Brand image inconsistencies of luxury fashion brands

A buyer-seller exchange situation model of Hugo Boss Australia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine whether brand perceptions differ across channel members of luxury brands using the buyer-seller exchange situation model.

Design/methodology/approach – A triangulation approach was used to compare perceptions of different channel members. The data collection was completed in two stages. First, a self-administered mail survey was sent out to 3,592 individuals from a publicly available mailing list. In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 retailer buyers.

Findings – The findings reveal that brand perceptions differ across channel members. There appears to be a mismatch in the perceptions of wholesalers and retailers that might constitute a source of brand image inconsistencies. Although the final consumers' overall attitude toward the Hugo Boss brand is positive, consumers appear to be in favour of other brands and their inclination to purchase the Hugo Boss brand seems to be relatively low.

Research limitations/implications – The study only examined one brand and is limited to the Australian context. Future research could examine other luxury brands in different countries. The study utilised judgement sampling, which could result in selection bias.

Practical implications – Brand knowledge is crucial to achieving brand image consistency between seller and buyer. Internal marketing techniques could be employed to assess the efficiency and development of brand knowledge among employees, retailers and other channel members.

Originality/value – This is one of the pioneering studies that applies a marketing channel approach to investigate brand image inconsistencies in a concrete working example. It contributes to luxury brand management across borders, opening the way for further research. The study provides ecological validity and reliability by working on a triangulation approach, using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Keywords Fashion, Premier brands, Brand image

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Brand image consistency is crucial to the success of any brand (Levine, 1998; McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999; Ritson, 2003). With greater regularity of consumer travel and increasing international media, consumers expect brands to deliver the same values on a worldwide basis (De Chernatony *et al.*, 1995; Phau and Yip, 2008). Preserving brand image consistency is particularly relevant for luxury brands that are based on brand symbolism (Levy, 1959; Elliott, 1997; Vickers and Renand, 2003; Banister and Hogg,

2004; Dall'Olmo Riley *et al.*, 2004; Park *et al.*, 2008). Nueno and Quelch (1998, p. 62) further define luxury brands as "those whose ratio of functional utility to price is low while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price is high". That is to say, price is not the prime issue for status consumers (Dall'Olmo Riley *et al.*, 2004). Whereas consumers of fast moving consumer goods may be influenced by the brand's image, they will generally prioritise on functionality and price (Dall'Olmo Riley *et al.*, 2004). In contrast, consumers of luxury goods will be primarily influenced by the brand's image, while considering functionality as a given prerequisite (Dall'Olmo Riley *et al.*, 2004). This is in line with Vickers and Renand (2003, p. 473) who state that:

> Although luxury and non-luxury goods can be conceptualised on the basis of functional [...] and interactional symbolic dimensions, there is a distinctive difference in the mix of these components.

Specifically, Vickers and Renand (2003) point out that luxury goods are based on symbolic attributes, whereas non-luxury goods mainly rely on functional attributes. As Dubois and Paternault (1995, p. 71) remark "luxury items are bought for what they mean, beyond what they are." Thus, symbolism shapes the luxury character of a brand, enabling luxury brands to maintain status and demand premium prices (Vickers and Renand, 2003).

However, brand image inconsistency is an issue several luxury brands struggle with (Matthiesen and Phau, 2005). Brand image inconsistencies, namely the difference between the identity of a brand and its image, embody the threat of brand dilution or might even change the values incorporated into the brand (McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999; Temporal, 1999). Gucci, Tiffany and Burberry are luxury brands that faced such brand image inconsistencies in the past (*The Economist*, 1992; Temporal, 2001). The brand Hugo Boss is a good example of global brand image inconsistency. The Hugo Boss global brand portrays an identity of being one of the most successful fashion groups with an array of brands offering the largest fashion diversity possible at a consistent and high quality standard for both men and women (Hugo Boss, 2003). However, in Australia, the image is that of a producer of high-quality business wear for men (Matthiesen and Phau, 2005). Similarly, the global Hugo Boss brand personifies fashion competence, brand showcase, dynamics, sport, glamour and fun. In Australia it only personifies masculinity, modesty, and leadership and fell short of several key attributes of the global brand image (Matthiesen and Phau, 2005).

Brand image inconsistencies can be avoided through consistent communication (McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999). That is to say, a brand's identity or its message must be delivered consistently to all publics, whether consumers, media or government (McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999; Kotler *et al.*, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2008). A prerequisite of consistent communication is consistency in the marketing mix (De Chernatony, 2001; Keller, 2003; Hoeffler and Keller, 2003; Kotler *et al.*, 2003; Phau and Yip, 2008). Despite the importance generally ascribed to consistency in the marketing mix, extant research on that matter has predominantly looked at product, price and promotion, but largely neglected place (Strategy, 2003; Lawn, 2004; Sustar and Sustar, 2005). Place refers to the distribution channel that might constitute one of the sources of brand image inconsistencies.

