so, the researcher gains a better understanding. Before he creates the final artifact, he repeats this process many times (Hevner et al., 2004). Holmström et al. (2009) describe this explorative process as a phase of design improvements, implementation and evaluation. It is like experimental designs.

The following steps for the design science process are described by Gregor and Hevner (2013). The problem(s) are first identified. The researcher then specifies the solution's objectives. After making these remarks, he moves on to the design and development of artifacts. He receives input through the demonstration and evaluation, after which he shares his conclusions.

Application

This study includes the following steps, as adapted from Gregor and Hevner (2013): understanding – definition – discovery – implementation – reflection

Kernel theories are investigated in the understanding step. These notions are included in the definition to explain the underlying cause of the artifact's instinctual result. The artefact is constructed and put through a number of tests during the discovery phase. This iterative process delivers feedback on the artifact, which will be used to further elaborate on the implementation. In the reflection, the entire process will be evaluated.

On the next pages, the outline of activities in this study is displayed.

Understanding

The reader will be introduced to on relevant theoretical concepts. The company's context and its content marketing activities are then explained.

Part 1 - Literature review

The literature review is conducted by desk research, making use of renowned scientific resources. The aim is to explore, identify and summarise theories and concepts relevant to the topic of this study. These will be emphasised in each chapter.

By doing this, the study's scientific context will be defined, and any research gaps may be discovered. The literature review serves as a theoretical foundation for the analysis of the expected outcomes, or 'why does it work?' given the exploratory and abductive nature of this study.

Part 2 - Company's context

- **About Volvo Trucks:** desk research is used to examine the current situation of VTN. It enhances understanding of the company's operations and market share by increasing brand and company familiarity.
- **Content strategy:** by the research motive, special attention is paid to the current state of the content strategy and distribution. Through desk research and being informed by employees of VTN, an understanding is created on how informative branded content is marketed along different digital platforms. The method of distribution will be discussed, revealing how and on which platforms this content is distributed. Imagery applied in informative branded content will be shown as well.
- **Analysing existing branded content:** the aim of this analysis is to see whether a preliminary judgement can already be made about how well locally oriented content or imagery performs compared to globally oriented content or imagery. The effectiveness of current branded content is evaluated using desk research, social media analytics tools (Meta Business, Coosto), and website analytics tools (Google Analytics).
- **Visions on localisation:** interviews will be conducted as a form of qualitative research. The purpose of the interviews is to better understand internal attitudes regarding the localisation of imagery. Employees of the company have been spoken to on both a global and local level in order to increase understanding of aspirations for localisation. The interviews should reveal how imagery localisation is seen from a local and global viewpoint.

Definition

A theoretical framework is developed that serves as a rationale for the instinctive hypothesis. Then, it is explained what the expected outcomes are. Based on the knowledge obtained until this moment, it will be described how the artifacts should be created and later evaluated.

Meaning

It will be introduced how this moment bridges two important phases in design science.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will emphasise the kernel theories and concepts that are relevant to the subject of this study. By doing this, the study's scientific context will be defined.

Rationale description

The expected outcomes of this study will be described by applying relevant theoretical outcomes.

Next steps

Theories provide information on the idea of congruity. However, it is not clear yet how this can be achieved. This section therefore discusses guidelines on how congruity between the viewer and the imagery can be achieved and how its impact should be assessed on branded content interactions.

Discovery

This phase will investigate how congruity can be achieved between the viewer and imagery and what the most profound elements are. Think of these elements as ingredients, which will later be used in testing. In A/B testing, the impacts of the individual ingredients as well as ingredient combinations will be evaluated.

Cue analysis

The aim is to investigate which imagery elements are viewed as cultural cues and hence relate to the viewer's cultural identity. Qualitative research should provide an understanding of these elements. First, imagery is selected with diverse cultural orientations. The participants will then be shown these pictures, and they will be asked where they believe the picture was taken. They must point out the elements on which they base their conclusion. By having multiple people reflect on cultural cues in imagery, it will be concluded what exactly these cues are. These will form guiding principles for the A/B testing to create distinctive locally and globally oriented imagery.

A/B testing

Locally and globally oriented imagery will be opposed to each other in A/B testing. There will be a number of A/B tests conducted in accordance with the findings of the cue analysis and the iterative nature of design science. Additionally, the outcomes of one test serve as input for another.

Implementation

The significance of the findings from the discovery phase will be explained in this chapter. It will be reflected upon the testing methodology and provide validation recommendations. Also, use cases are developed as a form of managerial implications.

Reflection

Finally, it will be considered how the discovered results compare to the anticipated results. This should reveal what can be concluded about the effect of imagery localisation on interactions with branded content.





Understanding

The purpose of this chapter is to gain an understanding of relevant theoretical concepts and the company's current state on the topic of the study.

In the literature review, elaborations will be provided on digital content marketing (DCM), the visual orientation of human beings and its application in online marketing, and how to address the self-identity of the viewer.

The company's current state is examined second. Here, an elaboration is given on the brand, its values and market share. Then, it will be reviewed how informative branded content is distributed, considering both the process as well as the imagery used. Additionally, an analysis will be conducted on existing branded content and the company's vision on the localisation of imagery are obtained from interviews.

This chapter contains the following sections:

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Visions on imagery localisation

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2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to determine how interactions are mediated by congruity between the viewer's cultural identity and the imagery applied in branded content, this section examines the theoretical concepts related to this aim.

The literature review first begins by discussing the concept of DCM. Here, the essence of the concept will be explained and the importance of interactions between brands and individuals will be highlighted. Additional attention is paid to the experience individuals obtain from branded content and the fact that marketing activities have become more visual.

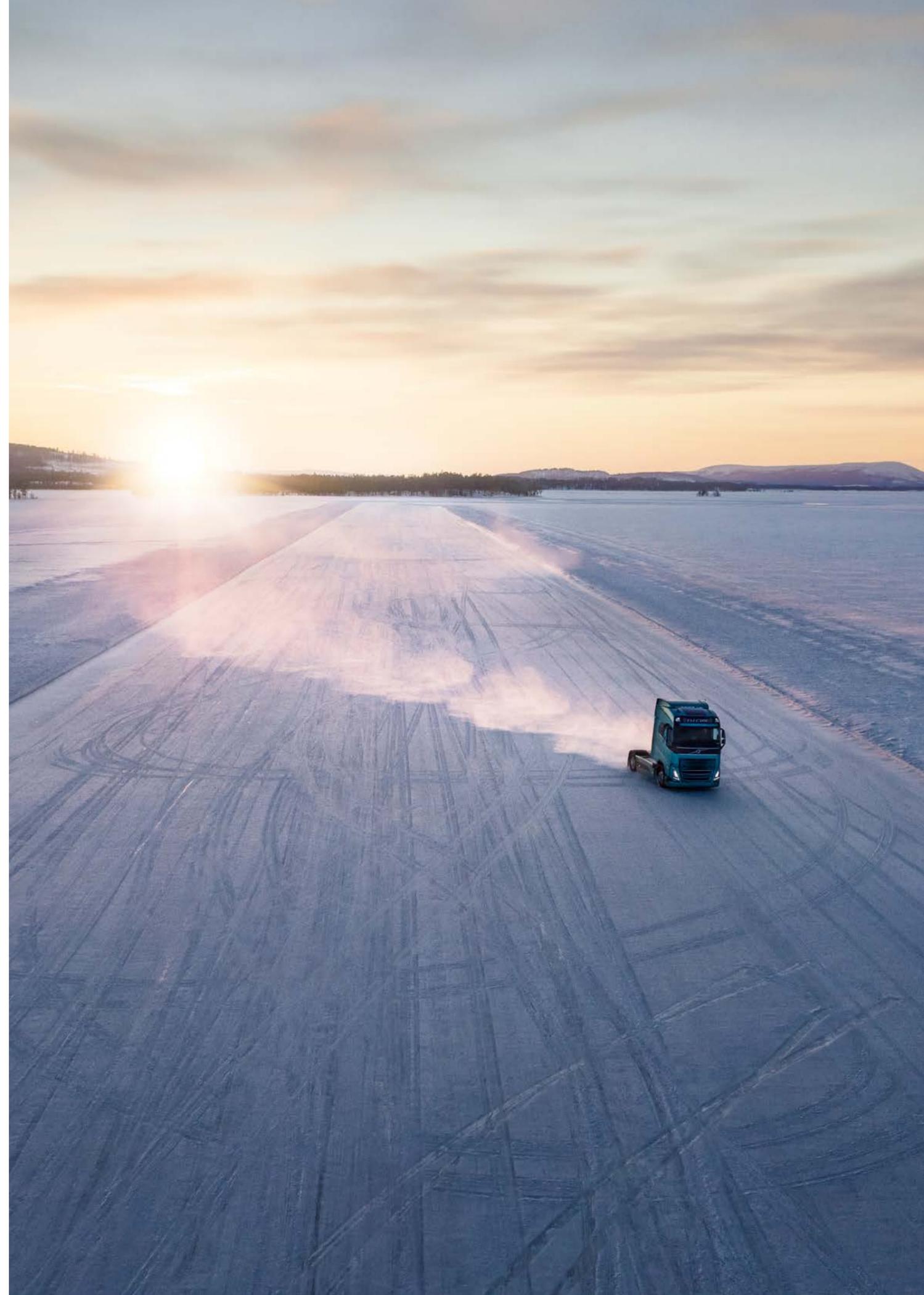
Then, an elaboration is provided on addressing the self-identity of the viewer. It will be explained how this concept is constructed and how it mediates preferences of the individual towards brands. This chapter is closed by reviewing the state of the art on localisation in marketing.

Relevant concepts and theories will be emphasised throughout this chapter, by the symbol on the left. Think of these notions as building blocks. The theoretical framework will eventually be described in chapter 3, Definition, along with the building blocks. These buildings blocks are either relevant to the research question, or relevant to take into consideration in next steps.

The literature view is a qualitative research method that helps defining the scope of this research and contributes to the development of a well-informed research question. In addition, it supports the identification of gaps in existing studies and building a theoretical framework.

Disclaimer

- In the literature, the focus is primarily on social media platforms as types of digital platforms. However, DCM activities cover a wider range of digital platforms.
- Words like 'customer' or 'consumer' are obtained from literature written in from the perspective of business-to-consumer (B2C). However, this study is conducted in a business-to-business (B2B) environment.
- Not all found theoretical concepts, characteristics and effects may directly relate to the aim of this study. Nevertheless, these will be presented for two reasons. First, they provide the reader with important characteristics that may be useful for content marketing activities. Second, they could be seen as conditions to consider in further steps in this study.



2.1.1 Digital Content Marketing

The way people connect with brands on online platforms is an inevitable development. In fact, 50% of social media users follow brands on social media and interact with branded content (Waqas et al., 2021). Thus, branded content is an important mediator between brands and individuals.

This chapter elaborates on the concept of DCM, the mediating role of branded content and the experience individuals get from interactions with branded content in online environments.

An introduction to DCM

The communication of a (global) brand to the outer world is a complex managing process. It should be considered how the brand sees itself, how it wants consumers to perceive it, and knowing how the brand's identity is built into people's mind as a result of marketing activities.

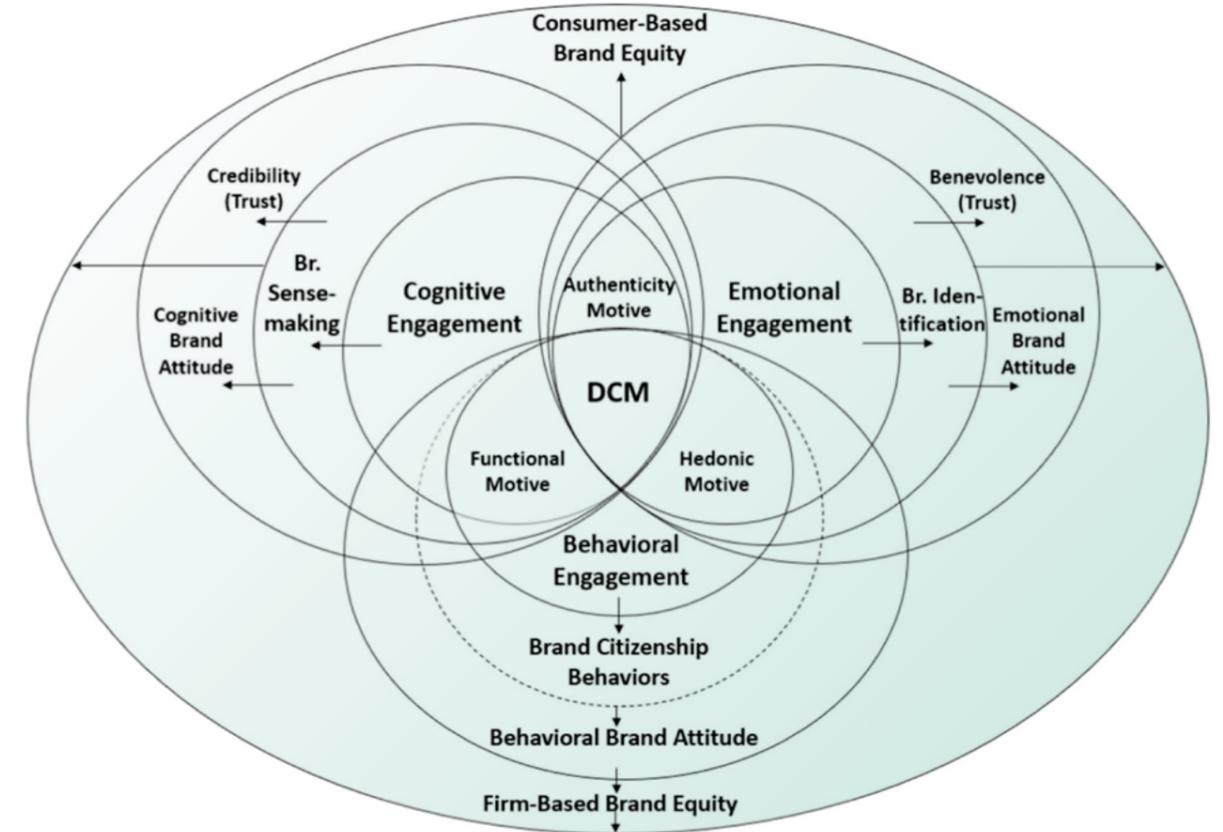
According to 70% of consumers, they prefer learning about products through content, instead of regular advertising (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Uncertainties may exist for businesses in light of the ongoing advances in mobility and transportation. These can be overcome by supplying relevant information. For this reason, as part of its DCM efforts, VTN focuses on the distribution of informative branded content. The value of their branded content increases. Hence, their branded content becomes something of value.

DCM is the "management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (Rowley, 2008). Considering this study, 'requirements' resemble the need for information. VTN has anticipated on this need, continues to identify important topics, and aims to provide companies and individuals with the informative branded content.

Branded content in DCM enables to "[propel]ing [the] brand into the hearts and minds of prospects, customers, and others" by offering something of value (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). As a result, connecting with branded content may lead to strong connections between the company and (potential) customers.

This connection builds upon either an identity or instrumentality basis. On an identity basis, the brand represents who the consumer is or wants to be. On an instrumentality basis, the brand becomes meaningful in terms of personal goals or concerns. In the end, connections to the brand can lead to brand attachment (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018).

It seems obvious that one's strong connection to a brand, like "I love the brand Volvo", will lead to a positive attitude towards the brand – "So, my next truck will be a Volvo". It is for this reason that brands focus their (marketing) efforts and resources on the connection between consumers and the brand.



Motives for interactions

Interactions shape the connection between brands and individuals in online environments. According to Hollebeek and Macky's (2019) DCM conceptual framework (figure 5), there are three motives that influence how individuals interact with branded content.

- **Functional:** the individual interacts with branded content for practical reasons (e.g., informational). The functional motive exists prior to interactions with branded content (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Interactions are likely to continue until the individual has fulfilled their need.
- **Hedonic:** the individual has an emotively driven, experiential need to interact with branded content. The desire for entertainment, diversion, fun, transportation, relaxation, or by projecting the individual's identity to others is the driving force of this desire (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Furthermore, distributing online content is a fundamental part of modern life (Berger, 2012).
- **Authenticity:** the individual has a need to connect with others (including brands), which is also reflected in the helping nature of DCM. The desire for brand related continuity, integrity, and symbolism supports this motive:

- Continuity refers to how closely the brand-related content adheres to the brand
- Integrity refers to what extent the viewer perceives a brand’s commitment to responsibility and caring.
- Symbolism refers to the extent to which the brand supports consumers in being true to themselves (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019) - *“While looking at this branded content, I feel like myself.”*

Considering the approach of this study, the need for information seems to reflect the functional motive. In relation to the authenticity motive, local imagery could make the branded content appear more relevant to the viewer. The imagery could give the viewer the idea that they can identify with the branded content, because it symbolises them. There is congruity between the identity of the viewer and the branded content. This form of congruity should strengthen the persuasive power of the branded content.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a renowned framework to persuasion developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). It addresses attitude formation, shifts and persuasion, revealing how and why individuals accept messages in a particular communication.

John and De’Villiers (2020) describe persuasion as the *“process through which communicators influence people through a message aimed at modifying perceptions”*. **Personal relevance of the message, the source credibility, argument quality and the degree of cognition needed to interpret the message** are all factors that affect acceptance of communication, according to John and De’Villiers (2020).

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), there are two ways of persuasion, being the central and peripheral route. Payne (2007) describes these as:

- *“The central route of persuasion entails careful evaluations of the merits of an advocated message. Thus, people who have a ‘need for cognition’ are more likely to be in the ‘central route’ and will evaluate a message based solely upon its merits.*
- *Conversely, the peripheral route of persuasion entails evaluation of an advocated message based not on its merits, but tangential information surrounding the message”*

Figure 6 illustrates the difference between these approaches. Via the central route, an individual explicitly seeks for knowledge and will judge the knowledge by its contents. In contrast, via the peripheral route, an individual will evaluate the knowledge based on its presentation.

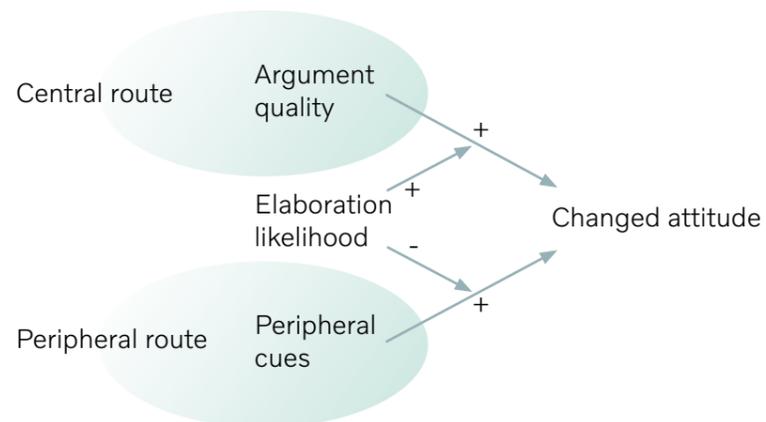


Figure 6 Elaboration Likelihood Model, adapted from Petty and Cacioppo (1986)

Interactions and engagement

The fundamental functioning principle of social media platforms is interactions (Waqas et al., 2021). A particular level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement is evoked by interactions. Based on this, the individual will develop cognitive, emotional, and behavioural brand attitudes. These eventually result in value centric outcomes of brand equity (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). According to Waqas et al. (2021), interactions enhance brand attitude, brand equity, brand loyalty, and purchase intention.

On social media, individuals interact with branded content through liking, sharing, and commenting (Waqas et al., 2021). Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) argue that engagement is the primary goal of distributing branded content on social media. They outline six types of social media engagement behaviour. These include **creating, contributing, and destructing** as active engagement behaviours. Additionally, **consuming, dormancy, and detaching** are passive and/or more individualised engagement behaviours.

Depending on the device used to access the platform, engagement may vary between digital platforms. On Instagram, people tend to like content rather than creating comments. In contrast, commenting on Facebook is the common engagement behaviour (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

There are various aspects that thrive engagement. **Vividness** and **interactivity** are important aspects of persuasive power, as well as **entertainment** and **authenticity**, according to Gensler et al. (2013). Furthermore, Berger (2012) argues that **emotions** (high arousal) are important, regardless of whether these are positive or negative. Moreover, sharing **surprising** and **interesting** content seems engaging, as well as **practically useful** and **positive** content (Berger, 2012).

Considering these factors, the authenticity of branded content could benefit from including a locally oriented image over a globally oriented image. It seems more applicable to the viewer rather than seemingly have a generic approach. In other words, it could seem more emotionally appealing by congruity to the self, and therefore more engaging.

Branded Content Experience

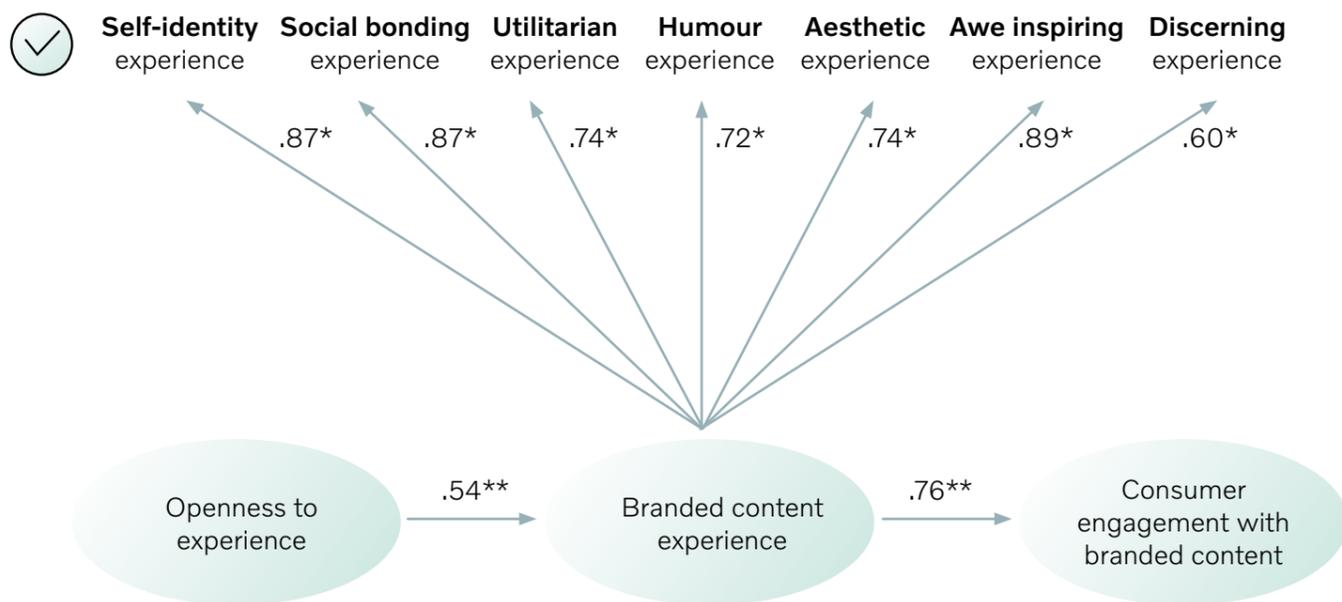
The term ‘content’ is diverse. Waqas et al. (2021) describe brand-related videos, audio, posts, pictures, contests, news and stories, brand supported causes, brand reviews, brand-related online games, and brand-related virtual gifts and cards as formats. Possibly, there are additional formats to think of.

