Stories are characteristic of humans. They have been embedded in our social and cultural environments in various forms throughout civilizations. Stories come naturally to us because we think in terms of stories and use them to communicate everyday events. Stories reflect the structure in which we make sense of, comprehend, and organize our experiences. Compelling stories persuade, entertain, and engage their audiences. It is therefore not surprising that marketers have become keen to capitalize on the persuasive effects of stories. Indeed, marketers frequently tell brand stories in multiple contexts with the aim to involve and persuade consumers. However, many questions on the effect of stories on consumers in commercial contexts remain.

Research shows that companies can purposefully relate stories to brands to elicit positive brand responses. Stories help individuals interpret the meanings of brands and create a bond between a brand and a consumer. Brand stories are told, for instance, on packaging, in promotions, on web sites, in social media, and on price tags. While the influential nature of stories as such has been widely acknowledged and verified in advertising research, many theoretically and managerially relevant issues remain unexplored. Previous studies have looked at stories in print and TV ads, while packaging and price promotions have been overlooked. Packaging and price promotions are key marketing tactics, which differ from ads in several respects, such as the framing and length of the message. This dissertation examines consumer responses to different types of brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. Brand stories are examined in terms of short, emotional and mental simulation brand stories.

The dissertation reports on six experiments in three separate studies. It offers significant contributions to storytelling, packaging, and pricing literature, as well as to business practice. The findings demonstrate that brand stories on packaging and in price promotions can influence several significant consumer responses positively. The dissertation also shows that the storytelling context acts as a boundary condition to the effectiveness of different types of brand stories. Hence, brand stories should be tailored according to context to reach maximal effectiveness.
Let Me Tell You a Story
Consumer Responses to Company-Created Brand Stories

Key words: brand story, short brand story, emotional brand story, mental simulation, consumer brand responses, narrative processing, categorization, typicality, packaging, price promotion, advertising, discount presentation, FMCG, experiment

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Eeva Solja
Hanken School of Economics
Department of Marketing
P.O.Box 479, 00101 Helsinki, Finland

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Helsinki, 13 June 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Stories are a prevalent part of human history. They are embedded in our social and cultural environments and have been told in some form throughout our existence in all civilizations (Barthes, 1975). Stories come naturally to us because we think in terms of stories (Bruner, 1986; Schank, 1990) and communicate everyday events in a story-like manner, giving them a beginning, a climax, a low-point, and an ending (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Stories reflect the fundamental structure in which we make sense of and organize our comprehension and experiences (Bruner, 1986; Egan, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988; Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001) as well as how we list, store, and retrieve information (Woodside, 2010). Stories make facts easier to remember and large amounts of information faster to assimilate (Schank, 1990). Compelling stories persuade, entertain, and engage their audiences (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Escalas, 1998; Green & Brock, 2000; McGregor & Holmes, 1999).

Storytelling has been the subject of research across several disciplines, such as anthropology, education, linguistics, psychology, and sociology. This attests to the pervasiveness of stories and their multifaceted role in society. Within the field of marketing, storytelling has been studied within advertising, where the persuasiveness of stories in terms of consumer responses has been acknowledged (e.g., Chang, 2009; Escalas, 2004b; Phillips & McGuarrie, 2010; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). Research shows that consumers construct stories in relation to brands (Megehee & Woodside, 2010; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008; Woodside, 2010) and that companies can purposefully relate stories to brands to elicit positive brand associations and responses (e.g., Chang, 2009; Escalas, 1998; Escalas, 2004b). Stories help individuals interpret the meanings of brands, and create a bond between a brand and a consumer (Escalas, 2004b). It is hence not surprising that stories are frequently used in the marketing communication of companies that have realized the potential of telling a good story. Yet, many issues that are theoretically and managerially relevant from a marketing point of view remain unexplored. These are elaborated in the following subchapter.

1.1. Research problem

The influential nature of stories as such has been widely acknowledged (Bruner, 1986; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995), and proven in advertising research (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Escalas, 2004a; Lien & Chen, 2013). Marketers have hence become keen to capitalize on the persuasive effects of stories. Indeed, marketers frequently tell brand stories in multiple contexts with the aim to involve and persuade consumers. Brand stories are told, for instance, on packaging, in promotions, on websites, in social media, and on price tags.

However, while the persuasiveness of brand stories has been demonstrated in an advertising context, a number of theoretically and managerially relevant issues remain unexplored. This dissertation will address six of these.

First, brand stories are frequently communicated on packaging. Brands such as Ben and Jerry’s, Oatly, Clif Bar, and Sweet Leaf Tea tell brand stories on their packages. Yet, little is known about consumer responses to brand stories on packaging. Past research has mainly examined consumer responses to brand stories on conventional advertisements, such as print and TV ads. However, although packaging can be considered an advertising media, packages and conventional advertising media (e.g., print, TV,) differ in several respects. Central differences include the framing and length of the message, the inclusion of other, mandatory product information on packages, and the circumstances in which the information is consumed. Messages on packages are typically short and focused on product arguments

---

1 In this dissertation, a brand story is defined as a company-created story about the brand that includes causality, temporality, characters, and a plot with a beginning, middle, and an end (see Chapter 2.1 for details).
2 In this dissertation, advertisements are referred to as print and TV ads, unless otherwise specified.
(Schoormans & Robben, 1997), whereas ad messages are often longer and emotionally engaging (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). Packages include mandatory information on, for instance, the producer, content, and use of the product. This is typically not included in ads. Consumers are exposed to packages in-store where the aim is purchase while ads are typically consumed in connection to recreational activities, such as reading a magazine. It is hence not evident that the results from past advertising studies hold in a packaging context where the typically very short, information-centred brand story competes with other product information.

Second, price promotions are a crucial part of a company’s marketing strategy. Indeed, price promotions are, after advertising, the second most frequently employed marketing tactic and represent a substantial share of consumer brand firms’ marketing budgets (Blattberg & Neslin, 1989; Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000; DelVecchio, Krishnan, & Smith, 2007; Lemon & Nowlis, 2002). Price promotions are effective in producing short-term sales that cover the immediate expenses of the promotion (Blattberg, Briesch, & Fox, 1995) due to their effective communication of utilitarian, monetary incentives (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Given the central role of price promotions, managers are keen to identify ways to make them more effective. Price promotion messages typically consist of arguments related to product attributes (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). These arguments might easily be communicated in story form instead of as a list of arguments, whereby the positive consumer responses to stories shown in an advertising context could potentially be elicited. Yet, little is known about the potential effects due to a lack of studies on story-formed information in price promotion messages. Like packaging, price promotion messages differ from ads. Key differences include the framing of the message and the weight assigned on the price description. Consumers might hence perceive stories in the pricepromotion context differently than in the ad context.

Third, ads set restraints to the length of the advertising message (Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). However, packages often set even more severe and fixed length restrictions due to, for instance, the size of the package and the mandatory information required based on laws and regulations. Hence, a brand story on a package must often be even shorter than in an ad. Very short brand stories are communicated frequently on packages of, for example, beer and ice cream. Existing studies have not examined if such short brand stories can have a persuasive effect on consumers.

Fourth, storytelling research suggests that a brand story should elicit emotions in order to maximally engage and involve consumers (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Escalas, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Guber, 2007; Twitchell, 2004). A conflict or struggle that becomes increasingly intense as the story plot proceeds towards its climax elicits emotions and has been shown to increase the quality and persuasiveness of a story (Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). This kind of a dramatic plotline typically requires negatively charged events (Papadatos, 2006). However, in practice, brand stories seldom include adverse elements and have a rather low emotional charge (McKee, 2003), especially on packaging. Although stories should, according to previous research, be emotionally involving to reach maximal effectiveness, the effect of emotional appeal in brand stories on packaging and in ads is yet to be studied.

Fifth, the use of mental simulation appeals is a popular tactic in product and brand advertising due to their persuasive effects (Elder & Krishna, 2012; Praxmarer, 2011). Mental simulation denotes the mental process by which a consumer imagines an event occurring (Taylor & Schneider, 1989). In the minds of the consumers, these imaginary scenarios take the form of stories (Escalas, 2004a; Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). In this dissertation, mental simulations are hence defined as marketer-evoked brand stories in which the consumer is framed as the main character. While the use of mental simulation appeals is prevalent in marketing and their effectiveness has been established in advertising, little is known about their effects in other key marketing tactics, such as price promotions. This dissertation will investigate the effect of mental simulations in price promotions.
Finally, previous studies on story effects in commercial settings have mainly examined high-involvement products, whereas low-involvement goods have not gained as much consideration. Yet, brand stories are frequently communicated by low-involvement, fast-moving consumer good (FMCG) brands, especially on packaging, which is an especially effective marketing tool FMCGs (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). FMCGs are purchased frequently and based on routine. This entails that they elicit marginal engagement and consideration prior to purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2006). High-involvement products elicit, on the other hand, comprehensive decision-making processes (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This means that consumers engage in more careful problem solving and information processing tasks (Hoyer, 1984). These differences might influence how a brand story about a high-involvement good versus a low-involvement FMCG is processed.

In summary, there is a paucity of studies that examine the effects of different kinds of brand stories in different marketing contexts on consumer responses. The majority of past studies have looked at stories in ads (e.g., Escalas & Stern, 2003; Escalas, 2004b; Wentzel, Tomczak & Herrmann, 2010), while packaging and price promotions have been neglected. Managers may hence wonder whether the findings from advertising studies extend to packaging and price promotions. Short brand stories, brand stories with different levels of emotional charge, and mental simulations as brand stories are another frequently appearing phenomenon in marketing practice. Nevertheless, academic understanding of the effects of these different story types is limited. Without more in-depth guidance from research about the dynamics of different kinds of brand stories about different types of products in key marketing tactics, managers are at a loss as to how the potential benefits of brand stories may be maximized. Research and marketers should therefore benefit from evidence on the causal impact of different types of brand stories in different marketing contexts on consumer responses. The present study hence aims to increase the understanding of how the brand story phenomenon in different forms affects consumers in different contexts.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to examine consumer responses to different types of brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. Different types of brand stories are examined in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories. This purpose is approached through three research questions derived from the research problem.

(RQ 1) How does a short brand story on FMCG packaging affect consumers’ attitudinal and behavioural brand responses?

(RQ 2) How does the level of emotional appeal in a brand story on FMCG packaging versus in ads affect consumers’ attitudinal and behavioural brand responses?

(RQ 3) How does a brand story in a price promotion message affect consumers’ behavioural brand responses?

Each of the research questions are addressed in a separate essay (Appendix 6). Table 1 summarizes the methods, contexts, and key variables used in each essay.
Table 1 Overview of the essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies and method</th>
<th>Storytelling context</th>
<th>Type of story</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Psychological processes (empirically measured EM)</th>
<th>Empirical mediators (ME) and moderators (MO)</th>
<th>Empirical consumer responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1: Short brand stories on packaging: An examination of consumer responses (RQ 1)</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Short brand story (vs. list of arguments &amp; non-story)</td>
<td>FMCG</td>
<td>Narrative processing EM</td>
<td>Narrative transportation ME, Positive affect ME, Critical thoughts ME</td>
<td>Brand attitude, Perceived value, Purchase intentions, Word-of-mouth intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple authored, first author</td>
<td>2 between-subjects controlled experiments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Under review at Psychology &amp; Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 2: Same story, different effect: Consumer responses to brand stories on packages versus advertisements (RQ 2)</td>
<td>Packaging, Advertising</td>
<td>Emotional brand story (vs. less emotional brand story)</td>
<td>FMCG</td>
<td>Narrative processing, Categorization and typicality</td>
<td>Credibility ME, Typicality ME</td>
<td>Brand attitude, Purchase intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single authored</td>
<td>2 between-subjects controlled experiments</td>
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<td>Under review at Journal of Business Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 3: Does mental simulation increase the effectiveness of a price promotion? (RQ 3)</td>
<td>Price promotion</td>
<td>Mental simulation as brand story (vs. attribute list)</td>
<td>Magazine, Event</td>
<td>Narrative processing, Categorization and typicality</td>
<td>Discount presentation MO</td>
<td>Purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple authored, first author</td>
<td>2 between-subjects field experiments</td>
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The dissertation offers significant contributions to storytelling, packaging, and pricing literature as well as to business practice. It demonstrates that the storytelling context acts as a boundary condition to the effectiveness of different types of brand stories. More specifically, the dissertation shows that short brand stories on packaging (i.e. in a context involving other competing text, such as ingredients lists, producer information, usage guides, and recipes) and in price promotions have the ability to influence several significant consumer responses positively. However, these positive brand responses are subject to particular conditions. That is, brand stories on packaging should have a relatively low (versus high) level of emotional charge in order to elicit positive effects. In price promotions, the accompanying price discount information should be framed in an experiential (versus typical) way in order to induce favourable effects. These conditions are not effective for ads. This indicates that brand stories should be tailored according to context in order to reach maximal effectiveness. Finally, the dissertation offers new evidence about brand stories about FMCGs: brand stories have the ability to significantly improve consumers' responses to FMCG brands.

3 Mediation analysis excluded from the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.
4 Credibility excluded from the analysis in the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.
1.3. Research philosophy

This section describes the underlying research philosophy of the dissertation.

**Ontological assumptions.** The ontological assumptions that a social science researcher has about the nature of the social world and the way it is examined are related to the essence of the investigated phenomena (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). What is “reality” and how does one define it are questions that build a central philosophical standpoint which determines how one conducts research. Burrell and Morgan (1979) distinguish between two major ontological approaches. The objectivist approach comprehends the nature of being through a realist point of view while the subjectivist approach sees it through a nominalist point of view. From an ontological perspective, this dissertation adopts an objectivist approach by assuming a scientific realist (Hunt, 1990; Hunt, 1994) and postpositivist (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) point of view. Accordingly, the underlying ontological assumption of this dissertation is that a reality exists both in the mind of the individual and independently of her or her thoughts, beliefs, and “knowledge” of her existence (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003; Hunt, 1990; Hunt, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). However, due to the complexity of this reality, it is impossible to apprehend it perfectly and with absolute certainty (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003; Hunt, 1990; Hunt, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

**Epistemological assumptions.** Epistemology questions what knowledge is, how it can be acquired, and to what extent knowledge related to any given subject or entity can be acquired (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). “How do we know something?” and “how do we know something is true?” are central epistemological questions. On the one extreme, knowledge is defined as something “real” which can be acquired, and on the other, as something subjective, which has to be personally experienced (Burrel & Morgan, 1979). In line with the chosen ontological approach, this dissertation adopts a scientific realist and postpositivist epistemology.

In scientific realism, objectivity is aimed under the assumption that any observation or evidence is “inevitably filtered through and limited by the characteristics of our senses, our method of measurement, and the socio-cultural context in which our research is conducted” (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003, pp. 87-88). That is, things are not “objectively, absolutely, and unconditionally true or false” (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003, p. 88). Consequently, certain knowledge can never exist (Hunt, 1990; Hunt, 1994). Nevertheless, this does not make the pursuit of knowledge useless. Instead, scientific realism accepts that “all knowledge claims are tentative, subject to revision on the basis of new evidence” (Boal, Hunt, & Jaros, 2003, p. 89). Importantly, however, scientific realism accentuates the need for all knowledge claims to be “critically evaluated and tested to determine the extent to which they do, or do not, truly represent, correspond, or are in accord with the world” (Hunt, 1994, p. 24).

The theories tested in this dissertation include concepts that are, for the most part, intangible, such as “brand attitude”, “purchase intentions”, and “word-of-mouth intentions”. In accordance with scientific realism and postpositivism, this dissertation assumes that these intangible concepts exist and may be captured with an experimental approach, by asking consumers or by observing and measuring their behaviour. In this dissertation, they are consequences of specific stimuli, such as short brand stories. It is further assumed that the knowledge claims that are produced as a result of the empirical studies in this dissertation are able to describe the world in some way. However, as these knowledge claims are products of their time and place, it is acknowledged that they may become revised as additional information is produced in the future. The role of culture, history, and previous research are accordingly crucial in the formation of new knowledge. In this dissertation, the results and conclusions should be viewed from the cultural and historical context in which they are conducted. Moreover, they are based on previous research that assumes a similar philosophical standpoint and are hence governed by these assumptions.

**Methodological assumptions.** Methodological choices direct how knowledge is examined and obtained. The chosen methodology is hence strongly linked to the ontological and
epistemological assumptions of the researcher. My dissertation adopts an objectivist approach, which entails that knowledge is examined and obtained through a nomothetic approach (Burrel & Morgan, 1979).

The nomothetic approach is based on methodologies used in the natural sciences and hence values systematic protocol and technique. The aim is usually to generalize and to derive laws that explain objective phenomena in general. Scientific tests, typically of quantitative nature, are used to test hypotheses (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Central methodological preoccupations include internal validity, external validity, reliability, generalizability, and operationalization (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

More specifically, this dissertation assumes a deductive approach, meaning that it generates hypotheses based on theory and tests them in quantitative empirical studies through experiments. That is, this dissertation seeks causal relationships with the aim to explain. However, in contrast to a positivistic view that seeks to establish facts or laws based on hypotheses, this research aims, in line with a postpositivist view, to find probable facts or laws (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For causality, this implies that a specific action is not fully determined by a specific law although it does not violate it (Gorski, 2013).

**Rationale behind the choice of research approach.** The reasons for assuming a postpositivist, deductive approach in this dissertation were twofold. First, this perspective was suitable given the research questions set in the dissertation. Postpositivism, like positivism, aims to explain and predict the social world by finding causal relationships between social phenomena (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In addition, a postpositivist perspective was a logical foundation for my deductive approach to research, meaning that I generated hypotheses based on existing theory and observations from practice and tested them in empirical studies. Based on the study results, the hypotheses were falsified or supported.

Second, positivistic and postpositivistic paradigms dominate the advertising, marketing communications, and consumer behaviour research. Consequently, the theoretical framework used as basis for the hypotheses in this dissertation predominantly comprises literature by authors who employ a positivist philosophy of science. My aim is to contribute to this stream of research. Moreover, adopting the same paradigm allows me to interpret findings in relation to these streams of literature. Taking a postpositivist research perspective was hence a rational choice.

The positivistic philosophy has long dominated the marketing discipline and is still deeply entrenched in the top marketing journals (Chung & Alagaratnam, 2001; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007). One reason for the dominance of a positivistic view is that the research traditions in marketing stem from the natural sciences, which are based upon very positivistic approaches (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Little D., 1991). Another reason is that positivist methods are “embedded in marketing's long-term normative commitment to the metaphysic and method of positivist science” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 237). Nevertheless, many authors stress the importance of adopting different standpoints in order to enrich the field (Chung & Alagaratnam, 2001; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Hirschman, 1986). Positivistic research approaches have, despite their dominance in the marketing field and its top journals, received criticism. Some scholars maintain that viewing research as a linear, deductive process characterized by objectivity, coherence, orderliness, and value-neutrality is not well suited for social science research since a social phenomenon cannot be investigated and explained as objective reality, independent of observer effects (Letherby, 2003). These researchers hence promote the use of alternative approaches.