Reviewing Hugo Boss as an example, the distribution strategy of the Hugo Boss Group is twofold. First, Hugo Boss relies on close cooperation with trading partners

(i.e. retailers) to sell its products to the final customer. These retail shops include flagship stores, freestanding stores, shop-in-shops and traveller shops run by franchisees or directly by Hugo Boss (Hugo Boss, 2003). Further, sales teams in the headquarters in Metzingen and 15 subsidiaries throughout the world are available to support the Hugo Boss trading partners. Second, Hugo Boss distributes its products via monobrand shops. Hugo Boss shops are globally uniform in matching the corporate identity of Hugo Boss. To guarantee this uniformity, Hugo Boss makes use of in-house teams of architects and merchandisers that also offer professional advice to Hugo Boss trading partners. This ranges from shop planning and execution to the design of retail space, or the organisation of retailer events. This aims at creating, maintaining, and strengthening the global brand image. However some pertinent questions arise which will form the research objectives of this study. The concerns are as follows:

(1) Are the perceptions of wholesalers, retailers and final consumers toward the Hugo Boss brand different?

(2) How do perceptions, specifically brand personality perceptions, transcend from wholesalers to retailers and from retailers to final consumers?

(3) What are the issues that constitute irregularities in the brand perception of wholesalers and retailers that led to brand image inconsistencies?

The next section will first provide background information on the Hugo Boss brand. This is followed by a brief review of extant literature on marketing channels and the brand identity concept. Subsequently, the research methodology and findings will be discussed. The final section draws an overall conclusion of this research, highlights the key contributions and limitations, and puts forward a number of recommendations for future research.

Relevant literature
The Hugo Boss Group
Hugo Boss is an international fashion company, founded in 1923 by Hugo Boss in Metzingen, Germany. Initially Hugo Boss was a manufacturer for working clothes that in the 1960s started to produce men's suits. Today, the company has established a worldwide reputation for high quality clothing with sophisticated European design, using mainly Italian fabrics. The brand is currently represented in 108 countries which constitute the world's key markets.

In 2003 the company had annual sales of €1,054.1 billion with an operating profit of €118.4 millions. It is listed as a joint stock company on the German stock exchange in Frankfurt. Boss is the core brand of the Hugo Boss Group, contributing €941.0 millions of the overall sales. Out of the €941.0 millions, €890.2 millions are made by BOSS Man and €50.8 millions by BOSS Woman. In 2003, 67 percent of Hugo Boss's overall turnover was gained in Europe, 25 percent out of that 65 percent was made in Germany. Moreover, 17 percent of the company's sales were gained in the US. The company's distribution policy is based on two strategies. On the one hand, distribution takes place via monobrand shops that aim at creating global brand image. On the other hand, close cooperation with trading partners allow Hugo Boss to sell its products to the final customer.

Hugo Boss's product range offers clothing for every occasion: business wear, leisurewear, sportswear and dinner wear, including shoes and accessories for men and women. The other goods of the company are eyewear, fragrances and watches that are produced by licensees. Hugo Boss has implemented an umbrella strategy of two brands*: BOSS Hugo Boss and HUGO Hugo Boss. Both brands cover a fashion range for men and women. Besides these, BOSS Hugo Boss is further divided into three labels: BOSS Black Label, BOSS Orange Label and BOSS Green Label. BOSS Man with its three labels Black, Orange and Green offers three independent collections, dedicated to consumers' diverse needs and wants (Figure 1).

BOSS Black Label is high quality fashion, with perfect fit that suits every occasion in the business world. BOSS Orange Label is ideal and individual clothing for leisure time, "making a distinct fashion statement in the casual market" (Hugo Boss, 2003, p. 21). BOSS Green Label is functional sportswear for the "modern, active man" that keeps its promises (Hugo Boss, 2003, p. 22). BOSS Woman is the "perfect parallel to Black Label from BOSS Man" – fashionable clothing in exceptional quality, personifying the "magic of women in society" (Hugo Boss, 2003, p. 21) and expressing a "very personal style" (Hugo Boss, 2003, p. 21). BOSS Woman underlines the cosmopolitan and self-confident attitude of its customers. HUGO is innovative and stylish business and leisurewear for women and men – fashion that incorporates current lifestyle trends.