Having this wide range of applications appears beneficial to advertising, as this limits to communications placed on paid for platforms (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). In contrast, DCM could be displayed on any kind of platform, because content remains regardless of its location (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

The experience gained through the variety of branded content, is important. The perceived brand’s image is mediated by the experience. Furthermore, as the concept of experience is central to marketing, it connects to brand loyalty, satisfaction, and brand equity (Waqas et al., 2021). Delivering branded content experiences that are appropriate for both the application and the brand is crucial.

According to consumer culture theory (CCT), an experience is a socially constructed phenomenon that is (co)-created by the interactions between marketplace actors. In a different light, an experience is a mental state that is the result of one’s interaction with an object (Waqas et al., 2021). The branded content experience (BCE) is described as “a cognitive and/or affective state which arises from cultural meanings given to the set of interactions between a customer and a brand-related image/video/text on a social media platform” in the conceptual development of Waqas et al. (2021).

From this perspective, social media users are the subject of experience. The branded content on social media is the object of experience. Experience is the driver of customer’s engagement with brands, according to Waqas et al. (2021). This wider construct (figure 7) includes the experience of self-identity, which appears to have a strong indicative strength. Thus, it is worthwhile to research how imagery in branded content contributes to this experience.



* Significant at the 0.01 level ** Significant at the 0.05 level

Visual orientation of marketing

Visual content allows for quick communication of complex messages (Ciprian, 2014). This makes visual-based marketing more effective than text-based marketing (Zhao et al., 2023). According to Chan et al. (2023), it is better in engaging users, simulating experiences, and conveying meaning. Therefore, the ‘visual’ is crucial for humans to obtain, express and transmit information (Ma and Fan, 2022).

Additionally, Kergoat et al. (2017) argue that pictorial elements have greater persuasive power than verbal ones. Imagery is processed and recalled more easily than words. Chan et al. (2023) argue that consumers encounter a tremendous amount of content, as a result of the uptake of online marketing and social media in society. Consequently, consumers have to deal with stimuli from a multifactorial environment. This reduces the cognitive resources available for processing advertisements or content (Kergoat et al., 2017).

Visuals can trigger a cognitive and emotional response of the viewer (Winarni, 2020, Ciprian, 2014). The cognitive response affects the communication of the message and increases the understanding of the viewer. The emotional response affects the emotion and attitude of the viewer. Consumer’s decisions about products are affected by both levels.

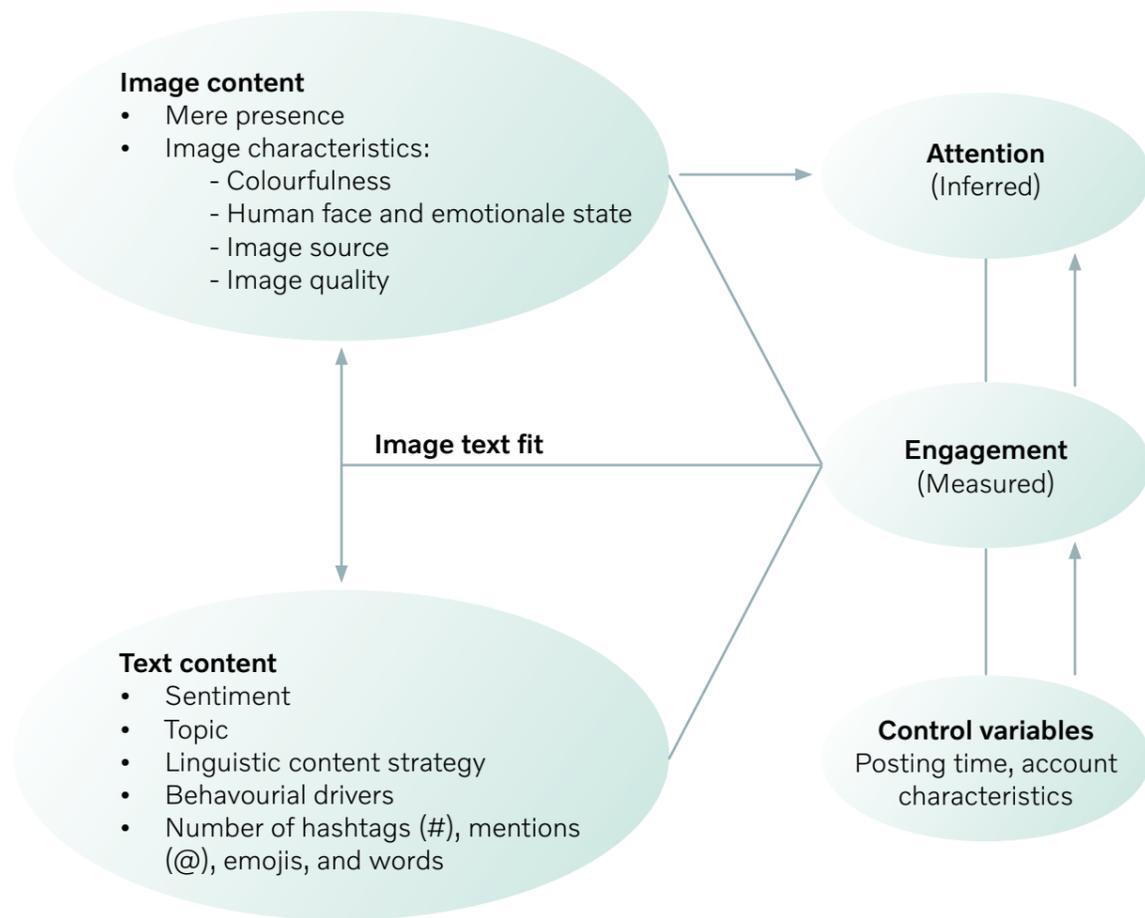
Imagery contextual factors

When distributing branded content, imagery has a supportive role. Various effects arise that affect interactions with branded content.

In general, marketing applies a range of factors. These include the **form of the object (product)** advertised, **context, people that give meaning to objects**, and the **text** reinforcing meaning (Winarni, 2020). To add to this, Ma and Fan (2022) describe three categories of research regarding imagery on social media. These include the **characteristics of pictures in social media**, **picture publishing behaviour** in social media and **picture perception and acquisition behaviour** of social media users.

Li and Xie (2019) present a range of effects that the presence of imagery has on other content elements (figure 8):

- **“Mere presence effect:** the image content in a social media post helps the post stand out from the media clutter when the majority of online content is text-based.
- **Image characteristics effect:** the image content in a social media post may provide informational, aesthetic, or self-enhancement value independent of the text content.
- **Image–text fit effect:** both imagery and text content in a social media post are employed by the author to express a particular viewpoint. Research has shown that irrelevant pictures in print ads create extra difficulty for readers to comprehend the main message and thus lead to worse ad recall and less favourable.”



Imagery characteristics

The following imagery characteristics were discovered from various studies. Li and Xie (2019) describe **colourfulness**, the **presence of human face** (and their emotional state), **picture source** and **picture quality** as important characteristics. Zhao et al. (2023) describe **colour**, **pixels**, **brightness**, as well as **lightness**, **chroma** and **hue**.

By congruity between the image and the text, the viewer is better able to comprehend the content. To some extent, an image serves as a thumbnail of the branded content. According to Koh and Cui (2022), a thumbnail has a two-part purpose. On the one hand, it is informative. On the other hand, it is visually appealing, to draw the attention of viewers. These two aspects are characterised by the following dimensions (Koh and Cui, 2022):

- Informative: **element complexity** and **object complexity**. Element complexity refers to the number of types of design elements used in a thumbnail, where object complexity refers to the number of objects included in a thumbnail.
- Visual appeal: **celebrity endorsement** (visually more appealing), **colourfulness**, **brightness**, and **picture quality**.

In addition, Yoon and Kim (2019) argue that **size** and **shape of text**, as well as **emotional stimulation** from pictures are important thumbnail characteristics.

To conclude, these factors show that effectiveness of visual content depends not solely on imagery characteristics. It depends on how the content is distributed and perceived as well.



2.1.2 Addressing self-identity

The shared identities and the way these are symbolised affects how strongly individuals feel connected to brands.

This chapter explains the construction of the concept of self-identity is constructed, how it influences the relationship between an individual and the brand, and how globalisation of brands affects consumer’s culture and their identities.

Self-identity concept

Self-identity is a crucial factor in marketing activities. Consumers choose products or brands to express their self-concept, values, and attitudes, and to gain self-esteem and self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). Moreover, the concept contributes to preferences that consumers express towards certain brands or products over others (Bartoli, 2022).

The self-concept is the collection of ideas and perceptions that individuals have about themselves (Sirgy, 1982). ‘Self-identity’ and ‘self-concept’ are frequently used interchangeably when referring to this concept (Oyserman, 2009).

The self-concept is an “individual’s awareness of being an “I” and “Me” with peculiar characteristics and of the relationships between that I and Me with external others and the surrounding environment”, according to Bartoli (2022). It is a multidimensional construct with three perspectives – the actual self, the ideal self, and the social self (Sirgy, 1982):

- The actual self refers to how a person perceives the self
- The ideal self refers to how a person would like to perceive the self
- The social self refers to how a person presents the self to others

These self-perspectives are based on a variety of personal and social identities (figure 9). Personal identities are decontextualised descriptions like **personal traits, characteristics, and goals**. Social identities are contextualised as they link to a social group. The individual was, is, or may become a member of groups, such as **gender, cultural, racial-ethnic, or religious heritage** (Oyserman, 2009).



Figure 9 Self-concept identities, adapted from Oyserman (2009)

Congruity between the self and the brand

The situation mediates the perception of the self-concept. According to Sirgy (1982), “Consumption of a brand may be highly congruent with self-image in one situation and not at all congruent with it in another”. This interplay contains a variety of congruities. Following is an overview of mechanisms, adapted from Sirgy (1982):

- **“Positive self-congruity:** the consumer will be motivated to purchase a positively valued product to maintain a positive self-image
- **Positive self-incongruity:** the consumer will be motivated to purchase a positively valued product to maintain a positive self-image (positive self-congruity condition)
- **Negative self-congruity / negative self-incongruity:** the consumer will be motivated to avoid purchasing a negatively valued product to avoid self-abasement”

In the context of this study, the imagery applied in branded content addresses the viewers’ self-concept. This mediates congruity between the consumer and brand. According to Morhart et al. (2015), the ability of a brand to act as a “resource for consumers to reveal their true selves or to allow consumers to feel that they are true to themselves by consuming the brand” is a form of symbolism of the self. It has an impact identity-related aspect of brand attachment (Morhart et al., 2015), making it a crucial concept for the effectiveness of branded content.

While this is the case, congruity between the brand and an individual is not solely based on identity similarities. Functional congruity, trait congruity and added value congruity are three types that Voorn (2022) outlines:

- Functional congruity examines the extent to which consumer’s functional requirements are met in a product
- Trait congruity examines the extent to which the brands personality matches a consumer’s personality
- Added value congruity examines the extent to which a brand’s values match those of a consumerr

Consider a scenario in which the ‘customer’ is a business, the ‘requirement’ is the need for information, and the ‘product’ is informative branded content. According to this viewpoint, functional congruity appears to be the most significant factor in VTN’s DCM activities. As one already has an image of the brand, the other types of congruity may already be present.

Brand - business congruity

In light of this study, congruity between the brand and consumer is better phrased as congruity between two organisations, business-to-business (B2B).

There is a distinction between B2B and B2C markets and relationships just by the terminology. However, there are similarities as well (Nguyen, 2016). It appears that in a B2B setting, decisions are profoundly made by rational thinking (e.g., calculations). However, according to Nguyen (2016), B2B scholars increasingly point to the role of subjective evaluations, heuristics, and emotions in the buying process. Additionally, the buying process is sometimes described as a group process. Yet, individuals make purchase decisions. They are influenced by economic, political, legal, and social-cultural factors in their surroundings (Webster and Keller, 2004).

As a result, the identification of B2B shows similarities to the identification and connections between brands and consumers. The concept of organisational identification describes the extent to which individuals identify meaningfully with an organisation. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), this concept is constructed by three levels:

- **Cognitive:** refers to the extent to which an individual sees the organisation as a part of their self-concept
- **Affective:** refers to the emotional attachment an individual feels towards their organisation
- **Behavioural:** refers to the extent to which an individual's actions are consistent with their organisation's goals and values



Global vs. local consumer culture

VTN represents a global brand locally, which results in an interplay between local and global approaches. This is not only present in the company's (marketing) activities, but also by their target audience.

The objective of marketing is to communicate a message as effectively as possible to a certain target audience (Winarni, 2020). Companies incorporate cultural meanings from the culturally outer world into their brands (Steenkamp, 2019). As a result, consumers' global or local interests through their self-concept are important to their product decisions (Tu et al., 2012).

These interests characterise consumer's culture. Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 869) describe consumer culture as *"a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets"*.

Local consumption used to characterise consumer culture. However, during the last decades, consumer culture has seen a greater dominance of globalisation processes, according to Steenkamp (2019). As a result, customers are faced with varying local and global orientations in consumer culture.

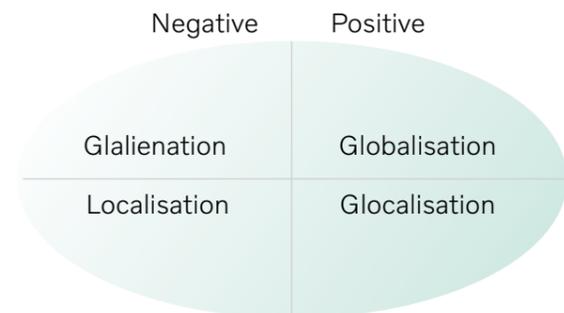
According to Tu et al. (2012), a local orientation (local consumer culture, LCC) is characterised by consumers who feel they belong to their local community and a local lifestyle. In contrast, the global orientation (global consumer culture, GCC) is characterised by consumers who feel they belong to the global community with a complementary lifestyle. Figure 10 presents an overview of consumers' attitudes towards local or global orientations.

Attitude towards global consumer culture



Attitude towards local consumer culture

Negative	Glalienation	Globalisation
Positive	Localisation	Glocalisation



Since it would be unfortunate to overlook local markets and their distinctive cultures (Vignali, 2001), advertising and marketing activities must pay attention to adapting global activities to local markets (Zhou et al., 2015). The reason is that cultural associations are an important source of brand equity, according to Steenkamp (2019). Brand associations consistent with consumers' cultural identity induce a more favourable attitude toward brands (Tu et al., 2012; Steenkamp, 2019). Moreover, Tu et al. (2012) describe that identity-consistent information is perceived as more relevant for processing objectives, than identity-inconsistent information.

Therefore, brands should focus on the role of culture in their marketing strategy, as well as the exact elements of the marketing mix that need to be standardised or localised in each market (Haron, 2016). A helpful and effective business environment can be created by proper adaption to a local market, according to Andersson (2011).

Localisation in marketing

The balance between GCC (globalisation) and LCC (localisation) is complicated, which makes it hard to argue for one over the other (Zhou et al., 2015). Mohan et al. (2018) argues that they are not defined opposites, as *“individuals can be global in one consumer domain but local in another”* (Steenkamp, 2019).

Therefore, it is an ongoing challenge for international brand management (Nguyen, 2016), academic researchers and marketers (Haron, 2016) to choose between standardisation (global consumer culture) and localisation (local consumer culture). According to Gala Global (2023), localisation, also known as ‘l10n’, is the process of *“adapting a product, an offering, or simply content to a specific locale or market”*.

One well-known method of content localisation is the process of translating content (e.g., articles) into the language of the viewer is. 65% of international consumers prefer content in their native language, according to Pokorny (2020). This notion is not novel, as adapting and customizing texts to cultural, social, and intellectual needs and expectations of target audiences has been a common practice throughout the literary history (Achkasov, 2017).

The term ‘localisation’ is a concept of complex content modifications (Achkasov, 2017). By addressing local requirements, regulations, customs, preferences, and more, the concept of localisation goes beyond mere translations (Pokorny, 2020). Localisation (i.e., translations) is important to make marketing activities appeal to different audiences across the globe (Kirmond, 2020), especially considering the rise of digital marketing and increasing online traffic.

It appears that localising imagery in branded content seems to be a supported strategy as well. Several marketing blogs (Austin, 2022; Williams, 2019; Hutchinson, 2022) contend that adapting imagery to local target audiences can help to shape a connection (Austin, 2022). In the words of Hutchinson (2022), *“people can better relate to images, illustrations, and visual content when they’re tailored to them”*. By using culturally appropriated images, cultural differences and mistakes can be avoided. Moreover, the self-identity of the viewer is addressed by doing so, and it reflects additional efforts that have been put in the delivered message (Austin, 2022; Williams, 2019; Hutchinson, 2022).

However, little is known about the effects of applying imagery in branded content. Li and Xie (2020) argue that studies about the effectivity of content are primarily about verbal content. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of how imagery has an effect on the effectivity of branded content.



2.2 COMPANY CONTEXT

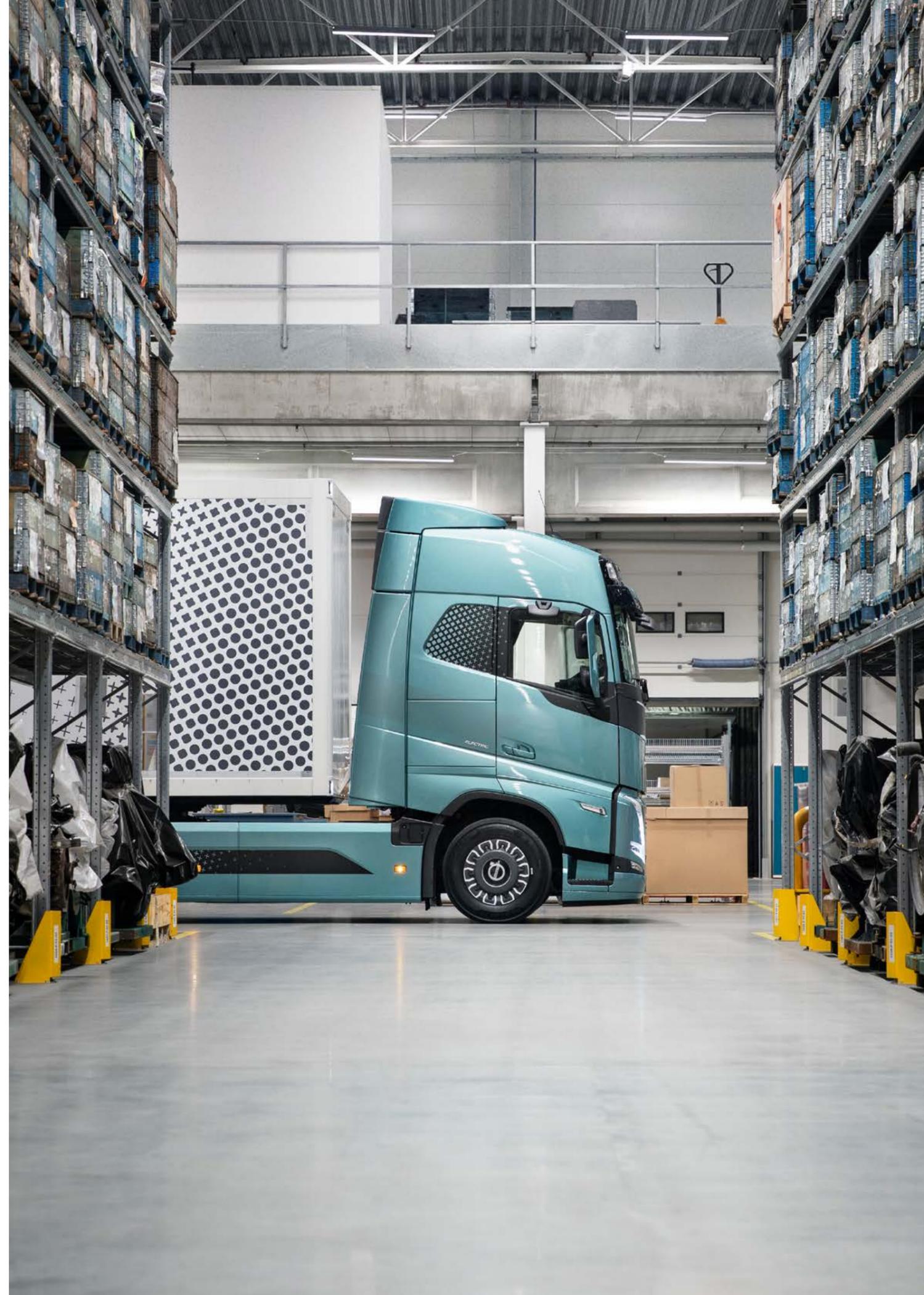
VTN finds itself at the intersection of global and local orientations. These orientations will be better understood after reading this chapter.

The brand and its values will first be introduced. It is crucial to deal consciously with these brand values as a local representative of the global brand. Second, to provide an idea on the size of the brand locally, it is displayed what the market share is.

Second, the distribution of informative branded content will also be reviewed. This clarifies the meaning of this form of content, how it is distributed, and show applied imagery. The latter will be indicative of the current state of the cultural orientation of the imagery. Building on this, existing branded content will be assessed. This should reveal which content items are most engaging, on which a preliminary conclusion could be drawn on the effectiveness of local and global orientations.

Additionally, the literature describes a scientific approach on localised imagery, but how is this concept viewed in practice? To answer this question, the vision of the company on the localisation of imagery is examined by interviewing employees who are acquainted with the marketing of branded content.

This methodology aims to examine the current state of this particular context, which should provide insights into the latest trends and relevant information. By doing so, opportunities for improvement and innovation are identified as well.



2.2.1 About Volvo Trucks

The history of the Volvo brand, as well as its core beliefs that make up its identity, are covered in this section. This sets the stage for the experience that should be transmitted via branded content interactions. Additionally, the local market segments that Volvo Trucks competes in are displayed, along with the brand's market share in each segment.

