

*Research Note:*

## **Linking Brand and Retailer Images—Do the Potential Risks Outweigh the Potential Benefits?**

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*The results of this pilot investigation suggest that when brand and retailer images become associated, an averaging process is activated such that the party with the more favorable image will be adversely affected, while the party with the less favorable image may have that image enhanced.*

Few would argue that consumers form impressions of stores, brands, and manufacturers and that these impressions can later exert a major impact on shopping behavior. Unfavorable images tend to adversely affect both patronage and purchase behavior, while favorable images are apt to impact positively on such behavior.

Accordingly, retailers and manufacturers have generally been concerned with three basic questions: (1) What images do they (and their brands) evoke in consumers? (2) How do these images relate to the images of their present and/or would-be competitors? (3) What can be done to modify or reposition an image?

The second and third questions represent “within-level” issues, that is, they compare the images of one retailer with another, one manufacturer with another, and one brand with another. Equally important, though generally ignored, is the corresponding “cross-level” question, namely, what happens when retailer images and manufacturer (or brand) images become associated with one another? As an example, how does the consumer react when he or she learns that J. C. Penney will be carrying the

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The authors appreciate the advice of James J. Jaccard on selected aspects of the methodology used in this research

Halston line of designer clothes? Does the combined impression reflect favorably upon both the manufacturer/brand and the retailer, or is there potential for one (or both) of the linked parties to be adversely affected by such an association? The present investigation addresses this question.

The vast number of image assessment procedures have either been borrowed from or patterned after attitude measurement procedures developed in social psychology. Within this set, perhaps no other technique has been as widely used as has been the semantic differential (for example, Mindak 1961; Pathak, Crissey, and Sweitzer 1974; McDougal and Fry 1974). Although there are many intricacies and variations that might be discussed, basically, the semantic differential approach involves taking an attitude or image object (say, Sears) and having the respondent evaluate it along a set of 7-point bipolar adjective scales.

To arrive at an understanding of how one's image compares with those of one's competitors, one need only substitute the competitors' names for one's own and have the same respondent (or a set of matched respondents) evaluate these along the same set of evaluation scales. The output from such a comparative assessment can provide four kinds of information. With respect to any given scale (for example, high-priced versus low-priced), these are: (1) whether one is perceived favorably relative to one's competitors; (2) whether one is perceived unfavorably relative to one's competitors; (3) whether all market entrants, both the target firm and its competitors, are perceived in a relatively favorable manner; and (4) whether all market entrants are perceived in a relatively unfavorable manner. Each of these kinds of information leads to different types of marketing strategies designed either to capitalize on one's existing image or to modify that image.

The semantic differential was originally developed by Osgood and colleagues (Osgood and Tannenbaum 1955; Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957) as part of an attempt to measure the basic components of meaning, particularly the meanings evoked by verbal stimuli. However, though image researchers borrowed the technique, they have thus far neglected to consider the theoretical context out of which it evolved. This is unfortunate, since this context, particularly that portion known as congruity theory, has considerable implications for retailer image and brand/manufacturer image combinations, such as "J. C. Penney's sells Halston clothing."

Congruity Theory is one of the early social psychological "consistency" theories and, in many respects, is essentially a more quantitative version of Heider's seminal "balance theory" (1944, 1946, 1958). The general tenet of all consistency theories is that when an individual's mind contains

two related thoughts and these thoughts are somehow inconsistent with each other, psychological tensions arise that pressure the individual to restore consistency.

The variant of consistency theory known as “congruity theory” focuses upon what occurs when a source either associates itself with (or disassociates itself from) some other source or object. As applied to the retailing context, an associative link would be reflected by the assertion “J. C. Penney sells Halston clothing.” (A disassociative link, in contrast, is exemplified by “Bergdorf-Goodman decided to discontinue carrying Halston.”)

Congruity theory holds that if both the source (in this case, J. C. Penney) and the object (here, Halston) in a positively associated linking are valued equally by the respondent, there should be no incongruity and, therefore, no strain to reestablish consistency. In terms of the standard +3 to -3 semantic differential scale, if a source which the respondent evaluates as being a +2 (for example, Saks Fifth Avenue) positively associates itself with an object which that respondent also considers to be a +2 (say, Ralph Lauren’s Polo brand), the individual should experience no psychological discomfort and, therefore, no strains to restore or establish congruity. (This would also be true for the case where a -2 source is positively associated with a -2 object, since it’s only fitting that sources we dislike should like objects that we dislike.) All other positive associations—between a source and an object that are not *equally* valued—are theorized to generate psychological pressures to restore a state of congruity.