Marketing channels and relationship marketing. Marketing channels were conventionally considered as "manufacturer-controlled vertical channels" (Achrol and Etzel, 2003, p. 146). Today, the distribution of marketing strategy, functions, responsibilities, coordination and power is more balanced between channel members (Pelton *et al.*, 1997; Achrol and Etzel, 2003). Channel members or intermediaries cooperate and pool their resources and risks in order to achieve individual and common goals more efficiently, and to adapt to the dynamics of the global marketplace (Achrol and Kotler, 1999; Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2001; Izquierdo and Cillán, 2004). The distribution of functions has produced mutual dependence among channel members (Pelton *et al.*, 1997; Svensson, 2001, 2002; Izquierdo and Cillán, 2004; Zhuang and Zhou, 2004).

Marketing channel literature defines dependence as "the degree to which the target firm needs to maintain its relationship with the source in order to achieve its desired goals" (Kale, 1986, p. 390). The focal point of marketing practices and hence marketing channel activities is the customer, not the consumer (Webster, 2000; Svensson, 2001). In this context, the term customer refers to "an individual or business entity that buys the product, meaning that they acquire it (legally and, probably but not necessarily, physically) and pay for it", whereas a consumer relates to "a person who uses or
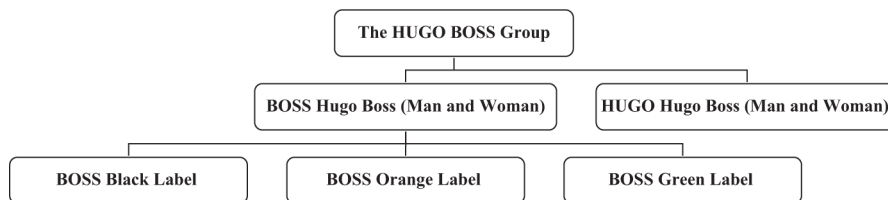
Note: Baldessarini, the third brand of HUGO BOSS was excluded for the purpose of this study

consumes the product" (Webster, 2000, p. 20). This development has entailed the rising significance of relational aspects in marketing and hence the area of relationship marketing (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Pels, 1999; Pels *et al.*, 2000; Haytko, 2004).

Relationship marketing is defined as "proactively creating, developing and maintaining committed, interactive, and profitable exchanges with selected customers (partners) over time" (Harker, 1999). It considers the establishment of strong relationships with customers as a major goal of organisations (Zinkhan, 2002). These relationships should be longitudinal in nature and beneficial for both parties of the buyer-seller relationship (Tse *et al.*, 2004). That is to say, relationship marketing is a philosophy in which the individual buyer-seller relationship is put "at the centre of the firm's strategic or operational thinking" (Tse *et al.*, 2004, p. 1159). The buyer-seller exchange situation and its restrictions determine the relationship, and hence the success of marketing channels (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Pelton *et al.*, 1997; Pels *et al.*, 2000). Although channel members pursue certain mutual goals, their focus of attention toward the exchanged good or brand is different, based on their distinct offer and need structure (Webster, 2000; Pels *et al.*, 2000; Weitz and Wang, 2004). This gap might comprise a source of brand image inconsistencies. Pels *et al.*'s (2000) buyer-seller exchange situation model (BSESM) will be used to investigate the gap between the seller's offer proposition and the buyer's need structure.

Buyer-seller exchange situation model. The BSESM consists of three dimensions (Pels *et al.*, 2000). The first dimension looks at the environmental context of seller and buyer. The second dimension addresses the interaction between seller and buyer and identifies the mismatch in their perceptions toward the counterpart. The third dimension deals with different exchange situations. It is the second dimension that is relevant to this paper and therefore will be discussed in detail below.

The second dimension of the BSESM investigates the interaction between seller and buyer. Specifically, this dimension explores the seller's offer proposition and the buyer's need structure and their perceptions of the counterpart which determine the overall relationship (Pels *et al.*, 2000). This dimension also identifies the mismatch or gap in the seller-buyer relationship (Pels *et al.*, 2000). This study defines the seller as the wholesaler (i.e. Hugo Boss Australia Pty. Ltd), and the buyer as the retailer (i.e. Hugo Boss's customers).

The seller's intention is to offer products and services to other organisations (Pelton *et al.*, 1997). That is to say, Hugo Boss Australia Pty. Ltd offers its brands to retailers that match the Hugo Boss identity. Literature differentiates between the generic and the core offer (Pels *et al.*, 2000). The generic offer relates to the core of the offer, that is, "value is delivered in the form of generic goods or the core service", whereas the unique offer is a customised proposition that is specific to each buyer (Pels *et al.*, 2000, p. 13). Hugo Boss Australia Pty. Ltd combines the core and the unique offer. The company provides its customers with the Hugo Boss garments (core offer), but also assists its customers in designing retail space and so on, depending on the customer's need structure (unique offer).

