

The Cost of Schema Incongruence: Lessons from Jaguar's Rebranding Strategy

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effect of Jaguar's 2024 rebranding initiative through the lens of a psychological perspective. Drawing on Aaker's Brand Equity Model and Mandler's Schema incongruity Theory, the paper assesses how the drastic shift has influenced how consumers perceive Jaguar. Aaker's model identifies key traits of brand equity as (1) brand loyalty, (2) brand association, (3) brand awareness, and (4) perceived quality. A cross-sectional survey of South Korean consumers familiar with Jaguar measured changes across the aforementioned variables. Statistical analysis through the Mann-Whitney U test and paired t test revealed a significant decline in all four dimensions among respondents who perceived the rebranding as extremely incongruent. In contrast, moderate incongruity showed no major negative effects, supporting the inverted U-shaped relationship posited by schema congruity theory. As a result, the findings underscore the importance of balancing innovation with consumer expectations in rebranding efforts, particularly for legacy brands similar to Jaguar.

Keywords

Schema Incongruity; Rebranding; Brand Equity; Aaker's Brand Equity Model; Schema Theory; Consumer Perception

1. Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Since its founding in 1922, Jaguar has long stood as a symbol of British heritage and automotive prestige. With a rich heritage and its deep historical connection to motor racing, Jaguar has cultivated an image rooted in performance, elegance, and engineering excellence (Jaguar, n.d.).

However, the gasoline-based car industry that Jaguar was situated in is in decline globally (Kass, 2019), driven by increasing regulatory pressures, environmental concerns, and shifting consumer preferences toward sustainable mobility solutions. According to the International Energy Agency (2023), global electric vehicle (EV)

sales exceeded 14 million in 2023, accounting for 18% of all car sales, a significant rise from just 4% in 2020 (International Energy Agency, 2023).

In response to this macroeconomic and consumer-driven shift, Jaguar, under its parent company Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) (JLC, 2019), announced its rebranding in 2024 (Jaguar 2024 Media Newsroom, 2024). This strategy included not only a complete overhaul of its visual identity that stemmed from rich British heritage with motor racing roots, but into a minimalist, future-oriented brand aesthetic. The rebrand involved the removal of the iconic leaping jaguar emblem, the adoption of a flattened sans-serif logotype, and the introduction of a pastel pink color palette, elements of which were absent in the original brand identity of Jaguar (Jaguar 2024 Media Newsroom, 2024). Concurrently, Jaguar declared its commitment to fully transition to electric vehicles by 2025, effectively retiring its legacy of gasoline-powered engineering in favor of a repositioned brand identity centered around future-orientation (Jaguar Houston Central, 2024).

Such rebranding efforts reflect broader strategic motivations and align with definitions established in existing academic literature. Specifically, Muzellec et al. (2003) characterized three key aspects that must be considered when defining rebranding. The first is the name when the name of a brand changes. Another key change is the brand aesthetics, not limited to colour palette, logo, and design language, which together shape the visual identity of the brand. Lastly, the repositioning of a brand within the same market can also be categorized as a rebranding, where the company modifies its core messaging, target audience, or value proposition while retaining its original product or service offerings (Muzellec, 2003).

As such, the aforementioned case of Jaguar can also be considered an instance of rebranding. Here, while the name remains the same, the other two key elements, the brand aesthetics and positioning, have shifted. In terms of the brand aesthetics, primarily, the logo and the corporate identity have undergone a significant change. Previously, Jaguar's logo featured a leaping jaguar with its legs extended forward (Doğan & Doğan, 2025). However, the new logo presents a flat, minimalist aesthetic, replacing the jaguar icon with a simplified typeface of jaguar. More notably, the updated logo introduces a bold shift in color palette, incorporating a soft pink hue, a color that was absent from the previous versions of the logo. Furthermore, Jaguar has been conducting a strategic repositioning, targeting now the electric vehicles (EV) market with its discontinuation of gas cars and shifting fully to EVs (Hood, 2024).

These shifts aim to respond to strategic pressures. According to Udonde et al (2022), there are mainly 11 reasons for conducting a rebranding. Such reasons

include aligning with consumer demand, the brand being outdated, fierce competition, and more (Udonde et al., 2023). In Jaguar's case, the rebranding appears to serve multiple strategic goals, including the following: adapting to the growing demand for EVs, repositioning itself within the sustainable mobility market, and visually differentiating from its historical identity as a combustion-engine luxury brand. According to Bhule and Chaudhary (2025), minimalist design in automotive branding with flat logos, simplified interiors, and digital-first UX/UI has become a common trend amongst brands, thus reinforcing Jaguar's strategic move to adopt a cleaner, future-oriented brand aesthetic through the rebranding initiatives (Bhule & Chaudhary 2025).

This initiative, however, poses several key challenges for Jaguar. Primarily, there has been backlash from the media. Major outlets have been strongly criticizing the rebranding initiative and how the brand has lost its core identity (Danziger, 2024). More importantly, such a drastic rebranding may lead to identity confusion amongst consumers. Persson et al. (2023) suggest that a rebranding may lead to "loss of identity in the company" (Persson et al., 2023). As a result, consumers may struggle to reconcile the brand's historical image with its new positioning, potentially leading to negative effects such as reduced brand loyalty and weakened emotional connections.

This tension between Jaguar's legacy and its new direction raises broader questions about the psychological impact of rebranding on consumer perception. Specifically, research can be done on the psychological influence a rebranding has, particularly in the case of Jaguar, to identify the cost of such incongruence of brand identity.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the following research question:

How have Jaguar's rebranding efforts harmed the brand as a result of schema incongruity?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks of rebranding, schema incongruity, and brand equity. Section 3 presents the hypothesis development. Section 4 outlines the methodology used in the study. Section 5 reports the results of statistical analysis, while Section 6 interprets the findings in light of existing theory and practical implications. Finally, Section 7 addresses limitations and suggests directions for future research.