Brand fundamentals

Volvo was founded in Sweden by Assar Gabrielsson and Gustav Larson (figure 11).

The very first Volvo vehicle left the factory in Gothenburg in 1927 (Volvo Experience System, 2023-A). In the present, the brand has become one of the leading suppliers of commercial transport and infrastructure solutions (Volvo Experience System, 2023-B). Additionally, Volvo Cars has become a dominant actor in the automotive industry. Volvo is Latin for *"I roll"*. The products and services from the Volvo Group carry the recognizable iron mark (figure 12), which is the

ancient chemical symbol for iron. It stands for strength, durability and staying power. Together, the name and this mark stand for rolling strength and movement (Volvo Experience System, 2023-C). The brand is associated with safety. The 3-point safety belt, one of their research and development milestones, serves as an example of this (Volvo Group, 2017). Volvo decided not to patent this invention, because they constantly strive to develop for safety. As a result, society could benefit.

"An automobile is made by and for people. The basic principle for all manufacturing is and must remain safety"

Assar Gabrielsson and Gustaf Larson
The founders of Volvo in 1927

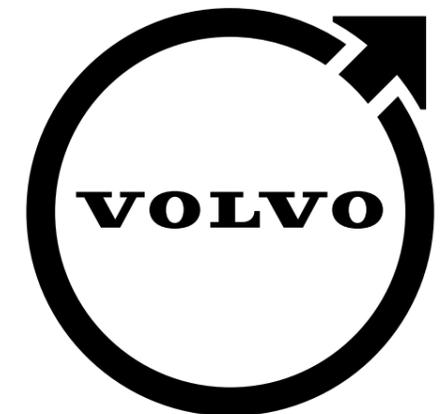


Figure 11
Founders of Volvo

Figure 12
Volvo iron mark

What are the brand's core values?

The primary value of the brand is to *“use technology to improve people's lives, with safety and sustainability as part of our DNA”*, according to the Volvo Experience System (2023-C). The purpose of the brand is to continuously reimagine mobility for people, businesses, and society at large: *“Our solutions drive sustainability and safety – for people by people.”* This claim embodies the brand's core values, which are quality, safety, and environmental care (figure 13).

Other brand values are human centric, innovation, progression, intelligence, premium, Scandinavian origin. Volvo describes its personality as:

- Confident, yet ambitious.
- Down to earth, but influential.
- Experts who love the success that human centricity, technology, and innovative design empowers.
- Honest people who care about other people.

All things considered, this should result in an experience that is perceived as a *“... perception of pleasure and ease of use, a feeling of serenity and genuine care”* (Volvo Experience System, 2023-C).

***“To move the world
we want to live in.
Driving progress”***

Volvo Trucks Dialect
As proposed by Volvo Group (2023-C)

Safety

is the guiding principle behind all Volvo products, services and operations.

Quality

is an integrated focus in all business aspects.

Environment

the overall objective is to continuously reduce the environmental footprint of Volvo products, services and operations.

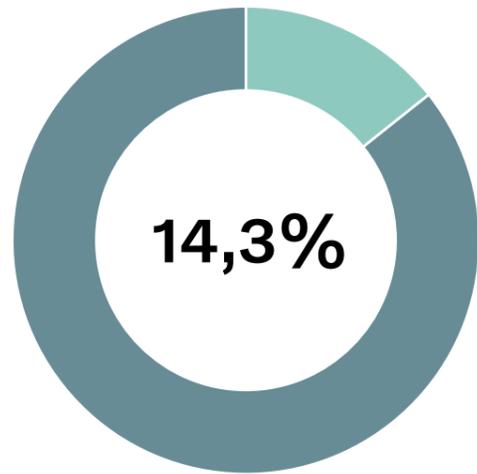


Figure 13 Brand core values

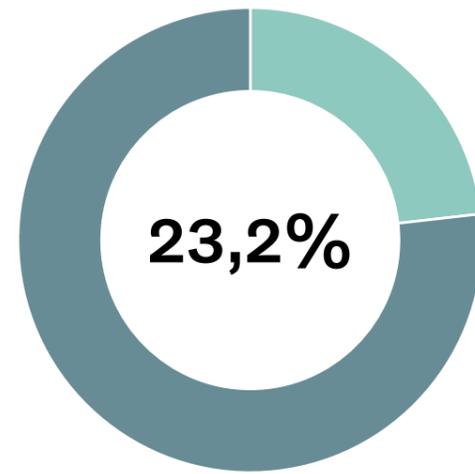


Truck market segments

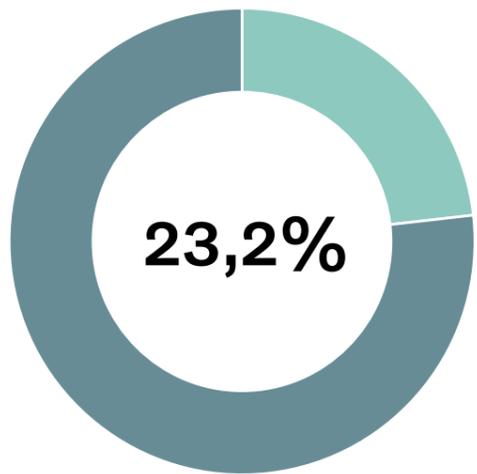
Trucks from Volvo Trucks come in a wide variety and can be utilised for many different tasks. Four broad categories are taken into account when studying market shares.



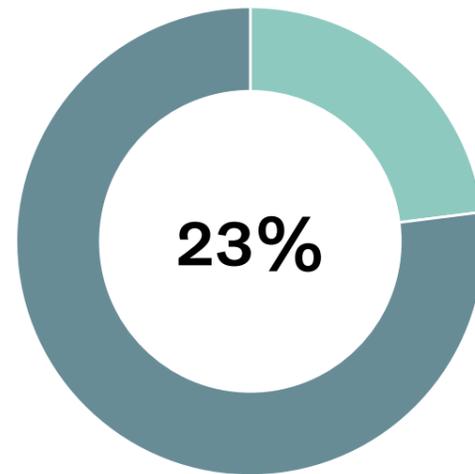
Distribution: the regional to national movement of goods. This includes more compact vehicles, which can move easily in city centres



Heavy Duty Vehicles (HDV): this includes vehicles converted to perform special tasks, like transporting exceptionally heavy loads or have a role in the field of construction.



Long Haul: transportation of goods on a regional to international scale. These include larger vehicles with a trailer, which allow for the transportation of more goods than distribution vehicles.



Severe: remaining segments that may require special adaptations of vehicles



Figure 14
Marketshare of Volvo Trucks in the Netherlands (2022)

Figure 15
Collage of Volvo-trucks

2.2.2 Content strategy

Disclosed information

Disclosed information

VTN is present on various social media platforms, being primarily Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. An elaboration of the different platforms is provided below, as well as the numbers of followers on this platform (as of March 2023).

- Facebook**
 This platform is a social network that gives people the power to build communities (Meta – Resources, 2023). Within Facebook, users can post comments, share pictures, and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form videos (Nations, 2021). Facebook has 10.4 million users in the Netherlands (Buijsrogge, 2022). The page of Volvo Trucks currently has 39.553 likes and 42.562 people are following the page.
- LinkedIn**
 This platform is a social networking site designed specifically for a more professional community. The goal is to enable members to establish networks of people they know and trust professionally (Hanna, 2022). LinkedIn has five million users in the Netherlands (Buijsrogge, 2022). The page of Volvo Trucks currently has 6.614 followers.
- Instagram**
 This platform is a social networking app which allows its users to share pictures and videos with their friends (W, 2021). Instagram has 8.5 million active users in the Netherlands (Buijsrogge, 2022). The page of Volvo Trucks currently has 11.496 followers.
- YouTube**
 This platform is a video sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment and upload their own videos (McGarrigle, 2021). YouTube has 9.1 million active users in the Netherlands (Buijsrogge, 2022). The page of Volvo Trucks currently has 2.150 followers.

Given the format of informative branded content (i.e., text based), LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram are the primary social media platforms that will be referred to and studied in the remainder of this study.

Applied imagery

The imagery applied (figure 17) demonstrates that Kennisbank imagery is not (always) locally oriented.

The Kennisbank includes a total amount of 140 articles. Only ten articles include imagery with a local orientation. All of the other articles are supported by imagery available from the brand (i.e., Volvo Trucks Media Library).

This branded imagery is distinguished by its high quality and global (i.e., foreign) orientation, considering the cues in the image. For instance, the landscape does not seem representative of the Netherlands. Additionally, the images show licence plates that are not Dutch, but Swedish. As a result, the imagery originates and aligns to the brand. It appears globally oriented.

Besides, it occurs that the Kennisbank’s introduction includes a summary of the articles’ topics. This serves as the main criteria for personal relevance of branded content. Therefore, the local orientation of those ten articles did not foster more interactions than the other articles.



2.2.3 Analysing existing branded content

Analysis of current branded content may already show which orientation of imagery (i.e., global vs. local) tends to appeal more to the viewer, even though the proof of concept will follow later.

The cultural orientation of the most popular branded content pieces throughout the previous year (March 2023–March 2022) will be examined in this section. Here, it will be reflected on existing branded content on social media.

Methodology

The social media channels that will be analysed are Instagram, Facebook (analysis through Meta Business) and LinkedIn (analysis through Coosto).

Branded content with the highest reach will be gathered on LinkedIn. On Instagram and Facebook, the branded content with the highest reach as well as the number of likes will be gathered. An overview will be made of most engaged content items. These statistics are derived from the branded content management tools per platform, which displays the ‘performance’ of all posts shared on social media.

The analysis will not take into account promoted content, because the paid distribution distorts the statistics of these content items. This does not allow for objective conclusions. The full analysis can be found in appendix 1.

A conclusion regarding the effectiveness of localisation of content cannot be drawn from this analysis. It focusses only on the orientation of existing branded content. In other words, it may show that locally oriented content performs better, but it lacks the comparison to an equivalent post with a global orientation. Locally oriented items will be marked.

Results

Instagram

What stands out here, is that from the twelve items presented, six items directly have a local orientation or include cues to the Dutch cultural identity. Here, the Dutch licence plate refers directly to a local orientation. It also appears to have been captured in the Netherlands. Some content items contain locally celebrities, such as the Dutch Royal family or Martijn Kuijpers, a well-known figure in the Dutch trucking community.

Considering these content items, it stands out that nearly items are regarded to be ‘sweets’. VTN uses this notion internally to content that, like fast food, is ‘easy to consume’. One needs a short attention span for this content, as it especially appeals to the viewer. They simply like what they are seeing, like pictures of special trucks. The opposites are ‘vitamins’, being the type of content that, like a salad, is ‘a nutritious consumption’. The viewer gains knowledge from their interaction with this content.

The popularity of ‘vitamines’ seems minimal on Instagram, compared to ‘sweets’. In a way, this finding reflects the interest of the target audience on Instagram. The topic of the locally oriented content makes the content more engaging, which is usually about trucks.



Facebook

What stands out here, is that out of the thirteen items listed, ten represent a local orientation. Here, the orientation is reflected by truck that have a Dutch licence plate and seem to be photographed in the Netherlands. In addition, certain content items include Dutch truck drivers.

The larger part of the most engaged content on Facebook is about heavy duty, remarkable trucks. In addition, nostalgic imagery of trucks appears engaging, as well as pictures of the trucks in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is argued that the primary audience on this social media platform are truck drivers or fans – just like Instagram. This is supported by the fact that other popular content consists of stories, articles that relate to truck drivers.

It seems that local imagery performs better than global imagery. However, the distinction between the imagery and the content appears to be similar. Whereas many ‘vitamins’ are accompanied by global photography, many ‘sweets’ are accompanied by local imagery. Local imagery appears to perform better given the target audience on this social media platform, but this seems the result of their interest.

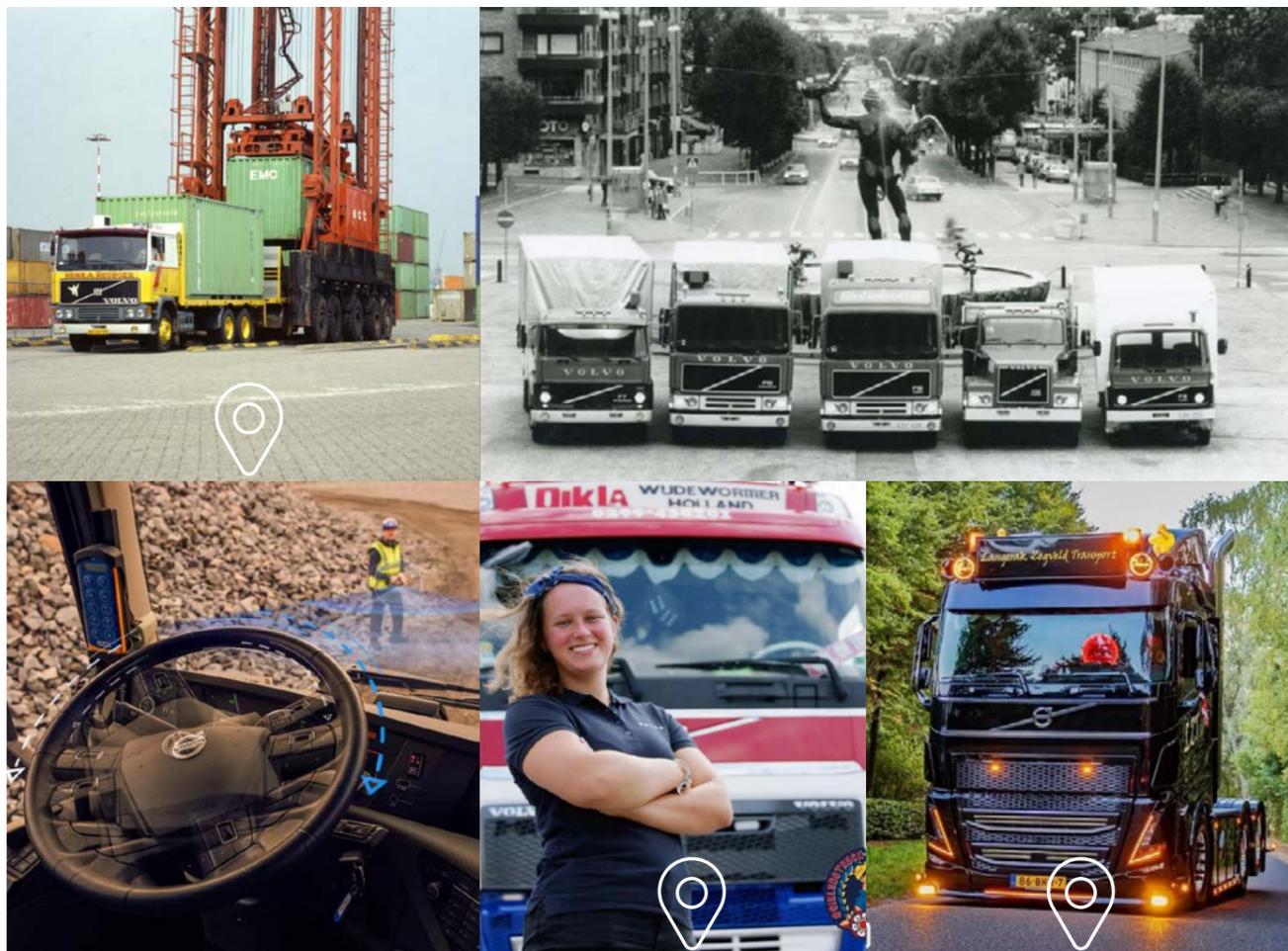


Figure 19 Most engaged branded content items on Facebook

LinkedIn

Thirteen of twenty posts on LinkedIn include locally oriented imagery, as these items are about local businesses or products.

These posts are primarily about companies taking delivery of BEVs. Other popular local content are remarkable trucks. The remaining other messages are about new product innovations, safety or related to driving trucks. As found on Instagram as well, the posts including the Dutch Royal Family has developed a large reach.

In addition, it was found that several posts were about product innovations (e.g., hydrogen). New developments, novelties, seem to appeal very well to the target audience on this platform.



Figure 20 Most engaged branded content items on LinkedIn

Discussion

The results partly support the expected outcomes of the rationale.

It cannot be concluded that all engaging content items are locally oriented. Yet, a significant portion of the most effective items (either through likes or reach) have a local orientation or related to Dutch cultural identity in another way.

Instagram and Facebook are more informal platforms, where VTN is followed primarily by fans and trucks drivers. Here, locally oriented content consists of pictures obtained from truck spotters, nostalgic pictures, or heavy-duty trucks. On LinkedIn, a more formal platform, the larger part of the popular content is about local companies taking delivery of their new BEV truck.

This test is simply suggestive. It is only possible to reflect on the orientation of different content items. Differences found in these items are not solely its cultural orientation, the topics of the content items also vary. Therefore, a clear conclusion on the effectivity between locally and globally oriented imagery or content cannot be drawn.

To illustrate this, it occurs that the topics of locally oriented content are different from the Kennisbank content. Locally oriented content is highly shaped by images from fans, in which local trucks are shown. In contrast, Kennisbank articles are often shared with globally oriented images and serve to inform. It seems that the followers are primarily interested in this local content with pictures of trucks. Besides, the performance of Kennisbank content is not reviewed. That is why A/B testing is a valuable next step, allowing for direct comparisons between cultural orientations in the distribution of this specific type of content.

Only the content pieces with the highest levels of engagement have been assessed. The overall balance between locally and globally focused content items has not received any consideration. As a result, the ratio of local content items to global content items is unknown. This ratio could have an impact on interactions. Suppose 90% of the content items are locally oriented. Then the remaining 10% of items might already be less appealing, as followers are used to content that is locally oriented.



2.2.4 Visions on imagery localisation

Interviews will be conducted with employees to learn more about the visions on the localisation of imagery. For a thorough understanding, employees with a function in relation to branded content on a local and global level will participate.

In this chapter, a summary is provided on different perspectives on the localisation of imagery and further insights in relation to the application imagery in branded content. In addition, an online session has been attended regarding the development of editorial branded content – should localisation be taken into account when creating new branded content, or not?

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted as a form of qualitative research. The aim is to create a better understanding of the opinions on the localisation of imagery within the company. To strengthen understanding of visions on localisation, three employees of the company have been interviewed on both a global and local level. In their function, they are related to the creation and distribution of branded content:

- **Local - Marketing & Communication Officer, female, 23 years old. Online interview (Teams), 30 minutes, April 2023**
Responsible for managing the branded content on social media
- **Local - Director of Truck Sales, male, 46 years old. Online interview (Teams), 30 minutes, April 2023**
Responsible for the management of truck sales. Knowledge of vehicle representation in branded content.
- **Global - Content Manager, female, 35 years old. Online interview (Teams), 30 minutes, April 2023**
Responsible for the management of editorial content, which relates to the informative branded content.

By interviewing these employees, it should be revealed how localisation of content is seen from both a local and global perspective. The following questions were predetermined. Yet, there was room left in the interviews for further elaborations, possibly providing more information on the topic

- *How could an image affect the relevance of content?*
- *Which picture seems more effective, in perspective of addressing a local market?*
- *What is the right balance between photos/content delivered by Volvo vs. created locally?*
- *Should we completely switch to using Dutch photos?*

Relevant insights and statements related to the questions will be noted. Then, the obtained information will be analysed along three aspects, being the opinions of localisation, the feasibility, and understanding why localisation could be a useful strategy. Finally, a summary will be presented that reflects on these aspects. Moreover, further insights obtained from the interviews and the online session will be presented. All notes from the interviews can be found in appendix 2.

Results

Applying local imagery is an effective way to address the local (Dutch) target audience:

- Local imagery contributes to the viewer's awareness and communicates more directly to them because it is related to their culture. Branded content is perceived more emotionally.
- The viewer is able to relate to the imagery, making the branded content perceived as more personal. In contrast, global imagery seems more generic.
- Especially truck drivers are reactive to local imagery - imagery that shows trucks in the Netherlands, or truck spotting (i.e., 'sweets').
- In the Netherlands, Volvo Trucks is the market leader for BEV trucks. As a result, much branded content is about companies taking delivery of BEV trucks. Showing such imagery does not only affect the relevance for the viewer, it demonstrates the position of the brand in the market as well.
- By the operational nature of trucks, imagery with trucks being used in daily activities may be perceived as more relevant to the viewer, compared to 'polished' product pictures.

However, a local market is not always able or in favour of including local imagery:

- Specific imagery is sometimes needed in informative branded content needed that is not locally available, but only globally.
- New products are not directly available in local markets. The brand would offer imagery with an universal focus, which can be applied in all markets. Local markets have little choice but to use this imagery in their distribution of this content.
- The brand has developed an extensive media library. Choosing between creating local imaging and using already-existing global imagery is the challenge that arises. As the media library includes a wide range of imagery, it is likely that specific imagery can be found here.
- Sweden is an important brand value. This country comes with positive associations in terms of the perceived quality of products. For this reason, imagery that is more on a global level and captured in Sweden, will remain to be used. It is part of the brand's identity. According to literature, the country-of-origin image, corporate image, and brand image are relied on in the consumers' decision-making process. Souiden et al. (2020) describe "the consumers' overall view of products from a particular country, based primarily on their prior perceptions of that country's strengths and weaknesses in production and marketing" as the meaning of the country-of-origin image.

Further insights

- The topic is crucial for the relevance of informative branded content. In fact, the topic may be more important than the imagery shown. As a result, the imagery only supports the relevance of the content. It does not determine it. Put in other words, global imagery may not make branded content less relevant.
- Congruity between the topic and the imagery is important. For example, an article includes local imagery, but it does not perfectly suit the topic. The editor could better make use of imagery with a global orientation.
- Some companies or truck drivers engage in daily activities outside the Netherlands. Think of a Dutch company delivering goods in Paris. For this particular audience, it seems more important to have imagery that applies to their activities, than being reflective for a specific country.
- The product itself also serves as a cue to self-identity. Trucks are built specifically for a market or according to local regulations. Assuming that the viewer has knowledge on trucks, they should be able to determine for which market a truck has been assembled from looking at imagery.
- Which type of congruity seems more important to the viewer? Should the branded content's imagery be congruent to the brand, or should it be more congruent to the viewer's identity?

Localising editorial content

An editorial content meeting was attended in addition to the interviews. It is best to think of editorial content as informative articles that will be published on the website. During this session, six tips were given on how to localise editorial content:

- *"Is there local SME, examples, statistics, facts, or quotes from your local expert that can be added?"*
- *Can you change the hyperlinks to your local website?*
- *Can you change/add a local Call To Action in the end of the article?*
- *Can you change the image/images to more locally suited imagery?*
- *Do you have any local related content to add: Films, testimonials, infographics, guides etc?*
- *SEO: can you include local keywords that matches your local search behaviour better?"*

Reference: Volvo Trucks internal communication

Discussion

Generally, the employees are in favour of the localisation of imagery and branded content. This is supported by the guidelines from the editorial content online session. However, the localisation of imagery does not always seem possible. Moreover, it does not seem to be the most important aspect in terms of branded content's relevance. The congruity between imagery and text, and the topic of the content are crucial factors to consider.