The buyer's intention is to find the organisation that offers the good or service that the buyer lacks by comparing several offer propositions (Pelton *et al.*, 1997). Specifically, Australian retailers purchase the Hugo Boss brands because their customers (i.e. final consumers) request Hugo Boss fashion. Hence, from the buyer's

perspective, the value of a seller's offer proposition depends on the buyer's perceived need (Pels *et al.*, 2000). Different buyers have different needs and consequently each buyer has a specific need structure. Fundamental to this structure is the buyer's generic need which, depending on the extent of the buyer's specificity, transforms into a unique need (Pels *et al.*, 2000). The retailers' needs are largely generic, that is, their need for the Hugo Boss brands. However, retailers also ask for personal assistance in various matters such as merchandising the Hugo Boss product (i.e. unique need).

Mismatch of seller's offer proposition and buyer's need structure. Distinct propositions of seller and buyer lead to misinterpretations of the counterpart's wants and needs. Specifically, buyers rarely understand the seller's offer proposition exactly in the way it was intended by the seller (Pels *et al.*, 2000). This is because buyers do not consider and acknowledge all offers, but the ones that correspond to their need structure (Pels *et al.*, 2000). In the same way, sellers only consider and recognise certain needs, namely the ones that are apparent to their understanding or demand (Pels *et al.*, 2000). Further, not only do the seller and buyer's propositions differ, but also their goals and perspectives can be in conflict and consequently contribute to the mismatch (Stern *et al.*, 1996; Pelton *et al.*, 1997; Wathne and Heide, 2000; Weitz and Wang, 2004). According to Weitz and Wang (2004), conflicting goals and perspectives are mainly threefold. First, both parties are interested in maximising their own profits and return of assets. Second, manufacturers or wholesalers typically have a national, international or global scope, whereas retailers care more about local competitive conditions. Third, retailers concentrate on the sales of a product category, whereas manufacturers or wholesalers focus on the sale of their specific brand.

The third point is an interesting proposition. For retailers, it is not important which fashion brand consumers buy, as long as consumers buy fashion. However, Hugo Boss Australia Pty. Ltd. wants consumers to particularly buy the Hugo Boss brands. Further, from the retailer's point-of-view, the size of a brand's sales space at retail is primarily determined by the mix of sales promotions (i.e. promotional features) and price incentives (i.e. trade discounts) given to the retailer in comparison to other competing brands and not by a brand's positioning (Webster, 2000). Generally, retailers and their sales representatives are less interested in explaining and communicating the positioning of a particular brand and its image to consumers because they sell an array of brands. As a result the brand value for the final consumer may become blurred (Webster, 2000). In contrast, manufacturers or wholesalers and their brand managers typically put emphasis on the use of advertising to build, maintain, and strengthen the value of their brand for consumers (Webster, 2000). Consequently, one problem manufacturers or wholesalers and their brand managers face in the marketing channel is that they create a brand identity which its success or failure to a certain extent depends on somebody else. In most cases, it is the retailer and his/her sales force (Webster, 2000). Specifically, brand managers have no control, authority or responsibility over the employment and training of the sales force, which constitutes the dyad with the final consumer (Webster, 2000).

Brand identity, personality and image. Brand identity is defined as "a set of associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain" (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). It refers to the way in which companies present or communicate their brands to the market (Kapferer, 1992). A key facet of brand identity is brand personality (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Martinez and Pina, 2003; Martinez and

De Chernatony, 2004; Park *et al.*, 2008). Whereas brand identity is descriptive and based on recognition, the brand personality concept focuses on providing a brand with a personality that provokes an emotional response (McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999; Park *et al.*, 2008).

Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). To exemplify, Dolce and Gabbana's personality is likely to be described by consumers as an innovative, extravagant, stylish trendsetter, whereas Hugo Boss is more likely to be described as conservative, stylish and elegant. Literature considers the brand personality concept to be significant for several reasons: it helps to differentiate a brand from its competitors in a product category (Halliday, 1996; McEnally and De Chernatony, 1999). Further, brand personality might enhance the personal meaning of the brand to the consumer (Fournier, 1998). Brand personality seems to be useful in establishing consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Aaker *et al.*, 2004). Besides, it enables consumers to identify themselves with a brand and to express their own self-concept, as well as to gain symbolic benefits through brand possession (Prentice, 1987; Belk, 1988; Kleine *et al.*, 1995).

Brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Plummer (1985) suggests that brand personality is useful when marketing a brand across cultures and in increasing brand loyalty. Since brand personality is a key facet of brand identity (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003), it also facilitates the understanding and interpretation of the brand identity concept as a whole (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). Brand identity, supported by communication mechanisms, creates associations in consumers' minds which result in a brand image (Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004).

Research methodology and findings
The research design of this study consisted of two phases. The first phase comprised survey research with final consumers, and the second phase in-depth interviews with Hugo Boss customers (i.e. retailers).

Phase 1: survey research
Sampling and data collection. This study defines the target market as Australian consumers with a total annual household income of more than AU$80,001. To reach the target market effectively, this study made use of judgement sampling. The survey was mailed to households situated in expensive residential areas only. These areas were defined by a focus group of eight participants who have been living for several years in Melbourne or Sydney respectively. Participants were asked to produce a list of the 15 most expensive residential areas. Participants' level of agreement was 95 per cent and discrepancies were resolved through discussion (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 1998). Subsequently, systematic sampling was used to generate a mailing list from the telephone book (i.e. Whitepages). Out of that mailing list, households that were situated in the formerly identified 15 most expensive residential areas were selected to participate in the mail survey.

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed to 3,592 households. A total of 523 questionnaires were undeliverable due to missing parts in the mailing address. A total of 372 completed questionnaires were returned in which 38 were invalid leading to an overall sample size of 334 with a response rate of 10.88 per cent.

Survey instrument. The self-administered questionnaire comprised of three sections. Section A consisted of a number of established scales to measure brand knowledge (Bruner *et al.*, 2001), brand attitude (Bruner *et al.*, 2001), brand image (Aaker, 1991; Ha, 1996; Aaker, 1997), and purchase behaviour (Bruner and Hensel, 1998) towards the Hugo Boss brand. Section B is made up of Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale. It consists of 42 items with five underlying factors, namely sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. The last section captured the demographic information of the respondents.

Findings of survey. Out of 334 respondents, 148 were female and 186 were male. Hence, males constituted about 55.7 percent of the sample. The age groups were fairly distributed. Specifically, 211 respondents were aged from 26 to 55 years which is Hugo Boss's main target group. Further, the majority of respondents were university graduates (59.4 per cent). A total of 202 respondents had a total household income above AU$80,000, hence the authors consider the Hugo Boss target market to be met. Most of the respondents were of Australian (78.1 per cent) or British (10.8 per cent) origin and 95.1 percent of the respondents have been living in Australia for more than five years.

A total of 94 (28.5 per cent) consumers indicated that they have purchased an item from the Hugo Boss brand during the past two years. Consumers' overall willingness to buy the Hugo Boss brand appeared to be low ($\mu = 3.89$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Consumers' overall awareness of the Hugo Boss brand appeared to be high, as 95.2 percent of respondents indicated to know the Hugo Boss brand at least by name. Further, consumers' knowledge with regards to the company's different brands seemed to be relatively high. BOSS was the most well-known brand (75.4 per cent), followed by HUGO (41.1 per cent). A total of 89 respondents (26.7 per cent) were familiar with BOSS Woman. However, consumers' knowledge with regards to the company's labels appeared to be lower. A total of 48 respondents (14.4 per cent) were familiar with BOSS Black Label, 26 (7.8 per cent) with BOSS Selection, 23 (6.9 per cent) with BOSS Orange Label and 5 (1.5 per cent) with BOSS Green Label.

Consumers' overall brand attitude toward the Hugo Boss brand was positive ($\mu = 5.11$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Consumers generally thought that Hugo Boss is a good brand ($\mu = 5.28$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Further, the Hugo Boss brand was liked ($\mu = 5.03$ on a seven-point Likert scale) by consumers and perceived as appealing ($\mu = 5.02$ on a seven-point Likert scale) and favourable ($\mu = 5.06$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Further, consumers considered the Hugo Boss brand to be superior ($\mu = 5.20$ on a seven-point Likert scale), expensive ($\mu = 5.46$ on a seven-point Likert scale), and of high quality ($\mu = 5.42$ on a seven-point Likert scale). However, although the overall brand attitude towards the Hugo Boss brand was positive, consumers did not regard the Hugo Boss brand as a "For Me" choice (3.99 on a seven-point Likert scale). This might be related to the findings that from the consumers' perspective, Hugo Boss does not offer value for money ($\mu = 3.98$ on a seven-point Likert scale).