This general thesis appears quite reasonable where a positively valenced (say, +3) source is positively associated with a negatively valenced (for example, -3) object, as would be reflected by the statement “Walter Cronkite (+3) has advocated that we adopt a socialist form of government (-2).” However, what is intriguing about congruity theory (and that which makes it a more sophisticated version of Heider’s balance model [1944, 1946, 1958]) is the thesis that even positive associative links between a positively valenced source and a positively valenced object will generate psychological pressures whenever these valences are not of equal magnitude. As an example, if a +3 source (say, New York’s Fifth Avenue jeweler, Cartier’s, which sells expensive pens and cigarette lighters) became positively linked with a +1 object (such as a Bic pen or lighter), then congruity theory predicts that the concerned consumer will experience pressures to bring these two elements into a state of congruity. This could be achieved, in the present example, if the impression of the source (Cartier’s) moved from +3 down to +2.3, and the impression of the object

(Bic) moved from +1 up to +2.3. Since both source and object were now at +2.3 in that consumer's mind, congruity would have been established and the psychological pressures would have been dissipated.

If valid, congruity theory suggests that in those many instances where a retailer's and a manufacturer's/brand's images are not viewed as being equally positive, potential benefit (and corresponding harm) exists for both the retailer and the manufacturer/brand. Specifically, if the initial image of the retailer is more favorable than that of the manufacturer/brand, the retailer is likely to have its image harmed while the manufacturer is likely to have its image improved. On the other hand, if the manufacturer/brand starts out with the more positive image, then it is the retailer that should benefit and the manufacturer/brand that should be harmed. The present investigation was devised as an exploratory test of these hypothesized relationships.

## METHOD

### Overview

The study consisted of asking respondents first to evaluate sets of familiar store and brand names, and then to evaluate various combinations of store and brand names, as in the phrase "Macy's sells Lee jeans." The method is discussed in the following sections on test stores, products, and brands; instrument development; respondents; and procedure.

### Test Stores, Products, and Brands

In order to maximize the number of respondents that would be eligible to participate in the study, it was considered desirable to use products that were purchased by large numbers of consumers, and stores and brand names that were familiar to as many respondents as possible. On the basis of discussions with others (including several retail buyers), three commonly purchased products were selected. One of them (jeans) was then used in tests involving both males and females; the second product (panty-hose) was used only in tests of females, while the third product (sneakers) was used in tests only of males.

Next, a pretest sample of 20 persons (comparable to the main sample, described below) provided evaluations of 12 New York City area stores and 12 different brand names within each of the 3 product categories. The task consisted of sorting four decks of cards (one deck for store names and three consisting of brand names for each test product) from most to least liked. Considerable variability was evidenced across the rated prod-

ucts and stores. On the basis of this procedure, two stores were selected to satisfy the necessary test conditions, that is, though both were rated positively, one store was rated more favorably than was the other. (In addition, the variances for each store were relatively low.) One of these stores was a mass merchandiser; the other, a specialty store. Both were large and well-known national concerns operating within metropolitan New York.

Using a similar procedure, a high- and a low-image brand was selected for each of the three product categories. These brands were Calvin Klein and Lee for jeans, Nike's and Keds for sneakers, and Christian Dior and L'eggs for pantyhose.

### **Instrument**

The instrument consisted of a self-administered questionnaire containing four sections. So as to be able to later screen out cases where respondents had no previous knowledge of one or more of the stores or brands, the first section contained a series of prior awareness and usage items. In section 2, each respondent provided separate evaluations for each of the test stores and test brands along a set of semantic differential scales selected so as to be appropriate for application to both stores and brands. This approach meant that, in some instances, scales were used which were not typically used in prior store-image research. Half the subjects evaluated the stores first and the other half evaluated the brand names first. Within each section, the specific names were rotated so that they appeared first and last an equal number of times. Note that this testing format enabled the respondent to compare the rating provided for one store (or brand) with that of another store (or brand). This procedure is consistent with Hirschman's (1981) emphasis on the importance of the interrelationship across stores in store-image formation.

The third section of the questionnaire presented the store and brand names linked together by the work "sells," as in "Macy's sells Lee jeans." These linkages were then evaluated on the same set of semantic differential scales. Again, the order in which these linked concepts were presented was randomized, thereby ensuring that they appeared an equal number of times in the first and last positions.