Additionally, customer's preferences for global and local orientations can vary. This raises the question of what their 'expectations' might be, does a viewer expect locally oriented imagery and content from a global brand?

The country of origin is a crucial factor here. Given that the viewer will probably receive branded content that aligns with the brand, it makes sense to have this reflected. The question is whether continuing this experience is necessary. Assume that localisation, thus moving away from branded imagery, improves interactions. What is then more important? Furthermore, it is likely that the viewer is already aware of the brand's values. Localised visuals may include less 'brand'. However, it is unclear whether this results in the viewer experiencing 'less brand'.

This question demonstrates a lack of understanding of the viewer's perception. This study is about congruity between viewer and branded content. The company contributes to congruity by the 'design' of the branded content. The viewer experiences the congruity. The purpose of these interviews has been to learn more about the company's vision on image localisation. However, the viewer is left out of the picture. In the end, their experience will be tested by measured interactions in the A/B tests.

However, qualitative research from the viewer's perception is lacking, whereas this characterises design science. Thus, this may be somewhat underexposed in this study. In addition, the current interviews have been with a limited number of participants/employees. This has resulted in a perspective that is positive about the localisation of imagery. However, by conducting more interviews with people with different functions might have painted a different picture.



3 / Definition

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the obtained information, including relevant theoretical concepts and factors related to the localisation of imagery in branded content.

The theoretical framework presents how theoretical concepts relate to this research. Additionally, an instinctive rationale is provided that describes the anticipated results of this study, based on specific theoretical concepts. Finally, considerations for the research's further phases are discussed.

This chapter contains the following sections:

3.1
Meaning

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3.2
Theoretical Framework

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3.3
Rationale

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3.4
Next steps

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3.1 Meaning

The definition phase in design science research sets the foundation for the rest of the study, based on the understanding thus far. In other words, it bridges the described problem domain and the following design and evaluation phases.

Through the literature review in the understanding phase, an understanding is gained on the theoretical context and scope of this study. Knowledge is obtained on the concepts of DCM and addressing self-identity. Based on this, the expected outcomes are described underpinned by theoretical concepts.

The definition therefore facilitates the communication of the essence of this study, ensuring that the reader and others have a common understanding of the research. A theoretical framework provides a clear and well-defined conceptual structure for the research. Moreover, it connects the current research with existing knowledge and research findings. This alignment is crucial for the design and evaluation phases. Here, clear and measurable objectives for the research will be outlined as well.

As a result, the definition phase ensures that later phases of the study are purposeful, practical, and driven by an understanding of the context and requirements. This should contribute to the creation and development of relevant artefacts, that eventually contribute to knowledge in the field of applicable sciences as well.



3.2 Theoretical framework

Obtained from the literature review, this chapter presents an overview of relevant concepts to the research question - could congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and imagery used in branded content affect interactions with the branded content?

In this overview, an expectation is expressed on the research question. This expectation is divided into parts, in which relevant theoretical concepts are related to each part.

Various concepts and effects have been found that seemed relevant for this explanation. Although not all may directly be applicable, they form important contextual guidelines and considerations for future chapters and test.

Existing research topics regarding visual branded content (i.e. imagery)

pictures characteristics, publishing behaviour, perception and acquisition.

Marketing Context Characteristics

Form of the object (product), context, meaning given to object, text

Picture Presence Effects

Mere presence effect, characteristics effect, picture-text fit effect

Engagement factors

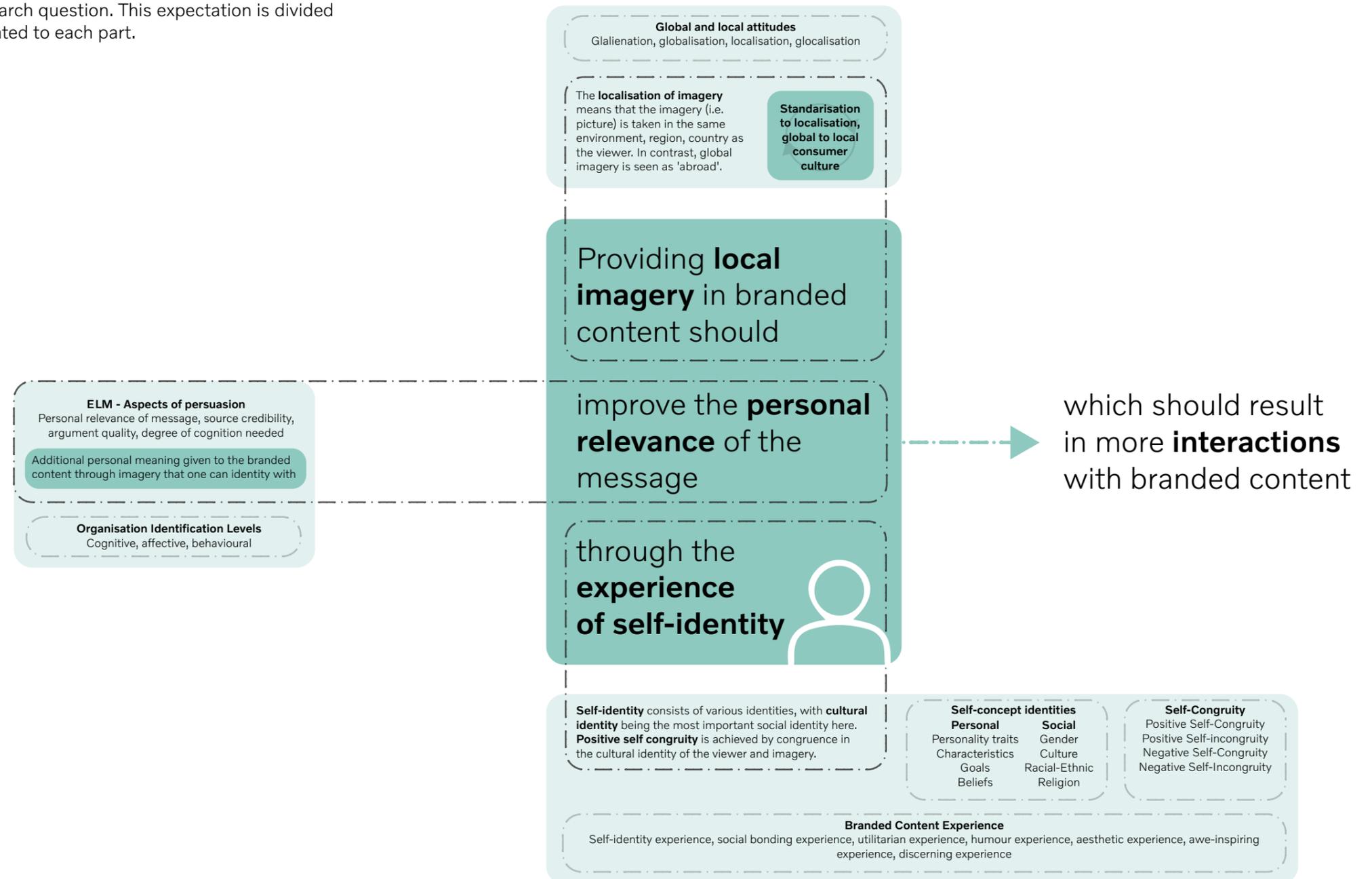
Vividness, interactivity, entertainment, emotion (high arousal), authenticity, surprise, interest, practically useful

Thumbnail Selection Characteristics

Element complexity, object complexity, emotional stimulation, colourfulness, brightness, picture quality, size of text, shape of text, celebrity

Visual Characteristics

Colourfulness, human face, emotion, picture source, picture quality, colour, pixels, brightness / lightness, chroma, hue



3.3 Rationale

In this study, the question is whether congruity could affect interactions. Based on adduction (chapter 2.1, Methodology), the rationale should therefore be seen as an expected outcome, which has yet to be discovered. This tone aligns to the explorative nature of design science, revealing whether the proposed mechanism will work or not.

The rationale for this study will be described using the CIMO approach. This approach is commonly applied in design science. According to Booth et al. (2021), in the CIMO approach, the 'c' stands for context, the 'i' for intervention, 'm' for mechanism and 'o' for outcomes:

- Context – *“Which individuals, relationships, institutional settings, or wider systems are being studied?”*
- Intervention – *“The effects of what event, action, or activity are being studied?”*
- Mechanisms – *“What are the mechanisms that explain the relationship between interventions and outcomes? Under what circumstances are these mechanisms activated or not activated?”*
- Outcomes – *“What are the effects of the intervention? How will the outcomes be measured?”*

Context

In DCM, branded content is the mediator between individuals and brands. VTN creates and distributes branded content that is aimed to inform (Kennisbank articles). This content is primarily distributed as articles, but as online marketing has become more visual, it is supported by imagery.

This imagery contains cues to a certain cultural identity. It has been observed that VTN uses imagery that is both global and local culturally oriented. However, the company has a local target audience. Thus, the question is raised if including local imagery will improve the interactions with the informative branded content.

Intervention

Therefore, the cultural orientation of the imagery will be addressed. Imagery that contains cues to a global cultural identity, will be adapted to the local target audience by adjusting these cues to a local cultural identity. In other words, it is the localisation of visual branded content.

Mechanism

As part of the BCE, the experience of self-identity is described as the extent to which interactions with branded content allow an individual to *“feel an individual persona, identity, and a perception of self”* (Waqas et al., 2021).

The intervention should support the experience of self-identity, based on the shared cultural identity of the imagery and the viewer. The imagery will be positively congruent to the self-concept of the viewer based on their cultural identity.

Outcomes

As a result, the branded content containing this adapted imagery seems more congruent to the viewer's self-concept. By this experience of self-identity, the branded content seems more personally relevant and authentic (ELM). As a result, more interactions occur with branded content when it contains localised imagery, compared to global imagery.

3.4 Next steps

The research question of this study is if congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and imagery used in branded content could affect interactions with branded content. This chapter describes the theoretical foundation for the expected outcomes. A better understanding has emerged on the meaning of congruity in DCM. It seems an important concept that can affect interactions between individuals and brands.

Next, the challenge is to apply and evaluate this knowledge. How can congruity between the viewer and the image be achieved? This should be explored in the next chapters.

As this study has a specific marketing context, no evidence was found in the literature describing which elements in images can ensure congruity. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate which elements in images of trucks lead to congruity. In other words, which elements in imagery are representative of a cultural identity?

Based on this knowledge, adjustments can then be made to imagery. In this way, globally oriented imagery can be transformed into locally oriented imagery, and vice versa. Next, these images will have to be applied in branded content. As a result, variants of the branded content are developed that each contain different cultural orientations in the imagery.

These variants will be compared to each other by A/B tests, a method that allows for direct comparisons between variants. By interactions with the branded content, the effect of congruity with the viewer's cultural identity will be examined. The intention of these tests is to investigate whether the localisation of imagery has an effect on interactions. Thus, it is investigated whether this mechanism has an effect on human behaviour. Given that this study is exploratory, any outcome will be valuable, even if it deviates from the expected outcomes. This is a fundamental aspect of design science.

If it turns out that the localisation of imagery has a positive effect on interactions, the company will be able to make their activities more effective in the future through the creation and distribution of local images and or branded content. Vice versa, if the localisation of imagery has a negative effect, the company should not apply this mechanism in the future, as it would result in spending unnecessary resources without result. Thus, insights gained from this research can be put to practical use, making it valuable input for future activities.



4 / Discovery

The importance of congruity between individuals and brands is explored in previous chapters. The next chapters will look at how congruity can be achieved and whether interactions are affected by this concept.

In order to identify cues to a cultural identity in imagery, imagery is assessed. A/B testing will then make use of the knowledge gathered from this. Congruity will be established using a variety of variables in a number of tests. Following the completion of these tests, it will be discussed whether localising images affects interactions with branded content.

This chapter contains the following sections:

4.1
Cue analysis

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4.2
A/B Testing

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4.1 CUE ANALYSIS

The congruity between the viewer and the branded content is reinforced by the images shown. The question is, what elements in the imagery establish this congruity?

This chapter examines the elements in imagery that serve as signals to the viewer's cultural identity. As a result, these elements form the input, say ingredients, for achieving local and global orientations in later A/B tests. In other words, once the cues have been evaluated, it will be clear what elements in the imagery should be changed. The full elaboration can be found in appendix 3.



4.1.1 Methodology

The cue analysis serves as a methodology for examining elements in imagery that have a relationship to cultural identity. These elements are fundamental to congruity between the viewer and (the imagery in) branded content.

Congruity is an important concept in online marketing. It should be seen as the bridge between the sender and receiver of branded content. A high degree of congruity means that the branded content strongly represents the viewer. This allows the viewer to identify themselves with the brand and the branded content. This should have a positive effect on personal relevance, probably leading to more interactions. However, the literature does not describe which elements in imagery of this particular context (products) are representative of cultural identity.

For this reason, the cue analysis is an important step in this research. On the one hand, it builds on the acquired theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, it provides input for the next steps in the research. The goal is to identify the cues to cultural identity in images of trucks, thus building a better understanding of how local and global orientations may be established in imagery. Later, these orientations will be compared.

This section describes the choices made in the approach of the cue analysis. First, it will be described who the participants are and what they will be asked to do in this test. Then, the applied imagery will be elaborated upon.

Procedure

Employees of Volvo Trucks and Volvo Cars, both male and female, with ages ranging from roughly 25 to 50 years old. They come from different disciplines and were randomly approached, despite their familiar backgrounds (i.e., automotive and mobility). As a result, the participants form a diverse group with varying backgrounds and knowledge. In total, eighteen people have participated in this study.

Two images are shown to the participant. One image is locally oriented, the other is globally oriented. Different image sets will be presented to each participant. By doing so, one participant does not profit from hearing the answer from others, if they were to sit next to each other. The participant will be asked in which country the images are taken. In addition, they have to point out the cues they base their judgement on. Then, it will be asked which cues seem to draw the attention initially. This should reveal which cue is the most important indication of a cultural identity. The test is closed by asking which image seems most personally relevant to the participant.

Introduction - Welcome participant to survey and describe what the participant can expect.

- *Can I have a minute of your time? Thank you for participating! I will be showing you a couple of pictures and we will shortly discuss each picture.*

Cues – Investigate what the cues are that people refer to, as they relate to a cultural identity.

- Where - in which country was this picture taken?
- Based on which elements can you tell?
- Which element accounts the strongest in your judgement?
- Which picture appeals more to you, in terms of relevance?

Closing off - Explain what you are trying to conclude from these questions. The participant might have something to say about this topic or wants to share their opinion.

Evaluation

The researcher has the same images as the participants on a note sheet. The imagery elements identified by participants are circled on the note sheet. Multiple participants will evaluate the same image. This provides quantitative support for the indication of elements. In addition, notes will be taken of any statements made by participants, should they verbally refer to elements without pointing them out.

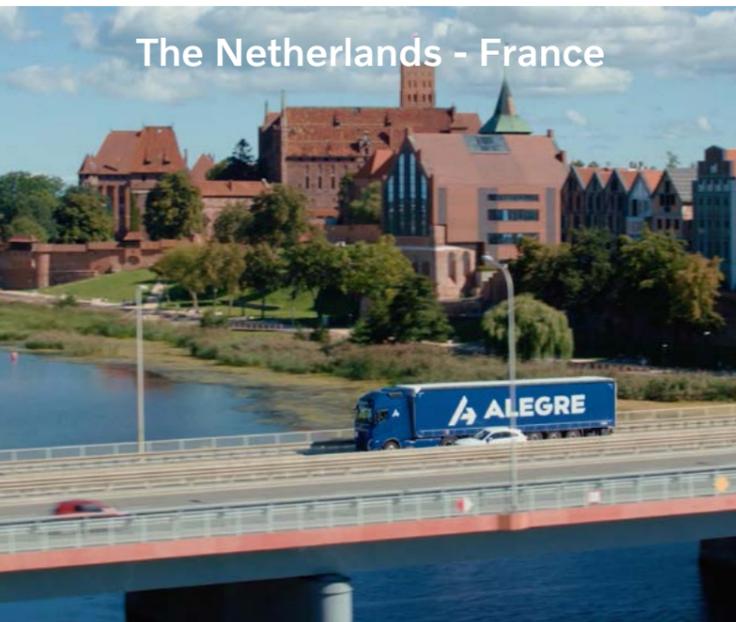
Based on the notes, the elements for each image will be highlighted by coloured spots. These spots not only point out the elements. The size of the spot also shows which element stands out more in the imagery than others. This approach shows similarities to heatmaps.

In addition, it will be reflected on the relevance of imagery. For each imagery set shown to participants, it is described which image is considered more relevant to the participants.

Imagery

The images used in this test have been carefully selected by the following considerations:

- The imagery includes both local and global orientations, with various environments in both orientations. One environment could contain more cues to a cultural identity than the other. By including distinctive environments and orientations, it is aimed to obtain a variety of cues.
- The imagery contains different truck brands. The country of origin (COO) is an important motive for Volvo Trucks. This may imply that a picture of a Volvo-truck is assumed to be in taken in Sweden if it appears foreign. However, it could be taken in another country. Here, the participant may draw their conclusion on this association to the brand, rather than by looking at the picture.
- The country of origin of the truck brands should not be correlative with the countries / environments shown (figure 22). It could still occur that a participant assumes that by the country of origin of the brand, the image was taken in that country. However, this consideration should limit these thoughts.



The Netherlands - France



The Netherlands - Germany



Sweden - United Kingdom



Poland - Sweden

4.1.2 Results

The cues pointed to by the participants are indicated in this section. The size of the spot also shows which cue catches more attention.

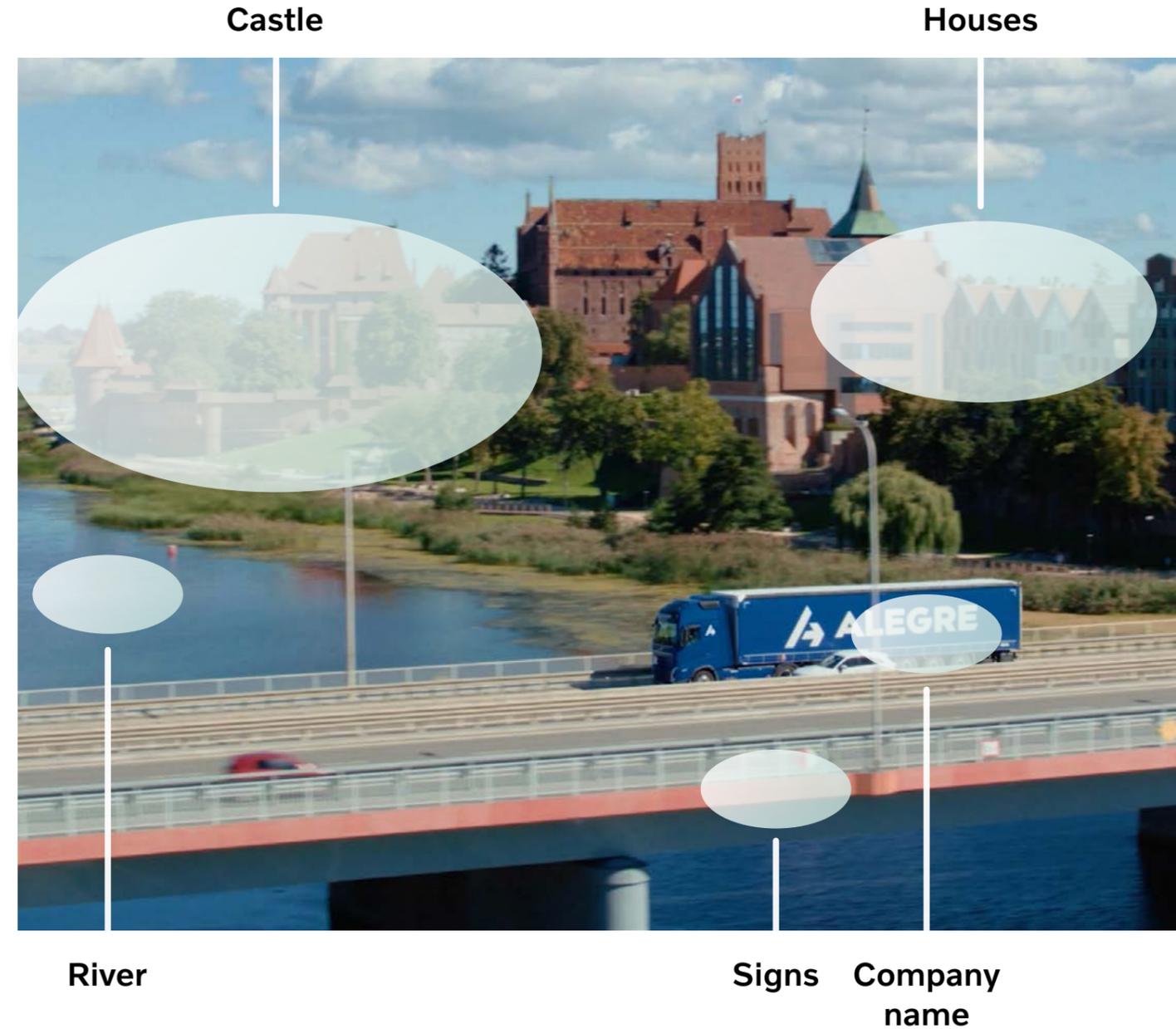


Figure 22
Imagery applied in cue analysis

Figure 23
Cues in imagery

Bridge

Windmill

Houses

Architecture

Words



Water

Company name

Company name

Licence plate

Signs (words) Company graphics

Licence plate

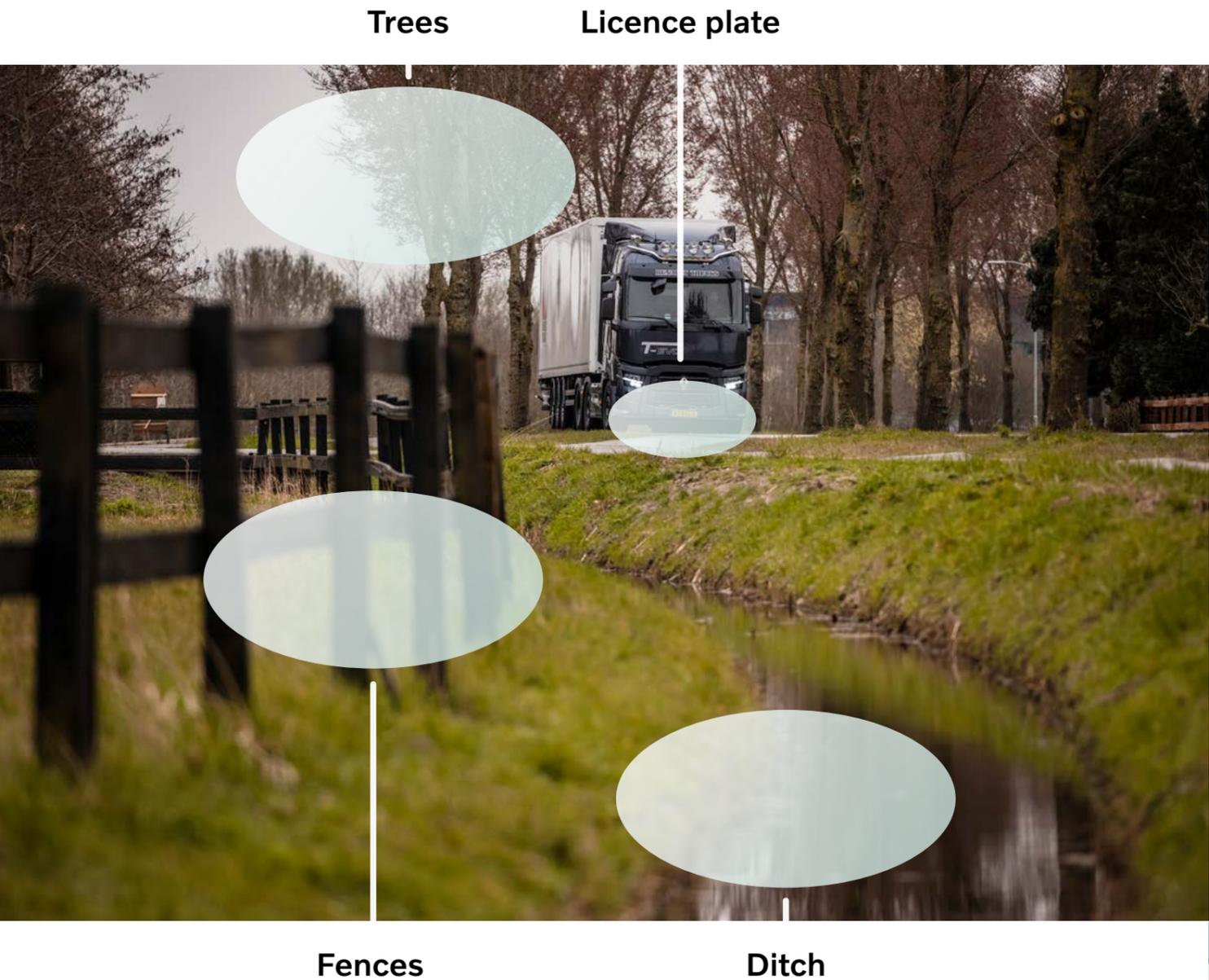


Figure 25
Cues in imagery

Figure 26
Company graphics on trucks



Cues

There are diverse levels of cues. These include the surroundings (i.e., landscape) around the truck, the licence plate and company's graphics on the truck:

- **Landscape:** participants primarily point to architecture. Think of special buildings, the building style and the appearance of. Moreover, participants pointed to elements that include written words, such as signs or words on buildings. Additionally, in the absence of architecture, nature becomes the primary cue.