The overall brand image of Hugo Boss was good ($\mu = 5.65$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Specifically, consumers perceived the Hugo Boss brand as stylish and of high quality ($\mu = 5.13$ on a seven-point Likert scale). However, when asked about brands in clothing, consumers stated that Hugo Boss would not come to mind immediately

($\mu = 3.12$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Consumers also did not consider Hugo Boss to be the most popular brand in its category ($\mu = 3.57$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Besides, consumers rated the Hugo Boss brand as their fourth choice when purchasing clothing ($\mu = 3.76$ on a seven-point Likert scale). Additionally consumers were of the opinion that Hugo Boss is not the most suitable brand to meet their needs ($\mu = 3.39$ on a seven-point Likert scale), hence seemed not to be inclined to pay a higher price for the Hugo Boss brand ($\mu = 3.41$ on a seven-point Likert scale).

To measure the personality of the Hugo Boss brand in Australia, Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale was employed. An exploratory factor analysis was used to identify the underlying personality dimensions of the Hugo Boss brand. Items loading on more than one factor or loading below 0.3 were deleted before running the analysis again. A three-factor solution appeared to be optimal, representing three out of five personality dimensions (Aaker, 1997). This is in line with Aaker (1997) who stated that brands do not necessarily embody all five personality dimensions. Aaker (1997) therefore concluded that brand personality dimensions can be used separately. The three underlying dimensions of the Hugo Boss personality were excitement, sincerity, and competence. Scale reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.940 which is deemed adequate in academic research (Hair et al., 1998; Jackson, 2003). Eigenvalues and percentage of variance explained by each factor are presented in Table I.

Brand personality scale items	Excitement	Sincerity	Competence
Exciting	0.822		
Imaginative	0.799		
Cool	0.775		
Trendy	0.774		
Unique	0.763		
Spirited	0.758		
Daring	0.742		
Up to date	0.728		
Sincere		0.862	
Honest		0.818	
Real		0.806	
Wholesome		0.751	
Sentimental		0.740	
Friendly		0.740	
Down to earth		0.727	
Family-oriented		0.705	
Cheerful		0.630	
Successful			0.829
Corporate			0.801
Leader			0.771
Confident			0.758
Eigenvalue	9.66	3.32	1.97
Variance	46.01	15.83	9.38
Cronbach's alpha	0.937	0.930	0.912
KMO		0.924	
Bartlett's test of sphericity		0.000	

Table I.
Results of factor analysis

Phase 2: in-depth interviews
Data collection and sampling. A total of 22 in-depth interviews with Hugo Boss customers were conducted over a two week period. The interviews were carried out at the Hugo Boss office in Melbourne. The interviewees were buyers from various retailers such as David Jones within Australia. David Jones is Australia's main upmarket department store.

To maintain consistency throughout the in-depth interviews, the same procedure was used for each interview. First the interviewee was given a short introduction. The interviewee was told that the in-depth interviews are part of a study that aims at investigating the personality of a number of luxury brands in the fashion industry. The interviewee was also informed that the Hugo Boss brand is used as an exemplar, but that the study is carried out independently from the company. This was followed by a confidentiality statement. Afterwards the interviewee was asked to answer the questions of the in-depth interview. Specifically, each interviewee was asked six main questions. Each main question had one up to three probing questions. For instance, participants were asked "what do you think of the Hugo Boss brand?" This was followed by probing questions such as "what is the first thing that strikes you about the Hugo Boss brand?" or "what brands/labels do you stock?"

Findings of interviews. A total of 22 in-depth interviews with Hugo Boss customers were conducted, constituting 28.21 per cent of Hugo Boss's total number of customers. The interviewees were buyers or shop owners from various retailers within Australia. Their retail businesses range from small boutiques to retail stores like David Jones. Depending on the business size, the retail stores carry one up to fifteen other brands belonging to the same or slightly lower/higher category as the Hugo Boss brand. Two retailers stated to carry the Hugo Boss brand only. Other menswear brands stocked by the retailers include Polo Ralph Lauren (27.27 per cent), Ted Baker (22.73 per cent), Zegna (18.18 per cent), Armani (13.64 per cent), Paul Smith (13.64 per cent), Cerrutti (9.09 per cent), and Ferraud (9.09 per cent) in the business wear segment, and Gant (18.18 per cent) and Nautica (13.64 per cent) in the leisure wear segment. In terms of the Hugo Boss brand, most interviewees stock BOSS Black Label (77.27 per cent) and BOSS Orange Label (77.27 per cent). BOSS Woman is stocked by 27.27 percent of the interviewees. Other women's wear brands stocked include Armani (9.09 per cent), Escada (9.09 per cent), and Vixen (9.09 per cent).