1.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Rebranding

Abhonen (2008) defines rebranding as “building a new name representative of a differentiated position in the mind of stakeholders and a distinctive identity from competitors” (Ahonen, 2008). There are generally two types of rebranding: revolutionary and evolutionary (Tevi and Otubanjo, 2013). Evolutionary rebranding is building upon the same brand equity, and revolutionary rebranding is transferring the previous equity to build an entirely new brand equity (Tevi and Otubanjo, 2013). Moloko (2014) identified other drivers of rebranding, which are “Corporate Structure and Strategy” and “Macroeconomic Factors”.

As Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007) suggest, there are mainly four negative effects that a rebranding strategy may lead to. First, rebranding can result in a loss of connection with the brand’s original identity, causing confusion among its established customer base. Second, companies may focus solely on internal visions of the brand while neglecting the expectations and perceptions of key stakeholders. Third, brands may prioritize superficial changes such as logos or slogans without reinforcing the embedded brand values. Lastly, rebranding may lead to having multiple identities that further confuse the customers (Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2007).

In contrast, as Blaquez et al. (2019) suggest, rebranding also has benefits, such as rebuilding or reinforcing brand equity, particularly when the strategy is aligned with a clear brand vision and remains grounded in the brand’s heritage. This study also raises potential concerns about rebranding loyal customers, as it may remove the sense of familiarity that those customers have had (Blazquez et al., 2019).

Schema Theory and Incongruence

Such aforementioned downsides have a psychological explanation rooted in schema theory. Theoretically, humans are characterized as cognitive misers who have limited capacity in their brains to be able to process various information thoroughly (Fiske and Taylor, 2013); as a result, humans tend to make mental shortcuts to make the cognitive process more efficient (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). Such mental shortcuts are known as schemas—schemas are mental frameworks that help individuals organize their memory and thoughts and interpret new information based on past experiences and expectations (Bartlett, 1928).

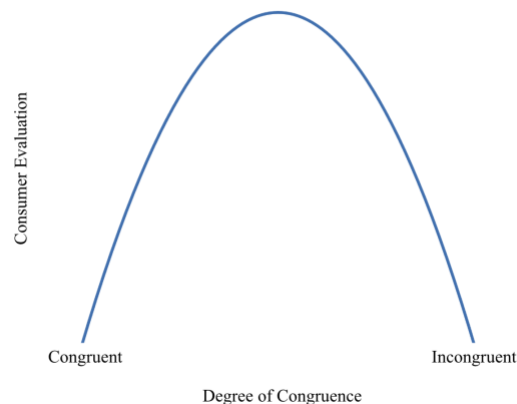
In the context of branding, a brand schema can be formed through repeated exposure and experience. Each encounter with the brand, such as ads or purchasing behavior, assimilates into existing schemas that later makes it easier for consumers to gather information about that brand in their brain (Dahlén et al., 2005).

When there is a brand schema that is established, such can be interpreted in two ways: with schema congruence or incongruence, where schema congruence is defined as the extent to which the existing schema or perception aligns with the obtained information (Halkias and Kokkinaki, 2014; Cakanlar et al., 2024).

Research on schema congruence has been grounded on Mandler's research (Mandler, 1982), initially classifying the extent of incongruence as either moderate or extreme. Moderate incongruence is when there is a shared association or a linkage between the perceived sensory input and the existing schema, an example being "vitamin-fortified coffee," where the linkage exists that both are "a good start to a day" (Jhang et al., 2011). In contrast, extreme incongruence occurs when there is no connection between the schema and the input information, such as "vitamin-fortified vodka".

As proposed in Mandler's Schema Congruity theory, there exists an inverted U-shaped relationship between the degree of incongruity and arousal, which refers to the psychological tension or attention elicited when individuals encounter information that deviates from their expectations (Mandler, 1982).

Figure 1. Mandler's Inverted U-shaped relationship between degree of congruence and consumer response



Current research demonstrates a mixed set of findings regarding the effects of schema incongruity on consumer responses. Research such as that conducted by Halkias and Kokkinaki (2011) reports that moderate incongruity yields a higher brand recall compared to congruence or extreme incongruence with the existing schema, as moderate incongruence evokes a slight degree of confusion that requires consumers to go through an additional layer of cognitive processing (Halkias and Kokkinaki, 2011). Similarly, Srivastava & Sharma (2012) found that moderate schema incongruity results in a more positive brand evaluation as a result of increased engagement and novelty effect, encountering something new (Srivastava and Sharma, 2012).

Studies such as Gao et. al (2022) suggests the positive effect of being schema congruent, as schema congruence allows for quicker recognition and comprehension, leading to more immediate positive interaction with the brand (Gao et al., 2022). In contrast, Gerrath and Biraglia (2020) suggest that having an extreme incongruence may have an advantageous effect on consumer evaluation if the incongruent element generates surprise or curiosity that ultimately enhances engagement (Gerrath and Biraglia, 2021).

As such, despite the mixed findings on the influence of schema incongruity, a potential gap in the literature lies in the lack of real-world application and ecological validity. Much of the existing research is conducted in experimental settings using unfamiliar or hypothetical product combinations rather than real-world experiences (Gao et al., 2022). Moreover, most studies focus on short-term reactions without considering how incongruity affects more enduring components of brand equity, such as loyalty, trust, or perceived quality. The low number of field-based research that integrates established psychological theory with concrete brand transitions presents a major limitation, particularly in industries where brand identity plays a significant role in purchase decisions.

Furthermore, there seems to be a potential lack of a consolidated framework that unifies the diverse variables used to measure the impact of schema incongruity. Existing research employs variables such as brand recall, evaluation, or loyalty, but none of them is a holistic measure of brand equity.