Not every image includes distinctive cues in the surroundings. For example, it is hard to judge in which country the image was taken if the truck is driving in an industrial area. These surroundings are rather generic. In other words, the more distinctive and characteristic the landscape in an image, the more recognizable it is (figure 26).

- **Licence plate:** the colour of a licence plate is indicative, as well as the number-letter combination. However, the printed imagery was of mediate quality and the letters could not be read properly. Therefore, the colour is an important cue to the which the number-letter combination could be offer support.
- **Company graphics:** the graphics of a company can relate to a cultural identity in several ways. First, participants could read actual words (i.e., the language applied) in some imagery. For example, a sentence in Dutch will be recognized by people who speak the language (figure 23, red truck).

Second, the design of certain graphics can be very distinctive and recognizable for a certain brand. Some participants pointed out that the red truck was one from Amstel beer, which was then related to the Dutch cultural identity. Even one participant could recall the name of the logistic company on this truck.

Relevance

Participants indicate that the image with the red truck appeals more to them (figure 27). They describe it as a recognizable Dutch landscape. The bridge and windmill are strong indicative cues. In addition, as the truck is also larger, the participants were able to read the company graphics, which includes written word in the Dutch language. Moreover, the licence plate contributes to their judgement.



Participants indicate that the image with the green landscape appeals more to them (figure 28). However, the opinions differ more than in the other set of images. In these two images, a city centre and a rural area are depicted. Some participants refer to this fact and state that the 'rural' image appeals more to them, as they are also living in a smaller village in a rural area. In other words, they answer this question by taking their current situation of living into account.

Concluding, elements in the imagery can lead to certain images to be considered more relevant to the self than other images.



Discussion

This test aimed to assess which elements in product imagery (as a form of branded visual content) relate to the cultural identity of the viewer. It was also questioned if some cues stand out more than others.

This study has demonstrated that there are several cues to a cultural identity, meaning that a local orientation can be achieved with various variables. In addition, it was found which cues participants refer to when being asked to examine where an image was taken. However, an uniform understanding of how cues compare to another is lacking. For this reason, cues will be applied and assessed individually and in combinations in A/B testing, to learn more about their impact on branded content's effectiveness.

The landscape is considered a dominant cue. Yet, this finding may be affected by the chosen imagery and the question asked to participants (i.e., 'Where - in which country was this picture taken?'). It occurs that the landscapes in the applied imagery are distinctive and may provide clear information on its cultural identity. This analysis did not include environment that are less characteristic, such as an industrial area. This could have been valuable for the test, because the participants in this situation might have identified other elements in the image as dominant cues.

Besides, participants were asked to point out cues and notes of their statements were made. This method offers room for interpretation. The quality of the answers could possibly be improved. An idea is to have participants write down the cues and then arrange them. At the same time, this leaves room for the participants. Will their conscious interpretation be the same as their unconscious behaviour? An alternative could be eye tracking, after all, participants look at certain areas in imagery to answer the question. These approaches could have produced a more realistic and qualitative view on cues.

In addition, the quality of the results could be improved by a more diverse group of participants and a higher number of participants. Employees within the company were asked to participate in this study. In a way, this group of participants is biased. After all, they work within the company. They may have prior knowledge in relation to the imagery, the trucks shown in the images, and the meaning or knowledge of some cues, such as company graphics. A more diverse group of participants, might have led to different results. This would contribute to the quality of this study. Meanwhile, the A/B testing will take place with a target group that has interest and prior knowledge on trucks as well.

Lastly, it should be noted that company graphics are only considered cues if they are recognizable, thus if the viewer can derive information from them. This can be achieved, for example, by using words (language), as part of a cultural identity, or by showing graphics that are recognized in a certain culture (for example, a well-known brand).

Figure 27
Image comparison 1

Figure 28
Image comparison 2

4.2 A/B TESTING

TESTING

This chapter explains how A/B tests are conducted as a research method to learn about the effects of content localisation on interactions with branded content.

This section describes the choices made in the strategy for A/B testing. The variables that were previously discovered and their application in this test will be explained first. Then, it will be described in what online environment the tests will be conducted. The adjustment of the imagery will then be elaborated upon, taking into account any mediating effects that might have been discovered during the literature review.

Finally, a content calendar for the tests is proposed and it will be presented how the branded content is presented in the A/B tests. The several test setups will then be displayed, followed by the outcomes. Lastly, the findings will be discussed.

Appendix 4 contains all of the testing's detailed documentation.



4.2.1 Methodology

A/B testing is used as a method in this research to measure the differences in interactions between branded content with local or global images. It is a user experience research methodology (Young, 2014) that is based on quantitative user feedback.

It is an appropriate methodology because it allows for the simultaneous presentation of different variants to users, whether locally or globally oriented. This approach minimises the impact of external factors that may vary over time and ensures that both groups experience the same conditions during the test. Additionally, A/B testing involves randomly assigning viewers to different variants (A and B) of the tested element (Young, 2014). This randomisation ensures that the two groups are comparable and helps control for potential confounding factors, leading to more reliable results.

In these variations, a single isolated design variable is included (Young, 2014). The design variables applied in this study are changes made to imagery, reflecting on cues found in the previous step. The user feedback consists of the statistics resulting from interactions with branded content. The A/B testing will therefore take place in online environments where interactions can be measured. This will guide the reflection on the effectivity of design variables, aiming to gain an understanding on how localised imagery affects the viewer's interactions with branded content.

In fact, as the A/B tests will be performed on social media, the viewer is not aware of the fact that he or she is participating in an experiment. This should be beneficial for the result, as awareness of the presence of the experiment could lead to distorted behaviour. Moreover, conducting this research in this environment reflects how design science has practical implications.

There will be a number of A/B tests conducted in accordance with the findings of the cue analysis and the iterative nature of design science. Additionally, the outcomes of one test serve as input for another. Possibly, multiple design variables will be included in an A/B test.

Design variables

A/B testing is characterised by serving two variations to the user that are distinctive by one design variable, as described in chapter 2.1, Methodology. The cue analysis revealed several cues (figure 29). These cues are considered guiding principles for the adjustments that will be made to change the cultural orientation of imagery. According to the cue analysis, these cues are:

- **Licence plate**
- **Company graphics**
- **Surroundings**

Several tests will be carried out to look into the impact of various cues, as design variables. Each test will contain a specific design variable, such as a modified licence plate. Additionally, it is possible to combine the cues. To give an example, a license plate can be adapted, but in addition, the environment can also be adapted. This makes it possible to investigate the effect on interactions if imagery contains more or less cues to the cultural identity of the viewer. The test may include more than two variants of the branded content.

Building on this notion, Young (2014) describes the extension of an A/B test as 'A/B/n test'. Here, any number of additional design variations (n) is added. In addition, it will be assessed if certain applied variables and combinations lead to consistent results. This series of tests is an iterative process, in which both the cues and the interactions form ingredients for next tests. This is reflective of the explorative nature of design science.



Surroundings

Company graphics

Licence plate

Therefore, the number of variations will be different for each test and partially cannot be anticipated upon, as the outcomes are unknown. The design variables from the cue analysis will all be examined. To clarify the loops of iterations, each test describes the applied design variables and consideration that will be applied in the next test(s). The overview below displays which design variables have been applied in the tests. Please note that by the iterative and explorative nature of this study, this overview was created upon completion of testing. The variables are referred to as: level 1 (L1) - licence plate, level 2 (L2) - company graphics, level 3 (L3) – surroundings.

	L1 - Licence plate	L2 - Company graphics	L3 - Surroundings
Test 1	✓		
Test 2	✓	✓	
Test 3	✓	✓	
Test 4	✓	✓	
Test 5	✓		✓
Test 6	✓	✓	✓

Testing environment

Platform

This study will involve A/B testing on social media, as available possibility in the current situation of the company.

On social media, testing will be conducted using Meta Business, which covers both Instagram and Facebook. It offers the possibility of A/B testing through paid ads. Here, within a set of advertisements, different variants of the ad can be set up. As the ad is published, the algorithm reflects on the interactions that occur with a particular variant. After its active period, it is reflected upon the statistics of the ad.

Disclaimer: besides executing A/B tests on social media, A/B testing was also conducted in the VTN newsletter. However, the analysis revealed that number of interactions with this medium were not significant enough to draw proper conclusions. For this reason, only A/B testing on social media is presented in this chapter. The approach and findings from testing with the newsletter can be found in found in Appendix 4.

Statistics

Statistics that are unaffected by the sponsored distribution will be monitored, because they should accurately depict the effectiveness of a particular ad's variant.

The unique CTR (click % link), the percentage of accounts that see the ad and perform a click on the link, will serve as a guideline in the analysis. This is decided in consultation with VTN's Digital Marketing Manager. This statistic is calculated by dividing the number of unique clicks on link by the reach. The statistic counts the number of accounts, not actions (Facebook, 2023).

Adding to this, this statistic is not subject to the paid distribution and high frequency of showing branded content (i.e., the viewer is faced with the content multiple times). Given these characteristics, the unique CTR should improve the reliability of the A/B tests' results.

Disclaimer: the results of certain statistics are mediated by paid distribution of the A/B tests. Please find the full elaboration on the usefulness of certain statistics in Appendix 4.

Publishing details

The target audience consists of an already existing audience pre-set from VTN, characterised by the following details:

- Located in the Netherlands, all genders, age between 25 to 64 years, all languages.
- Interests: Volvo FH, DAF CF, Trucks, Electric vehicles, DAF, Renault Trucks, DAF LF, Scania, Nikola Tesla, Mercedes-Benz, MAN Truck & Bus, DAF, Mercedes-Benz Actros, Iveco, Volvo Trucks of Scania Group. Also, must comply with interest in trucks.
- All languages

The A/B test will be active for one week on social media as a promoted message. It will be promoted on Facebook and Instagram as these are part of Meta Business.

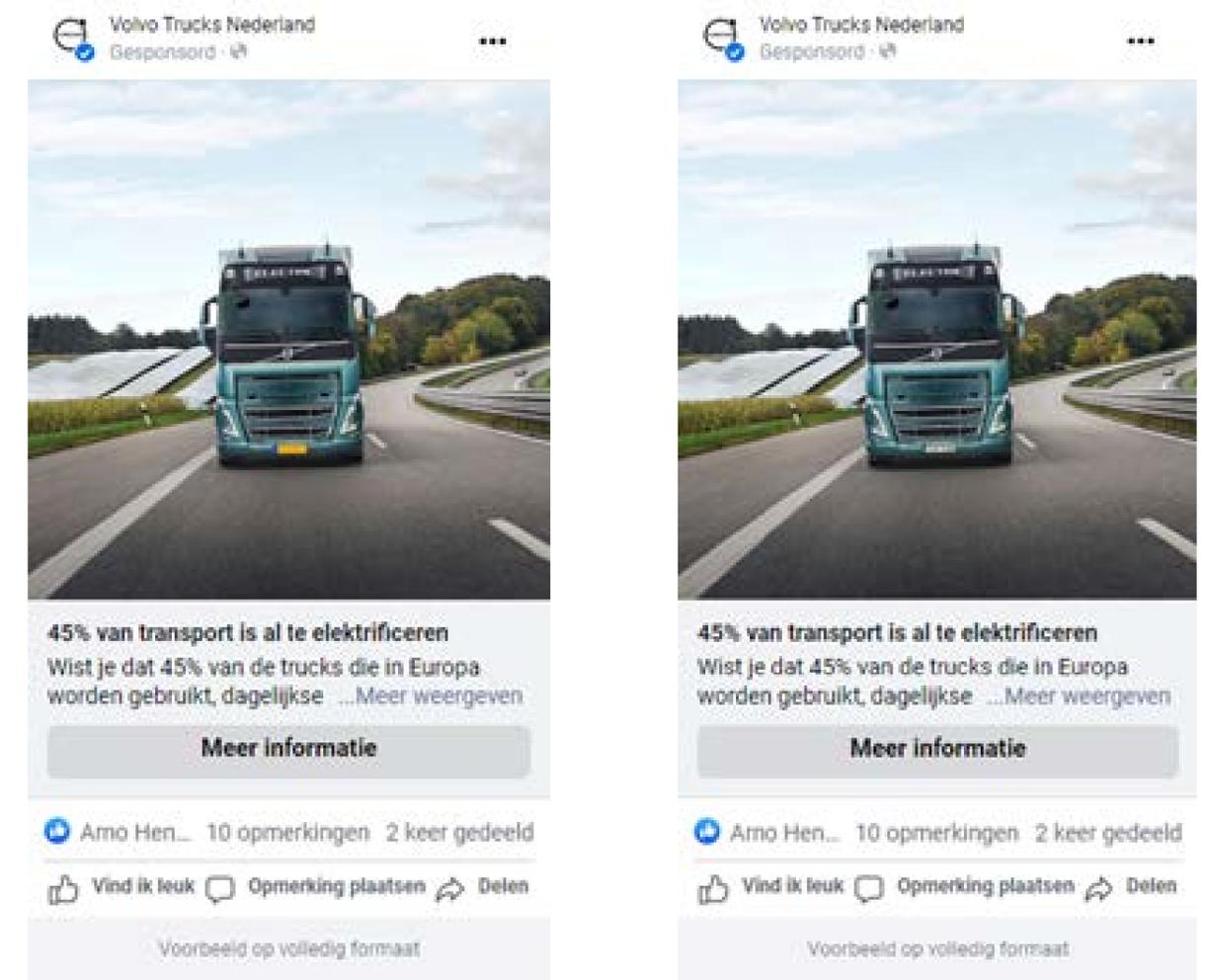
- Facebook: timeline, stories, Audience Network Native, banner, and interstitial
- Instagram: timeline, explore, home page of discovery, account overview, searching results

Imagery adjustments

To adjust the cues referring to cultural identity, Adobe Photoshop will be used. This is a programme that allows digital images to be edited. In the literature, various characteristics and effects were discovered regarding imagery and its application in online marketing. Please view chapter 3.1, Theoretical Framework, for an overview.

To maintain the validity of the results, the following principles are maintained:

- The only differences between the proposed variants should be found in the cultural orientation of the imagery. Other elements in the distributed content should be identical in both variants, like the text and headings (figure 30). By doing so, the congruity between the imagery and other elements in the branded content items does not differ in variants, as an example.
- In addition, the same fundamental image will be used. The image's characteristics, such as picture quality, colourfulness, brightness, are maintained in this way. The characteristics effect will therefore not affect the interaction. Thus, differences found in the results of the A/B test can only be related to the adjustments made in terms of the cultural orientation of the image.



Certain choices have been made in regarding the company and content:

- The tests will be conducted in a public space (social media, newsletter). Manipulations that could be hurtful to the company and its reputation are avoided. For this reason, fictitious company graphics will be used when adding this as a cue. After all, using a company name or logo without permission would not be ethical.
- The graphics of fictitious company identities will be designed by making use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools for generating logos (www.looka.com), and graphic design (Adobe Illustrator) software. Additionally, ChatGPT will be used to think of common (back)names within a country. This will be used for the fictitious company name. Then, it will be checked if the company name is not existing by entering it in Google and reviewing the searching results.
- The overarching theme of the content is about BEVs. Although this number of vehicles is growing, only a limited number of some trucks are actually in use in the Netherlands. In a way, every BEV is a novelty in a local environment and can therefore attract extra attention. Therefore, more common truck models will be shown in the imagery. The reason for doing so, is that when a rare truck model is shown, adding an unfamiliar corporate identity could cause confusion among viewers. This can hurt the credibility of the content, the brand, and the interactions with the branded content.
- When choosing the imagery, the congruity between the topic of the content and the image is considered. Possible differences in this relationship may cause the viewer to have trouble interpreting the information or consider the branded content to be incorrect. For example, the topic 'charging an electric truck' shows an image of a truck filling up with diesel.

Content calendar

A content calendar has been developed for the A/B tests. The branded content applied in the A/B testing will primarily consists of Kennisbank articles.

The following articles have been selected for the A/B testing. It consists of existing Kennisbank articles. By using Google Analytics, it has been analysed which articles were most frequently viewed (appendix 4). This is a crucial condition for the A/B testing, as the content itself (i.e., the topic) should be engaging in order to foster interactions. From this analysis, a number of articles were selected:

- The primary topic is BEVs, but another topic (savings on fuel) has been included as well. By doing so, different interests or target audiences will become part of the A/B testing. This is beneficial for the validity of the outcomes, as it extends the target audience.
- Kennisbank articles regarding hydrogen were frequently viewed. However, this content has not been selected for the A/B testing. Guided by the (lack of) developments of this innovation in the Netherlands, the localisation of the applied imagery in this branded content could cause a distorted reality.

An overview of the Kennisbank articles that will be used, as well as the (unedited) imagery:



Charging electric trucks during daily operations (translated)

Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/uitstoot-verminderen/het-op-laden-van-elektrische-trucks-bij-dagelijkse-werkzaamheden.html>

What you should know about an electric truck's range (translated)

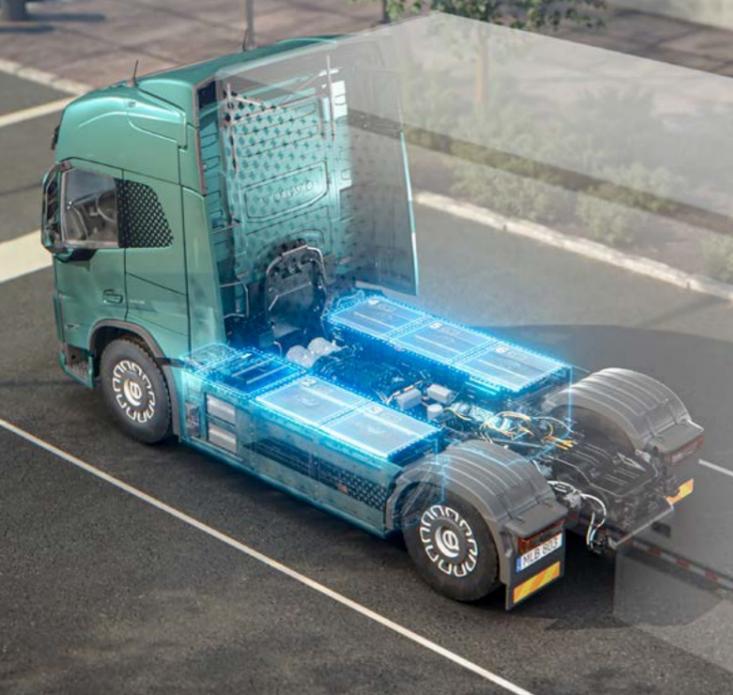
Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/uitstoot-verminderen/wat-je-moet-weten-over-de-actieradius-van-een-elektrische-vrachtwagen.html>

Things to consider when buying an electric truck (translated)

Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/uitstoot-verminderen/elektrische-vrachtwagen-kopen-hier-mee-moet-u-rekening-houden.html>



7 common myths about the batteries of electric trucks

(translated)

Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/uitstoot-verminderen/7-veel-voorkomende-fabels-over-accu-van-elektrische-trucks.html>

Why charging infrastructure for heavy-duty electric trucks will expand

(translated)

Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/uitstoot-verminderen/waarom-laadinfrastructuur-voor-zware-elektrische-vrachtwagens-gaat-uitbreiden.html>

Saving on fuel

(translated)

Article:

<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/kennisbank/brandstof-besparen/brandstof-besparen.html>

Figure 32 Imagery for A/B testing, unmodified

Branded content proposals

This section will show random branded content items, in the same way it will be presented to the viewer. In this case, it is shown how the content could look like on a Facebook timeline.