Adopting a positivistic view typically entails the use of quantitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and using numbers to prove facts in social life may imply potential problems in terms of oversimplifications, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and subjectivity (Letherby, 2003; Pham, 2013). Subjectivity, the very thing positivism tries to avoid, is the outcome, for instance, when marketing researchers seem to create reality rather than discover it in their pursuit for positivism (Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992). Zinkhan and Hirschheim (1992) point
out that the definitions of key marketing concepts have changed along with shifts in the interests of marketing researchers and hence mirror the popular research paradigms of their time rather than an increasingly accurate description of the world. While it is important to be aware of these potential downsides of an objectivistic, positivist approach, it is equally crucial to note that subjectivist approaches have distinct disadvantages as well. These include, for instance, biased data interpretation, lack of representativeness and generalizability, as well as absence of explanatory power (Borch & Arthur, 1995; Little D., 1991; Silverman, 2000).

Despite the criticism, it is important not to abandon the pursuit for causal explanations since they provide crucial information as to the reasons behind specific consumer responses that are not obtainable through a subjectivist approach. Based on my assumptions of how knowledge can be created, I believe that causal explanations can be obtained through experimental research. Causal information is valuable on a theoretical level when wanting to explain and predict consumer behaviour as well as on a managerial level when aiming to optimize marketing activities. These aims are in line with the purpose of this dissertation. Further, on the other extreme, abandoning positivism completely might lead to a form of social analysis that is extremely descriptive, but lacks explanatory value (Little D., 1991).

1.4. Clarification of key concepts

The key concepts used in this dissertation are defined in Table 2. Most of these concepts are elaborated further in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
<td>A narrative of an incident or a sequence of causally linked or interconnected events arranged temporally, and involving characters as agents of activity. Thus, a story includes causality, temporality, characters, and a plot with a beginning, middle, and an end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand story</td>
<td>A company-created story about the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short brand story</td>
<td>A brand story with fewer than 100 words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional brand story</td>
<td>A brand story that elicits a strong emotional reaction, regardless of the valence of these emotions. This is typically achieved by a dramatic story structure including negatively charged events. The strength of the emotional reaction is measured based on an existing scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental simulation</td>
<td>A brand story in which the consumer is framed as the main character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storied ad</td>
<td>An ad that contains a brand story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative ad</td>
<td>An ad that is based on arguments about the product. It does not include a plot or characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative processing</td>
<td>An information processing mode by which consumers process incoming information as a whole, in story form. Evoked by story-formed information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical processing</td>
<td>An information processing mode by which consumers process and evaluate each argument separately. Evoked by argument-formed information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorization</td>
<td>An information processing strategy by which consumers evaluate new stimuli based on previous category knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typicality</td>
<td>A new stimulus’ perceived level of similarity with the consumer’s expectations for a given category.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5. Outline of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured into five chapters. After the introduction (Chapter 1), the theoretical framework of the dissertation is presented (Chapter 2). Next, the methods used in the six empirical studies are described (Chapter 3). This is followed by Chapter 4, which introduces and summarizes the three essays. Chapter 5 consolidates the findings of the dissertation, discusses its contributions to research and business practice, reviews its limitations, and gives suggestions for future research.
2 BRAND STORIES AND CONSUMER RESPONSES

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature that will serve as the theoretical foundation for the empirical studies in this dissertation. It also represents the streams of research that this dissertation aims to contribute to.

An overview of the theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the types of stories and contexts that were investigated in this dissertation. The dissertation studies the effect of stories on consumers’ affective, attitudinal, and behavioural responses. A number of psychological processes are used to explain story effects on consumer responses.

The hypotheses that were derived from the theoretical foundation and tested in the empirical studies are presented in connection with the summary of the essays in Chapter 4.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, a definition for brand stories is developed based on previous story literature. Next, a review of and definitions for the different story types addressed in the research questions of this dissertation are given, that is, short brand stories (RQ 1), emotional brand stories (RQ 2), and mental simulations as brand stories (RQ 3). In the second part, potential consumer responses to the different kinds of brand stories are discussed. This is followed by an examination of how consumers process and respond to argumentative marketing messages, which are regarded to persuade fundamentally differently than stories. The chapter concludes with the third part, which starts with a review of packaging and price promotions as storytelling contexts in comparison to advertising. This is followed by a discussion of the potential effects of categorization, an information processing strategy by which consumers evaluate new stimuli based on previous category knowledge. Typicality denotes the perceived level of similarity of a new stimulus with the consumer’s expectations for the given category or type of stimulus. In this dissertation, typicality is assumed to mediate consumer responses to stories on packaging and price promotions.

2.1 What is a story?

A story consists of a narrative of an incident or a sequence of events (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). The events are tied together into a plot that has a beginning, a middle, and an end (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). A story has a goal (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Why and how this goal is reached, or lost, is narrated through the plot (Polkinghorne, 1988). Each event contributes to the plot by making the achievement of the goal more or less probable (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Stern, 1994a). Without a plot, the events would merely be a series of independent, discontinuous happenings (Polkinghorne, 1988).

5 The mediating (versus moderating) role of typicality is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.3.2.
Meaning is created through causal links between the events and a temporal ordering of them (Frye, 1973; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Stern, 1994a). Causality implies that the events are ordered in an interdependent way: each event is a product of a preceding event and leads to the next event, the final event being the goal state (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Temporality means that the events are organized in a temporal dimension. That is, each event is located in relation to the other events in the story (Polkinghorne, 1988). The events occur over time, but not necessarily in a chronological order (Carroll, 2007; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Actors with human-like behaviour and feelings carry out the actions in a story (Deighton & Hoch, 1993; Escalas, 1998; Stern, 1994a). They are the main agents of activity in terms of doing, feeling, and thinking (Carroll, 2007; Escalas, 1998; Stern, 1994a; Woodside, 2010). These activities are motivated by the characters' desires, needs, purposes, goals, or plans (Carroll, 2007). The actors play an important role in showing the audience how they should feel instead of explicitly telling them what they should believe (Deighton & Hoch, 1993).

Based on the widely recognized elements described above, a story is in this dissertation defined as a narrative of an incident or a sequence of causally linked or interconnected events arranged temporally, and involving characters as agents of activity. Thus, a story includes causality, temporality, characters, and a plot with a beginning, middle, and an end.

Most stories proceed in accordance with a universal dramatic arc (Freytag, 1900). It begins with a description of necessary background information (Freytag, 1900) simultaneously as anticipation is elicited (Woodside, 2010). Usually, a story starts with a relatively harmonious situation, which implies a sense of confidence for the future (Papadatos, 2006). This is followed by an inciting incident that leads to the climax, or the turning point of the story (Freytag, 1900; McKee, 2003). The climax includes elements of drama in terms of an unusual or unanticipated event (Escalas, 1998). This typically involves negative elements such as a life-changing crisis, a conflict that disrupts the balance, or a struggle (Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Peracchio & Escalas, 2008). These might be played out as battles between expectation and reality (McKee, 2003) or good and evil (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010). The dramatic episode is followed by actions to re-establish the balance (McKee, 2003) or a resolution of another kind (Woodside, 2010). This means that the goal is achieved, or not (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Nevertheless, in the end, the drama unravels and a resolution of some kind is found (Freytag, 1900). Although many stories include a dramatic arc, in this dissertation, a brand story does not necessarily have to include such an arc in order to be defined as a brand story as it is something generally linked with story quality rather than a prerequisite for a story6.

### 2.1.1 A brand story

A brand story is in this dissertation defined based on the above definition of a story. In addition to this premise, the story is crafted by the company and is linked to the brand in some way. This might, for instance, mean that the characters in the story interact with the brand, consume it, or enjoy the consequences of its use (Boller & Olson, 1991). It might also mean that the characters represent the brand or the product (Deighton & Hoch, 1993), like Mr Muscle, the Michelin Tire Man, Tony the Tiger, or Miss Chiquita Banana.

In this dissertation, a brand story is hence defined as a company-created narrative of an incident or a sequence of causally linked or interconnected events about the brand, arranged temporally, and involving characters as agents of activity. Thus, a brand story includes causality, temporality, characters, and a plot with a beginning, middle, and an end. Moreover, this dissertation is restricted to verbal brand stories.

Previous research that has looked at brand stories in ads in particular has used different labels when referring to these ads, such as drama ads (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Stern, 1994a) and narrative ads (Escalas, 1998). Table 3 summarizes some of the main story

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6 See Chapter 2.1.3 for a more detailed discussion of story quality.
definitions used by past advertising research. Elements such as plot and character appear in all definitions except one, the definition by Peracchio and Meyers-Levy (1997). Deighton, Romer, and Mcqueen (1989) and Stern (1994a) make distinctions between different kinds of storied ads based on where they stand on a “drama scale” (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989, p. 336). These distinctions are made based on the existence of a narrator and the number of characters involved in the story. This dissertation includes a more comprehensive set of defining components than plot and characters, i.e. causality and temporality. However, it does not make distinctions based on the existence of a narrator or the number of characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s), year</th>
<th>Label used</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Applied in e.g.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story advertisement</td>
<td>&quot;The transition from demonstration to story is marked by the concept of character. Characters are protagonists who act within the context of a plot, as distinct from narrators, who address the audience&quot; (p. 336).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama advertisement</td>
<td>&quot;...drama has plot and character but no narrator” (p. 336). I.e. a story advertisement, but without a narrator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boller &amp; Olson, 1991</td>
<td>GAIN commercial</td>
<td>&quot;...the GAIN commercial is best described as a narrative form. By this we mean, the content and structure of this commercial is that of a story. In terms of content, the GAIN commercial contains events (e.g., preparations for a family get-together, arrival of a spouse, parental greeting of a child) as well as characters (e.g., a young momma, a husband/father home from the military, an excited young daughter) who react to and experience these events. The temporal sequence of lead character reactions to story events defines the structure or plot of the narrative commercial—in this case, a folkloreish portrayal of maternal triumph in the context of family relationships. In terms of narrative exposition, the GAIN commercial is an example of a &quot;narrated drama&quot;...&quot; (p. 172)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical drama</td>
<td>&quot;Plot (pattern: single action; time: linear chronology; progression: beginning-middle/end; space: unity of space; causation: causal relation; change: change in end-state) Few characters (interactive in plot; main character(s)) Implicit narration (intermittent; fewer devices; less narration time)” (p. 605)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette drama</td>
<td>&quot;Story (pattern: multiple actions; time: discrete chronology; repetition: no order; space: variety of space; causation: associative relation; change: repetition throughout) Many characters (non-interactive/stories; no main character) Explicit narration (continuous; more devices; more narration time)” (p. 605)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peracchio &amp; Meyers-Levy, 1997</td>
<td>Narrative advertisement</td>
<td>A narrative advertisement conveys product features &quot;by means of a conversation-like story or narrative that contains much contextual material concerning the product's creator, use, and development&quot; (p. 182).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padgett &amp; Allen, 1997</td>
<td>Narrative advertisement</td>
<td>&quot;....we describe storied stimuli as any stimuli that include causally/chronologically connected events enacted by characters (irrespective of ad form or presentation format — drama, song, dance, mime, etc.). Typically, such stimuli involve actors with motives, an event sequence, and a setting that has physical, social, and temporal components” (p. 53). That is, &quot;narrative ads present a causal/chronological series of events acted out by a character” (p. 56).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ching, Tong, Chen, & Chen, 2013; Mattila, 2000; Padgett & Mulvey, 2011; Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010
Finally, it should be noted that some researchers and practitioners use and define the notion 'brand story' in a variety of ways that differ from those described in this dissertation. Some scholars examine, for instance, the 'brand stories' goods themselves tell through, for example, the logo (Sametz & Maydoney, 2003), the brand name, packaging design (Kniazeva & Belk, 2010), pricing, or through any rhetoric about the brand (Kniazeva & Belk, 2007). Others look at the 'brand stories' that emerge via the use of a product or a service (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009). However, this dissertation is limited to examining verbal brand stories that conform to the definition given in this chapter.

2.1.2 The short brand story

How short of a story can elicit substantial consumer responses? “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” is one of the shortest and most recognized short stories that allegedly made people cry. The story has been attributed to Ernest Hemingway, the master of short stories, although similar versions predate Hemingway’s writing career. Nevertheless, if a six-word story can elicit such strong responses, the power of a short story should not be overlooked.

The demand for short brand stories is evident due to limited space in marketing communication contexts and consumers’ reduced attention span. In an in-store environment where the time spent between shelves is limited, a brand story on a package has to arouse interest instantly, yet be very short due to the space limitations set by the packaging (Rosenfeld, 1987). The same applies to, for instance, price promotions, which seldom have space for long stories. Added knowledge on the effect of short brand stories is therefore valuable.

Stories in many marketing contexts, such as on packages or price promotions, are indeed short. A convenience selection of 12 packages with brand stories from two FMCG product categories, beer and ice cream, showed an average story length of 43 words (Appendix 2). The shortest brand story had a length of 12 words and the longest 73 words. Academic research on the effects of stories in advertising do not always report exact story lengths. The studies that do so have studied stories with lengths from 121 (Polyorat, Alden, & Kim, 2007) to 319 words (Chang, 2009) or longer, for instance, one page written text (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1997).

In this dissertation, the length of a short brand story is defined using brand stories on actual packaging as a benchmark. A brand story with fewer than 100 words is defined as short. In addition, it needs to consist of the brand story elements defined in the previous chapter, that is, causality, temporality, characters, and a plot.

Consumers hold story schemas (Mandler, 1978), that is, they possess “abstract knowledge about the structure of stories” (Escalas, 1998, pp. 273) and can hence make assumptions about how a story unfolds, even based on limited clues (Stern, 1994a). That is, consumers can use their previous story experience when perceiving a new short story. Söderlund and Dahlén (2010) suggest that short stories can be used as shorter versions of a longer story that is told elsewhere. Past studies show that a brand-related sales story of just a few sentences, told in person, may positively impact consumers’ purchase intentions (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Gilliam, Flaherty, & Rayburn, 2014; Gilliam & Zablah, 2013). Nevertheless, length is likely to influence the story’s impact on the consumer in some way. It seems less likely that shorter stories will be able to transport the consumer into a fully absorbed state of mind – something considered to be a requirement if stories are to have a maximal persuasive potential (Busselle
& Bilandzic, 2008). Yet, given consumers’ pre-existing story schemas and the strong position of the story as a natural mode for information processing (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), it is assumed that even a short story is likely to induce a degree of narrative transportation.

### 2.1.3 Story quality and the emotional brand story

The structure of stories makes them superior in comparison to other means of communication (Escalas, 1998). However, research suggests additional building blocks that contribute to the quality and effectiveness of a brand story in terms of desired consumer responses. Story quality is important because a bad story does not move or involve consumers to the extent that they become transported, a mental state that leads to several desired affective, attitudinal, and behavioural responses (Chapter 2.2) (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004).

The goal in a well-formed brand story is linked to the target group’s values and is thereby seen as desirable or undesirable (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). It also includes characters or events that the target group can relate to (Deighton & Hoch, 1993; Mossberg & Nissen Johansen, 2006) and feelings that are relevant with regard to their self-concept (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). This facilitates the creation of personal meaning on an individual level and is crucial for persuasion to occur (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). The goal and the characters of a well-formed brand story should – in addition to being important and relatable for the target group – transmit the values of the brand in order to build a strong link to the brand’s core (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010; Jensen, 1999; Mossberg, 2008). This way, the story ties back to the brand’s business objective and strategy.

A good brand story has one main message (Peracchio & Escalas, 2008; Twitchell, 2004), which is conveyed in a clearly defined, understandable way (Heath & Heath, 2007). Evidence suggests that a brand story narrated in first person may generate a more positive brand image than one narrated in non-first person (Huang, 2010). A good brand story should also be believable, but not necessarily true (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Huang, 2010; Mossberg, 2008; Mossberg & Nissen Johansen, 2006; Stern, 1994b). Furthermore, to use storytelling successfully as a branding tool, it is crucial to consider the purpose of the story in terms of expected results (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010), the type of product and brand in question (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012), the target group, the context, as well as the channel and modality through which the story is told (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010).

Lastly, and most importantly, however, a good brand story is emotionally engaging (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Guber, 2007; McKee, 2003; Twitchell, 2004). Many authors stress the significance of embracing a dramatic structure (Freytag, 1900, c.f. Chapter 2.1) in order to create an emotionally engaging story (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Escalas, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Guber, 2007; Twitchell, 2004). This typically involves adding negative aspects to the story (Guber, 2007; McKee, 2003; Twitchell, 2004). Rapidly worsening events, such as problems that throw the main character out of balance and make her struggle, elicit emotions (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Woodside, 2010). Indeed, many of the most involving and affective stories are innately unpleasant (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004), or as Leo Tolstoy put it, “Happiness is an allegory, unhappiness a story.” That is, something bad needs to happen (Papadatos, 2006) and this typically elicits emotions with negative valence (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Unpleasant emotions such as fear, sadness, and anxiety are at least as efficient as positively charged emotions in creating an impactful and enjoyable story experience (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010) as a harmonious, stable story line is seldom compelling or capable of eliciting strong emotional reactions (Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). The power of negative story events lies in that they allow the consumer to experience unpleasant emotions inside the safety of the story world (Nell, 2002). These unpleasant emotions mimic real emotions in terms of their strength due to the experiential nature of processing a story, but do not bear their real-life consequences (Boller & Olson, 1991; Nell, 2002).

Extant research suggests that consumers feel greater pleasure and enjoyment as the suspense in a story increases (Mikos, 1996; Zillmann, 1996). That is, negative events elicit strong
emotions and although these emotions may be negatively charged, they ultimately lead to increased elaboration, absorption\textsuperscript{7}, transportation\textsuperscript{8}, excitement, and enjoyment (Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). The fact that transportation and enjoyment are desirable and positively charged states, imply that they result in other positive responses (Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Mossberg, 2008; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). Results from advertising studies support this notion: negative, ad message congruent emotions elicited by ads appear to have a positive impact on subsequent ad and product evaluations (Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). Söderlund and Dahlén (2010), for instance, demonstrate that consumers develop more positive ad and product attitudes when violence is included in the plot of a storied ad in a way that is relevant for the product, as opposed to when violence is not included. That is, including an essentially negatively charged element in a brand story may create positive reactions as long as the element is relevant in terms of the story plot. Hence, the impact of a story lies in the strength of the emotions elicited by the story, not only their valence (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Yet, firms are typically reluctant to include negatively charged elements in their brand stories, which reduces the potential emotional reaction and positive responses (McKee, 2003).