Aaker's brand equity model

In the study of brand equity, numerous theoretical frameworks have been proposed to conceptualize and measure the intangible value of brands. Some of them include Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model (Keller, 1993), Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) Model by Young & Rubicam (Young & Rubicam, n.d.), and more. However, each of the models comes with its own limitations. For instance, a study by Kuhn and Alpert (2004) suggests that the model may place too much emphasis on emotional components like brand feelings and resonance, which are not always the primary drivers of brand strength (Kuhn et al., 2008). Furthermore, BAV has limitations, as suggested by Munteanu and Florea (2012), who argue that while BAV captures consumer perceptions across dimensions like Differentiation, Relevance, Esteem, and Knowledge, it lacks key elements such as loyalty, which remain imperative for a brand's success (Munteanu et al., 2012).

Aaker's model of Brand Equity has concerns, such as its dimensions, stating that the dimension of Proprietary technology is outdated or unfit for evaluation from the perspective of customers (Tasci, 2020). Despite the limitation, Aaker's Brand

Equity Model (BEM) serves as a comprehensive framework to evaluate the effects of schema incongruity in the context of rebranding. BEM mainly comprises five distinct components that define a brand's equity (Aaker, 1991). First is brand loyalty, defined as the degree of attachment a customer has toward a brand, which influences the likelihood of repurchase in the future. Second is brand awareness, referring to the extent to which consumers are familiar with and can recognize a brand. Third is brand associations, which include the thoughts, feelings, and imagery linked to a brand. Fourth is perceived quality, the consumer's perception of the quality of the brand's products. Last are the other proprietary brand assets, such as trademarks or patents. These five variables holistically influence brand equity, defined as the added value a brand name provides to a product or service that shapes consumer preferences and gives a competitive advantage in the market.

However, in the scope of this research, only the first four components of Aaker's Brand Equity Model will be utilized to measure the impact of schema incongruity due to the criticism towards the use of proprietary brand assets when analyzing consumer psychology and perception, which is the central focus of this study (Tasci, 2020). Furthermore, studies such as Pappu et al. (2005) or Nam et al. (2011) have also excluded the proprietary brand assets component in their adaptations of Aaker's model, arguing that such firm-level assets are not directly perceived by consumers and thus are irrelevant in capturing consumer-based brand equity (Pappu et al., 2005; Nam et al., 2011).

Thus, for the sake of this research, a holistic analysis of Jaguar centered around BEM will allow for a structured assessment of how schema incongruity influences consumer perception following a rebranding initiative.

2. Methodology

2.0 Hypothesis Development

Although various factors may influence consumer attitudes toward rebranding, one key dimension is the degree of change involved in the brand's visual and strategic identity. In the case of Jaguar, the rebranding features a dramatic transformation in aspects such as the brand color scheme, logo, font, and more. Such substantial changes suggest a potential disruption to the brand schema that consumers have established previously. Drawing from schema theory and Aaker's Brand Equity Model, the following hypotheses are developed to assess the psychological and perceptual impact of this rebranding initiative. As a result, this paper aims to answer the following research question: How have Jaguar's rebranding efforts harmed Jaguar as a result of schema incongruity?

H1: Jaguar's Rebranding efforts would negatively impact brand equity.

For instance, Roy and Sarkar (2015) argue that the announcement of a rebranding may have a different result depending on the recognition of the brand, suggesting that the rebranding announcement of a well-established brand has a detrimental effect on the brand equity (Roy and Sarkar, 2015). As Jaguar is a well-established brand in the automotive industry, the rebranding efforts are highly likely to negatively affect brand equity (Gayatri et al., 2025). Additionally, Merrilees and Miller (2008) provide theoretical support for the hypothesis, suggesting that a rebranding that involves a significant change in the visual identity of the brand leads to a decreased emotional connection and brand trust, particularly when there is a mismatch in the visual identity (Merrilees and Miller, 2008). This study further emphasizes the increased vulnerability of long-established brands, Jaguar in this case, as their reputation has been established upon years of marketing initiatives. Furthermore, Puspitasari et al. (2022) highlight the negative effect of rebranding on brand equity through empirical analysis, demonstrating that poorly aligned rebranding efforts significantly reduce the brand equity (Puspitasari et al., 2022). While this study examines universities, the core concept remains that brand equity is built through consistent identity and consumer expectations, regardless of industry. Holistically, Jaguar's rebranding is likely to disrupt established consumer perceptions, ultimately diminishing its overall brand equity across key dimensions.

H2: Jaguar's Rebranding efforts are a case of schema incongruity

Schema incongruity is generally defined as when the incoming sensual stimuli do not correspond to the existing cognitive framework, or schemas (Halkias and Kokkinaki, 2014b) (Houghton, 2021) (Yoon, 2012). Particularly, Yoon (2012) conceptualizes schema incongruity as a disruption of established knowledge structures (Yoon, 2012). Jaguar's rebranding that deviates from the existing brand ideals clearly deviates from consumers' established schema of Jaguar, thus serving as a case of schema incongruity. Furthermore, according to Sjödin and Törn (2006), such brand image incongruity is especially relevant for mature brands like Jaguar that possess firmly established consumer associations due to their long-standing presence in the market (Sjödin and Törn, 2006). When a piece of brand communication sharply deviates from these entrenched associations, consumers experience what is termed "brand image incongruity," triggering increased cognitive elaboration, confusion, and emotional amplification

H3a: Extreme schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity

H3b: Moderate schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity

According to Mandler, the extreme schema incongruence refers to a schema that is completely irrelevant and unexpected, that cannot be resolved utilizing a pre-existing lower level of schema, meaning that it is a connection that cannot be interpreted through an existing knowledge framework. On the other hand, moderate incongruity is a slight deviation from the existing schema that can be resolved with the original schema with additional cognitive processing. There have been ambiguous findings about what truly negatively affects brand equity: whether it is extreme incongruence or moderate incongruence. Studies such as Halkias and Kokkinaki (2014), Lee and Labroo (2004), or Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) add weight to the notion that extreme incongruence has led to a sense of confusion and discomfort, thus reducing key elements of the aforementioned brand equity model such as loyalty or quality perception. Studies such as this add weight to H3a. On the other hand, Lange and Dahle (2003) or Carvalho et al. (2013) both yield a result that moderate incongruity has a worsening result on the brand equity, particularly if that incongruity is unresolved.