It should be noted that per test (i.e., branded content item) only one variant is shown here (figure 33). In the next section, results, all create imagery variants will be shown and it will be explained which adjustments have been applied for what reason.

Disclaimer - the depicted engagement (e.g., comments) is fictitious.

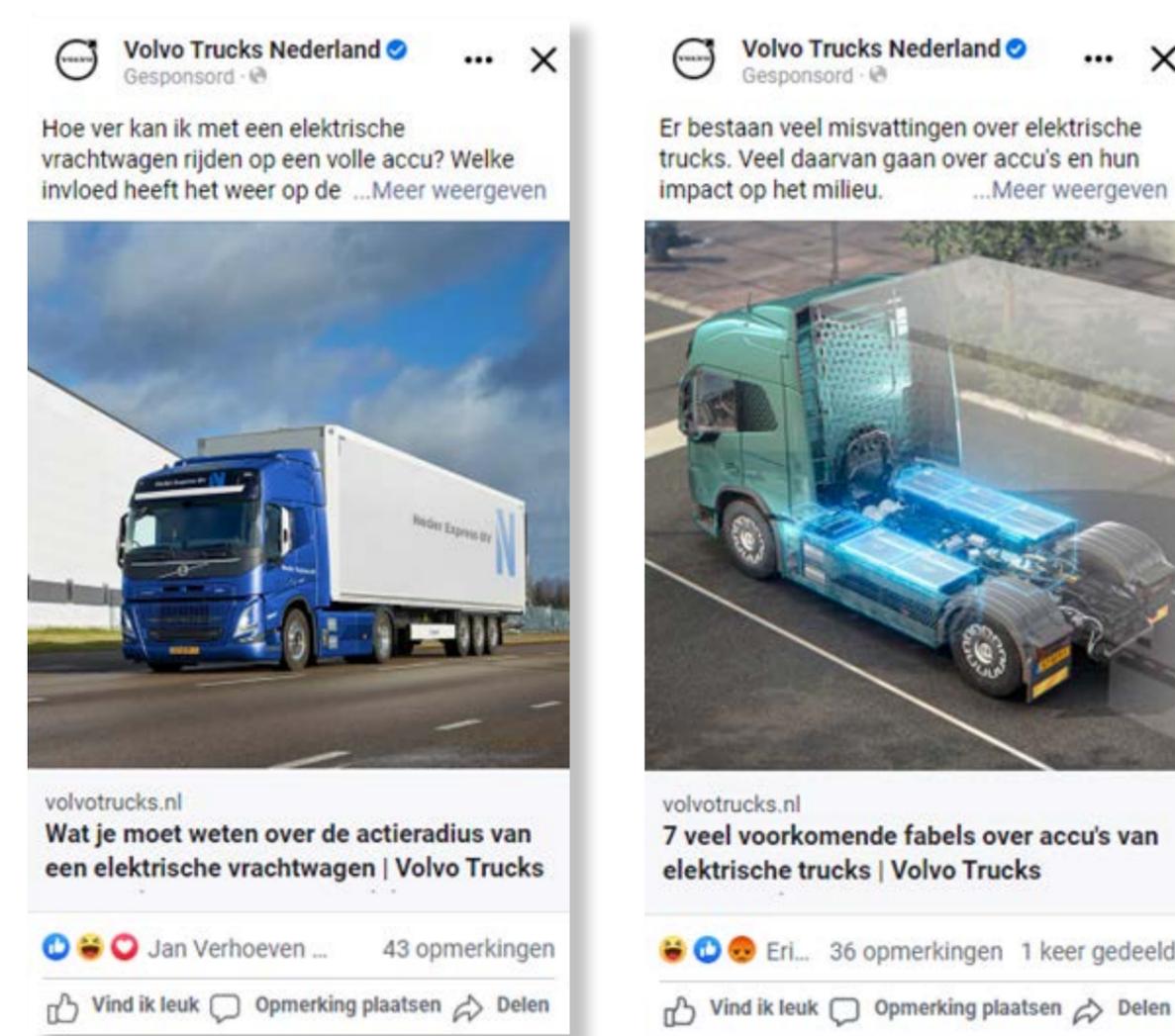


Figure 33 Branded content proposals for A/B testing

Branded content proposals

Volvo Trucks Nederland Gesponsord

Terwijl laadstations voor personenauto's steeds vaker voorkomen, bestaat er nog weinig openbare laadinfrastructuur ...Meer weergeven



volvotrucks.nl
Waarom laadinfrastructuur voor zware elektrische vrachtwagens gaat uitbreiden ...

Ado Schellekens en Ed... 14 opmerkingen

Vind ik leuk Opmerking plaatsen Delen

Volvo Trucks Nederland Gesponsord

Minimale verlagingen van het brandstofverbruik per truck kunnen enorme positieve effecten hebben op de totale ...Meer weergeven



volvotrucks.nl
Brandstof besparen: alles wat transportbedrijven moeten weten | Volvo...

25 5 opmerkingen 2 keer gedeeld

Vind ik leuk Opmerking plaatsen Delen

Volvo Trucks Nederland Gesponsord

Nieuwe wet- en regelgeving, milieuoverwegingen, nieuwe zakelijke kansen en een milieuvriendelijk ...Meer weergeven



volvotrucks.nl
Elektrische vrachtwagen kopen? Hiermee moet u rekening houden | Volvo Trucks

Jell... 49 opmerkingen 1 keer gedeeld

Vind ik leuk Opmerking plaatsen Delen

Volvo Trucks Nederland Gesponsord

Voor sommige bedrijven is de transitie naar elektrisch rijden een uitdaging, maar er zijn ook bedrijven die al hebben ...Meer weergeven



volvotrucks.nl
Hoe je een bedrijf kunt aanpassen aan elektrische trucks en opladen | Volvo...

1 opmerking

Vind ik leuk Opmerking plaatsen Delen

4.2.2 Results

The results of each A/B test will be presented in this section. Here, various data will be displayed for each test. The following elements make up each test: guiding principles, reach, imagery variants, results per cue, and a reflection.

Guiding principles

The adjustments made and the guiding principles applied for each test are described. These principles consist of design variables, as well as findings from previous tests. These inputs manifest themselves in the manipulations that are eventually made to change the cultural orientation.

Reach

The size of the experiment is presented by revealing statistics of the A/B test. Here, it will be presented what reach has been achieved and how many intended interactions occurred with the branded content.

Imagery variants

In each image variant, guiding principles are applied. These either change the cultural orientation of an image and/or assess the effect of a certain cue. It will be presented which design variables are included in the A/B/n test.

Results

The results from the A/B tests are presented in tables. If a combination of cues is applied in the test, each cue will have its own table. In this table, the unique CTR (click % link) is presented per image variant. Then, the proportional percentage difference between variants is shown.

Per cue table, it is presented which variant is most effective. In addition, it will be shown which cultural orientation is the most effective in direct comparisons, and how the application of a cue affected the results. The results are closed off by showing a top three of most effective variants, also indicating their cultural orientation.

Reflection

Based on the results, it is reflected upon the results and guiding principles applied in the test. Recommendations for next tests will be described, either in the reflection or in the guiding principles of the test that follows after another. The full elaborations can be found in appendix 4.

Test 1 - L1

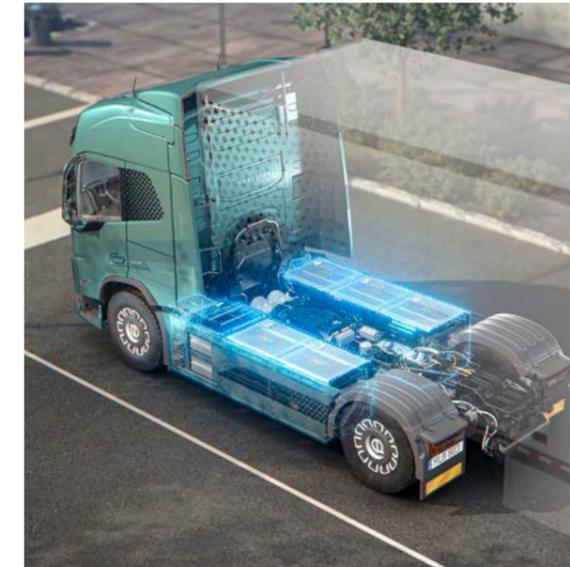
Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, the licence plate (L1) has been adjusted.

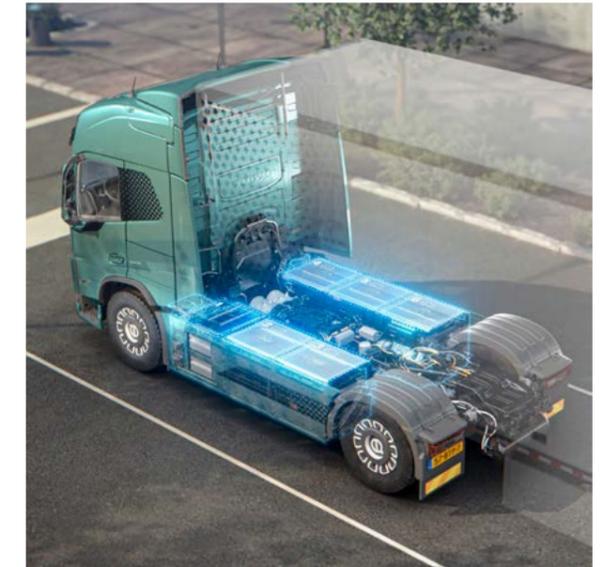
Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 91.121 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 1807 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



	1	2
Unique CTR (click % link)	4,37%	3,52%
Percentage difference (proportional)	24,1%	
Most effective cultural orientation	Global	

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was globally oriented. The imagery can be perceived as a computer-generated image. On the one hand, this may make it look like communication of the brand, thus in favour of the global orientation. On the other hand, given these image characteristics, the authenticity of the localisation may be put in doubt. Therefore, actual images have to be used in future tests.

Test 2 - L1 + L2

Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, the licence plate has been adjusted (L1). This serves as a reflection on the outcomes of the previous test (1). In addition, two variants are included with company graphics (L2). Here, it has been decided to change the colour of the truck, as the colour of electric Volvo-trucks is the same in much of the brand's imagery. Therefore, the colour may be associated with the brand.

Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 64.718 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 600 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



Variant 3



Variant 4



Figure 36 Imagery variants in A/B test 2

Licence plate (L1)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,98%	1,37%	1,57%	1,71%
Percentage difference (proportional)	39,8%		8,9%	
Most effective cultural orientation		Local		Local

Company graphics (L2)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,98%	1,37%	1,57%	1,71%
Percentage difference (proportional) by extra cue	60,2% (1 & 3)		24,8% (2 & 4)	
Company graphics = higher effectivity?		Yes	Yes	

Top 3 - Effectivity	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,98%	1,37%	1,57%	1,71%
Cultural orientation		Local	Global	Local

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was locally oriented. A locally oriented licence plate improves interactions in both comparisons. By adding company graphics, the branded content becomes even more effective. However, as the colour of the truck has been adapted, the differences found cannot solely be related to the added company graphics. Having different colours could affect interactions, as colours have meaning to the viewer. In the next test, the truck's colour should be similar along all imagery variants.

Table 4 Results regarding L1 cue Table 5 Results regarding L2 cue Table 6 Top 3 of A/B test 2

Test 3 - L1 + L2

Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, the licence plate (L1) has been adjusted. In addition, two variants are included with company graphics (L2). Here, it has been decided to change the colour of the truck and apply the same colour along all imagery variants. This test serves as validation on the outcomes of the previous tests (2).

Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 51.680 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 271 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



Variant 3



Variant 4



Licence plate (L1)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,47%	1,36%	0,83%	0,97%
Percentage difference (proportional)	189,4%		16,9%	
Most effective cultural orientation		Local		Local

Company graphics (L2)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,47%	1,36%	0,83%	0,97%
Percentage difference (proportional) by extra cue	76,6% (1 & 3)		40,2% (2 & 4)	
Company graphics = higher effectivity?		Yes	No	

Top 3 - Effectivity	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,47%	1,36%	0,83%	0,97%
Cultural orientation		Local	Global	Local

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was locally oriented. A locally oriented licence plate improves the interactions with the branded content. The results show a higher proportional difference than in the previous test (39,8% over 189,4%). The addition of the company graphics seems to only increase effectivity in the global orientation, not in the local orientation. Thus, the outcomes of the previous test have not been fully validated by this test and should be reviewed once more.

Test 4 - L1 + L2

Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, the licence plate (L1) has been adjusted. In addition, variants are included with company graphics (L2). Here, it has been decided to create more extensive company graphics. In previous test, mere logos were added to the truck or trailer. In reality, trucks carry distinctive company identities by both graphics and colour, like the yellow trucks of DHL (figure x). Therefore, coloured details will be added in two variants. By doing so, it can be assessed if a more outspoken company identity fosters more interactions, while this judgement becomes independent of the addition of a single colour. Therefore, this test serves as an exploration on the L2 cue, while being a validation on the outcomes of the previous tests (2 and 3) as well.

Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 42.608 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 189 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



Variant 3



Variant 4



Variant 5



Variant 6



Variant 7



Variant 8





Licence plate (L1)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,53%	0,85%	0,61%	0,77%	0,69%	1,00%	0,46%	1,17%
Percentage difference (proportional)	60,4%		26,2%		44,9%		154,4%	
Most effective cultural orientation		Local		Local		Local		Local

Company graphics (L2)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,53%	0,85%	0,61%	0,77%	0,69%	1,00%	0,46%	1,17%
Percentage difference (proportional) by extra cue	15,1% (1 & 3)		10,4% (2 & 4)		13,1% (3 & 5)		29,9% (4 & 6)	
					50% (5 & 7)		17% (6 & 8)	
Company graphics = higher effectivity		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Red = more effective	Brown = more effective	

Top 3 - Effectivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,53%	0,85%	0,61%	0,77%	0,69%	1,00%	0,46%	1,17%
Cultural orientation		Global				Local		Local

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was locally oriented.

A locally oriented licence plate improves the interactions with the branded content. The addition of the company graphics seems to improve effectivity, except for one comparison (variants 2 & 4). Thus, the outcomes of the previous tests (2 & 3) are not fully validated. Therefore, another test will be applied for this principle.

Moreover, having added a colour improves effectivity. It stands out that in a global orientation, red is more effective, whereas brown is more effective in the local orientation.



Test 5 - L1 + L2

Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, the surroundings (L3) have been changed. By adding a mountain landscape, one variant should occur globally oriented. These surroundings cannot be found in the Netherlands. The other variant does show surroundings that can be found in the Netherlands. Here, two aspects will be assessed. First, it will be assessed how localisation (by changing the licence plate, L1) in globally oriented surroundings affects interactions. Second, it will be assessed if adding a stereotypical cultural cue to the local surroundings affects interactions. Therefore, this test serves primarily as an exploration on the L1 and L3 cue.

Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 59.232 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 368 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



Variant 3



Variant 4



Licence plate (L1)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	1,14%	0,85%	0,74%	1,48%
Percentage difference (proportional)	37,6%			
Most effective cultural orientation	Global			

Surroundings (L3)	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	1,14%	0,85%	0,74%	1,48%
Percentage difference (proportional)	14,9% (2 & 3)		100% (3 & 4)	
	74,1% (2 & 4)			
Localised surroundings = higher effectivity?		No	Yes (additional cue)	Yes

Top 3 - Effectivity	1	2	3	4
Unique CTR (click % link)	1,14%	0,85%	0,74%	1,48%
Cultural orientation	Global	Global		Local

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was locally oriented. What stands out is that the variants with the global surroundings were found to be more effective than the 'basic' local surroundings. Perhaps, the 'basic' local surroundings are not distinctive. Yet, having added a cue (i.e., windmill) to the local surroundings improved interactions. In fact, this variant was more effective than the globally oriented variants. In the global variant, a global oriented licence plate was found to be more effective than the local licence plate. This makes sense, as it contributes to congruity between cues in a certain cultural orientation and appears as brand's imagery.

Test 6 - L1 + L2 + L3

Guiding principles

To achieve a local orientation in this test, adjustments have been made in regard to the licence plate (L1), company graphics (L2) and the surroundings L3). Here, combinations of cues will be made as well.

According to test 5, congruity of cues may affect interactions. This will be assessed by showing a globally oriented truck (by licence plate, company graphics, and a combination of both) in local surroundings. It is the opposite approach of the previous test. The same global truck variants will also be put in global surroundings. This allows for comparisons of the surroundings.

In addition, it will be assessed once more if having added a cue to a certain surrounding improves effectivity, as found in test 5. Besides, variants are included with company graphics. Therefore, this test serves as validation on the outcomes of the previous tests (2, 3, and 4).

Reach

During its active period, this A/B test gathered a reach of 36.292 (i.e., number of accounts that has viewed the branded content at least once) and the landing page was viewed 146 times (i.e., the intended interaction with the branded content).

Variant 1



Variant 2



Variant 3



Variant 4



Variant 5



Variant 6



Variant 7



Variant 8





Licence plate (L1)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,81%	0,79%	0,71%	1,26%	0,49%	0,54%	0,84%	0,69%
Percentage difference (proportional)	61,2% (2 & 5)				133,3% (4 & 6)			
	Local				Local			
Most effective cultural orientation	Local				Local			
	Local				Local			
Company graphics (L2)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,81%	0,79%	0,71%	1,26%	0,49%	0,54%	0,84%	0,69%
Percentage difference (proportional) by extra cue	11,3% (1 & 3)		59,5% (2 & 4)		10,2% (5 & 6)		21,7% (7 & 8)	
	No		Yes		Yes		No	
	No		Yes		Yes		No	
	No		Yes		Yes		No	
Company graphics = higher effectivity	No		Yes		Yes		No	
	No		Yes		Yes		No	



Surroundings (L3)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,81%	0,79%	0,71%	1,26%	0,49%	0,54%	0,84%	0,69%
Percentage difference (proportional) by extra cue	2,53% (1 & 2)		77,5% (3 & 4)		71,4% (5 & 7)		27,8% (6 & 8)	
	No (additional cue)		Yes (additional cue)		No		No	
Top 3 - Effectivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Unique CTR (click % link)	0,81%	0,79%	0,71%	1,26%	0,49%	0,54%	0,84%	0,69%
Cultural orientation	Local			Local			Global	

Reflection

The most effective variant in this A/B test was locally oriented. In terms of congruity in cues, the results prove once more that congruity can affect interactions. It seems that all cues should add up to a certain cultural orientation. Adding company graphics has not always improved effectivity, but it did proportionally large in the local orientation. Here, it stands out that the variant with locally oriented company graphics and an additional cue in local surroundings is the most effective, whereas in the global surroundings the truck without company graphics is found to be most effective.

4.2.3 Discussion

As part of the iterative process, many comments have already been made during the tests. Despite, there are several aspects that will be further examined and reflected upon. This discussion considers the methods of A/B testing its execution (1), aspects related to the imagery (2) and explanations of the results by pondering on the viewer's perception (3).

Testing

Familiarity with imagery

The imagery applied in A/B testing is based on existing images that are provided by services of Volvo Trucks, like the Media Library or press releases. In addition, the A/B tests are executed by recycling branded content. The branded content may have been published earlier accompanied the same imagery. As a result, long term viewers may be already familiar with the imagery and thus aware of the manipulations applied. In another light, the viewer may already expect a certain image, as used before. Moreover, the BEVs have a specific colour in imagery. Therefore, an image with a truck in this specific colour may leave the impression it is a branded image.

- To achieve a truly local image, it is recommended to create new imagery.

In addition, the same image has been used to develop new variants in two A/B tests. Adjustments were made to decrease the similarities between these images, but a critical viewer may notice that the images are fundamentally the same

- It is recommended that every A/B test in the future includes a new image that has not been used before.

Cues

• Quality of manipulations

At the heart of A/B testing are image manipulations to change the cultural orientation. The quality of these manipulations is depended on the skills and knowledge of the researcher. Although the researcher did his best to achieve the best possible result, someone else (e.g., a professional image editor) could have gone much further in manipulating the images. This could improve the distinction between the local and global orientation.

• Visibility

The amount of attention that cues receive, is different in every image. The lighting (e.g., reflections) and perspective in the image mediate the visibility of certain cues. For example, the front of a truck is photographed, thus the company graphics on the side of the truck and the trailer cannot be seen.

• Comparability

Some tests reflected on the difference in effectiveness by the application of company graphics. While plausible results emerged, it should be noted that comparing these variants was not pure. In the global company graphics, words were used that are different from the local orientation by language. Hence, in comparison, not only the license plate changes, but also the words in the company graphics. Additionally, in the last test, the colours of the company graphics were also different.

• Cultural orientation

Generic cues were applied in the adaptations of the cultural identity. For example, the company name in the company graphics is derived from common names in a country, or a windmill was added as a commonly known Dutch landmark. These cues are representative of a cultural identity, but at the same time, maybe a bit overdone. Perhaps the branded content is perceived more authentic if the cues are locally oriented, but do not have an explicit connection to the cultural identity. The application of real company graphics seems beneficial.

Statistics

• Paid distribution

Through the analysis of the A/B tests, it occurred that not all KPI's were useful to draw conclusions on the effectivity. Certain KPI's are mediated by the process of paid A/B testing. Suppose that in an early phase of the A/B test, it becomes clear what the best performing variant is. As the A/B tests were conducted by paid distribution, the remaining budget is spent on this variant. As a result, this variant will gain a higher reach than other variants. However, this does not allow for proportional comparison of effectivity.

• Unique CTR

The KPI used in the analysis is the unique CTR (click % on link). Some tests included a fair number of variants. Hence, the same budget was spent on A/B testing with only two variants or eight variants. If the total reach were divided evenly, there would be less reach per variant. This raises the question how the quality of the resulting statistics is affected by the amount of variants.

• Contextual tools

This study is distinctive from controlled scientific experiments, as the investigation has been executed in a public (online) environment. Advertisement management software has been used to set the boundaries of the A/B tests, in likely contrast to scientific controlled environments. What would a scientific experiment have looked like, and which KPI or unit of measurement would have been used?

Organic – paid branded content

In this study, the only opportunity to perform A/B tests on social media was by paid distribution. In other words, the branded content will be viewed as a sponsored message, rather than an organic post published on the company's social media channels. In a chronological timeline, one may view a message only once. However, by the paid distribution, the content could be shown more frequently to the target audience. In addition, as it is sponsored, it may be perceived differently.

Concluding, this could affect the interactions with the branded content. The conclusions that will be drawn in the end, hold only for interactions with sponsored branded content. How the findings will apply to organic interactions, can only be assumed at this point.