For the purpose of this dissertation, then, an emotional brand story is defined as one that elicits a strong emotional reaction, regardless of the valence of these emotions. The level of emotional charge is operationalized along a scale used by extant literature, including two items: “How emotional was the story?” and “How emotionally did you react to the story?” (Heuer & Reisberg, 1990; van Stegeren, Everaerd, Cahill, McGaugh, & Gooren, 1998). Comparing a more and less emotional brand story hence requires that the two stories differ significantly in terms of their level of emotional charge.

\subsection*{2.1.4 Mental simulations as brand stories}

Mental simulation denotes the mental process by which a consumer imagines an event occurring (Taylor & Schneider, 1989). Mental simulations are types of stories in the sense that they take the form of stories in the minds of the consumers (Escalas, 2004a; Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). This means that the scenarios created by the consumer include a plot, causality, temporality, and characters as agents of activity (Escalas, 2004a; Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). The main character in a mental simulation is the consumer herself (Escalas, 2004a). She has a goal and the pursuance of this goal leads to actions, which are ordered based on temporality and causality (Escalas, 2004a). For the purpose of this dissertation, mental simulation is defined as a marketer-evoked brand story in which the consumer is framed as the main character.

Encouraging consumers to imagine themselves in a positive scenario involving a product or a brand is a widespread marketing tactic, especially in advertising (Elder & Krishna, 2012; Praxmarer, 2011). Marketers may encourage the retrieval of different kinds of mental simulations, such as autobiographical memories (Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993) or consumption visions (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). Autobiographical memories refer to consumers’ memories of past personal experiences (Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993). Consumption visions represent mental images that allow consumers to experience the process of using an offering and/or enjoying its outcomes prior to purchase (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). Mental simulation literature distinguishes between two additional types of simulation: outcome- and process-focused simulation (Escalas & Luce, 2004; Escalas & Luce, 2003). Both types commonly occur in a marketing context. Process simulation implies

\textsuperscript{7} A mental state characterized by focused immersion, involvement, and detachment from the surrounding environment (Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2015). See Chapter 2.2.1.

\textsuperscript{8} An information processing mode by which consumers process incoming information as a whole, in story form. See Chapter 2.2.1.
that the consumer is encouraged to imagine the process of using a product whereas, in outcome simulation, she is encouraged to imagine the benefits gained from the use.

Marketers attempt to elicit these different kinds of simulations with the aim to persuade by linking the simulations with a particular product or brand. As an example of the use of mental simulation in practice, an ad for a restaurant might say: “Imagine yourself getting off work on a Friday after a long week’s work. You feel a sense of accomplishment and want to indulge yourself. You step into Restaurant X and are welcomed by a friendly atmosphere and relaxing music. You spot your friends at a table and excitedly walk toward them. Imagine yourself enjoying a perfectly relaxing evening with your friends at Restaurant X”.

The story structure of these imaginary scenarios makes mental simulation an influential tool for persuasion (Escalas, 2004a). Indeed, prior studies confirm the ability of mental simulation appeals in advertising to increase consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g., Chang, 2010; Elder & Krishna, 2012; Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007).

Mental simulations are – regardless of their type – strongly experiential due to their ability to “make events seem real” (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998, p. 430). That is, they offer consumers the possibility to catch a glimpse of how a product usage scenario will likely be or feel like, or what the consequences of using a product will result in and how this will feel (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). Consumers are able to go over the actions of the story-formed mental simulation scenario step-by-step. This also means that the emotions linked to each action in the story are likely evoked to some extent (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). Mental simulations are hence, like stories, strongly affective in nature.

Mental simulation has, due to its persuasive effects, become an increasingly popular tactic in product and brand advertising (Elder & Krishna, 2012; Praxmarer, 2011). However, while the use of mental simulation appeals is prevalent in different marketing activities and their effectiveness has been established in advertising, little is known about whether mental simulation appeals also work in the other key marketing tactics, such as packages or price promotions. This dissertation will investigate the effect of mental simulations in price promotions.

2.2 Consumer responses to brand stories

The form in which information about a product or a brand is structured has an impact on how consumers process and evaluate the information (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Boller & Olson, 1991). When information takes the form of a story, the consumer is prone to process the information in a narrative manner (Padgett & Allen, 1997). However, when the same information is presented, for instance, as a list of arguments or product attributes, other processing forms, such as analytical processing, are more likely triggered (Chapter 2.2.4) (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989). Given that information is presented in story form – regardless of the story’s length, its level of emotional charge, or its type (mental simulation) – it is based on previous literature expected to elicit narrative processing, an information processing strategy which is followed by several other responses.

Next, an overview of consumer responses to brand stories in general as well as to the different brand story types addressed in this dissertation (short brand stories (RQ 1), emotional brand stories (RQ 2), and mental simulations as brand stories (RQ 3)) is given based on extant literature. A first assumption is that consumers process story-formed information through narrative processing, which leads to transportation and thereby to a number of affective, attitudinal, and behavioural responses. This overview is followed by a discussion of analytical processing, which is considered the opposite of narrative processing (Escalas, 2004a).

2.2.1 Narrative processing and transportation

Past research indicates that a brand story elicits narrative transportation through narrative processing. Narrative processing is an information processing strategy that entails that the
consumer consuming a story arranges the information in the story in a narrative manner based on temporality and causality (Escalas, 1998). This style of processing is congruent with consumers’ natural way of thinking and storing information (Bruner, 1986; Schank, 1990). Information processed in a narrative manner is hence more easily assimilated and accepted by a consumer (Bruner, 1986; Schank & Abelson, 1995). The narrative mode of thought can evolve to absorption, a state characterized by focused immersion, involvement, and detachment from the surrounding environment (Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2015). Transportation is an intensive form of absorption and is characterized by affective, cognitive, and imagery involvement (Green & Brock, 2000). It is a distinct mental process where the consumer is carried away by the story to the degree that she or he is “lost” in it (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). This means that the consumer loses contact with some facts from the surrounding world in favour of the story, experiences strong emotions and motivations, as well as comes out of the experience transformed to some extent (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). That is, the consumer’s beliefs about and responses to the brand are changed in some way. Transportation has similarities with flow, a mental state that brings about enjoyment and happiness and is produced through activities, such as playing sports, games, or creating art (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

The consequences of narrative transportation lead to persuasion through four distinct mechanisms. First, transportation reduces critical thoughts (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007) because transportation is a desirable mental state with a primarily positive valence (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Critical thoughts are reduced also because consumers are less likely to disbelieve a story than a set of arguments, even if the story is fictional (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004). The experiential nature of stories adds to this by making a persuasive intent less salient, which decreases counter arguing (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). Second, transportation creates experiential meaning by offering consumers a chance to mentally experience the psychological outcomes related to the consumption of a brand (Boller & Olson, 1991; Escalas, 1998). Third, transportation makes consumers identify with the character/s of a story, whereby they “imaginatively project themselves into the experiences of featured” story characters (Boller & Olson, 1991, p. 173) to the extent that they are able to “sample” the characters’ emotions (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989, p. 264). This makes consumers prone to adopt the views and beliefs of the characters (Green & Brock, 2000). Finally, transportation makes the story consumption experience enjoyable, which puts the consumer in a better mood and makes her pursue similar experiences in the future due to the desirable nature of enjoyment (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). The experiential nature of stories might create ambiguity as to the message of the story (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). That is, the story is open for interpretation and the consumers might understand the story in unintended ways based on their personal story experiences. It is hence, from a marketer’s point of view, important to examine possible interpretations of a story when the aim is to persuade.

Based on the above theory, narrative transportation is expected to occur on some level regardless of the length of the brand story, the level of emotional charge in the story, or the trigger for the story. That is, even a short brand story should elicit some degree of transportation owning to consumers’ pre-existing story schemas (Mandler, 1978) and the strong position of the story as a natural mode for information processing (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), albeit a longer story is likely to induce a stronger transportation experience than a short one. Conversely, the intensity of the transportation experience is expected to increase along with an increase in the emotional charge in a story based on the assumption that the story becomes more involving as the emotional charge increases (Freytag, 1900; Polkinghorne, 1988). Furthermore, an increase in the level of emotional charge of a story – regardless of the valence of the emotions – is considered to intensify the feeling of enjoyment, which makes the transportation experience stronger (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Finally, mental simulations are expected to elicit a similar degree of transportation. This is based on empirical evidence that shows that company-encouraged mental simulations are like brand stories and persuade through the same mechanisms (Escalas, 2004a), i.e. by eliciting narrative transportation as a first response (Praxmarer, 2011; Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993).
Green and Brock (2000) argue that transportation is particularly likely to occur when the purpose of story consumption is enjoyment rather than explicit persuasion, as in marketing messages. Nevertheless, the occurrence of transportation in response to storied ads has been shown in several advertising studies (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Ching et al., 2013; Escalas, 2004b). Transportation has been observed also in other marketing contexts, for instance, as a result of salespersons’ storytelling efforts in face-to-face encounters with consumers (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). The message form, rather than the aim of the story consumption, thus seems to be the key element in inducing transportation. It therefore seems likely that consumers can be transported by messages composed by a company with the intention to persuade when these messages take the form of stories.

### 2.2.2 Affective and attitudinal responses

Given that a brand story has the ability to elicit narrative processing and thereby narrative transportation, several affective and attitudinal responses are likely to follow. Previous studies indicate that a story-formed ad message enhances positive affect, such as upbeat and warm feelings (Escalas, 1998; Escalas & Stern, 2003; Escalas, 2007). This may be attributed to the story form consisting of characters, because humans seem to be prone to react positively to the presence of other humans (Sears, 1983). Narrative transportation may add to the intensity of the positive emotions, because transported consumers are disposed to experience strong emotions (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). In addition, enjoyment that is elicited through transportation is perpetually positively charged and hence evokes positive affective responses (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Moreover, it should be noted that negative story elements, such as violence or horror, might also result in enjoyment and positive affect, although these elements are essentially negatively charged (Chapter 2.1.1.2).

Previous studies indicate that brand stories may positively influence brand attitude (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas, 2004a and 2004b; Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012; Lundqvist et al., 2013). Several mechanisms contribute to this effect. First, consumers perceive stories as an interesting, entertaining, and enjoyable form of communication (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2013), and these perceptions are likely to have a beneficial influence on consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Escalas, 1998). Second, transported consumers show more story-consistent and less critical beliefs, opinions, and attitudes vis-à-vis less transported individuals (Escalas, 2004a; Green & Brock, 2000). Third, the positive emotions elicited by narrative transportation are likely to expand to brand attitude in accordance to the affect infusion model (Forgas, 1994; Forgas, 1995). Finally, the experiential nature of a transportation experience offers consumers insights as to how the brand is consumed and/or gives them a taste of the benefits it has to offer and thereby positively influences brand attitude (Boller & Olson, 1991). These mechanisms indicate that narrative transportation and positive affect may further enhance the development of positive brand attitude.

Moreover, stories have been shown to have (1) a positive impact on consumers’ willingness to pay for the brand (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2013) and (2) a potential to attenuate price sensitivity (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). These variables could conceptually be linked to the concept of perceived value (Netemeyer, et al., 2004). It may be assumed, then, that a story can have a positive impact on perceived value. This effect may partly be attributed to the same antecedents as those of brand attitude.

These affective and attitudinal responses are expected to occur on some level regardless of the length of the brand story, the level of emotional charge in the story, or the trigger for the story. These expectations are based on consumers’ story schemas (Mandler, 1978), their disposition to process information in story form (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), and the proven attitudinal effects of mental simulation (Escalas, 2004a; Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993). However, the responses are assumed to be amplified along with the emotional charge of the story because it intensifies the transportation experience (Freytag, 1900; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988), which contributes to the development of these
responses. Furthermore, the feeling of enjoyment that escalates along with an increase in the emotional charge of the story contributes to the intensity of the consumer’s beliefs and attitudes after the transportation experience (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Indeed, more affective communication executions have been shown to lead to more positive judgements than less affective executions (Ray & Batra, 1983).

### 2.2.3 Behavioural responses

Brand stories have been shown to elicit a higher purchase intention as opposed to other forms of communication (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas et al., 2004; Escalas, 2004b; Lundqvist et al., 2013). This stems from the way in which the information in a story is processed and judged. Given that knowledge is stored in story form in the human memory, this means that new story-based information is easily matched with existing knowledge. It also makes the consumer prone to consider the information in the story as a whole through narrative processing instead of fragmenting it into detached pieces of information to be judged separately (Pennington & Hastie, 1992; Schank & Abelson, 1995). When information on a product or brand is considered and subsequently judged as a whole, the information becomes easy to grasp and hence appears instinctively correct and coherent (Pennington & Hastie, 1992). Correspondingly, transported consumers are more likely to accept the story claims and less likely to counter argue them (Green & Brock, 2000). Stories may, through this mechanism, have a positive effect on consumers’ purchase decisions (Adaval & Wyer, 1998).

Another factor that may favourably influence consumers’ purchase intentions as a response to a brand story is an increased level of brand attitude. Indeed, several studies show that brand attitude is positively associated with purchase intentions in a marketing communication context (e.g., Spears & Singh, 2004). The positive influence of brand attitude on purchase intentions is further supported by the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). That is, a person’s intention to perform a behaviour, in this case purchase, will increase as her attitudes toward the behaviour becomes more favourable.

An increased level of purchase intentions as a response to story-formed ads has been shown in several studies (e.g. Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas et al., 2004; Escalas, 2004b; Lundqvist et al., 2013). However, extant studies have yet to examine consumers’ actual purchase behaviour in response to brand stories. Moreover, previous studies have not explicitly looked at purchase intention responses to short brand stories or stories with different levels of emotional charge.

Given that positive judgments affect purchase intentions positively, such judgments are assumed to have an impact also on consumption-related behavioural intentions other than those related to purchases. Word-of-mouth intentions are such an intention type. Indeed, studies show that stories are likely to have a positive impact on such intentions (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). This may be a consequence of transportation and the resulting enjoyment since higher levels of transportation and enjoyment are shown to increase the likelihood to recommend the story (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Another likely behavioural intention response is related to information gathering. Given that narrative transportation goes hand in hand with interest and curiosity (Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2015), stories are expected to have an impact on information-gathering intentions, such as intentions to visit the supplier’s website.

As with brand attitude, these behavioural and behavioural intention responses are expected to occur regardless of the length of the brand story, the level of emotional charge in the story, or the trigger for the story (Elder & Krishna, 2012). Similarly, I expect that they are amplified along with the emotional charge of the story due to its intensifying effect on the transportation experience (Freytag, 1900; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988).
2.2.4 Consumer responses to argumentative messages

Previous advertising research that has looked at how stories influence consumers has typically contrasted storied ads with argumentative ads to compare their effects. Argumentative ads have been chosen as a point of comparison because stories persuade in profoundly different ways than arguments (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989). Argumentative ads are based on arguments about the product and they do not have a plot or characters (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989). Another central difference between storied and argumentative ads relates to the way an appeal is presented: storied ads show, whereas argumentative ads tell what the message is (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). That is, in storied ads, the characters perform an event, which conveys a message. A storied ad for a restaurant might, for instance, show a couple laughing and kissing while enjoying a delicious candlelight dinner. An argumentative version of the same ad would list attributes of the restaurant (romantic setting, delicious food, etc.) instead of showing them. Storied ads are hence able to transmit emotional appeals by showing consumers how they might feel as a response to the advertised offering. Argumentative ads are poorly suited for credibly delivering emotions as they focus on telling consumers what they should believe (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). Previous studies have referred to argumentative ads as informational ads (Puto & Wells, 1984), expository ads (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010), lecture ads (Wells, 1989), argument ads (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989), factual ads (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1997; Polyorat, Alden, & Kim, 2007), or list ads (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Mattila, 2000).

The way in which information is structured, that is, as a story or a list of arguments, has an effect on how consumers process and subsequently judge the information (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2004a). These different information structures elicit distinctive information processing strategies: stories prompt narrative processing whereas argumentative messages elicit analytical processing (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Escalas, 2004a). Brand stories and arguments hence persuade in different ways. Storied ads persuade by offering experiential brand meaning, by eliciting emotions, as well as by involving, captivating, and entertaining consumers (Boller & Olson, 1991; Escalas, 1998; Stern, 1994b), whereas argumentative ads persuade through educational learning and logical arguments for a claim (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Deighton & Hoch, 1993).

Analytical processing is data driven and focuses on distinct attributes (Deighton & Hoch, 1993; MacInnis & Price, 1987). It is more analytical, logical, and pragmatic vis-à-vis narrative processing (Green and Brock, 2000). In this approach, the consumer is prone to consider the strength of the argument in an “objective” manner and hence involves a more careful processing of product attributes (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; MacInnis & Price, 1987). As a result, analytical processing might increase the likelihood of creating counterarguments and reduce the creation of personal meaning (Escalas, 2004a). The benefits of storied ads over argumentative ads in terms of favourable consumer responses may be attributed to these differences in information processing strategies.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that argumentative ads may not be inferior to storied ads in all situations. Studies show that the relative advantages of storied ads over argumentative ads may disappear, for instance, in situations where the manipulative intent of the ad is salient\(^9\) (Escalas, 2007; Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010), the consumer’s cognitive capacity is constrained (Chang, 2009), or when the consumer is highly familiar with the advertised offering (Mattila, 2000). The common feature for these situations is that they constrict the consumer’s ability to process the storied ad in a narrative manner.

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\(^9\) That is, when an ad is formulated in a way that makes the manipulative intent of the ad salient. As a result, consumers become increasingly aware of the fact that the advertiser is trying to persuade them (Escalas, 2007; Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010).
2.3 Consumer responses to brand stories on packaging and in price promotions

The previous chapter discussed likely consumer responses to brand stories in general as well as to short brand stories (RQ 1), brand stories with different levels of emotional charge (RQ 2), and mental simulations as brand stories (RQ 3). This discussion was mainly based on findings from advertising studies that examine consumer responses to brand stories because past research has mainly been conducted in an advertising context (e.g., Escalas & Stern, 2003; Escalas 2004b; Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010). However, in practice, companies communicate brand stories in many other marketing contexts, such as packaging, websites, social media, and price tags. In this dissertation, brand stories on packaging and in price promotion messages are in focus, in addition to ads. The effects of stories in these marketing contexts were overlooked by past research. Yet, this dissertation suggests, that brand stories are perceived differently on packaging and in price promotions versus in ads due to differences between these contexts. That is, consumer responses to brand stories on packaging and in price promotions are assumed to be mediated by the perceived level of typicality of a story in the focal context. It is therefore of interest to examine the characteristics of these contexts in order to be able to evaluate how typical or atypical a story in these contexts is perceived to be.

Next, relevant characteristics of ads, packaging, and price promotions are examined. Characteristics of ads are discussed first as this context is the most established and researched storytelling context. This is followed by a review of packaging and price promotions. Finally, categorization and the impact of the perceived level of typicality on consumer responses to brand stories in these contexts are discussed.