The concluding section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic and past shopping experience questions.

### **Respondents**

The study was conducted using two types of samples. One sample consisted of 77 students recruited through a call for participation posted

in various buildings at the university. The second sample consisted of 91 shoppers, 76 of whom were intercepted in one of two shopping malls located within the New York City metropolitan area, with the other 15 being contacted in the environs of New York University. Since no mall exists which houses both retailers, the test malls used contained neither of the retailers. It might be mentioned, too, that college students are also "shoppers" when it comes to the products being tested.

Questionnaires completed by the university respondents involved the evaluation of two products. Males evaluate jeans and sneakers, and females evaluated jeans and pantyhose. A shorter questionnaire, in which jeans were the only evaluated product, was used with all consumers intercepted in shopping malls. This was done because of the concern that the full-length questionnaire (which included some additional material not relevant to the present discussion) might reduce shopping mall shoppers' willingness to devote the needed time for the study.

The total sample consisted of 88 females and 80 males. The mean age of the student sample was 21, while the mean age of the shopper sample was 30. Chi-square tests comparing the three groups ( $n = 77, 76,$  and  $15$ ) in terms of levels of awareness (have/have not heard about . . .), and levels of experience for each of the stores and brands produced no significant values. Thus, the different subgroups appeared to have relatively uniform levels of knowledge and experience with the store and brand names.

## RESULTS

Table 1 describes the number of eligible respondents (those who evaluated both retailer and brand images as being higher or lower, in accordance with a priori expectations). Tests of congruity theory are meaningful only for subjects who, in evaluating the retailer image and brand image separately, rated those retailers considered to be "high" more positively than those brands considered to be "low," and vice versa.

Tables 2 through 4 display the means and standard deviations for the store and brand images, rated separately, as well as for the predicted and obtained linked (i.e., store plus brand) image on each of the eight image facets. The formula for calculating the predicted image is described by Osgood et al. (1957, page 207) as follows:

When we are dealing with associative assertions only, in which the resolution of congruity is necessarily to a single, common point along the dimension, and when we are interested in the point of resolution rather than the amount of change, the following formula may be used:

TABLE 1  
**Number of Eligible Respondents for Each Scale**

Scale	Jeans						Sneakers						Pantyhose					
	HS + LB		LS + HB		HS + LB		LS + HB		HS + LB		LS + HB		HS + LB		LS + HB			
	n	% rating store higher than brand	n	% rating brand higher than store	n	% rating store higher than brand	n	% rating brand higher than store	n	% rating store higher than brand	n	% rating brand higher than store	n	% rating store higher than brand	n	% rating brand higher than store		
Youthful-Mature	62	62.9	65	81.5	16	43.7	22	68.1	16	68.7	21	52.3	16	68.7	21	52.3		
Good-Bad	62	62.9	64	78.0	16	81.2	22	90.9	16	81.2	21	80.9	16	81.2	21	80.9		
High price-Low price	62	91.9	65	100.0	16	100.0	21	100.0	16	100.0	21	95.2	16	100.0	21	95.2		
High quality-Low quality	62	75.8	65	95.3	16	87.5	22	90.9	16	100.0	21	85.7	16	100.0	21	85.7		
High class-Low class	62	93.5	65	97.0	16	100.0	21	100.0	16	100.0	21	95.2	16	100.0	21	95.2		
Good reputation-Poor reputation	62	67.7	65	86.1	16	81.2	22	81.8	16	81.2	22	80.9	16	100.0	21	80.9		
Modern-Old-fashioned	62	77.4	66	93.8	17	76.4	22	90.9	16	68.7	21	90.4	16	68.7	21	90.4		
Special-Ordinary	62	83.8	65	95.3	16	87.5	21	95.2	16	87.5	21	85.7	16	100.0	21	85.7		

Where HS + LB = High store image combined with low brand image  
 LS + HB = Low store image combined with high brand image

TABLE 2  
The Impact of Combining Separate Store and Brand Images on Eight Image Aspects of Jeans