In sum, the three hypotheses collectively construct a framework for the analysis of the effect of the instance of rebranding on Jaguar's brand equity. H1 asserts that the abrupt shift from Jaguar's traditional brand identity is likely to have a negative effect on brand equity, particularly given its established market position and longstanding associations with heritage and luxury. H2 situates this transformation within the psychological framework of schema incongruity, proposing that the rebranding goes against the existing cognitive frameworks that the customers had. H3a posits that extreme schema incongruity may trigger confusion or failed resolution, which ultimately leads to a negative brand equity evaluation. In contrast, H3b emphasizes that even moderate incongruity can be detrimental when left unresolved.

2.1 Method

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine consumer responses to Jaguar's rebranding through the lens of schema incongruity and its influence on brand equity. A self-administered online questionnaire was used to collect data on participants' perceptions of the rebranding and their evaluations across four dimensions of Aaker's Brand Equity Model.

2.2 Participants

Participants were recruited through a South Korean survey platform called "Surveyeasy", using convenience sampling. There were two key requirements for participants to participate in this self-response questionnaire. The first is that the participant be above 18 years of age, which is older than the legal driving age in

South Korea. Second is that participants must be familiar with the Jaguar—this was determined through two screening questions, which asked “Have you ever heard of Jaguar as a car company?” and “Are you familiar with the services and products that Jaguar provides?”. Only those who responded “Yes” to both were included in the analysis. As a result, of the total 104 responses collected over a span of three days. Through the first screening question, 16.2% of the respondents (n=17) were excluded. In the second question, 31.0% of the respondents (n=27) were excluded, resulting in a total of 60 viable data points to be utilized. Of the respondents, 58.3% identified as male, 41.7% as female, and the majority fell within the age range of 20-29.

2.3 Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants initially filled out the first section of the questionnaire, which was the demographics section. Then, they were presented with the newly redesigned Jaguar logo featuring the updated color scheme and minimalist font, and the original logo as the visual stimuli. Following the exposure, participants filled out the remaining three sections of the questionnaire: (2) perceived schema before the rebranding, (3) perceived schema after rebranding, including individual components of brand equity (4) general attitudes toward rebranding and schema incongruity.

2.4 Measure

All questions except the final question, which asked “What would Jaguar need to do to regain or maintain your interest?” were operationalized through either a 4-point or 5-point Likert scale. Participants filled out a total of 16 required questions and 1 optional question, including the demographics. Firstly, the schema incongruity was operationalized through 2 main questions: “How would you categorize the degree of change in Jaguar’s branding compared to your previous expectations?” and “How consistent do you find Jaguar’s new brand identity with how you previously viewed the brand?”

More importantly, brand equity was measured using four dimensions from Aaker’s Brand Equity Model (1991): brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. Each dimension was operationalized with one or two according to the questions. (1) Brand awareness was operationalized through “How confident are you in describing what Jaguar’s brand currently represents after rebranding?”, which asks for familiarity and clarity with Jaguar’s post-rebrand identity. Higher scores indicate greater brand awareness. As brand awareness is highly associated with the familiarity or the ability for the consumers to recognize the key traits, asking such a question is appropriate (Subhani et al., 2009). (2) Perceived quality was measured through asking “How would you rate the quality

of Jaguar vehicles after the rebranding?” Studies such as Chae (2020) utilize a similar style of asking for the quality when assessing using Aaker’s model, thus supporting the validity of the question used in this study (Chae, 2020). (3) Brand loyalty was assessed through “How likely are you to consider Jaguar for your next vehicle purchase after rebranding?”, a likert question, and “Has your willingness to support Jaguar changed due to its new brand identity?” with the options of “Yes, I am more likely to support”, “No, I am less likely to support” or “No change”. Meyer (2005) employs a similar style to the first, validating the construct in assessing future brand commitment (Meyer, 2005). (4) Brand association was tested through asking “How strongly did you associate Jaguar with the following traits after the rebrand?”. There were a total of seven keywords selected: British heritage, Classic luxury, Performance/speed, Exclusivity, Modernity, Masculinity, and Femininity (Štrach and Everett, 2006) (Su et al., 2016) (Merlo, 2023). Here, modernity and femininity were used as counterbalancing traits to traditional associations such as British heritage, classic luxury, and masculinity.

3. Results and Analysis

3.0 Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel and R. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were calculated for each component of brand equity both before and after exposure to Jaguar’s rebranded identity. To assess the impact of rebranding on consumer perceptions, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the pre- and post-exposure scores for each of the four components of Aaker’s Brand Equity Model: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. Furthermore, R was utilized to conduct Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for each brand equity component as a non-parametric alternative to the paired t-test.

3.1 Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Perception Variables (Pre- and Post-Rebranding)

Variable	n	Mean	Variance	Max	Min
Awareness	105	3.3	1.31	5.0	1.0
Quality	105	3.5	1.0	5.0	1.0
British Heritage	105	3.24	1.11	5.0	1.0
Classic Luxury	105	3.39	1.18	5.0	1.0
Performance /speed	105	3.45	1.19	5.0	1.0
Exclusivity	105	3.34	1.29	5.0	1.0

Modernity	105	3.14	1.2	5.0	1.0
Masculinity	105	3.65	1.35	5.0	1.0
Femininity	105	2.5	1.23	5.0	1.0
N-Awareness	105	2.88	1.46	5.0	1.0
N-Quality	105	3.24	1.3	5.0	1.0
N-British Heritage	105	2.87	1.67	5.0	1.0
N-Classic Luxury	105	3.04	1.34	5.0	1.0
N-Performance	105	2.93	1.33	5.0	1.0
N-Exclusivity	105	3.1	1.51	5.0	1.0
N-Modernity	105	3.22	1.37	5.0	1.0
N-Masculinity	105	3.04	1.44	5.0	1.0
N-Femininity	105	2.82	1.36	5.0	1.0

*Note: "N-" denotes variables measured after rebranding

H1: Jaguar's Rebranding efforts would negatively impact brand equity

H1 predicted that Jaguar's Rebranding efforts would negatively impact brand equity. To examine the effect of rebranding on Aaker's brand equity model, a paired t-test is used to analyze whether there are significant differences between before and after being exposed to the rebranding initiatives.