2.3.1 Characteristics of storytelling contexts

2.3.1.1 Advertising

Ads can take either a story or an argumentative form (Boller & Olson, 1991; Deighton & Hoch, 1993). However, stories or arguments are rarely found as pure forms in ads (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). Ads may hence be categorized on a story/non-story continuum based on the extent to which they tell a story (Escalas, 1998; Mick, 1987). One end of the continuum is represented by ads with a complete story structure including a plot, causality, temporality, and human-like characters as agents of activity, and the other by ads with a pure argumentative form.

Argumentative messages were the prevalent print and TV ad message format until the ’90s, when storied ads started to gain a stronger footing in advertising practice (Boller & Olson, 1991). According to a content analysis conducted by Escalas (1998), over 20% of ads tell a well-developed story and around 40% include a story structure to some extent (Escalas, 1998). Consumers have hence become used to seeing and processing storied ads.

Storied ads induce emotions to different degrees. Past research suggests that the most successful storied ads are emotionally appealing (Escalas, 1998; Feldman & Bruner, 1990). The use of emotional ads in general has increased considerably during recent decades and this appeal format seems to be dominant in today’s advertising environment (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011). Storied and emotional ads include scant direct information (Abernethy & Butler, 1992; Abernethy & Franke, 1996) since they are often aimed to be emotionally appealing rather than solely transmitting information or arguments (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011; Poncin, Pieters, & Ambaye, 2006; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005).

Advertising practitioners and researchers find that product type moderates consumer responses to emotional versus non-emotional ads (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011). Past research suggests that emotional ads are especially effective for low-involvement and/or hedonic products (Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011). However, Geuens, De Pelsmacker, and Faseur (2011) show that all kinds of products may benefit from emotional ads to some extent in contrast to non-emotional ads. In practice, FMCG ads, especially beverage and food
ads, have a history of using more emotional versus informational appeals (Aaker & Norris, 1982).

Taken together, both storied and non-storied ads are pervasive in advertising practice. Consumers are hence expected to perceive both types of ads as equally typical. However, storied and emotionally appealing ads seem to dominate the FMCG category in particular. These kinds of ads focus on subjective claims that appeal to consumers’ personal experience with the aim to involve, captivate, and entertain, instead of presenting logical, objective arguments for a claim (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Escalas, 1998).

2.3.1.2 Packaging

The majority of consumers’ purchase decisions are made at the point-of-purchase (Connolly & Davison, 1996; Solomon, 2006; Underhill, 2009), which emphasizes the importance of point-of-purchase marketing, such as packaging (Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Schoormans & Robben, 1997). Indeed, the packaging is often the only communication stimulus the consumer encounters at the point and time of purchase (Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006; Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). Packaging hence serves as an important source of information in consumers’ decision-making processes (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998; Underwood, 2003; Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006). Past studies show that packaging affects consumers’ responses to and evaluation of the brand (Little & Orth, 2013; McDaniel & Baker, 1977; Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006). Packaging is particularly important for low-involvement products and FMCGs because consumers typically put little effort into selecting or seeking additional information on these types of products (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). FMCG packaging thus frequently represents the product in the eyes of the consumer (Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Silayoi & Speece, 2007), like the Coca-Cola bottle, the Campbell’s soup can, or the Tiffany blue box.

Packaging is, because of its above characteristics, recognized as an important competitive tool (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). FMCG packaging thus frequently represents the product in the eyes of the consumer (Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Silayoi & Speece, 2007), like the Coca-Cola bottle, the Campbell’s soup can, or the Tiffany blue box. Packaging is, because of its above characteristics, recognized as an important competitive tool (Little & Orth, 2013; Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Silayoi & Speece, 2007) that differentiates the brand and strengthens consumers’ brand relationship (Simms & Trott, 2014; Underwood, 2003). This implies that packaging offers an influential context for the communication of marketing messages, such as brand stories.

The message content on FMCG packages is typically information intensive and centred on arguments about the product (van Ooijen, Fransen, Verlegh, & Smit, 2016). In addition to product claims, packages include information related to, for instance, ingredients, nutrition, quality, performance, and use (Schoormans & Robben, 1997). As of recently, many FMCG packages also include brand stories. However, these are typically fact centred and have a rather flat storyline that lacks a dramatic turning point or negatively charged elements. This might be ascribed to companies’ desire to control how consumers perceive the message of the story10 or simply to the lack of space on packages, which might hinder the inclusion of an elaborate story line. The emotional charge of these stories is hence typically low, which entails that they differ significantly from the recommendation of creating more emotional brand stories (c.f. Chapter 2.1.1.2). Consequently, the message content of a typical FMCG ad, which often relies on emotional appeal (Aaker & Norris, 1982), is by nature likely to be different from the message content of a typical FMCG packaging, which relies on facts.

Taken together, packages typically place a heavy emphasis on information and seldom include emotionally charged content. Hence, brand stories on packages typically centre on facts rather than emotions. Consumers are hence expected to perceive emotional brand story content on packages as atypical.

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10 Consumers create personal meaning and draw inferences as a response to stories, especially emotional ones (Deighton & Hoch, 1993). It is therefore more difficult to control exactly how consumers perceive the meaning of a story compared to straightforward facts (Deighton & Hoch, 1993).
2.3.1.3 Price promotions

Price promotion messages differ (1) from typical storied and/or emotionally appealing ads in terms of how the product attributes are framed and (2) from both ads and packages in terms of the weight assigned to the price description. Price promotion messages persuade by exhibiting arguments (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000), much like purely argumentative ads or typical packages. These arguments are usually communicated in a short and information-intensive way. In addition to arguments, price promotions typically assign a significant weight to the price description. This makes price promotions different from ads and packages, which seldom attach similar importance to the price description. Indeed, price information might even be missing altogether from ads and packaging. Price promotions hence offer a high level of utilitarian benefits in terms of arguments related to the product and the price discount (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Consumers are hence assumed to perceive a price promotion message that focuses on the attributes of the object of the price promotion as typical, whereas any type of story content will likely be perceived as atypical for price promotion messages.

The fact that price promotions assign a heavy weight to the price description has implications that do not apply to ads and packages in the normal case. Several studies demonstrate that different presentations of the same price discount amount in a price promotion message affect consumers' evaluations of the promotion's value and, hence, consecutive purchase behaviour (Briesch, 1997; Chandrashekaran, 2004; Kim & Kramer, 2006; Lichtenstein, Burton, & Karson, 1991). The effects of discount presentation are dependent on contextual and situational factors, which means that the same discount presentation might have different effects on purchase in different contexts and situations (Chandrashekaran, 2004; Kim & Kramer, 2006; Lichtenstein, Burton, & Karson, 1991). This implies that different contexts, such as combinations of different price promotion messages and discount presentations, likely influence how a promotion is perceived by consumers. That is, how a price promotion message including a brand story or mental-simulation-formed message is perceived is likely to depend on the price discount presentation and vice versa. This factor is irrelevant for an ad or package that excludes price information. When examining how brand story or mental-simulation-formed messages in price promotions influence consumers' responses, it is hence crucial to account for the effect of discount presentation.

2.3.2 Categorization and typicality

The perceived typicality of a marketing message has been found to mediate the effect of the marketing stimuli on consumer responses (Berg, Söderlund, & Lindström, 2015; Goodstein, 1993). In other words, the perceived level of typicality of a new stimulus, such as an advertising message, has an effect on how the consumer perceives the message and the object of the message. This kind of stimulus categorization theory is most frequently applied to the features of the product (i.e., whether a new unfamiliar product is categorized according to category x or y). However, in this dissertation, this theory is applied to the typicality or categorization of the advertising message format rather than product features.

Consumers classify new stimuli based on similarity to a given stimulus category and exploit this knowledge to build categories, which they use as reference points in subsequent information processing activities (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Category assignment is made by looking at a set of individual features or by assessing the overall fit of the stimulus to one or several salient examples (Cohen & Basu, 1987). The perceived level of typicality of a new stimulus then depends on how well the stimulus fits the target consumer's reference point for the stimulus category in question (Schoormans & Robben, 1997). A typical stimulus is, thus, one that matches the consumer’s expectations for a given stimulus category (Rosch & Mervis, 1975).

Typicality has been shown to lead to several positive emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural consumer responses (Barnes & Ward, 1995; Berg, Söderlund, & Lindström, 2015; Loken &
Ward, 1990; Pipers & Stokmans, 2000; Ward, Bitner, & Barnes, 1992; Winkielman, Halberstadt, Fazendeiro, & Catty, 2006). These positive responses are especially likely in situations where consumers have a low motivation to solve a possible incongruity between category expectations and an atypical stimulus (Loken & Ward, 1990). However, when a stimulus is perceived as atypical in a similar situation, it is likely to elicit less favourable consumer responses (Mandler, 1982). These negative responses may be amplified along with an increase in the perceived level of atypicality (Bloch, 1995; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). A preference for more typical stimuli has been ascribed to three main causes. First, typical stimuli prompt increased processing fluency, and consumers generally prefer more fluently processed stimuli (Winkielman, Halberstadt, Fazendeiro, & Catty, 2006). Second, typical stimuli have been shown to include attributes that are, on average, perceived as favourable and desirable for the category that the stimuli represent (Loken & Ward, 1987; Ward, Bitner, & Barnes, 1992). Third, typical stimuli are perceived as more familiar and are hence preferred (Loken & Ward, 1990).

Studies show that consumers employ categorization to evaluate new objects, especially in situations where they are not motivated enough to look for additional information or compare different options (Heckler & Childers, 1992; Ward & Loken, 1988). Consumers are on average uninterested in actively looking for information on low-involvement FMCGs prior to purchase and allocate modest effort to processing these types of products (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Categorization might be an especially important cognitive process in an FMCG environment because it allows consumers to find and choose a product effortlessly. Similarly, a price promotion decreases consumer’s motivation to process information prior to a purchase decision (Aydinli, Bertini, & Lambrecht, 2014). Consumers might hence be especially prone to use categorization as their dominant information processing strategy when evaluating low-involvement FMCG packages or price promotions.

It may be noted, however, that in situations where consumers specifically seek unique objects or when they are motivated enough to resolve the incongruity created by a new object that does not match the category reference, other processing strategies might override categorization (Heckler & Childers, 1992; Loken & Ward, 1990; Ward & Loken, 1988). This might be the case, for instance, when assessing high-involvement objects for which uniqueness and rarity are valued, such as luxury goods (Dubois & Paternault, 1995). These more complicated processing strategies lead to a feeling of satisfaction and positive affect, given that the incongruity is unravelled (Mandler, 1982).

Nevertheless, in the case of low-involvement FMCG packages and price promotions, consumers are primarily assumed to employ categorization based on the characteristics of FMCGs and price promotions. An emotionally charged brand story or mental simulation message framing on a packaging or a price promotion message is likely to be perceived as atypical based on the characteristics of typical packages and price promotions (c.f. Chapter 2.3.1.2 and 2.3.1.3). That is, packages and price promotions are typically information intensive, focused on delivering product arguments, and have a very low emotional charge (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000; Schoormans & Robben, 1997), whereas a large portion of print and TV ads include emotionally charged brand stories or mental simulations (Aaker & Norris, 1982; Geuens, De Pelsmacker, & Faseur, 2011; Poncin, Pieters, & Ambaye, 2006; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005).

Taken together, it is assumed that (1) an emotionally charged brand story or mental simulation message framing is perceived as atypical for an FMCG packaging and a price promotion message, and (2) perceived atypicality is negatively linked with brand attitude, favourable judgements, and behaviour. Based on these assumptions, consumers may show less positive attitudes and purchase behaviour towards a product when exposed to an FMCG packaging or price promotion message with an emotionally charged brand story or a mental simulation framing, as compared with a typical attribute-based framing (Barnes & Ward, 1995; Berg, Söderlund, & Lindström, 2015).
In the above scenario, typicality assumes the role of a mediator. That is, in a packaging context, the variations in the levels of emotional charge of a brand story on an FMCG package account for variations in the perceived levels of typicality of the message on the package. These variations in the levels of typicality further account for variations in the levels of brand attitude and purchase behaviour. Similarly, in a price promotion context, a mental simulation appeal and a non-mental simulation appeal are assumed to result in different levels of perceived typicality of the price promotion message and these variations are presumed to account for variations in the levels of purchase likelihood. Typicality hence provides an explanation for why the hypothesized effects occur.

In the case of a price promotion message, the effect of an additional variable, the price presentation format, needs to be accounted for. Brand stories and mental simulations generate experiential involvement since they lead the consumer to construct imaginary scenarios, which she experiences as the main character (Escalas, Moore, & Britton, 2004; Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). An experiential discount presentation that is aligned with the experiential nature of the brand story or the mental simulation framing might hence improve the perceived typicality of the price promotion as a whole, as well as the fit between the brand story or the mental simulation appeal and the price discount presentation. An experiential discount framing is in this dissertation defined as one that helps the consumer visualize the consumption situation that follows from paying the indicated price and hence contributes to making the experience more vivid (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). That is, an experiential discount framing focuses on the experience that the consumer gains through the discount – e.g., “enjoy the event with your friend and get 2 tickets for the price of 1” – rather than on the utilitarian, monetary benefit (“get 50% off when you buy 2 tickets”). This kind of an experiential discount framing is likely to reinforce the imaginary scenario suggested by a brand story or a mental simulation appeal and facilitate the consumer’s immersion in the scenario (Escalas, 2004a; Green & Brock, 2000), rather than becoming confused or turned off by the atypicality of the brand story or the mental simulation appeal in the price promotion message stimulus. In turn, becoming mentally involved in the imaginary scenario generates more positive consumer responses (Escalas, 2004a; Green & Brock, 2000; Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993).

In this case, the price presentation format assumes the role of a moderator as it creates boundary conditions that establish the domains of effectiveness of the independent variable, the mental simulation message, relative to the dependent variable, purchase. That is, there is an assumed significant interaction effect between the mental simulation message and the price presentation format. In this scenario, perceived typicality is the assumed explanatory mediator, which specifies why specific effects on purchase occur, while the price presentation format specifies when these effects hold and do not hold.

In the empirical studies covered in this dissertation, perceived typicality hence assumes the role of a mediator. However, on a conceptual level, typicality might assume the role of both a mediator and a moderator, depending on the context and conceptualization. For instance, in an imaginary situation where the focus is on the causal relationship between a brand story in an ad and purchase, typicality could assume the role of a second independent categorical variable represented by two dimensions of an ad in terms of design: a more typical ad versus a less typical ad. In that case, the actual typicality (of the ad design) would have a moderating effect on the dependent variable, provided that it would change the strength or the direction of the relationship between the brand story and purchase. Yet, even in this case, the effect of the typicality (of the ad design) would likely exert its moderating influence on purchase through the mediating variable of perceived typicality level that participants associate with the different ad designs.
3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to present the methodological choices and procedures applied in the empirical studies. The purpose of the doctoral dissertation, to examine consumer responses to different types of brand stories in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages, is addressed in six empirical studies. These studies and their results are reported in three essays. All six studies use an experimental design. The two first experiments reported in Essay 1 aim to answer the first research question: How does a short brand story on FMCG packaging affect consumers’ brand responses? The third and fourth experiments reported in Essay 2 aim to answer the second research question: How does the level of emotional appeal in a brand story on FMCG packaging versus in ads affect consumers’ attitudinal and behavioural brand responses? The two final experiments reported in Essay 3 aim to answer the third research question: How does a brand story in a price promotion message affect consumers’ behavioural brand responses?

Table 4 summarizes the methods and designs used in each study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study design</th>
<th>Storytelling context and object</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Empirical mediators (ME) and moderators (MO)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1: Short brand stories on packaging: An examination of consumer responses (RQ 1)</td>
<td>Packaging FMCG</td>
<td>Online consumer panel</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>Short brand story (present vs. list of arguments)</td>
<td>Narrative transportation Critical thoughts Positive affect Brand attitude Perceived value Purchase intentions Word-of-mouth intentions</td>
<td>Narrative transportation ME Positive affect ME Critical thoughts ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1×2 between-subjects controlled experiment</td>
<td>Packaging FMCG</td>
<td>Student sample in classroom setting</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Short brand story (present vs. absent)</td>
<td>Brand attitude Perceived value Purchase intentions Word-of-mouth intentions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 Mediation analysis excluded from the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.
Next, the choice of research methods and research design are explained and discussed. Detailed descriptions of the methods of each study are reported in the essay manuscripts at the end of the dissertation.

### 3.1 Choice of research methods

The empirical studies conducted and reported in this dissertation employed between-subjects experimental designs\(^{13}\). The first and the second essay consist of two main studies each, conducted as randomized between-subjects controlled experiments. In addition to the main studies, both essays include pilot- and pre-studies conducted as randomized between- or within-subjects controlled experiments, and interviews. The pilot- and pre-studies were included to ensure good experiment quality (Croson, 2002). The third essay consists of two randomized between-subjects field experiments. Experiments were deemed suitable due to the nature of the research questions and hypotheses set in this dissertation, the chosen research philosophy, and the stream of literature that this dissertation aims to contribute to.

Experiments aim to identify causal relationships between the independent and the dependent variable. This is done through three main steps. First, the independent variable is manipulated

\(^{12}\) Credibility excluded from the analysis in the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.

\(^{13}\) A between-subjects design refers in this dissertation to a design that examines differences between groups, not individuals.
in order to create systematic variation in it in terms of different treatments or stimuli (Perdue & Summers, 1986). Next, participants are randomly exposed to different versions of the treatment (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). In the last step, levels of the dependent variable are measured and results between the experiment groups are compared (Perdue & Summers, 1986). Causality may be assumed if statistically significant variations between the experiment groups are observed – given that good procedures were adhered to (Perdue & Summers, 1986). These main steps were followed in all experiments.

Triangulation provides a means to validate the results of a study by using multiple sources of data (data triangulation), utilizing multiple researchers (investigator triangulation), assessing competing/alternative theories or hypotheses (theory triangulation), or applying more than one method of gathering data (methodological triangulation) (Denzin, 1989). The three research questions in this dissertation were each addressed by using multiple sources of data in terms of space and person in accordance with data triangulation (Denzin, 1989). That is, each research question was answered through two studies, each of which utilized different data collection sites and kinds of respondent demographics. The results of the studies supported the same outcomes.

In addition to this type of validity, it is important to consider three other kinds: internal validity, external validity, and construct validity (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). The extent to which a systematic change in the dependent variable can be attributed to the independent variable instead of other, irrelevant sources (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985; Söderlund, 2010) is referred to as internal validity. That is, internal validity signifies the extent to which cause and effect conclusions may be drawn from the results of a study (Lynn & Lynn, 2003). Most threats to internal validity may be avoided through careful treatment design, random assignment of participants into the treatment groups, as well as by applying experiment designs that exclude pilot- and/or pre-tests in the main experiment (Perdue & Summers, 1986; Söderlund, 2010). These prerequisites were fulfilled in all six experiments.