Target audience

In this study, the A/B tests could only be performed on platforms connected to Meta, being Facebook and Instagram. As described earlier (chapter 2.2.2.2, Content Strategy), the tone of branded content and the target audience can differ per social media platform.

Based on these differences, the question is where the most interested target audience can be found, as this group may be more likely to interact with informative branded content. Vice versa, viewers that follow VTN on social media for other purposes, may be less interested. Given their distinct perspective on the informative branded content, they may interact differently with it.

This raises the question how interactions are affected by personal interests. Apart from this suggestion, these target audiences remain to have the same cultural identity in common, and how changing the cultural orientation of the image could trigger specific target audiences.

Ethical reflection

The insights from this study were derived from image manipulations and applying these in a public online environment. In fact, the imagery applied in the branded content is not 100% true to reality, despite the efforts of these manipulations. For example, fictitious company names and colour schemes have been used. A critical viewer can get the impression that he or she is being misled by the content presented.

On the one hand, this can be put into perspective by the interests involved in this study. An explicit choice has been made to use fictitious company names to limit potential damage between Volvo Trucks and its relationships (i.e., clients). Otherwise, clients would have had to agree to use their names — a discussion that would have delayed this study. In addition, the research has value for Volvo Trucks, and it has been approved by the company to conduct the research in this way.

On the other hand, it remains a fact that images have been manipulated. Effects should be monitored and dealt with. At the same time, the study has shown that the manipulations have influenced the interactions with branded content, in favour of imagery with a local orientation. With this knowledge, the company and brand can reconsider their content strategy and focus on the production of local imagery and content. If no manipulations are applied, this new imagery and content is more authentic and transparent, on which nothing can be enforced.

Imagery

Applied global orientations

In the globally oriented imagery, only one cultural identity (i.e., Swedish) has been applied. One could argue that applying different identities could have increased the diversity of the A/B tests. Local audiences have different judgements and associations for each country abroad. Their interactions are potentially affected by the cultural identity shown. At the same time, a random cultural identity should not be chosen just like that. Not only do associations play a role in this, but the depicted trucks can also differ per continent. Trucks in the EU look different than in the United States, for example.

However, having applied the Swedish cultural identity as a starting point is not illogical for two reasons. First, this global orientation is preserved by the brand. The brand's country-of-origin is and will remain an important brand value. Second, this orientation reflects the current state. Branded content, like Kennisbank articles, is distributed on social media supported by branded imagery. This is reinforced by the first argument. However, it is only assumed that the cultural identity is equal to the country of origin of the brand. There are images supporting this assumption, but there are also images in which it is doubtful if it was created in Sweden or not (figure 44). The landscape has an indicative role here.

Reflecting on these points, it is assumed that by including a distinct cultural identity from the Swedish, fewer interactions with branded content will occur. It is assumed that branded content with a local cultural orientation will be perceived as most personally relevant, followed by the Swedish cultural identity (suits the brand) and last, other global cultural identities. For example, by using France as a cultural identity, the branded content seems intended for a French target group. This is a mismatch if a Dutch target group that is ought to be reached. It will require more cognition for the Dutch viewer to make sense of the branded content and it occurs less personal relevant, reflecting on the ELM. As a result, they are less likely to interact with the branded content.

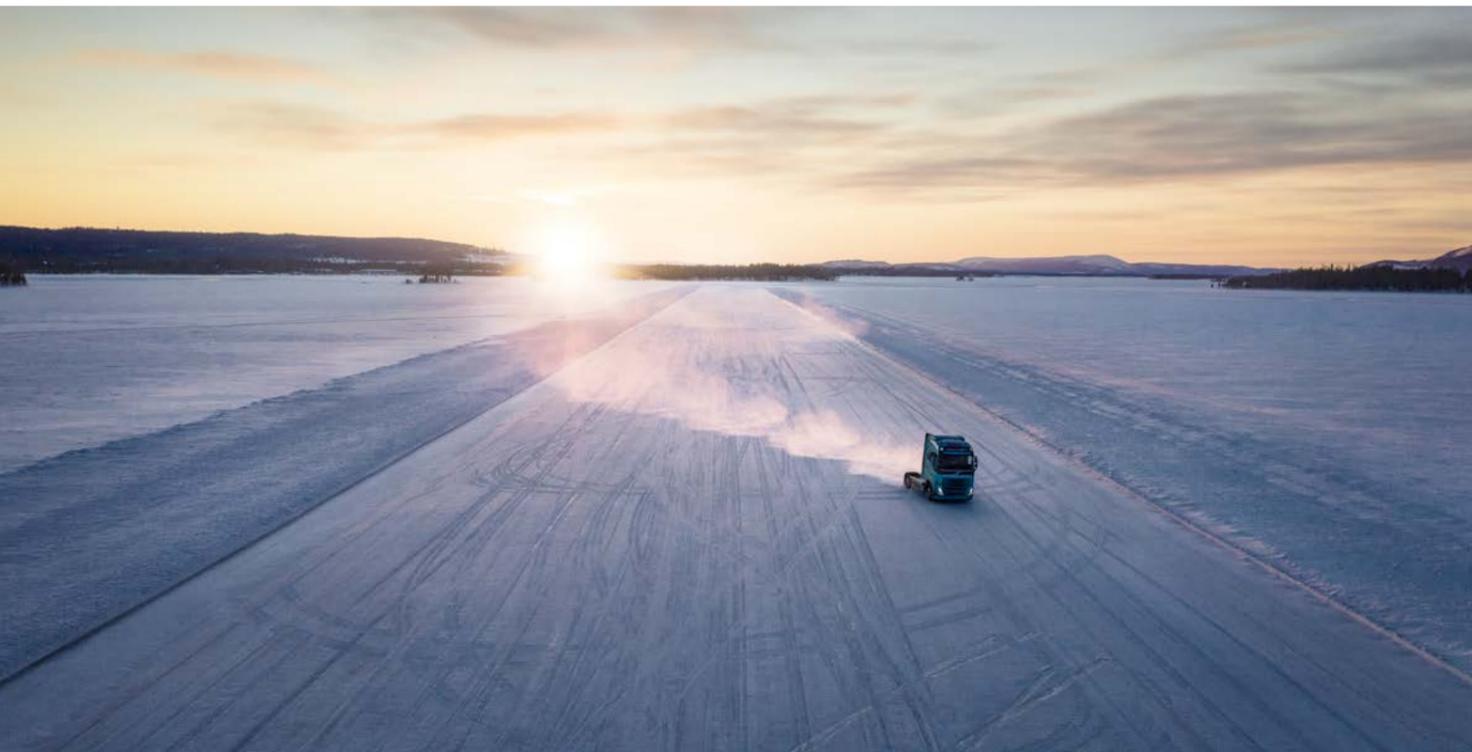


Figure 44 Different landscapes in imagery

Landscape as a cue

One landscape is more distinctive than others. Here, only the image with the mountains seems foreign (figure 45). By looking at the other images, their landscapes are more generic and could be representative for a variety of countries.

On the one hand, by including a distinctive landscape that is not representative of a local landscape, the imagery seems globally oriented. Given the country-of-origin as an important brand value of Volvo Trucks, the image may seem more coherent to the brand. On the other hand, a generic landscape is less distinctive. Other cues in the image will then be referred to, to obtain the cultural orientation. These may be the licence plate and company graphics.



Local landmarks

The local orientation of the landscape has been reinforced by adding a windmill (figure 46). When it comes to recognizability, it is said the windmill is a strong cue. However, the image could still be taken anywhere in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is recommended to perform A/B tests with a local orientation and different landscapes, validating if a landscape with a specific landmark or recognizable surrounding (figure 34, Rotterdam city centre) fosters more interactions.



Company graphics - Colour and graphics

At a certain point, the choice was made to change the colour of the trucks shown, because BEV from Volvo Trucks have a specific colour. By adding a distinct colour, it may seem that the imagery and branded content stand further from the brand (global orientation) and closer to the viewer (local orientation). After all, trucks have distinct colours per company (figure 47) and it is likely that the viewers are acquainted with trucks in their daily lives, in one way or another. In other words, changing colour suggests that the branded content becomes more representative of the viewer.

Additionally, trucks usually contain company graphics. The application of company graphics in the imagery made branded content more effective and more personally relevant of the viewer. Thus, adding company graphics to an image seems a good strategy to enhance interactions, as they mediate the perception of the viewer. This, however, could also have a reverse side. Suppose a company has recently received negative attention in the media. Then, associating this company with the branded content from Volvo Trucks could put the credibility in doubt.



Company graphics - Adding company graphics in a brand's image

Existing brand's imagery rarely include specific, outspoken company graphics. Instead, graphics applied relate to the brand (figure 48). As Volvo is using and has been using this imagery for a lengthy period, it contributes to the brand's image.

In the previous point, it is argued how company graphics become a more important cue if the landscape less distinctive or less representative of the brand. Considering both, the following principles were derived on adding company graphics in globally oriented imagery:

- Distinctive, foreign (i.e., Swedish), landscape: company graphics should not be added. The image should adhere to the brand and its values, thus not carry any specific company graphics except for the brand's graphics.
- Generic landscape: the landscape is no longer representative of the brand's values. Thus, company graphics catch attention and could improve effectivity.

Company graphics - Adding company graphics in a local image

As described in the previous points, there seems to be an interesting balance between the landscape and company graphics as cues. Question is, how the proposed principles translate to a local orientation. Reflecting on the results of this study, the following may be concluded about adding company graphics in locally oriented imagery:

- Generic landscape: company graphics catch attention and could improve effectivity.
- Distinctive, Dutch, landscape: company graphics could improve effectivity.

In the current study, most results are in favour of these guiding principles, but not all. Performing more tests on this principle, should reveal whether this could be a guiding principle. In addition, local companies could be reviewed as a cue to the local cultural identity, if the target audience knows the company. Reflecting on analysis of existing branded content (chapter 2.2.3., Analysing Existing Branded Content), it was found that branded content including well-known companies is popular, often viewed content.

- Adding the identity of an existing, well-known company or brand to a truck in imagery (figure 49), may have a positive impact on recognizability of the imagery for local audiences and improves effectivity of branded content.
- It could also make it seem the branded content is about this company. In other words, it could trigger more viewers, but affect the congruity between image and text.



Figure 48 Volvo Trucks' graphics



Figure 49 Company graphics with a local orientation

Viewer's behaviour

Knowledge

By addressing a certain target audience, their existing knowledge is addressed as well. This knowledge is fed by the current situation or developments in their country of living. To illustrate, one country may already have a functioning public charging infrastructure for electric trucks, whereas another country may not.

By changing the cultural orientation of an image, the depicted reality is also changed. Perceived differences in congruity between the depicted reality and the actual reality in branded content, could have an impact on the viewer's interactions. In this study, the local orientation of an image in relation to a developing topic fostered much more interactions. Despite the promising effect, it should be questioned if such novelties should be localised. It could improve interactions, but can also seem unrealistic, fed by the viewer's knowledge on the current situation. As a result, it could change their attitude, doubting the credibility and quality of the content and the brand.

The branded content in this A/B testing was primarily based on the topic of electric trucks. On the one hand, this transition is an ongoing development, and the number of BEVs is increasing. On the other hand, a large share of the target audience on social media has a sceptical attitude towards these developments. Showing a BEV in the Netherlands is not a false image to show. This novelty is not intruding on the reality of the viewer, but they may have to get used to it. The branded content with a local orientation especially triggers this idea, making it an effective strategy.

Contrasting cultural orientations

The combination of cultural orientations in a single image is not beneficial. On the one hand, it is not fully reflective of the viewer or a local orientation. On the other hand, it is not representative of a brand's image as well. In other words, the image does not align with either 'expectations' or ideas that the viewer may have. In terms of the ELM, a higher degree of cognition is needed to process the presented image and/or branded content. As a result, the viewer is less likely to interact.



5 / Implementation

The results found in the discovery phase will be discussed and applied in this chapter.

It will be reflected upon the approach of the tests and provide recommendations for future research, as well as provide ideas for the practical implementation for the company's activities and the brand.

This chapter contains the following sections:

5.1
Recommendations

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5.2
Use-cases

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5.1 RECOMMEN- DATIONS

In this section, it will be described how the findings of this study can be validated and what opportunities there may be for future research.

The localisation of imagery has been researched quite extensively. However, it should also be critically examined. Which principles have been investigated, and most importantly, which principles can be assessed next to improve the quality of the outcomes?

This reflection is based on three aspects of validation, focussing on the outcomes, applied principles and other contexts.



5.1.1 Continuing testing

First, additional tests are necessary to validate the discovered outcomes and will provide more insights on the effects of localisation on interactions.

More tests

It is recommended to conduct more A/B tests. In this study, six tests were conducted in which different principles have been assessed. From these tests, consistent findings emerged, but there were irregularities as well. Conducting more tests should reveal whether the findings and applied principles will be consistent or are more of a coincidence. This will allow for general conclusions.

Significance

Through more tests, it might become possible to draw a general conclusion about the degree of effectivity of applied principles. For example, based on thirty tests, it was found that adding company identity increases the unique CTR by 40% compared to an image without company identity. However, being able to provide an actual number will be a challenge for the following reasons:

- Statistics from different tests should not simply be compared, as the tests' topic are different. Here, certain topics may be more outstanding than others.
- In addition, assuming that different images will be used in different tests, the congruity between image and topic will be different in every test.

Thus, there are mediating effects that make it hard to provide an actual number. It is for this reason, that no generalised number is mentioned in this report in relation to the effectivity of localised imagery.

Target audience

It is plausible that the target audience of the A/B tests conducted does not fully match the intended target audience of the informative branded content. The current studies were conducted on Facebook and Instagram. It is assumed that the target audiences on these platforms are primarily truck drivers and fans. In other words, this looks more like a B2C - brand to customer - perspective, rather than B2B, business to business. Since the target audience is more B2B, it is recommended to conduct tests with specifically targeted audiences. This could be achieved by A/B testing on LinkedIn, for example.

Second, it is recommended to further investigate certain principles that were and were not applied in this study. An overview on how applied principles can be further validated:

- In this study, existing images were adapted. As discussed earlier, viewers may already be familiar with these. Using a new image may take away prior knowledge from the viewer.
- A stereotypical landscape or landmark may provide more recognition. However, the results in this study were mixed. Therefore, it should be assessed if this is a reinforcing effect. On the one hand, this can be achieved by adding recognisable elements (e.g., landmarks) to an image. On the other hand, a new image can be created by taking pictures in a recognisable (local) environment.
- Using different images. In this study, locally and globally oriented photos were fundamentally the same, except for adjustments made to change the cultural orientation. This would rule out differences such as perspective and lighting, to draw clean conclusions. However, the extent to which these differences will have an impact is unknown. Therefore, it may still be useful to compare different images and see what the differences in effectivity will be.
- It is assumed that adapting the colour of the (BEV) truck makes it seem like the branded content holds less connection to the brand. This also raises the question what would happen if the colour stayed the same, but the licence plate changed. This was assessed only once. In addition, changing the colour can also be investigated. Studying this way of localising should reveal if only changing the licence plate has an impact. In addition, it can also be assessed which colour is most effective.
- Adding a company identity can make an image more effective, on both a local and global level. Nevertheless, few tests pointed to a different result. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct more tests on this principle.
- In these tests, fictitious company identities were developed and applied. Therefore, it is unknown what the effect would be if an existing company identity were to be added. It is likely to have a positive effect, as it adds an element to the imagery that the viewer can recognize.
- In (technological) developments, certain countries are further ahead than others. Localising an image can lead to a distorted depicting of reality. This could trigger the viewer. This principle could translate to more interactions with branded content.
- From this study, it can be concluded that cultural congruity between the viewer and the image could have a positive effect on interactions with branded content. In a way, the image reflects who the viewer is. The viewer may be acquainted with the operation of trucks in their daily lives.
- This raises the question to what extent the image should match the viewer's reality. Suppose a dirty truck is depicted, or it is raining in the imagery. How would the interactions be affected by such imagery? These images would differ from the 'polished' imagery currently applied. As a result, they may seem more authentic and therefore more effective. Then, localising them is supposed to strengthen the authenticity even more.

5.1.2 Exploring other contexts

The current tests were conducted in a defined context. The branded content included originated from Kennisbank articles. The holistic topic of the tests was electric trucks, except for one test on the topic of fuel economy. In the imagery created for the tests, certain choices were made in advance in relation to the topic (chapter 4.2.1.3., Imagery Adjustments).

While this context was a solid starting point for now, it is valuable to investigate other contexts in future tests. This should reveal how localisation influences interactions, like when it comes to other topics or products.

On the one hand, it should be examined how a localised image affects effectivity with different trucks shown. Here, it should be noted that by the different applications of the trucks, their depicted 'natural habitats' vary as well. Certain environments may suit the purpose of the truck, but cannot be localised, as the surroundings cannot be found in the country of the viewer (figure 50). If this image were to be localised, it should be questioned what the added value would be if the surroundings do not seem congruent to the viewer. As said earlier, incongruity could cause confusion.

In addition, the brand includes other products as well, like applications or services. Supportive imagery is available for some products. These images seem generic and could be applied for any market (figure 51). But, if a local image were to be used in the content's publishment, would it be more effective than the branded image?

On the other hand, it should be examined how a local image could influence the effectivity of other types of branded content. Volvo Trucks does not only provide Kennisbank articles as branded content. These articles are a part of their content strategy.

From the branded content analysis (chapter 2.2.3., Analysing Existing Branded Content) and looking at the social media channels, it becomes clear that when global imagery is used, the related topics are usually Kennisbank articles, press releases from a global scale (i.e., news from the brand) and product posts. Since these topics are about the brand or coming from the brand, it would not seem reasonable to localise this content's imagery. This could cause incongruity in the image, resulting in a lower credibility of the branded content.

As discussed earlier (chapter 2.2.4., Visions on localisation of imagery), it is sometimes not possible to have local imagery. For example, images of the product range are only available as branded images, as not all trucks are available in certain countries. But, when informative branded content is distributed, the need to preserve the brand and its values may be less important. The content is meant to be informative, and the viewer should get the idea that this information is relevant to them.

Concluding, it should be carefully considered what the aim or topic of the content is to choose suitable imagery. Does the content hold a strong relation to the brand, then the viewer may expect an image that is coming from the brand. Does the content aim to inform about certain topics, then the viewer may be triggered by an image that is representative of who they are.



Figure 50 Surroundings that cannot be found in certain countries

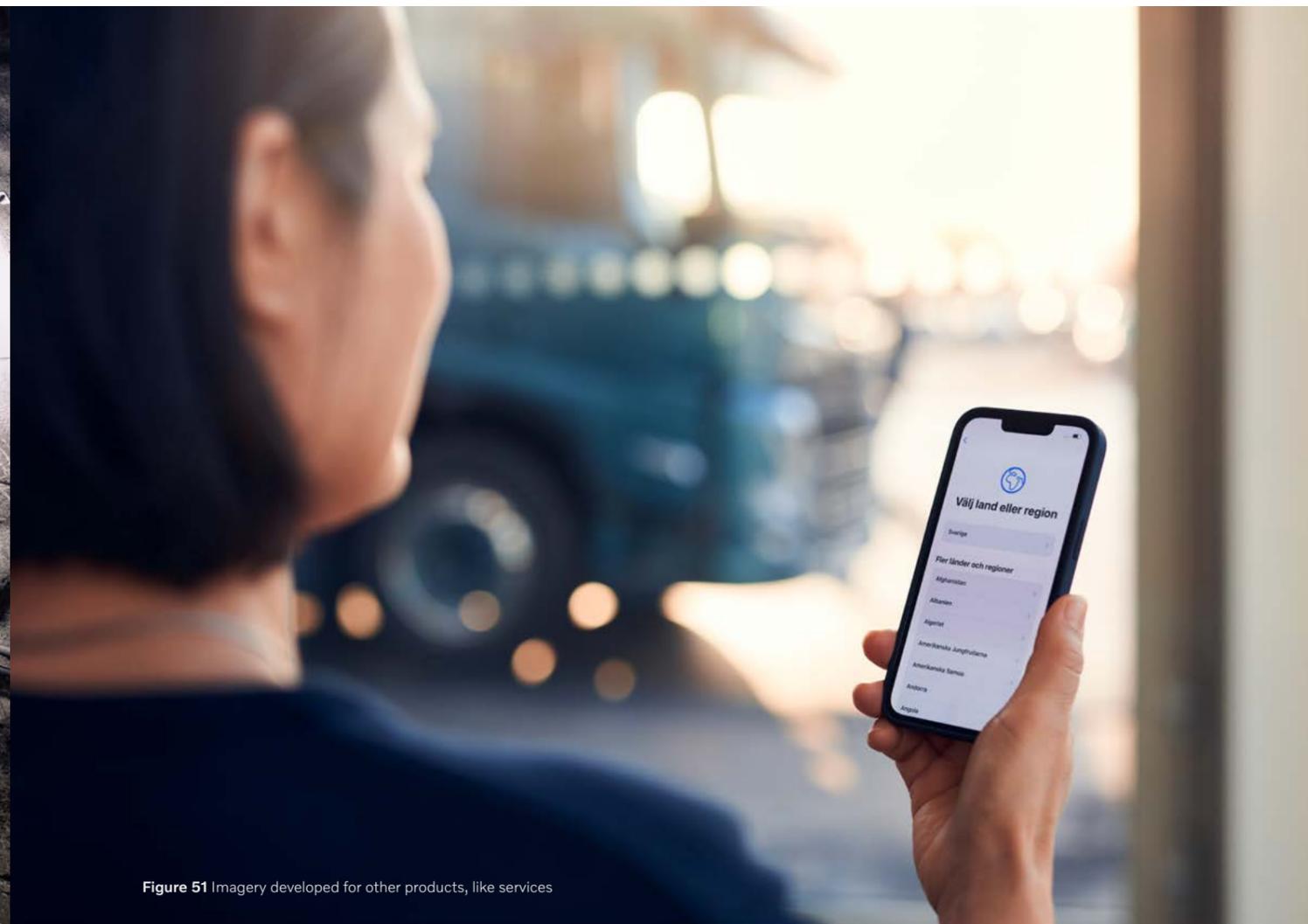


Figure 51 Imagery developed for other products, like services

5.2 USE CASES

In this chapter, the insights from this study are translated to reality.

Ideas are presented on how the findings can be applied and affect the company's and brand's marketing activities and content strategy.



5.2.1 Interactions in the customer journey

Disclosed information



5.2.2 Managerial implications

Interactions with branded content are essential for the company. In a way, they determine marketing activities. For instance, the effectivity of an online campaign can be reflected upon by the interactions. This chapter reflects on the influence of interactions, as well as looking at how localisation can be achieved. It is divided into three topics, being the effect on marketing budget, content localisation in other markets and describing how imagery may be localised in the future.