A two-sample paired t-test assumes that each observation in one sample is meaningfully paired with an observation in the other sample, such as pre- and post-treatment scores from the same individual. These pairs must be independent of one another, meaning that the result of one pair does not influence or depend on another. Furthermore, a key requirement is that it has a larger sample size ($n > 30$). As the data fits the aforementioned assumptions, the use of a paired t-test is appropriate for this analysis.

In the analysis, each dimension of the equity model was viewed separately.

(1) Examining the results for brand awareness yielded a statistically significant decline. The mean value of the question that asked for confidence before the rebranding was significantly higher than the value after the rebranding ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.06$; $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.21$). A paired sample t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(59) = 4.48$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), with a critical value of 1.671.

(2) Perceived quality also showed a statistically significant decline following the rebranding. Participants rated Jaguar’s product quality higher before rebranding (M = 3.62, SD = 0.92; M = 3.12, SD = 1.18). A paired sample t-test revealed this difference to be significant, $t(59) = 3.27$, $p = .000911$ (one-tailed), exceeding the critical value of 1.671.

(3) Brand loyalty also experienced a decline after the rebranding. Participants indicated a lower likelihood of choosing Jaguar again post-rebranding (M = 3.00, SD = 1.03; M = 2.73, SD = 1.21), with $t(59) = 1.90$, $p = .0312$ (one-tailed), and a critical value of 1.671. Based on three out of the four dimensions, the results indicate a consistent pattern: Jaguar’s rebranding led to a measurable and statistically significant decline in brand equity.

(4) Lastly, the results from brand association reveal that of the seven total traits studied, five of them—British heritage ($t(59) = 3.53$, $p = .00045$), classic luxury ($t(59) = 3.56$, $p = .00037$), performance/speed ($t(59) = -2.17$, $p = .0169$), exclusivity ($t(59) = 1.80$, $p = .0384$), and masculinity ($t(59) = 4.05$, $p = .000075$)—all showed statistically significant declines after the rebranding.

However, two traits that were utilized as counterbalancing traits to the traditional traits did not yield statistically significant results. “Modernity” yielded $t(59) = -0.98$, $p = .1655$. “Femininity,” however, did yield a statistically significant result: $t(59) = -1.96$, $p = .0274$. The direction of the mean change suggested a perceived increase, from M = 2.45 before rebranding to M = 2.82 after rebranding.

To synthesize the results across all components of Aaker’s brand equity model, Table 1 summarizes the statistical findings for each dimension and trait analyzed in this study. The following graph visually compares the mean scores for each brand equity dimension before and after Jaguar’s rebranding. It highlights the downward shifts in most categories, reinforcing the statistical findings reported earlier.

Table 2. Paired t-Test Results Comparing Brand Equity Dimensions Before and After Rebranding

Brand Equity	Dimension	Mean Before	Mean After	t-Value	p-value
Brand Awareness	Brand Awareness	3.57	2.78	4.48	< .001
Perceived Quality	Perceived Quality	3.62	3.12	3.27	.00091
Brand Loyalty	Brand Loyalty	3	2.73	1.9	.0312
Brand association	British Heritage	3.28	2.7	3.53	.00045
Brand Association	Classic Luxury	3.53	2.93	3.56	.00037
Brand Association	Performance	3.02	3.4	-2.17	.0169

Brand Association	Exclusivity	3.32	2.98	1.8	.0384
Brand Association	Masculinity	3.65	2.9	4.05	.000075
Brand Association	Modernity	3.03	3.2	-0.98	.1655
Brand Association	Femininity	2.45	2.82	-1.96	.0274

Taken together, the findings across all four dimensions of Aaker’s model, supported by statistically significant declines in brand awareness, perceived quality, loyalty, and five out of seven brand association traits, strongly validate H1. Jaguar’s rebranding appears to have weakened key elements of its brand equity, disrupting long-established consumer associations and reducing favorability across core dimensions of brand strength.

H2

H2 predicted that Jaguar’s Rebranding efforts are a case of schema incongruity. To assess whether the rebranding was perceived as schema-incongruent, participants were asked to rate both the consistency of the rebranding with their existing perception of Jaguar and the degree of change they observed. The average consistency was $M_{Consistency} = 2.78$, where 1 equates to being highly consistent and 5 not being consistent, which suggests a perception that the rebranding moderately deviated from prior expectations. Additionally, when categorizing participants’ perceived degree of change, results showed that 41.67% of responses were labeled as moderately incongruent (3) and 23.33% as extremely incongruent (4). In total, 65% of participants classified the rebranding as either moderately or extremely inconsistent with their previous image of Jaguar. As a result, H2 is supported, indicating that Jaguar’s rebranding efforts were largely perceived as schema-incongruent by consumers.

H3a

H3a predicted that extreme schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity. To examine this, participants were divided based on their responses to the perceived degree of change. As the question used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, extreme schema incongruity was defined as respondents who selected “4.” This resulted in $n = 14$, which is below the recommended sample size for a paired sample t-test. As a result, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test—a non-parametric alternative to the paired t-test—was used to assess changes in brand equity among this group.

In a Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the null hypothesis (H_0) is that there is no difference in brand equity scores before and after the rebranding for participants who perceived extreme schema incongruity (i.e., the median difference is zero). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) posits that brand equity scores are lower after the

rebranding for participants who perceived extreme schema incongruity (i.e., the median difference is negative).