External validity refers to the generalizability of the observed causal relationship beyond the experimental sample and context to other times, places, and people, whereas construct validity relates to the extent to which an instrument measures the theoretical construct it is intended to measure (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985; Lynn & Lynn, 2003). Other validity issues include ecological validity and content validity.

The choice of controlled and field experiments as well as the validity issues concerned with these choices are elaborated further below and in Chapter 3.2.3.

3.1.1 Controlled experiments

A controlled setting was chosen as the context for the four experiments reported in Essay 1 and 2. Controlled experiments were chosen because they allow a more exact manipulation of the independent variables and the stimuli, the measurement and examination of psychological mediating variables, a more precise evaluation of the outcomes, and a more effective minimization of the effect and influence of irrelevant variables that might affect the dependent variable (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). Controlled experiments hence typically enable a high internal validity (Lynn & Lynn, 2003). A controlled setting was also necessary due to the hypotheses set in the essays: the hypotheses involved affective and attitudinal dependent variables in addition to behavioural ones, and affective and attitudinal responses are difficult, if not impossible, to measure in a field setting.

Controlled, or laboratory, experiments are sometimes criticized for their inability to predict events in a real-life setting due to their artificial nature and the effects that this might have on participants’ responses and behaviour. However, a critic of the artificial nature of these experiments overlooks the fact that the aim of experiments is to test a theory – that is, to test if a theory has, in principle, the ability to correctly predict an outcome – not to describe or explore all the nuances and nuanced outcomes of the real world (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). This means that the focus is on the theory’s applicability in a controlled
environment. The main question is: can a behaviour be elicited as a result of a distinct treatment in isolation of extraneous variables? (Söderlund, 2010). It is hence essential to recognize that results gained in the laboratory or in a controlled environment are not automatically replicated in a real-world setting. Nevertheless, if the theory is not confirmed in a controlled setting, it will most probably not have predictive power in reality (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). A more challenging issue in controlled settings relates to the effects that the experiment setting might have on participants. The researcher, participants’ willingness to obey, or for instance, their desire to perform “well” or according to assumed expectations might influence them (Söderlund, 2010). These kinds of concerns are more difficult to tackle per se. However, random assignment ensures that any such participant-related confounds should be equally distributed between the different experiment groups.

3.1.2 Field experiments

A field setting was selected for the experiments conducted in the realm of the third essay since it provides benefits in terms of external and ecological validity over controlled experiments (Croson, 2002). Ecological validity refers to the degree to which the methods, treatments, and settings of a study mimic the real world. The advantage of allowing the experimenter to observe how consumers behave in response to a stimulus in a real-world context has the downside of reduced control over possible external, extraneous effects on the behaviour (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). Some scholars contend that this is, in fact, an advantage compared to controlled experiments, which are restricted by the fact that they remove an event out of its context although events seldom happen in isolation in the real world (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985). Nevertheless, the aim of Essay 3 was such (to examine how mental simulation in price promotions influences actual purchase behaviour) that it called for examination of consumers in real-life situations instead of volunteers in controlled settings (Verhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016). Self-reported attitudes, beliefs, and intentions constitute uncertain predictors of actual behaviour (Lynn & Lynn, 2003). Randomization offered the additional benefit of eluding endogeneity and causality biases as any differences between the groups were controlled for via random assignment (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2015). Endogeneity denotes the self-selection bias, which was avoided by random assignment, as participants (with certain characteristics) were unable to influence their ending up in a certain treatment group. The treatment could hence not be an endogenous factor.

3.2 Experimental research design

Next, procedures related to stimuli development, sampling, data collection, measurements, and questionnaires are elaborated.

3.2.1 Stimuli development

The stimuli used in the six studies were consistent with the purpose of the dissertation: to examine consumer responses to different types of brand stories in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. The stimuli hence consisted of FMCG packages (Essay 1 and Essay 2), FMCG ads (Essay 2), and price promotions (Essay 3).

Three main principles guided the stimuli development. First, the intention was to design as realistic stimuli as possible in order to increase the ecological validity of the studies. That is, to ensure that the stimuli resembled their real-life counterparts as closely as possible and would hence be as authentic and plausible representations of actual objects in the focal categories as possible. To achieve this, a professional advertising and packaging designer was entrusted to design the packaging and advertising stimuli used in the studies conducted in the realm of Essay 1 and 2. In addition, the packaging stimuli in both experiments in Essay 1 and in the first experiment in Essay 2 were based on real packages. That is, the message content was manipulated whereas the rest of the package was left untouched for the most part. E-mail price promotion messages were used as stimuli in the two field experiments in Essay 3. The field
experiments were conducted in cooperation with two companies and e-mail messages were chosen because these companies frequently perform price promotion campaigns via e-mails. The price promotion stimuli were designed by the focal companies’ marketing teams and hence reflected the visual style of their actual e-mail promotions.

Second, the stories portrayed in the stimuli needed to conform with the definitions set in this dissertation for the different story types tested in the experiments (short brand story in Essay 1, more and less emotional brand story in Essay 2, and mental simulation in Essay 3). This means that all brand stories included a plot, causality, temporality, and human-like characters as agents of activity. In addition, the short brand stories contained under 100 words and the more emotional brand stories included a dramatic structure including negatively charged events. The strength of the emotional reactions to the less emotional brand stories were hence weaker than to the more emotional brand stories.

Finally, ecological validity concerns guided the choice of products. Given that brand stories are frequently communicated on FMCG packages, FMCGs were deemed as an appropriate product category to test consumer responses to (short and emotional) brand stories on packaging in Essay 1 and 2. In terms of Essay 3, a magazine and a fair event were chosen as objects because price promotions are a frequently used marketing tactic in these product categories.

To ensure that the stimuli portrayed what was intended (Perdue & Summers, 1986), the manipulations of the stimuli were tested in separately conducted pre-tests (Essay 1 and 2) or reviewed by other experienced researchers and practitioners in the field (Essay 3). These kinds of manipulation checks are recommended in order to ensure that the treatment has the intended effect and hence contributes to the internal validity of an experiment (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmith, 1985).

### 3.2.2 Sampling and data collection

Data were collected in three primary ways: in classroom settings using student samples (Essay 1), through online consumer panels consisting of registered participants (Essay 1 and 2), as well as through actual companies’ marketing databases consisting of real consumers (Essay 3). In addition, most of the studies included several pilot- and/or pre-studies conducted in classrooms with student samples. The three primary sampling and data collection procedures are elaborated below.

Student samples are a form of convenience sample that is frequently utilized in controlled experiments and have, in many respects, become an accepted standard in marketing studies (Söderlund, 2010). Nevertheless, the use of students as respondents is regularly criticized. Critics contend that students are unsuitable because they do not represent the wider population they belong to in terms of, for instance, demographic, socioeconomic, or personality-related matters, or that they do not behave or make decisions similarly to “real consumers” (Croson, 2002; Söderlund, 2010; Wells, 1993). However, students are as real as any consumers are and make decisions accordingly (Croson, 2002). What kinds of consumers the respondent pool consists of should be especially inconsequential in psychological and behavioural experiments focused on differences between groups as these assume that people will in general react in a certain way, regardless of their traits (Söderlund, 2010). Also, the aim of experiments is to test theory, not to create an accurate description of reality (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmith, 1985), and theory is by nature general, which implies that it should be applicable for all kinds of people, including students (Söderlund, 2010). Students were deemed appropriate for the first experiment in Essay 1 and for all pilot- and pre-tests considering that the aim of these experiments was to test if a theory could correctly predict hypothesized outcomes with the focus being on differences between the experiment groups, that is, the relative differences, not absolute levels or effects. The experiments were conducted in classroom settings, where the participants were randomly assigned to receive a piece of paper with a picture of a stimulus and questionnaire items. The stimuli varied according to the number of treatments, but the questionnaire items were the same for all participants. The
advantage with these kinds of controlled experiments is that they allow the researcher to present the same instructions to all participants simultaneously. In addition, the researcher is able to oversee that all respondents answer the questionnaires in the same setting without additional cues. Possible confounds in terms of time and place are hence avoided.

Online consumer panels were used in the second experiment in Essay 1 and in both experiments in Essay 2. In these experiments, the participants were randomly assigned to view a stimulus online, after which responses were collected with an online questionnaire. Panels maintained by YouGov, a market research firm specializing in panel data and online methods, and Aalto Choice Tank (ACT), a behavioural research laboratory administered by Aalto University School of Business, were used. The participants in the experiments conducted with YouGov approximated a nationally representative sample in terms of demographics such as age, gender, education, and income level. The participants in the experiment conducted in cooperation with the ACT panel consisted of students and consumers in various professions. The distribution of age and other demographical factors hence differed from a typical student sample. Online panels that include a more heterogenic sample in terms of demographical factors are advocated over student samples by some researchers because of their ability to offer a more representable sample of the focal population (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Nevertheless, as a drawback, consumer panels include issues related to self-selection, participants’ prior experience (participants are typically experienced respondents, which influences their responses), compensation, and a lack of control over the response circumstances (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Yet, consumer panels have become increasingly popular in marketing-related studies (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014).

Real consumers unaware of their participation in the experiments were used as samples in the two field experiments conducted in the realm of Essay 3. The experiments were conducted in cooperation with two companies using their direct marketing recipient lists. The participants were, unknowingly, randomly assigned to receive one of the stimuli e-mail promotions. The sample thus consisted of consumers deliberately targeted by the companies based on their marketing databases. However, the targeting was not deliberate in the sense that randomization of the groups would have been disturbed. Deliberate targeting may involve selection biases unobservable to the researcher (Fong, Fang, & Luo, 2015). These possible biases have the potential to confound the responses. However, given that the main interest in these studies was in the relative differences between the different experiment groups, not the absolute values, the confounding effects could be minimized by applying random assignment.

3.2.3 Measurements and questionnaire construction

Consumer responses in the four controlled experiments conducted in the realm of Essay 1 and Essay 2 were collected through questionnaires that measured the occurrence of the dependent, mediating, and control variable responses. That is, the participants completed questionnaires by evaluating a set of items after being exposed to a stimulus. In all experiments, the participants could revisit the stimulus at any time during the experiment. The items in the questionnaires were primarily based on established measures used in previous studies. Most measures consisted of multi-item scales including several questions measured mostly using semantic differentials or Likert-type scales. Most of the measured variables are well established and frequently used in marketing-related studies, such as brand attitude, perceived value, purchase intentions, and credibility. However, even for the variables that do not appear as frequently in marketing-related studies, such as narrative transportation, relevant and tested scales existed. In the case of one variable, critical thoughts, a modification of the typical measurement approach was used due to feasibility issues. Critical thoughts are typically measured by asking the participants of a study to write down what they are thinking about while looking at a stimulus (e.g. Escalas, 2004a). As a second step, an independent coder codes the resulting thoughts into different types of arguments. The proportion of negative responses represent the share of critical thoughts (Escalas, 2004a). Critical thoughts were measured in the first experiment of Essay 1. The thought listing exercise was replaced by a four-item scale, namely, by asking the participants to indicate how much they agreed with four claims about
the product on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high). Two of the claims were subjective (“The muesli is delicious” and “The muesli is of high quality”) and the two others were based on company-generated statements included in the packaging text (“The muesli is environmentally friendly” and “The muesli is locally produced”). The scale was reverse coded before analysis. As a result, lower values correspond to lower levels of critical thoughts (greater agreement with the statements on the original scale) whereas higher values correspond to higher levels of critical thoughts (less agreement with the statements on the original scale). This measurement was deemed an appropriate modification of the thought listing exercise. Cronbach’s alpha and factor analysis confirmed that the construct validity and reliability levels were good. This modification of the more frequently used thought listing exercise was used due to feasibility-related reasons. That is, the intention was to keep the questionnaire and completion of it as compact and straightforward as possible in order to guarantee quality responses and to avoid participant fatigue.

The measures used in the four controlled experiments conducted in the realm of Essay 1 and Essay 2 are presented in full in Appendix 3. The sources for the measures mentioned in Appendix 3 are examples of similar studies. For most measures, several other sources, in addition to the mentioned ones, exist.

In addition to using established measures, appropriate statistical tests, such as factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha, were conducted to ensure, for instance, that each multi-item question measured the same underlying construct. That is, to ensure construct validity and reliability.

Construct validity relates to the extent to which an instrument measures the theoretical construct it is intended to measure (Aronson, Brewer, & Carlsmilh, 1985; Lynn & Lynn, 2003). Construct validity was tested through statistical tests in terms of factor analysis in all main studies. In addition, most of the constructs were pilot tested prior to the main experiment14. Based on the factor analysis results, the constructs were either confirmed or modified.

Reliability of the measures were evaluated through Cronbach’s alpha (α), which assesses the internal consistency of the items in a construct (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). All final constructs showed a good or excellent level of internal consistency (see Appendix 3 for exact α-levels).

The dependent variables, mediating variables, and control variables were measured in a random order in all questionnaires. That is, the measures for the variables were not ordered according to the sequence in which the response constructs were expected to occur in order not to steer the participants towards this assumed logic.

In addition to the questions deemed relevant in terms of the studied responses, the questionnaires included filler items in order to confound the respondents as to the aim of the study. As a last step, the questionnaire results were analysed using appropriate quantitative methods, such as t-test, analysis of variance, and planned contrasts analysis.

The two field experiments conducted in the realm of Essay 3 measured consumers’ actual behaviour (purchase versus non-purchase) and hence did not require any additional scales: the dependent variable of purchase likelihood was measured as the share of participants purchasing the price promotion offer advocated in the e-mail stimuli.

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14 A more detailed description of the pilot studies is reported in the essay manuscripts as well as in Chapter 4.
4 SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ESSAYS

The aim of this chapter is to introduce and summarize the three essays and discuss their contributions. The complete essays are included in Appendix 6.

4.1 Essay 1: Short brand stories on packaging: An examination of consumer responses

The purpose of the study was to investigate how consumers’ affective, attitudinal, product value, and behavioural intention responses are affected by packages with short brand stories. The study was set in an FMCG context. The surge of brand stories observed on product packages in practice originally motivated the study. Brand stories are an interesting phenomenon from a marketing perspective due to their influential nature. Indeed, previous studies have demonstrated their persuasive effect in an advertising context (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Escalas, 2004a; Lien & Chen, 2013). However, consumer responses to brand stories on packaging were neglected in past research. Yet, packages differ from ads in significant ways, which indicates that previous findings regarding brand stories on ads may not apply to a packaging setting. Packages differ from ads as marketing contexts in several respects. The two most important distinctions in terms of the purpose of the focal study pertain to the space available for marketing messages and the inclusion of other, compulsory text. The space available for messages on a package is often even more limited than on a print or TV ad due to the size of the package. Other information that is required on FMCG packages by laws and regulations (e.g. nutrition labels and producer information) further reduce the potential length of the story on a package. Brand stories on FMCG packages hence typically must be even shorter than on ads, which also generally require short stories (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). Moreover, the presence of other information may influence how consumers engage in and process the story.

Past empirical storytelling studies have mainly looked at high-involvement goods. Nevertheless, many low-involvement goods communicate brand stories, especially on packaging. Most FMCGs are low-involvement goods (Silayoi & Speece, 2004) and the evaluation and decision-making processes differ for high- versus low-involvement goods (Kotler & Keller, 2006). In summary, existing studies have not examined how consumers respond to brand stories on packages and to very short stories, especially on low-involvement FMCG packages, where the story competes with other product information.

A number of hypotheses pertaining to the purpose of the study were set based on existing literature. The hypotheses are presented in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Experiment 1</th>
<th>Experiment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a: A short brand story on a product package produces a higher level of narrative transportation as opposed to the absence of a story.</td>
<td>H1a supported</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: A short brand story on a product package produces a lower level of critical thoughts as opposed to the absence of a story.</td>
<td>H1b supported</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: A short brand story on a product package produces a higher level of positive affect as opposed to the absence of a story.</td>
<td>H2 supported</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: A short brand story on a product package produces a higher level of brand attitude as opposed to the absence of a story.</td>
<td>H3 supported</td>
<td>H3 supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: A short brand story on a product package produces a higher level of perceived value as opposed to the absence of a story.</td>
<td>H4 supported</td>
<td>H4 supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The hypotheses were tested in two between-subjects experiments. The first experiment (N = 215) compared consumer responses to a muesli package with a short brand story versus the same package with a list of product arguments. Breakfast cereals, which may be likened with muesli, are recognized as low-involvement products (Zaichkowski, 1985). An authentic muesli package including a short brand story (34 words) was used as the stimulus for the story condition. The short brand story conformed to the definition of a short brand story set in this dissertation. The emotional charge of the story, although not the focus, was explicitly tested in a separately conducted pre-test (N = 22), which confirmed that the story was perceived to have a relatively low emotional charge (M = 4.50 on a scale from 1 (little emotional) to 10 (highly emotional)). The list package stimulus was developed using the brand story as a starting point. The content of the story was then converted into separate arguments, and these arguments were organized in a list format (33 words). The stimuli are presented in Appendix 4.

Hypotheses H1a relates to the level of narrative transportation elicited by a product package with a short brand story versus a list of arguments. Past research indicates that story-formed information is especially effective in eliciting narrative transportation (e.g. Escalas 1998; Green & Brock, 2000; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2015). However, narrative transportation is not something exclusively produced by stories. According to Green and Brock (2000), transportation denotes the “processes that occur when a reader encounters a text” (p. 701). This indicates that many other forms of information aside from the story form may produce narrative transportation. For instance, a set of product arguments might provoke autobiographical memories in a consumer. In such a situation, the consumer might portray herself as the protagonist and consequently experience narrative transportation. Given this background, the aim of H1a was to confirm that the packaging with a short brand story does indeed produce a higher level of narrative transportation than the packaging with a list of arguments. As an additional control, the level of narrative transportation evoked by the short brand story treatment was tested against the scale midpoint. A one sample t-test confirmed that the short brand story condition elicited a significantly (p < 0.05) higher level of narrative transportation (M = 5.99, SD = 2.24) than the scale mid-point (5.5).

In addition to examining consumers’ responses to a short brand story on the package, the experiment explored the sequence in which the different consumer responses occur in order to gain insights into how consumers’ process short brand stories on packages. This mediation analysis was excluded from the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.

The results showed that the package with a short brand story produced less critical thoughts as well as higher levels of narrative transportation, positive affect, brand attitude, perceived value, and word-of-mouth intentions than the package with the same information presented as a list of arguments. The short brand story also elicited a higher level of purchase intentions versus the list condition. However, this difference was not significant. Nevertheless, even though the story was short, presented in a setting involving other competing text, and had a relatively low emotional charge, it was able to enhance several consumer responses.

