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# The Fit Factor: The Role of Fit Between Ads in Understanding Cross-Media Synergy

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**This research investigates the role of fit between campaign ads in generating cross-media effects. Using an ecologically valid design, this article enhances our understanding of cross-media effects in real life. By combining a content analysis of Dutch cross-media campaigns with a secondary data analysis of tracking studies on the same campaigns ( $n = 900$ ), this research revealed that fit contributed positively to campaign evaluations yet contributed negatively to brand and campaign memory. In conclusion, this research shows that fit is an important factor in understanding cross-media synergy but might have both positive and negative effects.**

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Over the years, researchers and practitioners have embraced the notion that cross-media campaigns are more effective and produce more positive campaign results than single-medium campaigns do (Assael 2011; Bronner, Neijens, and van Raaij 2003; Chang and Thorson 2004; Chatterjee 2012; Dijkstra 2002; Edell and Keller 1989; Naik and Raman 2003; Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Vandeberg et al. in press; Voorveld 2011; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). Synergy is the main reason why cross-media campaigns are so successful. Synergy refers to the combined effect of multiple media communications that exceeds the sum of their individual effects (Naik and Raman 2003). Using multiple media instead of a single medium to communicate a message thus can generate “extra” effects and improve campaign results (Chang and Thorson 2004).

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Both authors contributed equally to this work.

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Despite the popularity of cross-media campaigns, little is known about the conditions under which synergy is most likely to occur (Bronner, Neijens, and van Raaij 2003). The “fit” (i.e., similarity and congruence of the ad execution among ads within a campaign, for example, ads with the same key visuals, colors, and slogan across different media) could be a key factor in explaining the success of cross-media campaigns (Bronner 2006; Assael 2011), because the psychological mechanisms underlying cross-media synergy critically rely on some sort of overlap in ad execution between the ads within a cross-media campaign. Yet scant scientific research has been conducted to examine the role of “fit” in generating cross-media effects.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to investigate the role of the fit among campaign ads in generating cross-media effects. Research in different subfields of marketing communication (e.g., message consistency, context effects, brand placement, endorsements) consistently showed that a high level of fit results in more positive ad evaluations but also showed that a high level of fit might backfire, because it negatively influences consumer responses in terms of memory. In the current study we investigate whether this principle also applies to fit in cross-media campaigns or has a positive influence on consumer responses only, which can be suggested based on the cross-media literature.

The contribution of the present study is that by studying the influence of fit on both memory and evaluative measures, this study offers a comprehensive insight into the conditions under which cross-media campaigns are most effective. This is important because the empirical literature on cross-media synergy has thus far ignored studying the role of content characteristics in explaining consumer responses to cross-media campaigns.

Moreover, the present study also offers an important practical contribution, as this research is one of the first to study cross-media effects in real life. Because academic research on cross-media effects is typically conducted in an experimental setting using forced exposure (e.g., Edell and Keller 1989; Chang and Thorson 2004; Dijkstra, Buijtsels, and van Raaij

2005; Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Tang, Newton, and Wang 2007; Voorveld 2011; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011, 2012; Wakolbinger, Denk, and Oberecker 2009), little is known about how cross-media effects work in the field, in other words, without forced exposure (some exceptions are Havlena, Cardarelli, and de Montigny 2007; Naik and Raman 2003; Naik and Peters 2009; Taylor et al. 2013). By combining a content analysis of Dutch cross-media campaigns with a secondary data analysis of cross-media tracking studies on the same advertising campaigns, this study enhances our understanding of cross-media effects in real life.

## BACKGROUND

### Content Analyses on Fit in Integrated Marketing Communications

In the present research, *fit* is defined as the degree to which the ads within cross-media campaigns are similar and congruent (Bronner 2006). Fit, or tactical integration, is present when the same visual and verbal elements, also referred to as *retrieval cues*, are used across the different media (Sheehan and Doherty 2001). These retrieval cues are identifiable ingredients such as slogans, key visuals, symbols, and distinctive phrases (Keller 1996).

Although there is no research on the role of fit among ads within cross-media campaigns, some studies did assess the integration of different marketing communication efforts in a broader perspective (e.g., Kanso and Nelson 2004; Sheehan and Doherty 2001). The results of these studies show that despite the widespread idea that ad execution should be consistent, a good fit is not always present. Kanso and Nelson (2004), for example, investigated the integration of companies' websites and print advertisements and concluded that print and online advertising efforts are not sufficiently integrated. In addition, a content analysis by Sheehan and Doherty (2001) showed that although some advertising elements are well fitted, often others are not. It was found that although many advertisers succeed in tactically integrating their websites and print advertisements to some extent, elements such as the slogan and the spokesperson were less likely to be used in both communication efforts (Sheehan and Doherty 2001). Whether fit between ads in cross-media campaign drives consumer responses toward these campaigns is unknown. However, based on other fields of research in marketing communication and on the mechanisms underlying cross-media synergy, it can be expected that fit is an important factor in explaining both cognitive campaign results, such as ad recognition and brand recall, and campaign evaluations.