The Wilcoxon results showed statistically significant declines across multiple dimensions of brand equity. For example, brand awareness decreased significantly ($V = 64.5$, $p = .0085$). Similarly, the brand quality rating also decreased significantly ($V = 71$, $p = .0058$), and brand loyalty followed the same trend ($V = 48.5$, $p = .0160$). As the p -values for each test are lower than the significance level of 0.05, H_0 is rejected, demonstrating that brand equity dimensions are lower after the rebranding for consumers who perceived extreme schema incongruity.

Examining the descriptors associated with brand associations yielded a similar trend. British heritage ($V = 53$, $p = .00496$), classic luxury ($V = 55.5$, $p = .0223$), performance/speed ($V = 57$, $p = .0173$), exclusivity ($V = 42$, $p = .0107$), and masculinity ($V = 56.5$, $p = .0185$) all demonstrated statistically significant declines. On the other hand, the counterbalancing traits of modernity and femininity yielded p -values of .6973 and .99, respectively, showing no significant change and indicating that traditional traits were more adversely affected.

As a result, H3a is supported: when rebranding efforts are perceived as extremely incongruent, brand equity is likely to be negatively affected.

H3b

H3b predicted that moderate schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity. Participants who rated the degree of change as 3 on the 1–4 Likert scale were categorized as perceiving moderate incongruity, resulting in a subsample of $n = 25$. The null and alternative hypotheses follow as outlined above. Brand awareness increased significantly following the rebranding ($V = 92$, $p = .026$), indicating a positive shift in consumer recognition. This finding runs counter to the hypothesized negative effect. However, other variables such as perceived quality did not change significantly ($V = 43.5$, $p = .171$, one-tailed), suggesting that participants did not perceive the rebranding to meaningfully alter product quality. Furthermore, brand loyalty likewise showed no significant difference ($V = 18$, $p = .739$).

Among brand associations, only the masculinity dimension yielded a statistically significant increase ($V = 69$, $p = .045$), suggesting that the rebrand enhanced perceptions of the brand's masculine identity. All other association dimensions—Britishness ($p = .195$), luxury ($p = .327$), exclusivity ($p = .566$), femininity ($p = .811$), modernity ($p = .881$), and performance ($p = .108$)—did not exhibit statistically significant change. These results suggest that, for consumers perceiving moderate schema incongruity, the rebranding did not significantly diminish brand equity, and

in some cases (e.g., brand awareness and masculinity), may have positively influenced perception—thus providing limited support for H3b.

Taken together, these results do not support H3b. Rather than decreasing brand equity, moderate schema incongruity has no observable significant effect on all dimensions of the brand equity, except for brand awareness and masculinity of the association, suggesting that moderate incongruity may not undermine brand perceptions as hypothesized.

4. Discussion

4.0 Discussion

The present study sought to investigate the psychological and perceptual consequences of Jaguar's 2024 rebranding initiative, specifically through the lens of schema incongruity theory and its effects on brand equity. Drawing upon Mandler's schema theory and Aaker's Brand Equity Model, three key hypotheses were tested, aiming to understand whether and how schema incongruity influenced consumer attitudes toward the Jaguar brand. The findings provide insight into the interplay between cognitive expectations, brand perception, and consumer response in the context of luxury automotive rebranding.

H1

Consistent with H1, the analysis demonstrated that Jaguar's rebranding led to statistically significant declines across several dimensions of brand equity. Specifically, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty all declined after participants were exposed to Jaguar's new visual identity. In addition, five of the seven brand associations had declined, except for the two, which were counterbalancing measures that did not align with the traditional view of Jaguar. These results reinforce the broader literature suggesting that abrupt visual or strategic changes in legacy brands can erode long-standing associations and emotional attachments (Merrilees and Miller, 2008). The following result also has strong connections to the Perceptual Fluency Theory, which suggests that stimuli that are easier to process are typically evaluated more positively by consumers (Reber et al., 2004). In the case of Jaguar, the rebrand has made it more complex for consumers to identify and comprehend the message, leading to increased processing in the comprehension of the message and brand ideals. As a result, this likely reduced perceptual fluency by introducing unfamiliar elements, thus leading to declined results in key elements of the brand equity.

Our finding is consistent with previous research, such as Lee and Labroo (2004) suggesting that increased fluency has allowed us to develop a more favorable attitude towards the brand (Lee and Labroo, 2004). Despite not considering brand equity in this research, their study demonstrates that both perceptual and conceptual fluency positively influence brand evaluations by reducing cognitive effort and enhancing processing satisfaction, aligning with the findings of our study. Furthermore, Yu et al. (2024) also emphasize the visual elements that represent a brand plays a key role in establishing fluency: when these visual elements deviate too drastically from what consumers are familiar with, the resulting disfluency can create perceptual friction, ultimately reducing brand likability and trust—this also aligns with our research on how this has led to a decreased brand equity in this research (Yu et al., 2024).

H2

The results of this study lend strong support to H2: Jaguar's rebranding efforts are a case of schema incongruity. Drawing on schema theory, schema incongruity occurs when new sensory input—such as a redesigned logo, color palette, or brand message—conflicts with preexisting mental frameworks that consumers have developed about the brand (Halkias and Kokkinaki, 2011). In Jaguar's case, consumers reported that the new brand identity diverged noticeably from their previous perceptions, suggesting a disjunction between established schemas and the updated brand presentation. Quantitative data from the survey reinforces this interpretation. The average score for brand consistency was $M = 2.78$ on a 1–5 Likert scale, and 65% of participants explicitly rated the rebranding as either moderately (41.67%) or extremely (23.33%) incongruent with their expectations.

H3

The findings from this study offer support for the two sub-hypotheses, H3a and H3b, regarding the effects of different levels of schema incongruity on brand equity. Specifically, H3a, which predicted that extreme schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity, was strongly supported. H3b, on the other hand, which predicted that moderate schema incongruity negatively affects brand equity, was not supported.