Scale	High store + low brand				Low store + high brand											
	High store		H.S. + L.B. [predicted]		Low store		L.S. + H.B. [predicted]									
	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)								
Youthful-Mature	5.53	(1.34)	4.03	(1.83)	4.97	(1.59)	4.10	(1.52)	3.93	(1.34)	6.06	(1.27)	5.75	(1.23)	4.65	(1.67)
Good-Bad	6.44	(0.79)	5.60	(1.17)	6.26	(0.78)	4.68	(1.52)	4.38	(1.44)	5.83	(1.26)	5.62	(1.30)	4.76	(1.69)
High price-Low price	6.49	(0.73)	4.41	(1.06)	6.04	(0.79)	5.31	(1.34)	3.57	(1.17)	6.54	(0.69)	5.76	(1.02)	4.63	(1.70)
High quality-Low quality	6.58	(0.58)	5.65	(1.10)	6.40	(0.56)	4.58	(1.34)	3.81	(1.17)	5.75	(1.18)	5.29	(1.11)	4.66	(1.50)
High class-Low class	6.46	(0.72)	4.61	(1.10)	6.19	(0.77)	4.18	(1.56)	3.41	(1.32)	6.03	(1.10)	5.18	(1.40)	4.68	(1.35)
Good reputation-Poor reputation	6.64	(0.67)	5.93	(0.98)	6.54	(0.53)	5.06	(1.61)	4.61	(1.44)	6.08	(1.02)	5.83	(0.96)	5.00	(1.34)
Modern-Old-fashioned	6.13	(1.02)	4.09	(1.56)	5.57	(1.15)	4.64	(1.37)	3.96	(1.62)	6.38	(0.86)	5.64	(1.32)	5.03	(1.42)
Special-Ordinary	6.09	(0.96)	4.23	(1.36)	5.70	(1.12)	3.81	(1.72)	2.93	(1.67)	5.39	(1.50)	4.17	(1.73)	4.32	(1.57)



TABLE 3  
The Impact of Combining Separate Store and Brand Images on Eight Image Aspects of Sneakers

Scale	High store + low brand						Low store + high brand									
	High store		Low brand		H.S. + L.B.		Low store		High brand		L.S. + H.B.					
	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	[predicted]	(S.D.)	[actual]	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	[predicted]	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	[actual]
Youthful-Mature	5.83	(0.98)	4.50	(1.22)	5.53	(0.82)	5.16	(1.47)	3.90	(1.72)	5.00	(1.56)	4.75	(2.30)	5.12	(1.24)
Good-Bad	6.15	(0.89)	4.61	(0.87)	6.02	(0.57)	4.00	(1.34)	4.61	(1.03)	6.05	(0.63)	5.72	(0.81)	5.33	(1.02)
High price-Low price	6.50	(0.81)	4.00	(0.81)	6.28	(0.73)	4.73	(1.38)	3.95	(0.88)	5.60	(0.94)	5.22	(1.11)	4.00	(1.05)
High quality-Low quality	6.21	(0.89)	4.35	(1.21)	5.77	(1.29)	4.00	(1.03)	4.42	(1.01)	6.05	(0.78)	5.68	(0.96)	4.94	(0.91)
High class-Low class	6.43	(1.03)	4.00	(0.96)	6.11	(1.18)	4.00	(1.41)	3.71	(1.07)	5.47	(0.81)	4.92	(1.16)	4.33	(1.23)
Good reputation-Poor reputation	6.42	(0.51)	4.57	(1.08)	5.99	(0.64)	4.78	(1.12)	5.11	(0.90)	5.88	(0.83)	5.78	(0.60)	5.11	(1.05)
Modern-Old-fashioned	5.84	(1.34)	3.76	(1.30)	5.28	(1.48)	4.00	(0.81)	4.10	(1.37)	5.63	(0.76)	5.17	(1.06)	5.00	(1.18)
Special-Ordinary	6.00	(0.73)	3.68	(1.07)	5.47	(1.31)	3.62	(1.14)	3.10	(1.29)	4.85	(0.87)	3.76	(1.59)	4.55	(1.43)

TABLE 4  
**The Impact of Combining Separate Store and Brand Images on Eight Image Aspects of Pantyhose**