### Contribution of Fit to Cognitive Campaign Results Based on the Marketing Communication Literature

There is ample literature available that gives insight into the role of fit in driving cognitive consumer responses, such as

literature on message consistency, context effects, brand placement, and sponsorships, although the term *fit* is not always used (other terms include, for example, *congruence* or *congruity*; for an overview, see Fleck and Quester 2007).<sup>1</sup> In these fields, the general conclusion is that fit negatively contributes to ad and brand memory, because well-fitted elements do not stand out enough to attract attention. Literature on message consistency tested differences in brand memory when participants were exposed to either the same ad execution three times or to three different ad executions of the same brand using a different spokesperson. Results showed that varied ad executions result in better brand-name memory than repeated ad executions (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). In the literature on context effects, several researchers have shown that thematic congruency ("the degree to which advertising is thematically similar to adjacent editorial content," per Zanjani, Diamond, and Chan 2011, p. 68) has a negative influence on recall and recognition of ads and brands in cluttered environments (Zanjani, Diamond, and Chan 2011; Dahlén et al. 2008) and that incongruity between banners and the website on which the banners are placed has a more favorable effect on recall and recognition than congruity (Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter 2005). In the brand placement literature it has repeatedly shown that brands that are prominently placed (and thus stand out from the program around it, i.e., are not well fitted) are memorized better than more subtly placed brands (for an overview, see Van Reijmersdal 2009). Also in the sponsorship literature it is suggested that slight incongruence between sponsor and event results in better recall from consumers than congruence (Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001). Translated to the field of cross-media campaigns, these findings suggest that campaigns with a higher level of fit among ads in multiple media may not draw enough attention to stand out and therefore may result in a lower level of recall and recognition than campaigns with a lower level of fit.

Next to the previously discussed empirical findings, there are also several theoretical explanations for why a high level of fit would result in lower levels of recall and recognition. An important theory that provides an explanation for the conclusion that fit negatively contributes to brand and ad memory is the encoding variability theory, which argues that "the context in which the information is embedded forms part of the memory trace for that information" (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991, p. 406; Young and Bellezza 1982). This contextual information then acts as a retrieval cue for the to-be-remembered information, and multiple retrieval routes result a higher recall and recognition of the information. It is also argued that variation among repeated items should be large enough to form separate retrieval routes. When variation among ads in cross-media campaigns is only marginal, it may not set up multiple retrieval routes in memory (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). Translating this to the optimal level of fit among ads in cross-media campaigns, this finding might plead for not too much overlap between ads in different media because it would not

result in multiple retrieval routes. Thus, from this point of view, a high level of fit among ads in cross-media campaigns would result in a lower memory.

Another theory that can be used to explain differences in memory for varied versus repeated ads is the differential attention hypothesis, which states that when people are exposed to the same information repeatedly their attention to later exposure declines and recall decreases (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991; Crowder 1976). Changing ad executions would, however, maintain people's attention because of novelty, which would then result in better memory for varied ads than for repeated ads (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991). This explanation can also be used to predict that cross-media campaigns with a higher fit among ads in multiple media may not draw enough attention to stand out and therefore may result in a lower level of ad and brand memory than campaigns with a lower level of fit.

Schema theory (Cornwell and Maignan 1998; McDaniel 1999) can also be used to support the expected negative influence of fit on brand memory. Schema theory suggests that consumers develop brand schemas in which consumers' brand knowledge and perceptions are stored. When consumers encounter new information about a brand, the brand schema is activated and the new information is interpreted in light of the already existing brand schema (Dahlén et al. 2008). When a brand communicates information in line with the brand schema, there is no need for consumers to elaborately process the new information (Dahlén et al. 2008; Dahlén 2005). However, when consumers encounter brand messages that deviate from the already existing schema, they pay more attention to this new information (Dahlén et al. 2008) and new inferences are formed, which result in a more elaborate brand schema (Rifon et al. 2004).

Extending this line of reasoning to the role of fit in cross-media campaigns, it can be expected that when consumers see ads in multiple media which use the same visual and verbal elements or retrieval cues, there is no need to pay attention because the ads are consistent with the existing brand schema and associations. However, when ads in multiple media differ from one another (i.e., have a low level of fit), consumers pay more attention to them and engage in more extensive processing to resolve the incongruence (Dahlén et al. 2008; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Thus it can be argued that a high level of fit among ads in cross-media campaigns results in lower brand and ad memory.