Moreover, the additional mediation analysis, which was excluded from the journal paper, offered indications of the sequence in which the constructs occur. The first mediation model, illustrated in Figure 2 as a x d1 x d2 x d3 x b1/b2, contains six links. (1) A link between the experimental treatment, i.e. the short brand story and narrative transportation (link 1, path a in Figure 2) (Green & Brock, 2000). (2) A link between narrative transportation and positive...
affect (link 2, path d1 in Figure 2) (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). (3) A link between positive affect and brand attitude (link 3, path d2 in Figure 2) (Forgas, 1994; Forgas, 1995). (4) A link between brand attitude and perceived value (link 4, path d3 in Figure 2). Moreover, it was assumed that perceived value is associated with both purchase intentions (link 5, path b1 in Figure 2) (Spears & Singh, 2004) and other behavioural intentions (link 6, path b2 in Figure 2) (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015).

In the second mediation model, illustrated in Figure 2 as a2 x d21 x d22 x d23 x b21/b22, links 1, 4, 5, and 6 are identical to the links in the first model, corresponding to the paths that are labelled a2, d23, b21 and b22 in the second model. In addition, the second mediation model includes a link between narrative transportation and critical thoughts (link 2, path d21 in Figure 2) (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas, 2004a) as well as a link between critical thoughts and brand attitude (link 3, path d22 in Figure 2) (Escalas, 2004a). The link between narrative transportation and critical thoughts is assumed to be negative because narrative transportation diminishes the level of critical thoughts (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Escalas, 2004a).

![Mediation model](image)

**Figure 2  Mediation model**

To address the mediating factors involved in the causal chains in models 1 and 2 in empirical terms, a Preacher-Hayes mediation analysis approach (cf. Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010) was used. Two mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes’ (2013) model six including four mediators.

The first mediation analysis was set to evaluate the links in model 1 (a x d1 x d2 x d3 x b1/b2). The mediation analysis showed that the mean indirect effect of the story to purchase intentions through narrative transportation, positive affect, brand attitude, and perceived value from the bootstrap analysis was positive and significant \((a \times d1 \times d2 \times d3 \times b1 = 0.0669)\) with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero \((0.0117 \text{ to } 0.2080)\). The path to other behavioural intentions was correspondingly positive and significant \((a \times d1 \times d2 \times d3 \times b2 = 0.0715)\) with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero \((0.0102 \text{ to } 0.2331)\).

The second mediation model was employed to examine the mediating effect of critical thoughts in an otherwise equivalent structure \((a2 \times d21 \times d22 \times d23 \times b21/b22)\). In other words, it was of interest to test the assumption that narrative transportation reduces critical thoughts, which in turn leads to a higher level of brand attitude. The mediation analysis indicated that the mean indirect effect of the story on purchase intentions through narrative transportation, critical thoughts, brand attitude, and perceived value from the bootstrap analysis was positive and significant \((a2 \times d21 \times d22 \times d23 \times b21 = 0.0497)\) with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero \((0.0071 \text{ to } 0.1711)\). The path to other behavioural intentions was correspondingly positive and significant \((a2 \times d21 \times d22 \times d23 \times b22 = 0.0672)\) with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero \((0.0117 \text{ to } 0.2326)\). Both mediation models in Figure 2 were hence confirmed.
The second experiment (N = 98) compared consumer responses to a laundry detergent package including a short brand story versus the same package without a story. Laundry detergents are generally regarded as low-involvement products (Hoyer, 1984; Suh & Youjae, 2006). An authentic laundry detergent package including a short brand story (98 words) created by the authors was used as the stimulus for the story condition. The short brand story was designed to resemble the kind of brand stories found on product packages in practice, which implied that the level of emotional charge was modest and the story mainly addresses consumers’ functional needs. In addition, the story conformed to the definition of a short brand story set in this dissertation. The package stimulus without a story corresponded to the actual product package and had no story. The stimuli are presented in Appendix 4.

The results showed that the package with a short brand story produced a higher level of brand attitude, perceived value, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions than the package without a story. Thus, despite the fact that the story was short and presented together with other information, it had a positive impact on consumer responses.

The study extends prior research in three primary ways. First, it advances storytelling and packaging literature by providing empirical evidence on consumer responses to brand stories on packaging. Previous studies have examined consumer responses to stories in ads (e.g., Chang, 2009; Escalas, 2004b; Lien & Chen, 2013; Mattila, 2010; Polyorat, Alden, & Kim, 2007). This study extends these findings to packaging. Most importantly, the study shows that even in a message environment including competing information, the presence of a story has a positive impact on several consumer responses.

Second, previous studies on brand storytelling have examined relatively long stories. This study, in contrast, extends storytelling research by providing evidence explicitly covering the effects of short stories (<100 words). It is indeed impressive that even such a short story can cause consumers to feel transported and lead to several subsequent positive responses.

Finally, the study contributes to storytelling and brand management literature by demonstrating that stories can be effective branding tools for FMCGs. These are often low-involvement products, and such products have been neglected in past research on brand stories.

4.2 Essay 2: Same story, different effect: Consumer responses to brand stories on packages versus advertisements

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of emotional appeal in brand stories on packages versus in ads on consumer responses. The study was set in an FMCG context. The purpose was set with the aim to address three theoretically and managerially relevant issues that have remained unexplored by extant storytelling research. Essay 1 addresses the two first issues: (1) the paucity of research on the effects of storytelling on packaging and (2) lack of studies that examine consumer responses to brand stories about FMCGs. The third issue relates to the emotional charge of the story. Research suggests that a good brand story is emotionally engaging (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Guber, 2007; McKee, 2003; Twitchell, 2004). Many authors stress the significance of embracing a dramatic structure and including negatively charged episodes when aiming to craft an emotionally engaging story (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Escalas, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Guber, 2007; Twitchell, 2004). This typically requires that something bad happens (Guber, 2007; McKee, 2003; Papadatos, 2006; Twitchell, 2004). Yet, few brand stories include negative elements or have a high emotional charge (McKee, 2003), especially on packaging. It is hence of interest to explore the effect of emotional appeal in brand stories on FMCG packages versus ads on consumer responses.

A number of hypotheses pertaining to the purpose of the study were set based on existing literature. The hypotheses are presented in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Experiment 1</th>
<th>Experiment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 6 Essay 2 hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H1: A more (versus less) emotional brand story on FMCG packaging produces a higher (versus lower) level of brand attitude and purchase intentions.  
H1 not supported

H1alt: A more (versus less) emotional brand story on FMCG packaging produces a lower (versus higher) level of brand attitude and purchase intentions.  
H1alt supported

H2: An FMCG packaging with a less (versus more) emotional brand story is perceived as more (versus less) typical and credible\(^{15}\).  
H2 supported

H3: An FMCG ad with a less emotional brand story is perceived as equally typical and credible\(^{15}\) as an FMCG ad with a more emotional brand story.  
H3 supported

H4: A less (versus more) emotional brand story on FMCG packaging (versus advertising) produces a higher level of (a) brand attitude and (b) purchase intentions.  
H4a and b supported in the packaging condition, not supported in the ad condition

H5: In packaging, the negative (versus positive) effect of a more (versus less) emotional brand story on brand attitude and, further, on purchase intentions is mediated by perceived non-typicality (versus typicality) and credibility\(^{15}\) of the story.  
H5 supported

The hypotheses were tested in two between-subjects experiments. The first experiment (N = 208) compared consumer responses to a more emotional brand story on an FMCG package, a muesli product, to a less emotional brand story on the same package. The more emotional brand story was designed to include elements that have been identified by previous research as characteristic for an emotional story. Also, a pre-test (N = 23) confirmed that the two story versions differed significantly in terms of their level of emotional charge and could hence be described as less and more emotional versions of the same story. The brand and package used as stimuli in the experiment was the same as in the first experiment in Essay 1 (Appendix 4). The two different story versions are presented in Appendix 5.

Extant research offers two theories regarding the ways in which consumers might evaluate less versus more emotional brand stories on packaging. These lead to competing, alternative hypotheses about the direction of the effect of emotional brand stories on packaging on consumers’ brand responses. The first theory, grounded in narrative processing theory (Escalas, 2004b; Shank & Abelson, 1995; Pennington & Hastie, 1992), suggests that the story quality and subsequent consumer responses improve along with an increase in the emotional charge of a brand story (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Deighton & Hoch, 1993; Escalas, 1998; Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010). This is described in H1 (Table 6). The second theory is based on the notion of relevancy (Baker & Lutz, 2000; Heckler & Childers, 1992; MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989), which implies that a less emotional brand story on FMCG packaging elicits more positive consumer responses than a more emotional brand story. This is described in H1alt (Table 6).

The results of the first experiment offered support for H1alt by showing that the level of brand attitude and purchase intentions were higher for the respondents exposed to the less emotional story. A follow-up study was conducted in order to gain deeper insight into the reasons behind these results. The follow-up semi-structured interviews (N = 10) indicated that the perceived level of typicality and credibility of the brand story on the package may mediate the effect of the story on consumer responses. That is, an emotional brand story was perceived as more

\(^{15}\) Credibility was excluded from the analysis in the journal paper version in order to condense the scope of the paper.
typical and credible in an ad context versus in a package context, where it was perceived as out of place and non-credible by the interviewees.

The second experiment (N = 158) was designed with a twofold aim. First, the intention was to confirm that the less emotional brand story is, in fact, perceived as more typical and credible than the more emotional brand story in a packaging context (H2) and equally typical and credible in the ad context (H3). Second, the intention was to examine whether the consumer responses to brand stories with different levels of emotional charge are different when the story is communicated on a packaging versus in an ad (H4), as well as to test the implicated mediation relationships (H5). The target low-involvement FMCG was a milk product. A pre-test (N = 31) confirmed that milk is indeed a low-involving product. A fictional brand for organic milk was used in order to avoid potentially confounding effects of differing brand familiarity and attitudes across participants. The less and more emotional brand story versions were designed based on the same premises as in the first experiment and were pre-tested separately (N = 54) to ensure that the perceived levels of emotional charge differed significantly. The stimuli are presented in Appendix 5.

The findings supported H2 by confirming that the less emotional story was perceived as significantly (p < 0.05) more typical (M = 6.76, SD = 1.71) and credible (M = 7.06, SD = 2.05) than the more emotional story (Mtypicality = 5.73, SDtypicality = 2.27; Mcredibility = 6.08, SDcredibility = 2.17) in the packaging condition.

Moreover, and as predicted in H3, the less (Mtypicality = 6.76, SDtypicality = 1.88; Mcredibility = 6.62, SDcredibility = 1.79) and more emotional story (Mtypicality = 6.21, SDtypicality = 2.23; Mcredibility = 6.29, SDcredibility = 2.19) were perceived as equally typical and credible in the ad condition. That is, there was no significant difference (p > 0.10) between the levels of typicality.

Furthermore, the findings showed, in accordance with H4, that the less emotional brand story in the FMCG packaging condition elicited more favourable brand attitude and purchase intention responses than the more emotional brand story. However, in the ad condition, the less and more emotional brand story elicited an equal level of brand attitude and purchase intentions.

Past storytelling research emphasizes the importance of building a dramatic, emotionally appealing story in order to improve story quality and effectiveness (Bruner, 1986; Escalas, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Guber, 2007; Twitchell, 2004). Conditions under which the advantages of a more emotional story over a less emotional one are attenuated or reversed have been scarcely discussed. The findings indicate that the advantages of a more emotional story are reversed in a packaging condition due to message typicality and credibility, which seem to mediate the effect of the story in the packaging condition on consumer responses.

To address the mediating relationships, a Preacher-Hayes mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010) was used (H5 in Figure 3). The mediation analysis showed that the mean indirect effect of the treatment (less vs. more emotional story on packaging) to purchase intentions through typicality, credibility, and brand attitude from the bootstrap analysis was positive and significant (a x d1 x d2 x b = -0.1001) with a 95 % confidence interval excluding zero (-0.3094 to -0.0170). This mediation relation was not significant in the ad condition. H5 was thus supported.

In summary, the mediation relationships resulted in more positive consumer responses to the more typical and credible, less emotional brand story in the packaging condition. Conversely, the more emotional brand story elicited less favourable brand responses due to its less credible, atypical, non-congruent nature in the packaging condition. In the ad condition, the less and more emotional stories were perceived as equally typical and credible and resulted in equal levels of brand attitude and purchase intentions. This means that the advantages of more emotional brand stories, as suggested by extant literature (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Deighton & Hoch, 1993; Escalas, 1998; Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, &
Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010), were not effective in this experiment. The results are illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3  Summary of the results**

The study extends prior research in three primary ways. First, it advances the storytelling and packaging literature by showing that consumers respond differently to more and less emotional brand stories on packages versus in ads. Prior research has neglected to compare the effects of brand stories on packaging versus advertising, although the importance of adjusting the brand story according to medium has been noted by past research (Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2013).

Second, the study adds to storytelling literature by showing that the perceived level of typicality, or fit, of a brand story in a specific context mediates the effect of the story on consumer responses. A more emotional story is perceived as atypical for a low-involvement FMCG package and is hence evaluated less favourably than a package with a less emotional story. The same does not apply in an ad condition. This implies that the same brand story can be perceived as both typical and atypical depending on the context. Consequently, the benefits elicited by a brand story may be lost if the perceived fit between the story and the medium is low.

Third, the study widens the application context of previous storytelling studies by examining low-involvement FMCGs and implies that the findings from studies conducted on high-involvement goods might not be applicable in an FMCG setting. Typicality and credibility were found to mediate the effects of the story in the packaging condition on attitudes and behavioural intentions. This mediating relationship may have emerged due to qualities that are distinctive for low-involvement FMCGs, such as low information processing motivation (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Consumers make decisions for high-involvement products more carefully in terms of information processing (Hoyer, 1984). Typicality might hence not have a

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Type</th>
<th>Packaging</th>
<th>Ad</th>
<th>Packaging</th>
<th>Ad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typicality</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Attitude</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intentions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

▲ indicates that the value of the response variable is positively influenced
▲ indicates that the value of the response variable is negatively influenced

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$^a p > 0.10$
4.3 Essay 3: Does mental simulation increase the effectiveness of a price promotion?

The purpose of the study was to examine how mental simulation appeals in price promotion messages influence consumers’ purchase rates and whether price discount presentation formats and depths moderate, or serve as boundary conditions for the effect of mental simulation. Mental simulations are types of brand stories. That is, they are marketer-evoked brand stories with the distinctive feature that the consumer herself is the main character.

Mental simulation is a marketing tactic frequently used by advertising practitioners, and past advertising studies show that mental simulation is an effective tool for persuasion (e.g., Chang, 2010; Elder & Krishna, 2012; Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007). However, the effectiveness of mental simulation in the context of price promotions remains unexplored. Because ads and price promotions differ in several respects, it is not evident that mental simulation has the same effects when applied to a price promotion message. Shedding light on the conditions under which mental simulation may be successfully used in price promotions is therefore of interest.

Two hypotheses pertaining to the purpose of the study were set based on existing literature. The hypotheses are presented in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Experiment 1</th>
<th>Experiment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: (main effect of mental simulation appeal): A mental simulation appeal ...</td>
<td>H1 supported</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: (interaction effect of discount presentation and mental simulation on purchase): An experiential price presentation positively moderates the effect of mental simulation appeal in a price promotion message on consumers’ purchase likelihood.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>H2 supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis H1 is based on the assumption that typicality mediates the effect of the mental simulation appeal on purchase. That is, a mental simulation appeal and a product attribute appeal are assumed to result in different levels of perceived typicality of the price promotion message and these variations are presumed to account for variations in the levels of purchase likelihood. Specifically, the mental simulation appeal is assumed to be perceived as less typical and hence induce a lower level of purchase likelihood. Typicality hence provides an explanation, although not an empirically tested and confirmed one, for why the hypothesized effects occur.

Hypothesis H2 is based on the assumption that the main effect of mental simulation in price promotion messages on purchase likelihood may be moderated by the price presentation format. In this scenario, typicality is assumed to be the explanatory mediator, while the price presentation format specifies when the effects on purchase likelihood prevail and when they may be mitigated or reversed.

The hypotheses were tested in two large-scale randomized field experiments. The first experiment (N = 68,374) tested the presence of a main effect of a mental simulation appeal (present versus absent) in a price promotion message on consumers’ purchase likelihood (H1). The object was a magazine that frequently promotes its products through price promotion messages. The price promotion was presented in the same way in both treatment conditions: “3 months magazines for 0 € (when subscribing 5 months)”. In the mental simulation present condition, the message encouraged the recipients to imagine themselves sitting on a sofa and
enjoying the magazine and its topics (37 words). In the condition where mental simulation appeal was absent, the message presented the same attributes related to the magazine’s topics as a list of product attributes (40 words). The exact stimuli e-mails cannot be reproduced here due to the cooperating magazine’s anonymity appeal.

The second experiment (N = 14,196) examined the interaction effect of discount presentation (typical versus experiential), discount depth (deep versus moderate), and mental simulation appeal (present versus absent) on purchase (H2). The object was a fair event, the Boat Show. The convention centre that organizes the fair frequently uses price promotion messages as a marketing tool. In the mental simulation conditions, the recipients were encouraged to imagine themselves visiting the Boat Show and enjoying the different activities and stands (95 words). In the conditions without mental simulation, the same activities and stands were mentioned, but without the request to imagine themselves at the show (79 words). The typical discount presentation was operationalized as “get X % off the regular price when buying 2 tickets”, whereas the experiential discount presentation was operationalized as “bring your friend with you to the fair and get X tickets for the price of 1”. The deep and moderate discount depths were operationalized as 50% and 25% off. The exact stimuli e-mails cannot be reproduced here due to the cooperating magazine’s anonymity appeal.

The results of the first experiment showed that mental simulation significantly decreases consumer purchases. However, the second experiment showed that when paired with an experiential discount presentation versus a utilitarian discount presentation, a mental simulation appeal in the price promotion message increases purchase likelihood. This was evident in the case of both moderate and deep discounts.

The findings offer three contributions to research. First, the study contributes to storytelling literature by showing that mental simulation can, when paired with a congruent experiential discount presentation, be used as a persuasive tool in price promotions. Past studies conducted in controlled settings show that ads that encourage mental simulation have the potential to elicit narrative transportation, which leads to increased purchase intentions (Chang, 2010; Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007). The study provides evidence of the conditions under which mental simulation appeals in price promotions may increase (versus decrease) purchases by using data from the field and showing a causal impact.

Moreover, while past studies on price promotions have primarily looked at the effects of discount presentation (e.g., Briesch, 1997; Chen, Marmorstein, Tsiros, & Rao, 2012; DelVecchio, Krishnan, & Smith, 2007; Kim & Kramer, 2006), the interaction effect with the message framing has been overlooked. The study increases the understanding of the dynamics of price promotions by demonstrating the relevance of both discount presentation and message framing in predicting consumer responses. The study shows that the congruency, or interaction effect, of message framing and discount presentation is crucial in determining the effectiveness of a price promotion.