Scale	High store + Low brand				Low store + High brand											
	High store		Low brand		High store		Low brand									
	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)	$\bar{x}$	(S.D.)								
	5.77	(0.97)	4.44	(1.23)	5.62	(0.79)	4.22	(1.30)	3.00	(0.77)	4.36	(1.12)	3.44	(1.13)	3.44	(1.13)
Youthful-Mature	6.08	(0.79)	5.08	(1.37)	5.80	(1.05)	4.25	(1.71)	3.46	(1.06)	5.60	(0.98)	4.94	(1.45)	4.92	(1.07)
Good-Bad	6.37	(0.80)	3.87	(0.88)	5.91	(0.88)	4.37	(1.31)	3.15	(1.26)	6.60	(0.59)	5.55	(0.99)	4.70	(1.30)
High price-Low price	6.43	(0.62)	4.56	(1.15)	5.95	(0.66)	3.81	(1.60)	3.35	(0.99)	6.05	(0.82)	5.16	(1.08)	4.76	(1.09)
High quality-Low quality	6.56	(0.72)	3.93	(0.85)	6.13	(0.87)	3.62	(1.31)	2.94	(1.17)	6.21	(0.97)	5.08	(1.28)	4.27	(1.40)
High class-Low class	6.37	(0.80)	4.87	(1.20)	6.20	(0.62)	4.26	(1.62)	3.62	(1.14)	5.93	(0.92)	5.47	(0.74)	4.64	(1.33)
Good reputation-Poor reputation	5.60	(1.17)	4.60	(1.26)	5.47	(1.17)	4.33	(1.58)	3.75	(1.32)	5.63	(1.21)	5.01	(1.47)	4.66	(1.45)
Modern-Old-fashioned	5.78	(0.80)	3.35	(1.15)	4.97	(1.22)	4.00	(1.79)	2.44	(1.24)	5.50	(1.04)	3.85	(1.55)	4.43	(1.36)
Special-Ordinary																

$$pr = \frac{|p1|}{|p1| + |p2|} p1 + \frac{|p2|}{|p1| + |p2|} p2$$

According to this formula,  $pr$  is the predicted point of resolution, while  $p1$  and  $p2$  represent evaluation of the source and object separately. Note that  $p1$  and  $p2$  refer to absolute values representing departures from zero on a +3 to -3 scale.

The results are easier to visualize when the data provided in Tables 2, 3, and 4 are plotted as in Figures 1 through 3. Each figure concerns a different test product, with the top half of each reflecting the low brand plus high store-image linking, while the bottom half reflects the high brand plus low store-image condition.

Two striking findings emerge overall. In all three cases in which a very positive brand image was linked with a less positive store image, both the predicted (according to formula) and obtained linked image fell somewhere inbetween the scores given to the separate components. In contrast, in all three cases where a very positive store image was linked with a less positive brand image, the resultant linked image was generally as low as, and often lower than, the low brand-image component rated separately.

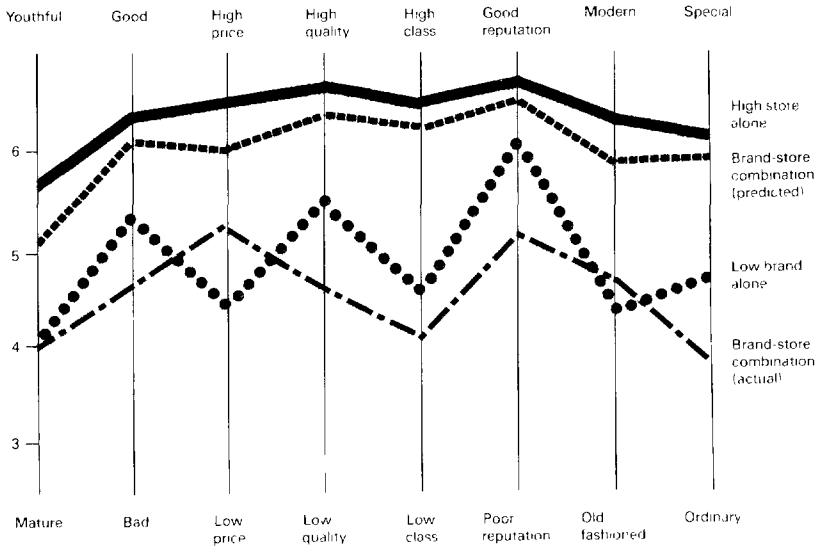
Tables 5 and 6 yield additional perspective. Restricting attention to the high store plus low brand condition (Table 5), the following findings are noteworthy: (1) The mean rating given to the store plus brand combinations was lower than the rating given to the store component alone in all 24 instances (3 products times 8 scales), and was significantly<sup>1</sup> lower in 23 of these 24 cases. Clearly, there seems to be great potential for a retailer's image to suffer if that retailer becomes linked with low image brands. (2) In contrast, the combined image was not significantly higher than the rating given to the low brand-image components along any of the eight scales for either sneakers or pantyhose; it was significantly different for six of the eight jeans scales. (3) The ratings obtained for the linked store and brand images were significantly different from those which were pre-