### **Contribution of Fit to Cognitive Campaign Results Based on the Cross-Media Literature**

It is also necessary to discuss the cross-media literature itself to predict how fit would contribute to brand and ad memory, because fit between campaign elements in cross-media campaigns does differ from fit in other fields of research. In other fields of research the role of fit is usually investigated

among elements that are presented closely together (e.g., an ad and its immediate context; a brand placement and the program around it; a sponsoring brand and the sponsored event), while in cross-media campaigns fit among campaign elements is further distant from one another in time. Consumers might be exposed to an ad on television on a certain day and then see the print ad belonging to the same cross-media campaign several days later.

The cross-media literature is less consistent on whether a high level of fit results in lower or higher levels of ad and brand memory. On one hand, the explanations for why cross-media campaigns are related to more positive campaign results than single-medium campaigns are all built on the same general underlying principle of variability, for example, encoding variability (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991; Stammerjohan et al. 2005), repetition-variation (e.g., Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Yaveroglu and Donthu 2008; Schumann, Petty, and Clemons 1990), and differential attention (e.g., Unnava and Burnkrant 1991; Stammerjohan et al. 2005). The idea is that processing information across different media causes more variability in the encoding and retrieval of the information than (repeatedly) processing information within a single medium (Vandeberg et al. in press). Therefore, a high level of fit (i.e., less variability) would result in lower levels of ad and brand memory.

On the other hand, the cross-media literature also assumes that a high level of fit among ads in a cross-media campaign is needed so that consumers can recognize a cross-media campaign as one campaign (Bronner 2006; Assael 2011). Fit is also important because two of the most important psychological processes that occur when people are exposed to cross-media campaigns require a certain amount of fit between ads. The first process is forward encoding (Bronner 2006; Dijkstra 2002; Edell and Keller 1989; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). Forward encoding implies that when consumers are exposed to a combination of media, the ad in the first medium may serve as a teaser to "attract attention to, arouse interest in and increase curiosity for the ad in the second medium" (Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011, p. 70). When consumers see an ad in the first medium, a memory trace is formed and the aroused interest in the ad facilitates the subsequent encoding of the ad in the second medium (Edell and Keller 1989; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). Consequently, people are more motivated to process the ad, resulting in an easier encoding and a deeper processing of the ad (Dijkstra 2002; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). The second process is image transfer. Image transfer is a retrieval process that is prevalent during exposure to the second ad, where consumers imagine or mentally replay the ad from the first medium during exposure to the second ad (Bronner 2006; Edell and Keller 1989; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). This process states that memory is improved when cues available at encoding are also present at retrieval.

A common factor in both forward encoding and image transfer is their critical reliance on some overlap in ad execution among the ads within a cross-media campaign. That is, retrieval cues ought to be present across the different ads for forward encoding and image transfer to occur. Considering that it is precisely the creative elements such as color, product picture, or slogans that function as retrieval cues, it is evident that both processes are highly dependent on a good fit among the ads in cross-media campaigns. Furthermore, it is evident that fit is an important factor in generating cross-media effects. Overlap among the ad executions will likely facilitate a deeper processing of subsequently viewed ads (forward encoding) and an enhanced memory for previously viewed ads (image transfer). This increased processing in turn is likely to enhance the recognition and recall of the advertisements and advertised brands. Therefore, a high level of fit would result in higher levels of ad and brand memory.

Because the cross-media literature and the literature on fit in other fields yield inconsistent expectations, we pose the following research question:

**RQ1:** To what extent does fit among ads in cross-media campaigns contribute to (a) ad recognition and (b) brand recall?

### **Contribution of Fit to Evaluative Campaign Results Based on the Marketing Communication Literature and the Cross-Media Literature**

Whereas literature from fields other than cross-media literature results in inconsistent expectations regarding memory measures, the cross-media literature and the literature on fit in other fields (among others: message consistency, context effects, brand placement, endorsements, sponsorships, and cobranding) is rather consistent regarding the positive influence of fit on evaluation measures. Literature on message consistency repeatedly reveals that a higher level of congruency results in more positive ad evaluations (e.g., Dahlén 2005). Research on context effects, for example, shows that congruence between the style of ads and the style of their direct context usually leads to more positive evaluations (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002), and that congruity among banners and the websites on which they are placed results in more positive evaluations than incongruent banners and websites (in terms of products advertised and colors used) (Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter 2005). The brand placement literature concludes brands that are well integrated in a story line are evaluated more positively than brand placements that stand out because they are not so well integrated or too prominently placed (e.g., Russell 2002; Dens et al. 2012; for an overview, see Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit 2009). The sponsorship literature also shows a positive relationship between fit (between a sponsor and an object) and attitudes (e.g., Carrillat, Harris, and Lafferty 2010; Rifon et al. 2004; for an overview, see Olson and

Thjømmøe 2011). In the literature on celebrity endorsement, the match-up hypothesis is a relevant mechanism that refers to the harmony or the match between the celebrity endorser and the product being endorsed (Till and Busler 2000). It has repeatedly been shown that a good fit between a celebrity and a product is necessary for positive evaluations (for a meta-analysis, see Amos, Holmes, and Strutton 2008). Literature on brand extensions and cobranding also found that fit is an important factor driving consumers' attitudes. In this field of research it is shown that attitudes toward brand extensions are more favorable when there is a good fit between the brand's original product class and the product class of the extension (Simonin and Ruth 1998).