Finally, past studies have primarily examined consumer responses to brand stories in controlled settings. This study, however, provides evidence on the effectiveness of mental simulations, which are processed similarly as stories, in a field setting. This advances the storytelling literature and makes an empirical contribution to it.

The findings of Essay 3 complement the findings of Essays 1 and 2 in terms of factors that affect the superiority of stories in comparison to argument-based communication. Essay 1 shows that short stories have the potential to be effective in eliciting positive consumer responses in comparison to argument-based communication. Essay 2 shows that a higher level of emotional appeal in stories does not always result in more positive consumer responses than a lower level of emotional appeal.
5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this chapter is to summarize the findings, contributions, and implications of this dissertation as well as to discuss its limitations and give suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary and consolidation of the findings

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine consumer responses to different types of brand stories in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. To fulfill this purpose, three research questions were set. These questions were addressed in three essays and six empirical studies. The main findings in terms of the research questions are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 Summary of the main findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer responses</th>
<th>Type of story</th>
<th>Short brand story (RQ 1)</th>
<th>More emotional brand story (RQ 2)</th>
<th>Less emotional brand story (RQ 2)</th>
<th>Mental simulation (RQ 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Packaging (RQ 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Induces an increased level of: Positive affect Brand attitude Perceived value Purchase and word-of-mouth intentions A decreased level of: Critical thoughts</td>
<td>Induces a decreased level of: Brand attitude Purchase intentions</td>
<td>Induces an increased level of: Brand attitude Purchase intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad (RQ 2)</td>
<td>Induces an equal level of: Brand attitude Purchase intentions</td>
<td>Induces an equal level of: Brand attitude Purchase intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increases purchase likelihood when paired with an experiential discount presentation Decreases purchase likelihood when paired with a typical discount presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price promotion (RQ 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Next, the main findings are discussed in more detail in relation to the three research questions.

5.1.1 Short brand stories on FMCG packaging

The first research question, “How does a short brand story on FMCG packaging affect consumers’ attitudinal and behavioural brand responses?” was examined in Essay 1. The findings showed that a short brand story on an FMCG package produces fewer critical thoughts as well as a higher level of narrative transportation, positive affect, brand attitude, perceived value, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions in comparison to the absence of a story. That is, a short brand story on FMCG packaging affects consumers’ brand responses in
a positive way. The findings are interesting and novel because they were obtained with very short stories (98 and 34 words), which were portrayed in a setting involving other competing text, such as ingredients lists, producer information, usage guides, and recipes.

In addition to the individual responses, the findings offer indications of the sequence in which the response constructs occur in response to a short brand story. As a first response, a short brand story evokes narrative transportation. This is in line with previous findings from studies conducted in an advertising context with longer stories (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Ching, Tong, Chen, & Chen, 2013; Escalas, 2004b). In the next step, narrative transportation appears to both increase the level of positive affect and reduce the level of critical thoughts. This is consistent with previous transportation studies, which indicate that transported consumers hold more story-consistent beliefs and evaluate story objects more positively (Escalas, 2004a; Green & Brock, 2000). However, these results have been obtained with longer stories and in the absence of competing information. Both an increase in positive affect and a reduced level of critical thoughts seem to lead to a higher level of brand attitude and thus a higher level of perceived value. Both the direct link between a story and brand attitude, as well as the mediation chain from a story through narrative transportation and positive affect to brand attitude, have been shown in previous studies conducted in other contexts, with longer stories, and in the absence of competing information (e.g., Escalas, 2004a and 2004b; Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2013). The occurrence of increased perceived value as a response to a short story, mediated through narrative transportation, positive affect, and brand attitude, is a novel finding. In the last step, the short brand story seems to have a significant indirect effect on both purchase and word-of-mouth intentions through narrative transportation, positive affect, brand attitude, and perceived value.

5.1.2 Emotional appeal in brand stories on FMCG packaging versus ads

The second research question, “How does the level of emotional appeal in a brand story on FMCG packaging versus in ads affect consumers’ attitudinal and behavioural brand responses?” was examined in Essay 2. The findings showed that brand stories with different levels of emotional charge are perceived differently on packaging versus in ads. A less emotional brand story on an FMCG package elicits more favourable attitudinal and behavioural responses than a more emotional brand story, whereas the effects are equal in an ad condition.

In addition, the findings provide indication of the mediators that cause these results. Message typicality and credibility mediated the effect of the story in the packaging condition on consumer responses. That is, in the packaging condition, the less emotional story was perceived as more typical and credible than the emotional story. This resulted in more positive consumer responses to the more typical and credible, less emotional brand story. Conversely, the more emotional brand story elicited less favourable brand responses due to its less credible, atypical, non-congruent nature in the packaging condition. In the ad condition, the less and more emotional stories were perceived as equally typical and credible. In summary, in contradiction to extant literature (e.g., Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Söderlund & Dahlèn, 2010), the studies showed that an increase in the emotional charge of a story does not have a positive impact on consumers’ responses in all contexts.

5.1.3 Mental simulation brand stories in price promotions

The final research question, “How does a brand story in a price promotion message affect consumers’ behavioural brand responses?” was examined in Essay 3. The brand stories took the form of mental simulations in the studies. The results showed that brand stories have the ability to increase purchase likelihood when paired with a congruent, experiential discount presentation (such as “bring your friend with you and get 2 tickets for the price of 1”) rather than with a typical, utilitarian presentation (such as “get 50% off when you buy 2 tickets”). That
is, when paired with a congruent price presentation, brand stories increase the purchase likelihood of a price promotion. However, conversely, when a brand story is paired with a typical, utilitarian price presentation format (such as a percent-off presentation) it decreases consumers’ purchase likelihood of a promotion. This pattern is evident on both moderate and deep discount levels.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine consumer responses to different types of brand stories in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. To fulfil this purpose, three research questions were set based on five research problems.

The theoretical contributions of this dissertation to storytelling and additional streams of research are discussed below. The contributions are organized into six themes. The first five themes are based on the research problems identified in Chapter 1.1, i.e. packaging and price promotions as brand story contexts, brand story types in terms of short, emotional, and mental simulation brand stories as well as brand stories about FMCGs. The price promotion context and mental simulation brand story type are discussed under the same theme (5.2.2). The remaining themes are discussed separately. The sixth theme considers contributions linked to the mediating role of typicality. The theoretical contributions are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9 Summary of the theoretical contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Theoretical contributions</th>
<th>Based on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer responses to brand stories on packaging (5.2.1)</td>
<td>Extends storytelling and packaging literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of brand stories in a theoretically meaningful, novel context, packaging. Brand stories on packaging have the ability to positively influence several consumer responses. This contribution adds to existing research as the effects of brand stories on packaging on consumer responses have not been examined by previous research. This contribution is relevant since packages differ from conventional advertising media, which has been the focus of past research, in key respects. Central differences include the framing and length of the message, the inclusion of other, mandatory product information on packages, and the circumstances in which the information is consumed.</td>
<td>Essay 1 and 2 findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer responses to mental simulation brand stories in price promotions (5.2.2)</td>
<td>Extends storytelling, mental simulation, and pricing literature by examining the effectiveness of mental simulation appeals in a new context, price promotion messages, and by identifying conditions under which consumers respond positively to a mental simulation framing in this context. Mental simulations influence the effectiveness of price promotions by significantly (1) decreasing consumers’ purchase likelihood when paired with a typical discount presentation. (2) increasing consumers’ purchase likelihood when paired with an experiential discount presentation. Offers an empirical contribution by examining how consumers behave in response to a mental simulation stimulus in a real-world context versus a controlled/laboratory environment.</td>
<td>Essay 3 findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer responses to short brand stories (5.2.3)</td>
<td>Extends storytelling theory by examining a new story type, short brand stories (&lt; 100 words). Short brand stories have the ability to influence several consumer responses positively through the same mechanisms as longer stories. This is a relevant extension of theory, as many brand stories are indeed short. Previous research has not examined whether the same psychological processes (narrative processing) are activated for short brand stories as for longer ones and thereby lead to positive brand responses.</td>
<td>Essay 1 findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Brand stories on packaging</td>
<td>This dissertation extends storytelling and packaging literature by providing empirical evidence on consumer responses to brand stories on packaging. Previous studies have shown that storied ads and messages have the ability to elicit more positive consumer responses than argumentative ads and messages (e.g., Chang, 2009; Escalas, 2004b; Lien &amp; Chen, 2013; Mattila, 2010; Polyorat, Alden, &amp; Kim, 2007). This dissertation extends the extant findings to packaging by examining authentic packaging stimuli rather than comparing isolated argument lists with isolated story conditions. That is, the story and the arguments were added to existing information on a package. By law, many products, particularly in the FMCG category, have to include a predefined set of information on the packaging, such as producer information, ingredients lists, usage guides, as well as measurements and dates. This type of additional information is often excluded from ads. Consumers are consequently confronted with more information on a package than in an ad, and this additional information may not be inherently interesting from the consumer’s point of view. These circumstances could reduce the impact of a story. However, the findings of this dissertation show that even in a relatively cluttered message environment alongside mandatory information, the presence of the right type of story may have a positive impact on several consumer responses. In addition, this dissertation is, to my knowledge, the first to directly compare the effects of brand stories on packaging versus ads, although the importance of adjusting the brand story to the context has been noted by past research (Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, &amp; Wetzel, 2013) and even though brand stories are frequently communicated on packaging in practice. This dissertation hence advances storytelling literature by demonstrating that there is a need to tailor the brand story to the context in order to reach maximal effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>Mental simulation brand stories in price promotions</td>
<td>This dissertation adds to storytelling and pricing literature by showing that mental simulations can, when paired with a congruent, experiential discount presentation, be used as a persuasive tool in price promotions. Past studies conducted in controlled settings show that mental simulation in advertising messages may elicit narrative transportation, which leads to increased purchase intentions (Chang, 2010; Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007). This dissertation provides evidence of the conditions under which mental simulation appeals in price...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 The mediation relationship was not empirically verified in the price promotion context.
promotions may increase (versus decrease) purchases, by using real data from the field and showing a causal impact. The dissertation hence also offers an empirical contribution in terms of using a field setting.

Moreover, this dissertation contributes to storytelling and pricing literature by increasing the understanding of the dynamics of price promotions. The findings demonstrate that the interaction effect of a price promotion message framing and a discount presentation is crucial in determining the effectiveness of a price promotion. That is, the message framing and discount presentation need to be congruent to produce positive consumer responses. Past price promotions studies have primarily looked at the effects of discount presentation (e.g., Briesch, 1997; Chen, Marmorstein, Tsiros, & Rao, 2012; DelVecchio, Krishnan, & Smith, 2007; Kim & Kramer, 2006) while overlooking this interaction effect with the message framing.

### 5.2.3 Short brand stories

Previous studies on brand storytelling have examined relatively long stories. This dissertation extends storytelling research by demonstrating that even very short brand stories (< 100 words) may positively influence consumer responses through the same mechanisms as longer stories or novels. It is indeed impressive that a story with as few as 34 words (Essay 1, experiment 1) can cause consumers to feel transported and lead to several subsequent positive affective, attitudinal, and behavioural intention responses.

### 5.2.4 Emotional brand stories

This dissertation contrasts existing storytelling theory by showing that emotionally appealing stories do not always have an advantage over less emotional stories in terms of persuasive effects, as suggested by previous literature (e.g., Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). Indeed, the empirical studies indicate that less emotional stories produce more positive consumer responses than more emotional stories in an FMCG packaging context. This contributes to packaging literature by extending the understanding of what type of appeals are effective on FMCG packaging.

More emotional brand stories might not be superior to less emotional brand stories even in an advertising context. The empirical studies showed that the more emotional brand story was as effective as the less emotional story in producing positive consumer responses in this context.

These findings are interesting given the extant storytelling literature that emphasizes the importance of crafting emotionally appealing stories that include deteriorating episodes, a dramatic turning point, or negatively charged elements (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010; Woodside, 2010). However, according to the findings of this dissertation, these kinds of elements do not necessarily produce desired consumer responses in all contexts, especially on packaging. A dramatically loaded turning point or a radical exacerbation of events might hence not be indispensable in a brand-building context.

Moreover, this dissertation contributes by showing that there is a gap between storytelling theory and practice. The real-life brand stories used in this dissertation (as stimuli in several experiments, pre- studies, and follow-up studies, as well as in the length calculation exercise of brand stories on packages (Appendix 2)) indicate that practitioners seldom apply recommendations from storytelling theory in their marketing activities. More specifically, brand stories on packaging typically lack a strong emotional element, are relatively unexciting, and scarcely include negative aspects. They rely on information and facts about the product or brand and are perpetually positively charged. These kinds of stories may be suitable for a packaging context, as indicated by the results of the dissertation, but in advertisements, they may not produce the most positive consumer responses.
5.2.5 Brand stories about FMCGs

This dissertation widens the application context of previous storytelling studies by demonstrating that stories about low-involvement FMCGs have the ability to elicit several positive consumer responses. The study also extends the brand management literature by demonstrating that brand stories can be effective branding tools for FMCGs.

This contribution is interesting because low-involvement FMCG products have been neglected in past research on brand stories although FMCG brands frequently apply brand stories in their marketing communication.

5.2.6 Effect of typicality on consumer responses

This dissertation contributes to storytelling literature by increasing the understanding of how and why consumers respond to brand stories the way they do in a packaging and price promotion context. The findings show that consumer responses to brand stories on packaging are mediated by the perceived level of typicality of a story in a specific context vis-à-vis the context category reference point. That is, the perceived fit between the story and the context influences consumers’ brand responses.

Categorization theory is most frequently applied to the features of the product (i.e., whether a new unfamiliar product is categorized according to category x or y). However, this dissertation employs a somewhat new application of the theory in that this theory is applied to the typicality or categorization of the advertising message format rather than product features.

Lin and Chen (2015) compared the effects of a typical and an atypical brand story in an experiment that included two versions of the same product’s brand story: a typical and an atypical one. The story stimuli were presented in written form on paper. A typical brand story was operationalized as one that matches consumers’ expectations for a brand story and an atypical brand story as one that does “not match the expectations of consumers” (Lin & Chen, 2015, p. 693). The study showed that the level of brand story typicality has an effect on consumers’ product evaluations (Lin & Chen, 2015). However, the results of this dissertation show that the level of typicality of a brand story depends on the context in which the story is transmitted — there is, in this sense, no absolute typicality scale for brand stories. In other words, the same story can be perceived as both typical and atypical depending on the context. Consequently, the benefits elicited by a brand story may be lost if the perceived fit between the story and the medium is low. As demonstrated in the empirical studies, different types of stories are perceived as typical in a packaging versus an ad context. The same seems to apply to price promotions, although typicality and its mediating effect was not empirically measured.

Moreover, this dissertation identifies conditions under which stories might have negative effects on consumers’ responses. This is an important contribution because the potential negative effects of stories have been scarcely discussed by previous research. Most studies attest to the persuasiveness of stories (e.g., Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Chang, 2009; Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989; Escalas, 2004a; Lien & Chen, 2013) while adverse effects have received limited attention. This dissertation shows that brand stories may indeed have negative effects under certain boundary conditions. More specifically, an emotional brand story may induce negative consumer responses when communicated on a package due to the mediating effect of typicality. Stories may also have a negative impact in a price promotion context when paired with an incongruent discount presentation due to the moderating effect of the price presentation format.

Finally, typicality was found to mediate the effects of the story on consumer responses in an FMCG packaging context. However, this mediation effect might not be significant for high-involvement product packages. Research shows that consumers employ categorization to evaluate the typicality of new objects, especially in situations where they are not motivated enough to look for additional information or compare different options (Heckler & Childers, 1992; Ward & Loken, 1988). Consumers generally have a low level of motivation to process
information on FMCGs (Kotler & Keller, 2006), whereas they make decisions more carefully for high-involvement products (Hoyer, 1984). This indicates that typicality might not have a similar mediation effect on consumers’ information processing strategies in the case of high-involvement goods.

5.3 Implications to business practice

The dissertation offers several implications to business practice. First, communicating brand stories on product packaging may be worthwhile. Managers may be pleased to learn that relatively unexciting and emotionally moderately unengaging brand stories on packaging have the potential to produce the most positive consumer responses. Indeed, the positive consumer responses observed in the empirical studies were produced by relatively unexciting brand stories with a low emotional charge. Firms might hence not need to construct advanced, exceptionally emotional stories in order to enjoy the benefits of stories. This also implies that the type of stories that many companies currently place on their packages have the potential to enhance consumers’ brand responses. This may be encouraging for marketers who are not seasoned storytellers.

However, it is important to point out that this dissertation did not account for possible issues pertaining to the typical placement of the story on the backside of the package (see continued discussion in Chapter 5.4). Based on consumers’ purchase behaviour for low-involvement goods (Kotler & Keller, 2006) (i.e. consumers do not pay much attention to detailed texts on packages of low-involvement goods when shopping in supermarkets, for example), it might be advantageous to introduce or refer to the story in some way on the front side of the package. Depending on package size, story length, and other design criteria, the entire story or parts of it could be placed on the front side. Alternatively, a teaser could be integrated on the front in order to catch consumers’ interest and make them want to read more on the back.

Second, packaging might be an especially influential story submission context for FMCGs or low-involvement products because consumers typically put little effort into selecting or seeking additional information on these types of products, which means that the importance of point-of-purchase marketing efforts, such as packaging, become substantial (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). Indeed, the findings showed that an FMCG package with a less emotional story elicited a higher level of brand attitude and purchase intentions as opposed to a less or more emotional story on an ad for the same product. This is in line with past research that suggests that packaging is an effective communication context for FMCGs (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998).

Third, marketers should consider using short brand stories in situations where the transmission of longer stories might not be possible or called for. This is good news for marketers considering the limited space available in many marketing contexts as well as today’s cluttered message environment and consumers’ shortened attention span that calls for short and concise messages. However, given that the findings imply that there are limits to the effects a short story can produce, managers are encouraged to boost the impact of short stories in other channels and contexts. For example, the impact of messages embedded in stories may be increased if stories are integrated with other communication activities or if they are further elaborated in other contexts.

Fourth, this dissertation offers guidance as to how marketers should design and communicate packaging, price promotion, and ad stories. Based on the findings, it may be advisable to tailor separate stories for each context to reach maximal effectiveness. More specifically, packages and price promotions seem to benefit from more fact-based stories with a lower level of emotional charge, whereas both less and more emotional stories might be suitable for ads. This notion is highly relevant as many brands communicate brand stories in several contexts, but seldom craft personalized stories for them. Communicating a brand story through multiple
contexts simultaneously may be relevant in order to achieve expected campaign effectiveness and consumer responses in today’s marketing environment (Burton & Garretson, 2005).