<sup>1</sup> The results provided in this section are based on paired t-tests as reported in Tables 5 and 6. However, owing to multiple t-test runs applied to the same population, the results may have been spuriously biased. To account for this possible bias, a more stringent test, namely, Bonferroni t-test (Alt 1982) was applied. The requirement, according to this test, is that the t-value will be significant at  $\alpha/k$  level (which in the present study is  $0.05/8$  referring to  $k = 9$  comparisons) rather than the conventional 0.05 level to satisfy statistical confidence. The results of this analysis are also reported in Tables 5 and 6. It should be noted, however, that the results of the Bonferroni t-test did not undermine the conclusions, which are based on the individual paired t-test comparisons.

FIGURE 1

**Brand and Store Image Evaluations: Jeans**

**a. High store, low brand**



**b. Low store, high brand**

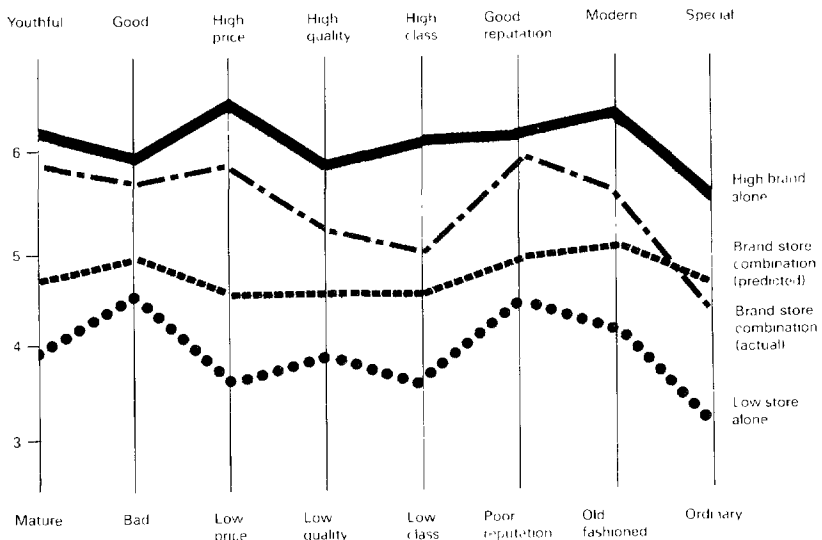
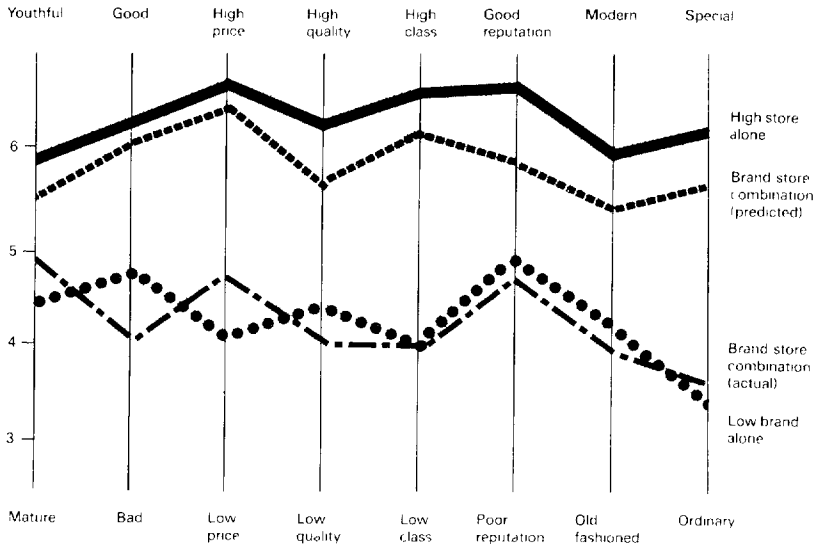