In line with Mandler's Schema Congruity Theory (1982), extreme schema incongruity occurs when there is a mismatch between the existing schema and the new sensory information that is being provided to individuals. Utilizing the subsection of participants who reported that the degree of mismatch between the original and new brand ideals was an extreme schema incongruity, with a rating of four out of four, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed statistically significant

declines across multiple dimensions of Aaker's Brand Equity Model. Specifically, all dimensions, including brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and key brand associations such as British heritage and classic luxury, had a significant decline.

Such findings are in line with previous research. Primarily, this finding supports Mandler's inverted U-shaped curve, where moderate schema incongruity yields a low evaluation and preference by the consumers due to the extreme degree to which there is a dissonance between the previous perception and the new information that is being provided. Furthermore, studies such as Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) serve as other literature that supports this finding: they found similar findings that extreme schema incongruity generated too much confusion and discomfort from the consumers—this is likely the reason for the decline in the brand equity for Jaguar in this research.

Furthermore, the findings are also supported by Perceptual Fluency Theory. As the new stimulus, the brand after rebranding, becomes too difficult to process, due to dissimilarity, novelty, or surprise, consumers require more cognitive effort to understand (Reber et al., 2004). This disfluency may have contributed to lower evaluations across dimensions of brand equity.

In contrast, H3b was not supported by the data. Participants who perceived moderate incongruity, reporting a three out of four in the question on degree of inconsistency, did not exhibit significant declines in brand equity. Brand awareness and "masculinity" of the associative traits were the only dimensions to see a significant decrease.

This result supports the idea that moderate schema incongruity may be processed as novel but not threatening, particularly when the dissonance can be resolved with additional cognitive effort. Halkias & Kokkinaki (2011) and Srivastava & Sharma (2012) have argued that moderate incongruity can stimulate deeper cognitive engagement, enhancing recall especially when consumers are motivated to make sense of the discrepancy. Additionally, based on the aforementioned Perceptual Fluency Theory, participants who perceived this change as a moderate schema incongruity would have experienced a manageable level of cognitive stress where they would require extra processing, but not to the point of inducing discomfort or confusion. This manageable tension may have led to heightened attention, thus allowing the new brand elements to stand out and be encoded more effectively into memory. Consequently, brand awareness increased, as the unfamiliar features of the rebrand prompted consumers to re-engage with the brand's identity (Lee and Labroo, 2004).

Together, H3a and H3b offer empirical support for Mandler's inverted U-curve: moderate incongruity may lead to neutral or slightly positive reactions, whereas extreme incongruity generates confusion, disfluency, and ultimately, negative evaluations. For Jaguar, participants who perceived extreme change clearly downgraded their views of the brand across nearly all dimensions, indicating a costly psychological misalignment. Those perceiving moderate change, however, were more ambivalent, with some indicators improving or remaining stable.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

5.0 Implications

Utilizing such findings, marketers can utilize these findings to create a strategically informed approach to rebranding that recognizes the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer perception and balances innovation with familiarity.

Marketers can deliberately aim for moderate schema incongruity when executing a rebrand. As demonstrated, moderate schema incongruity does not lead to a significant reduction in brand equity, unlike extreme schema incongruence. This suggests that rebranding efforts should introduce enough novelty to capture attention and encourage re-engagement, but not so much that they disorient or alienate loyal consumers. Key brand elements, such as key symbols or color scheme, shall be maintained while modernizing others can establish the right balance. For instance, in the case of electrification conducted by Mercedes, they retained their iconic three-pointed star emblem and signature silver color while creating a new line of EQ vehicles (Mercedes-Benz, 2025). This approach allowed Mercedes to signal innovation and sustainability without disrupting the brand's core identity, thereby maintaining loyalty among existing consumers while appealing to a newer market.

Additionally, marketers must keep in mind that rebranding must be customer-centric, not internally driven. One of the common pitfalls of rebranding, as highlighted by Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007), is when companies prioritize internal visions over consumer expectations. The Jaguar case underscores this risk: by pushing an aesthetic and strategic transformation not aligned with consumer schemas, the brand suffered losses in awareness, loyalty, and quality perception. Marketers should conduct consumer perception tests before initiating rebrands to ensure the shift reflects the market's expectations, not just executive ambitions.

Lastly, marketers must consider gradual adaptation to a rebranding. Jaguar's rebranding was relatively abrupt, simultaneously changing its logo, aesthetic, and strategic direction. Such a rapid change may have caused more overload to the

consumers to adjust and comprehend the change, thus leading to an even stronger negative reaction. Therefore, a phased rollout strategy, where visual and strategic changes are introduced over time with consistent messaging, may allow consumers to adjust their schemas incrementally, reducing resistance.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

There are several key limitations in this study: primarily, the study relied on a relatively small valid sample ($n = 60$) drawn from a South Korean online panel. While Jaguar is an internationally recognized brand, cultural context and brand exposure in Korea may differ from primary markets like the UK or US, limiting the generalizability of the results to other geographic regions. Furthermore, Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which increases the likelihood of self-selection bias. Those who chose to respond may have stronger opinions or prior experiences with Jaguar than the average consumer, potentially skewing the results.

The study's design also has limitations: The research design is cross-sectional, meaning that it is unable to capture the long-term changes or effects of the rebranding. Rather, it relies on a snapshot of a single timeframe. Additionally, schema incongruity was assessed via self-reported Likert scales on perceived change and consistency, which may vary significantly based on individual differences, prior exposure, or brand knowledge. No standardized incongruity manipulation was used.

Lastly, the study removed the last component of Aaker's BEM, which is proprietary brand assets. While justifiably omitted for consumer perception reasons, such exclusion means the study does not assess the full brand equity framework, which could be relevant for B2B or legal/financial branding outcomes.