Marketing budget

The localisation of imagery could have a positive effect on online marketing activities' effectivity. Although no significant increase can be defined, a rule of thumb makes it possible to reflect. What impact might the increased effectivity have on marketing activities and resources?

Suppose a local image fosters 50% more 'results' in a marketing activity, compared to a global image. Here, what is meant by 'results' may vary. What does this mean for marketing activities? Two scenarios:

- By 50% less budget, the same number of intended results can be achieved. This means that the same results as normal would be achieved with fewer resources
- By 100% of the budget, the same number of intended results (e.g., signups, visitors, clicks) is increased by 50%. This means that more results than normal would be achieved with the same resources.

From a marketing point of view, getting more results with the same resources seems more appealing than getting the same number of results with fewer resources. To illustrate the impact, scenario two is developed including a calculation. This shows how more effective marketing has an impact on turnover in the end.

Calculation

The starting point is an advertisement for the new Volvo FH Electric. The advertisement has a budget of €10.000. The effectivity will be reflected upon by the number of click-throughs. A fictive difference of 50% will be applied in the compared effectivity between local and global imagery. Then, a conversion rate is applied, as interactions do not one-on-one lead to purchases. From this ratio, a number of potential customers is derived. Imagine that each customer will order 2 Volvo FH Electric's. The margin of this purchase is €10.000. Multiplying this by the number of customers, results in the total marginal sum.

	Local imagery	Global imagery
Advertisement budget	€10.000	€10.000
Number of click throughs	160	≈ 107
Conversation rate 5%	0,05 x 160	0,05 x 107
Potential customers	8	5,33 ≈ 5
Margin x number of customers	€10.000 x 8 = €80.000	€10.000 x 5 = €50.000
Difference	€80.000 - €50.000 = €30.000	

The numbers and percentages mentioned are fictitious. In reality, there will be more steps adding up to a purchase. The conversion rate is probably also lower. Nevertheless, this calculation example shows what a difference more effective marketing can make. It should be observed that from both scenarios budget is created for other activities.

- In scenario one, budget is created directly because less is spent. The gap resulting from this, can be used to be spent on other activities or for improving effectivity of existing activities or campaigns.
- In scenario two, the budget indirectly arises. This will require intensive monitoring, but an in-depth analysis will make it demonstrable what share marketing activities have in the financial turnover. The calculation is a simple example of it.

Reflecting on the last, more attention and budget could be spent on creating local imagery. In this study, existing images were adapted. Even more interactions with branded content take place if it contains new, local imagery. The effectivity of marketing activities would improve even further.

Testing in other markets

The fundamental aspect in this study is finding the right balance between global and local orientations in the management of online marketing. The tests have been executed in the Netherlands. What could the obtained knowledge on localisation mean for other markets of Volvo Trucks?

Innovative

Compared to other markets, the way Volvo Trucks Nederland spends resources on their DCM is progressive. From observations, it can be concluded that the VTN is further ahead with the development and dissemination of informative branded content than other markets. Given this situation, it is good to be aware about the fact that such tests are not an everyday occurrence in other markets.

Value of A/B testing

However, introducing such tests for other markets is valuable. A/B testing is an uncomplicated way to reflect on the effectivity of certain branded content and marketing activities. Introducing this principle can help other markets and the brand to analyse and reflect. By doing so, they should develop knowledge on what is effective, and what is not.

Sharing the knowledge

The knowledge of the Dutch market company on effective marketing activities can be valuable for other markets. This is particularly beneficial for other markets that have yet to start on DCM (i.e., distribution of informative branded content), are just getting started, lack the knowledge to tackle this, or do not have the capacity to do so. Ideally, insights from all markets are shared with each other, to reach a higher level of understanding on effective marketing.

Global - local imagery

Researching the effect localisation of imagery in other markets will deliver validation of the findings of this study. It also raises the question of whether the mechanism holds up in other markets. There are differences. While it is plausible that the target groups are partly the same (e.g., age and interests), their cultural identity will be different. In certain countries, people are prouder of their origins, than in others. How will this affect their interactions on branded content with localised imagery?

Content strategy

In chapter 2.2.4., Visions on localisation of imagery, it was elaborated on localising imagery in branded content from various perspectives. From a global perspective, localising branded content is encouraged. The results of this study support the vision on localising branded content. Then, if localising imagery in branded content seems effective, what other applications of branded content can be localised as well?

How to localise imagery

Most imagery used in the A/B tests was downloaded from Volvo Trucks' Media Library and then modified using Photoshop. A localised image can also be created in other ways. The most obvious way is to create new local images, for example by a photo shoot. At the same time, a new image can also be created based on an existing image. A strikingly relevant development is the application of AI as featured in Photoshop Beta. This software is different from the regular Photoshop, as it allows users to test new beta features (Helyer, 2023). One of these features is called Generative Fill: the user selects part of a photo, adds a prompt in which the user tells what needs to be added or changed to the selection and the program then fills in the selection using AI.



Figure 52 Original image and adapted variant by using AI

The images shown are examples of how AI generated a new background. The first image is the original image (figure 52). In the other images, prompts have been entered to change the background, like 'change the background to the city centre of Amsterdam'. Although the backgrounds have imperfections, this development shows how easy it can be to modify an existing image and make it seem more local by entering the right prompts.

It is likely that developments in AI in relation to creating new imagery will continue. Eventually, the realism of AI imagery will increase, as said by ChatGPT: *"Based on the current state of AI research and technological advancements, it is highly plausible that images generated by AI will become more realistic in the future"*, as a response to the prompt *"What is more plausible? That images generated by AI will become more realistic, or not?"*

This will not only affect image localisation, but the entire production of imagery for the brand may also benefit. The rise of AI could make image creation significantly easier. To take an example, a product is photographed in a studio. Then, using AI, an environment is virtually added. Details such as the lighting and reflections on the truck are also added to the photo via AI. This will create a realistic image of a truck in a certain environment, without having to photograph the truck actually there. This may save significantly on costs and organisation of media productions. Moreover, it would allow the brand to provide local imagery to local markets, should markets have limited resources to create a local image themselves in any way.

When to localise an image

A key issue is when a global brand should localise its branded imagery, and when it should not. One aspect that may play a role in this is the brand's country of origin. Based on interpretation of this study, an overview has been created of which content items could (should) be localised, and which not.

Regardless, the challenge of finding a right balance will remain. Assume that localisation will be a more effective strategy at all times. As a result, the country of origin (Sweden) of the Volvo brand would no longer be explicitly expressed as a brand value, as the imagery represents the Netherlands. Does this harm the brand (i.e., brand identity, equity) on a local level? This is a question that cannot be answered now, but reflects the challenges of finding a balance between localisation and standardisation in the marketing activities.

In addition, some content items may not be presented in this overview. These could be about different subjects than the ones listed in the table. Moreover, only digital content is discussed in this study, whereas content includes many more applications. Think of publications in magazines.

Type of branded content	To localise imagery?	Elaboration
Kennisbank	Yes	The personal relevance of Kennisbank content is improved by the localisation of imagery. In relation to the topics, it should be reviewed whether the image could be localised, or will result in a distorted reality (see innovations)
Images from fans or truckspotters	Yes	This imagery usually already contains a local orientation. No additional efforts are required.
Campaigns	Yes - no	It seems appropriate to localise campaigns in order to make them seem more relevant for the target audience. However, some campaigns build upon earlier (viral) content. The media supporting the campaign should then be recycled.
New product	No	Products are first introduced by the brand and will later be introduced to local markets. It is expected to receive globally oriented imagery first, from the brand
Experiences from clients	Yes	In fact, the content itself should be locally oriented as well. Local clients appeal more to experience of clients from other countries.
Press releases - local	Yes	This imagery usually already contains a local orientation. No additional efforts are required.
Press releases - global	No	Such press releases are usually related to news from the brand and are about happenings abroad. The localisation of imagery could cause incongruity
Events	Yes	As most events are organised in the Netherlands, it is appropriate to use locally oriented imagery.
Innovations - available in country of the viewer	Yes	The localisation of imagery is congruent to the developments in the country of the viewer, thus will not show a distorted reality that could possibly harm the credibility of the branded content.
Innovations - not available in country of the viewer	No	In contrast, the localisation of imagery here creates a somewhat distorted reality, affecting the credibility of the branded content and the brand.
Holidays and special days	Yes	These days are in a sense part of the viewer's cultural identity, so connecting to them makes sense.
Services	Yes	The localisation of imagery could make this branded content seem more relevant to the viewer.
Deliveries of trucks	Yes - no	This imagery usually already contains a local orientation. No additional efforts are required. Deliveries abroad are sometimes presented as well, and should be not be localised.
News related to local regulations - subsidies	Yes	This news applies especially to the local market. The imagery applied should therefore be local as well.

Localising the content and strategy

Content is a broad concept that includes different formats. Would the outcomes of this study be true for videos, for example? The results of this study seem to indicate that local content production can pay off. As an example, think of interview in which a local business shares their experiences with an electric truck.

Then, what content and other resources should the global marketing team provide to the markets? For example, this can influence the strategy for developing editorial content and the creation of imagery.

Improving personal relevance

What other ways exist to make informative branded content more personally relevant, besides localisation? One way to make is more relevant could be by addressing a specific target audience. Another way would be targeting branded content to a particular audience or market segments. By fragmenting content in this way, it becomes relevant to specific target audiences.

Additionally, branded content becomes more engaging by considering the following factors, as described in the literature review: vividness, interactivity, entertainment, emotional, authenticity, surprise, interesting, practical useful, and positive content. These aspects can be applied in different forms of content.

Different behaviour

In a way, localised imagery leads to different behaviour. One step further, could interactions lead to more engaged behaviour with the branded content and the brand? For example, is the average reading time of a localised article higher than with a general article? Will a visitor that interacts with local content become a potential customer more quickly?

6 / Reflection

What are the lessons learned? In this chapter, it will be reflected upon the found results in relation to the expected outcomes.

This should reveal what can be concluded about the effect of imagery localisation on fostering interactions with branded content.

This chapter contains the following sections:

6.1
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Conclusion

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6.1 Discussion

Design science

The aim of this study was to explore the effects on interactions, based on congruity between the viewer and the imagery applied in the branded content. First, an understanding of the meaning of congruity was developed by familiarising with theoretical concepts. Then, the elements that could establish congruity were examined and later applied in A/B tests. This study has shown that interactions with branded content are mediated by congruity. Thus, the results support the expected outcomes of the rationale. This implies that abductive reasoning, followed by instinct, can deliver realistic and practical findings.

Additionally, this study is somewhat 'ill-structured'. An extensive amount of literature dedicated to the defined problem does not exist. Therefore, theoretical concepts from other fields of science had to be discovered, to underpin the phenomena or artefact. As the outcomes validate the expectations, this study proves that sometimes an 'ill-structure' research can be of (scientific) value, guided by its explorative process. This is supported by the fact that literature can lack specific concepts or applications in specific contexts.

Generalisability

There remain opportunities to be explored when it comes to the effects of self-congruity on branded content's interactions. From the cue analysis, it occurs that the landscape in an image contributes strongly to the identification to the self. Yet, the effects of this cue were examined to a little extent and could be improved by showing more distinctive (local) surroundings. Moreover, it should be examined whether the addition of cues (e.g., company graphics added to a truck in a local landscape) improves the effectiveness of the branded content. Even though the results of the different tests should not simply be compared with each other, the trend derived from the current results can be strengthened by more tests.

For this reason, testing in various environments is valuable to review the generalisability of the effects of image localisation on branded content. The Volvo Trucks brand has multiple markets - countries to serve. Each country has a different audience, with a distinct perspective and sensitivity to local and global orientations. Testing in other markets will allow for further validation. The insights that will emerge can be considered in the content strategy of both global and local marketing levels. Besides, the localisation of imagery may not positively affect interactions in other (product) contexts. Various mediating effects occur, such as the brand's image, values (e.g.,

country-of-origin), and consumer's associations. Therefore, it is recommended to research the localisation of imagery in other marketing contexts as well.

Behaviour

In this study, the results are derived from promoted branded content. This may detract from the DCM's approach of remaining objective and informative. A sponsored message can leave a more commercial impression. In this study, it has not been researched how interactions with organic branded content are mediated by localisation. Another issue found in this study are the different types of congruity. Branded content can become more personally relevant by localisation. In a sense, this moves it further away from the brand. The expected form of congruity by the viewer is somewhat unknown. Therefore, it should be reviewed what thrives the relevance of branded content – is it by symbolising the self, or by adhering to the brand?

The findings seem to reflect that symbolism of the self is the stronger mechanism. However, this conclusion has been derived from quantitative research by A/B testing. More qualitative studies and emphasis with the 'user' was lacking in this study. However, design science is characterised by the involvement of users in the design process. The understanding of congruity could have improved by qualitative studies, and may have delivered insights that were lacking in the explanation of the A/B testing. Nevertheless, as the A/B testing revealed valuable insights in regards to the congruity.

Ethical

As described, fictitious elements were sometimes added to the imagery as design variables in an A/B test. By doing so, the company's relationships were preserved. However, the viewers were presented with an image that showed, in fact, a distorted reality. It could be argued that this (modest) deception could be justified by the importance of the investigation. At the same time, the implementation of the insights must be critically examined. Suppose the company proceeds with image localisation, how will they achieve this? Does the authenticity of the branded content remain by creating truly local content (imagery), or is a local orientation of branded content achieved in an artificial way? The possibilities exist, but it is recommended to go for authenticity. Otherwise, the credibility of the company and the brand could be harmed.



Figure 53 Electric Volvo-trucks

Academic contribution

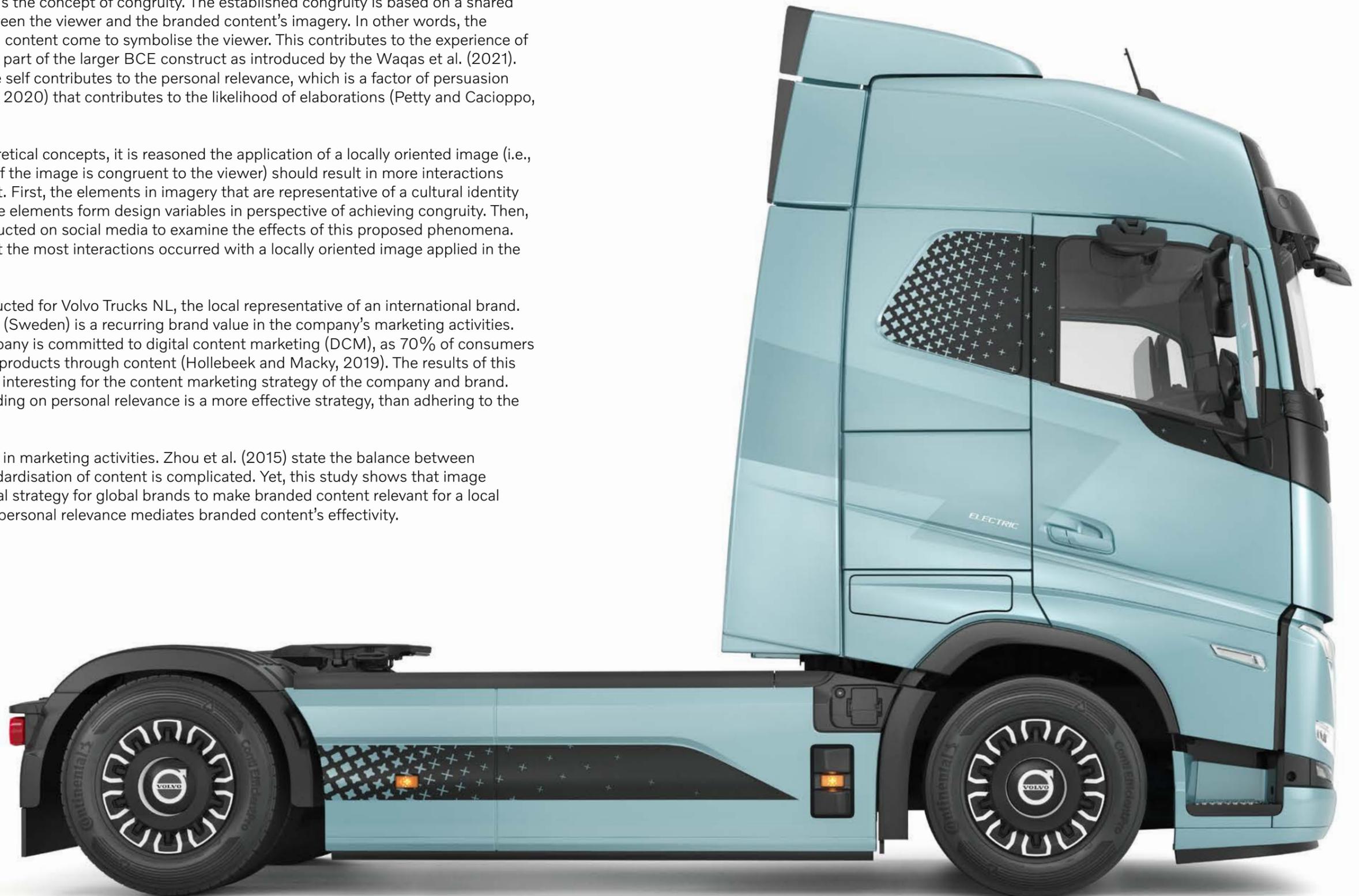
This study has implications for the field of online marketing management. Here, the adaption of global brands to local markets and the role of imagery on branded content's effectivity form the primary topics of knowledge contribution. Imagery has a crucial role in the perception and experience of the branded content. It triggers a cognitive and emotional response of the viewer (Winarni, 2020, Ciprian, 2014) and is better in engaging users, simulating experiences, and conveying meaning, according to Chan et al. (2023). Although it seems an effective part of marketing, the knowledge on marketing effects through imagery is scarce. Li and Xie (2020) argue that studies about the effectivity of content are primarily about verbal content.

Central to this study is the concept of congruity. The established congruity is based on a shared cultural identity between the viewer and the branded content's imagery. In other words, the imagery and branded content come to symbolise the viewer. This contributes to the experience of self-identity, which is part of the larger BCE construct as introduced by the Waqas et al. (2021). The experience of the self contributes to the personal relevance, which is a factor of persuasion (John and De'Villiers, 2020) that contributes to the likelihood of elaborations (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Based on these theoretical concepts, it is reasoned the application of a locally oriented image (i.e., the cultural identity of the image is congruent to the viewer) should result in more interactions with branded content. First, the elements in imagery that are representative of a cultural identity were identified. These elements form design variables in perspective of achieving congruity. Then, A/B tests were conducted on social media to examine the effects of this proposed phenomena. The results show that the most interactions occurred with a locally oriented image applied in the branded content.

This study was conducted for Volvo Trucks NL, the local representative of an international brand. The country-of-origin (Sweden) is a recurring brand value in the company's marketing activities. Meanwhile, the company is committed to digital content marketing (DCM), as 70% of consumers prefer to learn about products through content (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). The results of this study are particularly interesting for the content marketing strategy of the company and brand. They reflect that building on personal relevance is a more effective strategy, than adhering to the brand.

This is a striking shift in marketing activities. Zhou et al. (2015) state the balance between localisation and standardisation of content is complicated. Yet, this study shows that image localisation is a crucial strategy for global brands to make branded content relevant for a local audience. Moreover, personal relevance mediates branded content's effectivity.



6.2 Conclusion

This study is fundamentally about exploring effective online marketing strategies. Specifically, the aim of this study was to examine whether congruity between the cultural identity of the viewer and imagery applied in branded content could affect interactions with this content.

This question is answered by exploring the effects of congruity, by means of design science. Instinctively, one might indeed think that the described form of congruity leads to more interactions. However, science does not always provide evidence on specific notions. By lacking established theories or results, the design scientist has no option but to explore and research the question himself.

In digital content marketing, branded content is seen as the mediator between consumers and brands. Over the past decades, consumers have increasingly been faced with global brands and marketing expressions. As a result, consumer culture has become both globally and locally oriented. However, global brands continue to struggle on their marketing mix, not knowing what aspects they should standardise or localise. In other words, what marketing expressions could maintain a global orientation, and what expressions should be adapted to a local market?

The localisation of branded content is a known concept in literature, but only in regards to verbal content. Little is known about the effects of imagery in branded content, whereas the visual aspect of marketing is a proven effective strategy. In particular, the effects of imagery localisation are unexplored. Building on literature, the experience of self-identity seems an promising way of making branded content relevant to the viewer. Therefore, congruity was sought in this study based on cultural identity, as a way of localising imagery. After all, cues to a cultural identity reflect whether the image is locally or globally oriented.

From the examination of imagery with trucks, cues to cultural identity were the licence plate, company graphics and landscape depicted. Building on this knowledge, the cultural orientation was adapted in imagery from a global truck brand. Through A/B testing, social media users were exposed to branded content that either included locally or globally oriented imagery. The interactions with this content were measured as a reflection on the proposed effect.

Differences in interactions did occur, based on the cultural orientation of the imagery. This indicates not only that the choice of the imagery has an effect on branded content's effectivity, so does cultural congruity between the branded content and the viewer. This insight reinforces the meaning of localisation (over standardisation) in online marketing. In this study, localisation went beyond the activities of translating text.

Locally oriented imagery leaves the impression that the content is dedicated to the local market. This improves the authenticity and personal relevance of the branded content, which are aspects of persuasion. This insight is valuable for the brand's digital content marketing activities, as it will contribute to the relationship between the brand and the consumer. In the end, this leads to brand attachment.

Yet, creating the most effective marketing mix will remain a challenge. Brand values, different topics in content, different forms of content are all variables that should be considered. Moreover, certain content items of an international brand should not be localised. However, the localisation of imagery appears as a promising mechanism to make marketing activities more effective, and branded content more relevant for local viewers. This is a valuable insight for the development of the content and marketing strategy of international brands, as well as science.





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Figures

Figure 1

Companies part of the Volvo Group.
<https://www.volvogroup.com/en/about-us/brands.html>

Figure 2

Volvo-trucks
<https://images.volvotrucks.com/categories>

Figure 3

Electric Volvo-trucks.
<https://images.volvotrucks.com/categories>

Figure 4

Distinctive imagery.
<https://www.volvotrucks.nl/nl-nl/news/press-releases/2021/juli/stille-en-schonehuisvuilinzameling-in-rotterdam.html>,
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Figure 5

DCM Conceptual Framework as presented by Hollebeek and Macky's (2019).

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Figure 6

Elaboration Likelihood Model, adapted from Petty and Cacioppo (1986).

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Figure 7

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Figure 8

Modeling framework for the determinants of social media post engagement, adapted from Li and Xie (2019).

Social Media Post Engagement framework by Li and Xie (2019). Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2019). Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? An Empirical Study of Image Content and Social Media Engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 1–19.
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Figure 9

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