Fifth, the results demonstrate that brand stories in the form of mental simulations may be used to increase consumer purchases of price promotion offers. However, in order to enjoy this positive outcome, managers should be careful to pair mental simulation with the correct type of discount presentation as mental simulation can either significantly increase or decrease the purchase rate depending on discount presentation. It is hence crucial to consider the promotional content as a whole to ensure the fit between message framing and discount presentation. That is, mental simulation appeals should be paired with an experiential discount presentation. A typical, utilitarian discount presentation (e.g., percent off) should, on the other hand, be coupled with a traditional, non-mental simulation message.

Furthermore, mental simulation may enable offering additional benefits to consumers. The most successful sales promotions offer both utilitarian and hedonic benefits to the customer (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Focusing purely on utilitarian, monetary incentives might be appropriate when aiming for a short-term sales boost. However, as a downside, this may have a negative impact on future sales or, at worst, damage brand equity (Blattberg, Briesch, & Fox, 1995; DelVecchio, Krishnan, & Smith, 2007). However, offering a combination of utilitarian and hedonic benefits may add customer value and create longer-term advantages (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Stories are experiential in nature. Depending on the story, this might mean that the receivers of the story identify with the story’s character or imagine a positive consumption experience. When identifying with a story character, consumers experience emotional reactions (Boller & Olson, 1991; Escalas, Moore, & Britton, 2004) and when imagining a positive consumption experience, consumers feel good and may even get a chance to “escape from the pressures of daily life” (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995, p. 283). Stories may hence be a tool to create hedonic benefits (Mossberg, 2008). Promotions that trigger experiential emotions offer hedonic consumer benefits (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Adding a brand story to a price promotion message might hence provide hedonic consumer benefits in addition to the utilitarian benefit provided by the price discount. The company might hence gain both short- and longer-term advantages. This might be difficult to achieve through, for instance, advertising, which typically enables long-term benefits, but rarely offers a short-term payback in terms of campaign spending (Blattberg, Briesch, & Fox, 1995).

Moreover, as a general recommendation, managers should consider using randomized field experiments or tests, of the kind utilized in this dissertation, to identify the optimal combinations of price promotion messages and price presentation formats for their brands. Randomized field experiments are also recommended when launching a new story or a new way to communicate an existing story.

Finally, this dissertation offers guidance as to the use of brand stories in the context of low-involvement goods. This is relevant for business practice as marketers are constantly looking for ways to differentiate their low-involvement offerings from competition to gain advantages beyond low prices. Leveraging a brand story through packaging might be an effective way to strengthen consumer’s positive brand responses in a low-involvement context, where the role of packaging as a marketing communication vehicle is particularly important (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Nancarrow, Wright, & Brace, 1998; Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Underwood & Ozanne, 1998).

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The findings of this dissertation should be interpreted considering a number of limitations. These limitations along with avenues for further research are discussed below.

The first limitation pertains to the controlled setting used in the studies in Essay 1 and 2. The participants were exposed to photos of packages and ads, rather than real packages and ads, in
a classroom or online setting. This creates some differences from a situation in which a consumer is examining a package on the floor of the store or viewing an ad while browsing through a magazine. That is, the results provide information on how consumers respond to the brand stories in the focal contexts when they are made aware of the stories, but cannot estimate whether or not consumers would be more likely to pick up the product in store or notice the ad in a magazine and read the story. Future research should therefore attempt to employ field experiments to further explore the effects of stories on packaging and in ads.

A second, interlinked limitation relates to the placement of the story on the package. In practice, most stories on FMCG packages are placed on the backside of the package and packages are generally placed on a shelf with the front side facing the consumer. This indicates that the consumers visiting the store would need to pick up the product from the shelf in order to see the story. This fact further decreases the likelihood of the story having an impact on the consumer prior to purchase, given consumers' purchase behaviour for low-involvement goods (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Companies might attempt to tackle this issue by means of design (see elaboration in Chapter 5.3). On the other hand, consumers are typically exposed to FMCGs, such as detergent and muesli packages, for relatively long time periods post-purchase. This indicates that consumers have the possibility to read a story placed on a package several times during this period. This exposure might then have an impact on future purchase decisions. Nevertheless, future research should undertake field experiments to gain insights into the impact of brand stories on packages on consumers' decision-making processes in an in-store environment as well as to examine the longer-term effects of exposure to brand stories on packages at home.

A third limitation relates to the field setting used in the studies in Essay 3. The studies provide causal evidence on the effects of mental simulation and discount presentation on consumer purchases. The results are explained using categorization (Rosch & Mervis, 1975) and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) theories. However, the occurrence of these information processing strategies as the underlying mechanisms would need to be confirmed through controlled experiments. Furthermore, while the field experiment methodology offers the advantage of enhanced external and ecological validity by capturing actual consumers' purchase behaviour, it has the potential downside of decreased internal validity due to the absence of control over external circumstances (Deighton, Romer, & Mcqueen, 1989), such as exposure to other marketing efforts for the studied brands before, during, or after receiving the promotional e-mails.

Fourth, consumer responses to brand stories on packaging were examined using products from three different low-involvement FMCG product categories (Essay 1 and 2). Future studies should be conducted with other types of low-involvement FMCGs in order to build generalizability, as well as with products capable of evoking different levels of involvement. Consumers’ decision-making processes vary depending on the level of product involvement (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Similar findings might hence not be applicable to, for instance, high-involvement product packages. Moreover, the studies conducted in the price promotion context were limited to two product categories. Future research may explore the effects in product categories other than those presently studied.

Fifth, consumer responses to three different types of brand stories were examined in this dissertation: short brand stories, brand stories with different levels of emotional charge, and mental simulations as brand stories. Nevertheless, there are many different stories and many different ways of telling stories. Further studies should therefore examine different types of stories and their impact on consumers in terms of brand responses. One such story type is a story that includes negative elements. Negative story elements have been shown to elicit strong emotional reactions (e.g., Feldman & Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Nell, 2002; Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010). Yet, the application contexts of such stories in terms of positive consumer responses are scarcely studied.
Sixth, the studies in this dissertation examined products from categories in which brand stories are rarely included on packages. Yet, many brands in certain FMCG categories, such as beer and ice cream, regularly communicate stories on packages. The possible effect of the frequency with which stories appear on the packaging in a focal category was not accounted for in this dissertation. One possible consequence is that a surge of stories on packages might make consumers become accustomed to stories, and their novelty value might wear off. The increased number of stories on packages might also influence how consumers perceive stories. That is, as consumers become more accustomed to reading stories on packages in general and different kinds of stories in specific, their category reference points for a typical packaging will likely evolve (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). This might make consumers perceive a wider array of stories as typical for packages and hence produce a demand for different kinds of stories. In this scenario, the form and content of the story may become more important in drawing attention to the story and the brand. This would in turn seem to call for more sophisticated storytelling. These types of possible implications should be explicitly examined by future research.

In addition, this dissertation showed that consumer responses do not vary based solely on the type of story, but also depending on the context, and the fit between the context and the story type. Future studies should hence include a comparison of different contexts.

Moreover, few studies explicitly examine conditions that result in negative story effects. Such studies would offer valuable insights into both theory and business practice.

Finally, the focal study looked at the influence of specific mediators chosen based on extant literature and a pre-study study (Essay 2). However, future studies should look at additional possible mediators or moderators, such as individual-level traits or situational mindsets in terms of, for example, consumer’s emotions, motivations, and goals (Roy & Phau, 2014) or their disposition to seek and consume entertainment (Brock & Livingston, 2004).
REFERENCES


Van Laer, T., de Ruyter, K., Visconti, L., & Wetzels, M. (2013). The extended transportation-imagery model: A meta-analysis of the antecedents and


APPENDIX 1 LIST OF ORIGINAL ESSAYS

ESSAY 1

ESSAY 2

ESSAY 3
APPENDIX 2
AVERAGE STORY LENGTH OF A SELECTION OF PACKAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th># words</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teerenpeli</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandels</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stadin panimo</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stallhagen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmgård</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Brewery</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikolai</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene King Brury St Edmunds</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kona Brewing Co</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pappagallo</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben &amp; Jerry’s</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Kaveriin Jäätelö</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average length** 43
APPENDIX 3  ESSAY 1 AND ESSAY 2 VARIABLE MEASURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay 1 Variable measures</th>
<th>Items measuring the variable</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable and α</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While reading the text on the package, I could easily picture the described events taking place.</td>
<td>Adapted from Green &amp; Brock, 2000 (cognitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was mentally involved in the content of the text on the package while reading it.</td>
<td>Adapted from Green &amp; Brock, 2000 (cognitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I could picture myself in the scene described in the text on the package.</td>
<td>Adapted from Green &amp; Brock, 2000 (cognitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The text on the package affected me emotionally.</td>
<td>Adapted from Green &amp; Brock, 2000 (affective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While reading the text on the package, my attention was focused on the content of the message.</td>
<td>Adapted from Agarwal &amp; Karahanna, 2000 (immersion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The muesli is delicious.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The muesli is of high quality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The muesli is environmentally friendly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The muesli is locally produced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel now, after seeing this package?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel joyful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am in a good mood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your overall attitude towards the brand?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dislike/like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bad/good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low quality/high quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unpleasant/pleasant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>negative/positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What I get from [Brand] is worth the cost.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Brand] is a good buy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Brand] is good value for money.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am willing to pay this price for [Brand].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would you be willing to purchase the product in future?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unlikely/likely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improbable/probable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>impossible/possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Word-of-mouth Intentions | I intend to talk about [Brand] to others. |        |

All items were measured on a scale from 1 to 10 in Experiment 1 and on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 in Experiment 2. The focal brand’s name has been replaced with [Brand].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay 2 Variable measures</th>
<th>Items measuring the variable</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable and α</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your overall attitude towards the brand?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dislike/like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bad/good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unpleasant/pleasant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>negative/positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would you be willing to purchase the product in future?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unlikely/likely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improbable/probable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>impossible/possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typicality</strong></td>
<td>The text on the package/ad is suitable for the product</td>
<td>Adapted from Berg, Söderlund, &amp; Lindström, 2015; Loken &amp; Ward, 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment 2</strong></td>
<td>$\alpha = 0.79$</td>
<td>The text is like a typical text on a milk package/ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The text on the package/ad is suitable for a milk package/ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand familiarity</strong></td>
<td>Indicate how well the below adjectives describe the text/message on the packaging/ad (not at all / a lot)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Credible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td>Are you familiar with the brand?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>How much time do you use to compare different brands when buying muesli?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase frequency: have you purchased muesli during the past six months? Adapted from Escalas, 2004a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I definitely have a 'wanting' for this product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I rate this product as being of the highest importance to me personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When making choices in this product category, I am sensitive to how much I pay. Erdem, Swait, &amp; Louviere, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I would define the information given on the package/ad as a story. (Experiment 1 and Experiment 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The information on the package/ad had a beginning, middle and end. (Experiment 2) Escalas &amp; Stern, 2003; Escalas, 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All items were measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 10.
APPENDIX 4  STIMULI ESSAY 1

Essay 1, experiment 1 stimuli
The front side of the package visible for all participants.
Short brand story condition visible for the experiment group.

English translation of the short brand story:

[Muesli brand] was founded in 1999 on our farm. We produce delicious and environmentally friendly organic products using domestic grain. The excellent quality of our products is important to our family business now and in the coming years.

Enjoyable organic moments!

[Farmer name], organic farmer and muesli producer

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17 The translation was not included in the actual treatment.
List condition visible for the control group.

Takaosa

MYSLILASTUT

100 g vasta
2 dl sokea
2 dl kantriola
2 dl öljyä
2 ml tekniska oleola
1 til voorinjohetta
2 til vaniljaseeraita
3 mmon


Kysymyksiä tai ideoita?

Sysmä luomuherkut ry, info@sysmaluomuherkut.fi

Sivu

Aineokset: luomuvahvistatut, luomuomusristatut, luomumaisut, luomuvesijät, luomusyöski, luomuvedet, luomuvesit, luomuvadatatut ja muiden vahvistetut tuotteet.

Palauta tila-oisa, joisia käsitellään paljastamatta.

Maihitun huonon tuotannon

Energia: 1400 kJ/340 kcal
Proteiini: 0,5 g
Käshi: 8 g
Josta suokerta: 10 g
Ruokaa: 77 g
Josta tyypittymä: raskaus
Raskaus
Nitriini: 0,03
g
Kasvi- ja

Maidotem, ruokakulttuurin

Tulosta ja saa laadukkaampi

Sysmä luomuherkut ry

Valmistettu siomitissa

Tillyverkko ja Finland

English translation of the list\(^{18}\):

[Muesli brand]

- delicious and environmentally friendly products
- family business operating from the farm
- products produced using domestic grain
- founded in 1999
- organic production methods
- excellent quality is important

\(^{18}\) The translation was not included in the actual treatment.
Essay 1, experiment 2 stimuli

Short brand story condition.

Front

Side

Back

The text is displayed separately on the next page.19

English translation of the short brand story20:

19 All text on the package was displayed in original language for the participants of the study. Here, only the English translation of the short brand story on top of the backside of the package is displayed.

20 The translation was not included in the actual treatment.
Domestic freshness for over 50 years

In the 1950s, laundry machines facilitated housework. [Entrepreneur] identified a big problem: all laundry detergents were foreign made and hence not suitable for local water conditions or local consumers’ scent preferences. [Entrepreneur] wanted to make a change. He developed a range of laundry detergents and started to manufacture them in his hometown of [Town] in the early 1960s. As a result, [Brand] was launched.

[Brand] is still the only domestic laundry detergent manufacturer. All products are designed and produced locally in [Town], considering our needs, preferences, and the local environment.

[Brand] – fresh and natural, with nothing artificial.
No brand story condition

The text is displayed separately on the next page.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} All text on the package was displayed for the participants of the study. The text is not displayed here. The text is identical with the story condition except for the story, which is excluded in this no brand story condition.
APPENDIX 5      STIMULI ESSAY 2

Essay 2, experiment 1, stimuli\textsuperscript{22}

Less emotional brand story

[Muesli brand] was founded in 1999 on our farm. We produce delicious and environmentally friendly organic products using domestic grain. The excellent quality of our products is important to our family business now and in the coming years.

Enjoyable organic moments!

[Farmer name], organic farmer and muesli producer

More emotional brand story

I grew up on a farm and participated in the work on the field already as a child. Work equalled play at that time. In my teens, the wage from summer jobs felt attractive and I consequently almost changed occupations. My love for Anita restored my passion for farming. Our joint dream became true in 1999 when we founded [Muesli brand]. Together with our children, we produce delicious and environmentally friendly organic products of excellent quality using domestic grain. We produce our products with love – now and in future.

[Farmer name], organic farmer and muesli producer

\textsuperscript{22} Only the English translations are included here. The original stimuli were displayed on the package and in local language only.
**Essay 2, experiment 2 stimuli**: The less and more emotional story in the **packaging** condition

The front side of the packaging condition. These were visible for all participants in the packaging condition.
The less and more emotional brand story stimuli in the packaging condition.
Essay 2, experiment 2 stimuli: The less and more emotional story in the ad condition

The less emotional brand story stimuli in the ad condition.
The more emotional brand story stimuli in the ad condition.
Story translations

**English translation of the less emotional brand story:**

Emma and Ismo Korhonen ended up as farmers by accident. Emma grew up as a neighbour to Ainila organic farm and became acquainted with farm work from an early age through the couple who owned and ran the neighbouring farm. Later, Emma moved to a nearby city and met Ismo. As Ainila’s owner couple retired in 2013, Emma was offered the opportunity to take over the farm. Emma and Ismo grabbed the offer and moved to Ainila. Emma and Ismo want to respect the history of Ainila by making its products available for as many Finns as possible.

Ainila Organic Milk is made of the milk produced by the Ainila farm cows, which have been fed with organic feed. The milk is pasteurized, but not homogenized. This means that the milk fats rise to the surface. It is hence advocated to shake the package prior to use. Organic milk tastes good and it includes lots of calcium. It is suitable for drinking, baking, and cooking.

**English translation of the more emotional brand story:**

Emma and Ismo Korhonen ended up as farmers by accident. Emma grew up as a neighbour to Ainila organic farm and became acquainted with farm work from an early age through the couple who owned and ran the neighbouring farm. Later, Emma moved to a nearby city and met Ismo. In 2013 Emma received shocking news: Ainila’s owner couple had passed away in an accident. The couple had left the farm to Emma in their will and after contemplating the matter, Emma and Ismo decided to make a life change and moved to Ainila. Emma and Ismo want to respect the history of Ainila by making its products available for as many Finns as possible.

Ainila Organic Milk is made of the milk produced by the Ainila farm cows, which have been fed with organic feed. The milk is pasteurized, but not homogenized. This means that the milk fats rise to the surface. It is hence advocated to shake the package prior to use. Organic milk tastes good and it includes lots of calcium. It is suitable for drinking, baking, and cooking.

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23 The translations were not included in the actual treatments.
APPENDIX 6
ORIGINAL ESSAYS INCLUDED ONLY IN THE PRINTED VERSION


Stories are characteristic of humans. They have been embedded in our social and cultural environments in various forms throughout civilizations. Stories come naturally to us because we think in terms of stories and use them to communicate everyday events. Stories reflect the structure in which we make sense of, comprehend, and organize our experiences. Compelling stories persuade, entertain, and engage their audiences. It is therefore not surprising that marketers have become keen to capitalize on the persuasive effects of stories. Indeed, marketers frequently tell brand stories in multiple contexts with the aim to involve and persuade consumers. However, many questions on the effect of stories on consumers in commercial contexts remain.

Research shows that companies can purposefully relate stories to brands to elicit positive brand responses. Stories help individuals interpret the meanings of brands and create a bond between a brand and a consumer. Brand stories are told, for instance, on packaging, in promotions, on web sites, in social media, and on price tags. While the influential nature of stories as such has been widely acknowledged and verified in advertising research, many theoretically and managerially relevant issues remain unexplored. Previous studies have looked at stories in print and TV ads, while packaging and price promotions have been overlooked. Packaging and price promotions are key marketing tactics, which differ from ads in several respects, such as the framing and length of the message. This dissertation examines consumer responses to different types of brand stories on packaging, in advertising, and in price promotion messages. Brand stories are examined in terms of short, emotional and mental simulation brand stories.

The dissertation reports on six experiments in three separate studies. It offers significant contributions to storytelling, packaging, and pricing literature, as well as to business practice. The findings demonstrate that brand stories on packaging and in price promotions can influence several significant consumer responses positively. The dissertation also shows that the storytelling context acts as a boundary condition to the effectiveness of different types of brand stories. Hence, brand stories should be tailored according to context to reach maximal effectiveness.