All interviewees considered Hugo Boss to be a well-known brand in the Australian market. Further, 86.36 per cent interviewees hold the opinion that the Hugo Boss brand stands out from the crowd. Besides, 31.82 per cent of the interviewees regarded Hugo Boss as the leader in the Australian market, 22.73 per cent regarded Hugo Boss as the leader in the area of men suiting only, and 13.64 per cent did not regard Hugo Boss as the leader, but as a member of the leading edge.

When asked about the Hugo Boss brand, interviewees first thought of menswear (81.82 per cent), quality (54.55 per cent), design (40.90 per cent), and luxury (36.36 per cent). Interviewees perceived the following personality traits as the most striking ones of the Hugo Boss brand: stylish (45.46 per cent), business person (36.36 per cent), elegant (36.36 per cent), classy (31.82 per cent), mature (27.27 per cent), and masculine (22.73 per cent). From the retailer's angle the key selling propositions of the Hugo Boss brand are high quality (50 per cent), good design (40.91 per cent), well established brand image (36.36 per cent), good fit (36.36 per cent), and high brand awareness (36.36

per cent). When asked about the biggest challenges of the Hugo Boss brand in the Australian market, interviewees stated that the brand might be too expensive (18.18 per cent). Further, interviewees were concerned that the Hugo Boss brand could become over-distributed in the Australian market, resulting in a loss of exclusivity and hence brand dilution. Preventing the brand from brand dilution was considered as a responsibility of the Hugo Boss company.

The majority of retailers (36.36 per cent) had no dissatisfactions regarding their relationship with the Hugo Boss company. The following aspects were requested to be enhanced further:

- better communication in terms of store involvement and activity (i.e. product knowledge);
- better back-up service with regards to return policy and replacements;
- better control of advertising, as certain advertised items are not available in Australia;
- subsidies of local advertisements;
- more and updated promotional material;
- higher penetration of the youth market (i.e. a greater push of the orange label);
- more flexibility in payments;
- more permanent stock; and
- no minimum orders for shoes and accessories.

Most retailers promote the brand's image (or its spirit) to final consumers via direct mailing (50 per cent). Events for VIP clients (i.e. showings) are also frequently used by retailers (36.36 per cent). Furthermore, retailers stated to use in-store displays (36.36 per cent), in person promotion (36.36 per cent), and magazine advertisement (31.82 per cent) to promote the image of the Hugo Boss brand.

Discussion and implications
Final consumers mainly know Hugo Boss for its brand BOSS, which encompasses its business wear range and less for HUGO which is the younger and trendier brand of the company. Further, consumers' familiarity with BOSS Woman seems to be relatively low, indicating that consumers largely refer to menswear when thinking of the Hugo Boss brand. Also consumers' familiarity with Hugo Boss's different labels appears to be low. If one compares the final consumers' brand knowledge with the Hugo Boss brands and labels that are stocked by retailers, it becomes apparent that the final consumers' knowledge reflects the Hugo Boss brands and labels he/she encounters in retailing. Therefore, it is concluded that if Hugo Boss wants to extend the final consumers' knowledge in terms of its different brands and labels, these might need to be stocked by the retailers first, so that the final consumer can experience all brands and labels of the Hugo Boss brand while shopping.

The final consumer's overall brand image of the Hugo Boss brand is positive. Specifically, consumers perceive the Hugo Boss brand as stylish, expensive, and of high quality. The retailers' image of the Hugo Boss brand was dominated by similar thoughts (i.e. menswear, quality, design, and luxury). Retailers strongly relate the

Hugo Boss brand to menswear. This coincides with the finding that the final consumers' knowledge of the BOSS Woman was relatively low. Above all, the retailers' image of the Hugo Boss brand seems to be restricted and different from the Hugo Boss brand statement as Hugo Boss emphasises on its fashion diversity. This restrictiveness might have an impact on the final consumers' image of the Hugo Boss brand as the retailer constitutes the direct link to the final consumer. As such, Hugo Boss should take some responsibility in helping shape a consistent image for women's wear and further enhanced awareness in this line of products.

The Hugo Boss brand personality dimensions, as perceived by the final consumer, were excitement, sincerity, and competence. From the retailer's point-of-view the Hugo Boss brand personifies a middle-aged male business person with a classy and elegant, but at the same time fashionable style. The perceptions of the final consumers and the retailers are different from the brand personality defined by the Hugo Boss company. According to the company, the Hugo Boss brand symbolises fashion competence, brand showcase, dynamics, sport, glamour, fun, and current lifestyle trends. Furthermore, the Hugo Boss brand is targeted at female and male customers and therefore final consumers and retailers are supposed to notice a feminine as well as a masculine side to the brand. However, masculinity seems to dominate the Hugo Boss brand personality, overriding the feminine aspects of the Hugo Boss brand personality. Consequently, building on the discussion in the preceding paragraph, there appears to be a need to stress the feminine side of the Hugo Boss brand.