Amidst these limitations, future research can be conducted to deepen the understanding of the cost of schema incongruity. First, longitudinal research can be incorporated to explore the long-term effects of the negative implications of schema incongruity on consumers. Understanding the long-term effect will be valuable in increasing ecological validity and determining whether consumers eventually adapt to the rebranded identity or if the negative perceptions persist over time. Furthermore, qualitative research can be adopted to enhance the understanding of how customers perceive the brand in the case of incongruity. Qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would allow researchers to uncover the underlying cognitive and emotional mechanisms that are not expressed quantitatively.

5.2 Conclusion

This study used Jaguar's 2024 rebranding to test how schema incongruity shapes consumer-based brand equity in a real-world setting. Across the full sample, brand awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty declined after exposure to the new identity, and five of seven associations weakened. This shows how abrupt rebranding or position shift can erode entrenched brand meanings, particularly for legacy brands, as is the case for Jaguar.

Perceived incongruity was consistently shown throughout the entire surveyed sample: two-thirds of respondents judged the new identity to deviate moderately or extremely from their prior Jaguar schema. In line with Mandler's Inverted U-Shaped Theory, extreme incongruity was costly. Key factors such as awareness, quality, loyalty, and heritage-linked associations all fell significantly for this subgroup. By contrast, moderate incongruity produced no broad deterioration and even lifted certain indicators such as awareness.

Holistically, the results point to a key implication that managers and brand experts shall target the "moderate" zone. Rebranding should be done carefully, preserving key recognizers such as symbols or palette while pacing change to signal new positioning.

This, however, should be viewed with the study's scope in mind (Korea-based, convenience sample, cross-sectional design, and self-reported incongruity).

Overall, the paper provides evidence that the costs of rebranding rise steeply at the "extreme incongruity" end of the curve. If done correctly, taking account of consumers' existing schemas and perceptions, rebranding can, in fact, refresh a brand without sacrificing equity.

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Appendices (if applicable)

Appendix 1. Survey Instrument

This appendix presents the bilingual (English and Korean) version of the questionnaire administered in this study.

Section 1: Demographics

What is your age? (귀하의 연령대를 선택해 주세요.)

What is your gender? (귀하의 성별은 무엇인가요?)

Have you heard of Jaguar as a car company? (재규어라는 자동차 회사를 들어보셨나요?)

Are you familiar with Jaguar's services and products? (재규어가 제공하는 서비스와 제품에 대해 알고 계신가요?)

Section 2: Before Rebranding

(Participants were shown the original Jaguar logo.)

How confident were you in describing Jaguar's brand previously? (리브랜딩 전, 재규어 브랜드가 무엇을 나타내는지 얼마나 자신 있게 설명할 수 있었나요?)

How would you rate the quality of Jaguar vehicles before rebranding? (리브랜딩 전, 재규어 차량의 품질을 어떻게 평가하셨나요?)

How strongly did you associate Jaguar with the following traits? (리브랜딩 전, 아래의 특성과 재규어 브랜드를 얼마나 강하게 연관지어 생각하셨나요?)

British heritage (영국적 전통), Classic luxury (고전적인 고급스러움),

Performance (성능), Exclusivity (희소성), Modernity (현대적 이미지)

How likely were you to consider Jaguar for your next vehicle purchase?

(리브랜딩 전, 다음 차량 구매 시 재규어를 고려할 가능성은 어느 정도였나요?)

Are you aware of Jaguar's "Copy Nothing" rebranding campaign? (재규어의 최근 "Copy Nothing" 리브랜딩 캠페인에 대해 알고 계셨나요?)

Section 3: After Rebranding

(Participants were shown the rebranded logo and vehicle design.)

How consistent is Jaguar's new brand identity with your previous perception of the brand? (재규어의 새로운 브랜드 아이덴티티는 리브랜딩 전 귀하가 인식하던 이미지와 얼마나 일치한다고 느끼시나요?)

How confident are you in describing Jaguar's brand after the rebranding? (리브랜딩 이후, 현재 재규어 브랜드가 무엇을 나타내는지 얼마나 자신 있게 설명할 수 있으신가요?)

How would you rate the quality of Jaguar vehicles after the rebranding? (리브랜딩 이후, 재규어 차량의 품질을 어떻게 평가하시나요?)

How strongly do you associate Jaguar with the following traits? (리브랜딩 이후, 아래의 특성과 재규어 브랜드를 얼마나 강하게 연관지어 생각하시나요?)

British heritage (영국적 전통), Classic luxury (고전적인 고급스러움), Performance (성능), Exclusivity (희소성), Modernity (현대적 이미지), Masculinity (남성성), Femininity (여성성)

How likely are you to consider Jaguar for your next vehicle purchase after rebranding? (리브랜딩 이후, 다음 차량 구매 시 재규어를 고려할 가능성은 어느 정도인가요?)

Has your willingness to support Jaguar changed due to its new brand identity? (재규어의 새로운 브랜드 아이덴티티로 인해 브랜드를 지지하려는 의향에 변화가 있었나요?)

Options: Yes, I am more likely to support (예, 더 지지하게 되었다), No, I am less likely to support (아니요, 덜 지지하게 되었다), No change (변화 없음)

Section 4: Schema Incongruity

How would you categorize the degree of change in Jaguar's branding compared to your previous expectations? (이번 리브랜딩의 변화 정도는 어느 정도라고 생각하시나요?)

Scale: 1 = Very consistent (매우 일치함), 4 = Very inconsistent (전혀 일치하지 않음)

Section 5: Open-Ended Feedback

What would Jaguar need to do to regain or maintain your interest? (재규어가 귀하의 관심을 다시 끌거나 유지하기 위해 어떤 점을 개선해야 한다고 생각하시나요?)

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Submission Checklist:

- [V] The manuscript follows the journal's formatting guidelines.
- [V] All co-authors have reviewed and approved the submission.
- [V] References are formatted correctly according to the journal's guidelines.
- [V] Figures and tables are appropriately formatted and referenced.
- [V] A conflict of interest statement is included.

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