FIGURE 2

**Brand and Store Image Evaluations: Sneakers**

**a. High store, low brand**



**b. Low store, high brand**

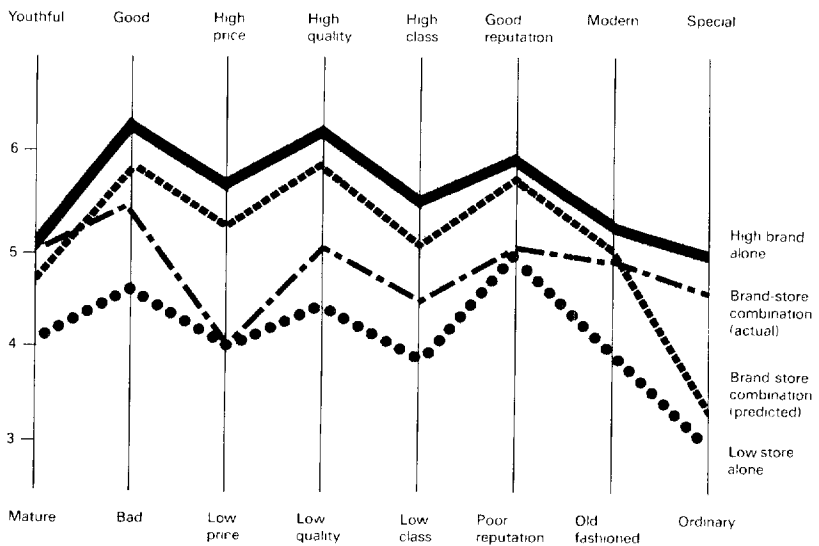
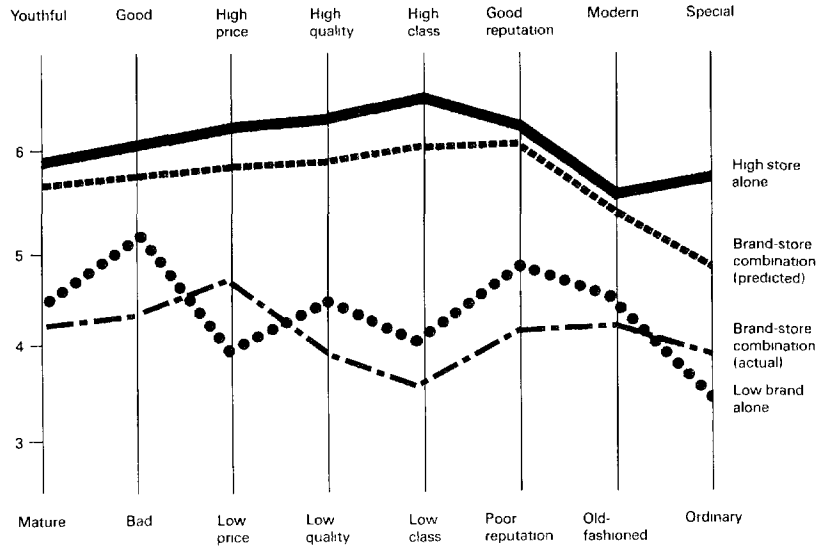


FIGURE 3

**Brand and Store Image Evaluations: Pantyhose**

**a. High store, low brand**



**b. Low store, high brand**

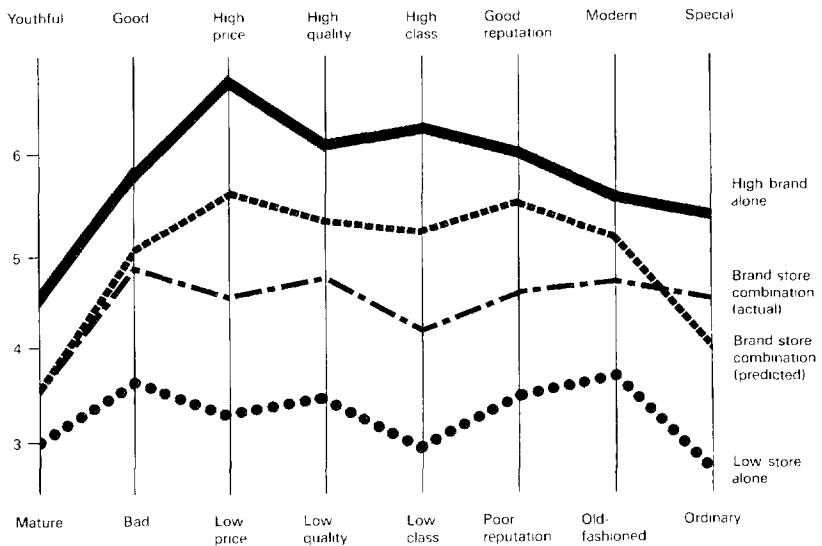


TABLE 5  
**Comparisons between High-Store—Low-Brand Evaluations: Significance Levels of Paired t-test**