The retailers perceived the key selling propositions of the Hugo Boss brand to be largely product related. They also acknowledged the high brand awareness and the well-established image of the Hugo Boss brand. Explicitly, retailers stated that the high brand awareness and strong image of the Hugo Boss brand enhance its commercial ability in store. Further, they pointed out that there is a need for Hugo Boss to further strengthen its brand image via national celebrity endorsement. Hence, retailers appear to perceive brand awareness and brand image as sales prerequisites that Hugo Boss is responsible for, and not as an issue they need to reinforce themselves. This underscores the conflicting perspectives of the seller (i.e. Hugo Boss) and buyer (i.e. retailer) as outlined in the literature review. The conflicting goals and perspectives of the seller and buyer are also apparent in the retailer's statements on the challenges of the Hugo Boss brand in the Australian market.

Retailers perceived the high price of the Hugo Boss brand. Furthermore, they also perceived the brand to be over-distributed, resulting in brand dilution as a possible threat for the Hugo Boss brand. However, despite their concern for brand dilution, retailers demanded "end of season sell-outs" in order to adapt to the "Australian bargain culture". End of season sell outs would dilute the luxury character of the Hugo Boss brand, and will be not be allowed by Hugo Boss brand managers. This again highlights the conflicting goals between the seller and buyer. Seasonal limitations were another issue pointed out by retailers. Specifically, the fact that new seasons need to be bought one year in advance was regarded as problematic as it requires the exact prediction of future sales. Hugo Boss will have to come up with a strategy o reconcile this issue.

Retailers largely referred to more sales promotions and better price incentives but not to the brand positioning issues. This also demonstrates that the perspectives of the seller and buyer do differ. Retailers use a mix of marketing tools to promote the brand's

image to the final consumer. However, as retailers' brand perception in terms of the image and personality of the Hugo Boss brand appear to be restricted, brand image inconsistencies might arise in retailing.

Concluding comments

In summary, the findings of this study reveal that brand perceptions differ across channel members. Specifically, there appears to be a mismatch in the perceptions of wholesalers and retailers. This mismatch might be rooted in the wholesaler and retailer's conflicting goals and perspectives as identified by the BSESM. This mismatch might constitute a source of brand image inconsistencies as the retailer constitutes the direct link between the brand and the final consumer. Further, although the final consumers' overall attitudes toward the Hugo Boss brand were positive, consumers appeared to be in favour of other brands. In addition, their inclination to purchase the Hugo Boss brand appeared to be relatively low.

The findings indicate a mismatch in the wholesaler and retailer's perceptions and therefore the question that arises is "which marketing measures are helpful in overcoming the mismatch and enhancing the retailer's brand perception?" Literature proposes to first address the source of the retailer's perception. Specifically, brand perceptions are based on brand knowledge (Keller, 2003), and hence on the information and/or knowledge retailers receive from the wholesalers or manufacturers.

The Hugo Boss company provides their customers (i.e. retailers) with brand and product knowledge each new season within sales periods, but also offers brand knowledge throughout the year. In particular, retailers are visited on a regular basis by Hugo Boss salesmen/saleswomen, specific brand trainers or visual merchandisers who, for instance provide product information to retailers or inform retailers about new trends in Hugo Boss fashion. However, these brand knowledge measures seem to require further focus and enhancement as the retailers' perception of the Hugo Boss brand is restricted. Consequently, Hugo Boss Australia Pty. Ltd might want to re-evaluate its brand knowledge techniques for efficiency.

The brand knowledge techniques could be assessed for efficiency via internal marketing measures. Internal marketing measures can be implemented to constantly evaluate the staff's present knowledge and encourage the development of new internal knowledge (Ballantyne, 2003). Specifically, Hugo Boss Australia might consider investigating whether its employees, specifically salesmen/saleswomen and customer service have a clear understanding of the Hugo Boss brands and their different meanings. This is vital as the salesmen/saleswomen and customer service constitutes the link between the brand and the customer (i.e. retailer).

This study may be limited by the researching only one brand and in one country of study. Therefore generalisations must be drawn with caution (Bhat and Reddy, 2001). Consequently, confirmation or disconfirmation of findings with other luxury brands in different countries are strongly recommended (Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004). This would enrich the generalisation of research findings and help to establish cross-national validity (Malhotra et al., 1996; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). This study was exploratory in nature and qualitative methods are deemed appropriate because they provide an in depth study of a relatively small sample. Knowledge generated from a large sample would enhance the results.

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