Scale	Jeans			Sneakers			Pantyhose		
	Predicted vs. actual	Store vs. actual	Brand vs. actual	Predicted vs. actual	Store vs. actual	Brand vs. actual	Predicted vs. actual	Store vs. actual	Brand vs. actual
Youthful—Mature	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>
Good—Bad	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .01	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .01	≤ .01 <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>
High price—Low price	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .01	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>
High quality—Low quality	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>
High class—Low class	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>
Good reputation—Poor reputation	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>
Modern—Old-fashioned	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .01	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>
Special—Ordinary	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>a</sup>	≤ .001	— <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The — signs denote nonsignificant differences for both individual t-test and Bonferroni t-test.

<sup>b</sup> Nonsignificant differences if Bonferroni t-test is applied.

TABLE 6  
**Comparisons between Low-Store—High-Brand Evaluations: Significance Levels of Results of Paired t-test**

Scale	Jeans						Sneakers						Pantyhose					
	Predicted		Store		Brand		Predicted		Store		Brand		Predicted		Store		Brand	
	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual	vs actual	actual
Youthful—Mature	≤ .001	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	≤ .01 <sup>b</sup>	—	—	—
Good—Bad	≤ .001	—	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .01	—	—	—	—	≤ .001	—	—	—
High price— Low price	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	≤ .001	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	—	—
High quality— Low quality	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	≤ .001	—	—	—
High class— Low class	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	≤ .01	—	—	—
Good reputation— Poor reputation	≤ .001	—	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .01 <sup>b</sup>	—	—	—	—	≤ .01	≤ .01	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Modern— Old-fashioned	≤ .01	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	≤ .05 <sup>a</sup>	≤ .05 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	≤ .05 <sup>b</sup>	—	—	—
Special— Ordinary	—	≤ .001	≤ .001	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	≤ .001	—	—	—	—	—	≤ .001	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup> The — signs denote nonsignificant differences for both individual t-test and Bonferroni t-test.

<sup>b</sup> Nonsignificant differences if Bonferroni t-test is applied



dicted in 20 of the 24 instances. This suggests that, although the general congruity notion of averaging is confirmed, the specific nature of the averaging process as described by the Osgood et al. formula (1957) is less than adequate.

The low store-image–high brand-image condition also yields interesting perspective (see Table 6). (1) In 17 of the 24 cases, the linking of the low store image with the high brand image produced ratings that were significantly higher than the store-image component alone. This confirms the picture that emerges from Figures 1 through 3, namely, a store with a low image can usually help its image by associating itself with a high brand image. (2) Also confirming the pattern depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3, in 20 out of 24 instances, the combined store plus brand image was significantly lower than was the image of the brand component rated separately. (3) Again, the predicted and obtained point of congruence is significantly different in 13 out of 24 instances. As before, this suggests that although the general notion of averaging postulated by congruity theory appears to be correct, the specific formula suggested by Osgood et al. (1957) provides a less-than-adequate approximation of the point of congruity resolution.

## DISCUSSION

This exploratory investigation possesses obvious limitations in terms of sample size, representativeness, and ability to generalize. Despite these limitations, the consistent findings across all eight image facets are quite provocative. They have implications for both retailers and manufacturers.

For retailers, the findings imply that while a retailer with a relatively low image might be able to improve this image by associating it with a more favorably evaluated brand or manufacturer image, a very favorable retailer image is likely to be damaged if it somehow becomes connected with brands having less positive images.

The implications for manufacturers (and brands) are somewhat different. It appears that a manufacturer (or brand) having a very positive image is likely to have the image damaged if it becomes associated with retailers who have less positive images. On the other hand, association with retailers having more favorable images than itself will do little or nothing to improve the manufacturer's brand's relatively lower image.

It should also be pointed out that store images are shaped by many factors above and beyond brand images. Further, stores generally carry a variety of brands and the store's image is most likely determined by the combined assortment of brands. Given these considerations, the present

investigation is probably most directly relevant to those instances where the store begins to offer a brand that is dramatically different from the others in its assortment, as was the case with J. C. Penney's decision to carry Halston III. The present findings clearly point to the need for additional research.

*For a discussion of managerial implications, please turn to the Executive Summaries section at the beginning of this issue.*

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