The positive influence of fit on affective consumer responses such as campaign evaluations can also be deduced from the cross-media literature. The mechanisms of forward encoding and image transfer can also be used to explain how fit influences evaluative consumer responses. Both mechanisms imply that consumers process information that uses the same retrieval cues more thoroughly, which may result in a greater liking of the ads and the brand (e.g., Lee 2000; Dahlén et al. 2008). Furthermore, messages communicated through different media may be perceived as more convincing and credible (Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011; Dijkstra 2002). The different media within cross-media campaigns are seen as independent sources conveying the same message, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness of the message (Bronner, Neijens, and van Raaij 2003; Bronner 2006; Gotlieb and Sarel 1991; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). However, because the perception of different media as independent sources conveying the same message is valid only to the extent that this message is believed to be the same message about the same brand, fit is likely to increase multiple source perception. Therefore, a higher fit among the ads in cross-media campaigns is expected to improve the credibility and persuasiveness of the message. A higher fit may thus improve evaluative campaign results, such as the evaluation of the ad.

The more positive evaluation of ads with a high level of fit can also be explained by the idea that such an ad or campaign tells a coherent story, which facilitates processing and results in more positive evaluations (Dahlén 2005). Also, on a more automatic level, well-fitted cross-media campaigns may lead to more positive evaluations, because ads with overlapping cues or elements may be processed more fluently. Research on processing fluency has shown that fluent processing (which can originate from repeated exposure) leads to more positive evaluations because people automatically attribute the positive feelings of processing fluency to the ad at hand (Fransen, Fennis, and Pruyn 2010). This idea is also in line with mere exposure theory, which states that repeated exposure leads to increased liking (Zajonc 1968).

Based on both the cross-media literature and literature on fit in other fields, hypothesis 1 follows:

**H1:** Fit between ads in cross-media campaigns positively contributes to ad evaluation.

## METHOD

To give insight into the role of fit in evoking consumer responses to cross-media campaigns, we combined data from a content analysis and real-life secondary data collected in tracking research conducted by MeMo<sup>2</sup>, an independent research agency in the Netherlands. The Netherlands provides an interesting case for this study because it has a reputation for being a creative hub and is an important player in Europe with local agencies doing plenty of international work (M&M Global 2011). The Netherlands is the 11th highest country in terms of ad spending per person (eMarketer 2013).

### Content Analysis

*Sample.* All campaigns selected for this study were Dutch cross-media campaigns broadcast nationally between March 2010 and December 2011. Each campaign was selected to make use of two or more different media, ranging from TV to print, online, online video, and outdoor advertising. In total, 12 cross-media campaigns belonging to 12 different brands were selected. We deliberately selected a broad range of brands and campaigns to make the results more generalizable. These brands can be categorized into three different product types: service brands (mobile network providers, financial services brands, insurance brands), durable goods (television and mobile phone brands), and nondurable goods (drinks, cheese, and fashion brands). All brands were specifically selected to cover different markets, although they were all well-known brands with a top-three position within their markets.

*Coding instrument.* To assess the fit within of these cross-media campaigns, the coding instrument consisted of seven elements (retrieval cues) that are traditionally included in advertising. These elements were acquired from Sheehan and Doherty's (2001) content analysis of the tactical integration of print advertisements and websites. Fit was determined by analyzing whether the different ads within a cross-media campaign consistently included visual and verbal elements. It was coded (1) whether the ads in all media used the same logo, (2) whether the key visual was the same, (3) whether the product was depicted consistently in the ads in different media, (4) whether the ads used the same colors, whether the same spokespersons were used in the ads in the different media, (6) whether the slogan was consistently used across all ads, and (7) whether the ads consistently promoted the single most important message. It should be noted that the last element, the single most important message, was borrowed from the elements that Sheehan and Doherty coded to assess strategic integration. Strategic integration implies an integration of the different communication efforts on a higher level (Sheehan and Doherty 2001). The other elements used by Sheehan and

Doherty (2001) to assess strategic integration were not relevant to the current study. While the seven elements used to code fit formed a reliable scale (Kuder-Richardson 20 = .795), the conceptualization of tactical fit by Sheehan and Doherty was convoluted a bit by coding the single most important message as part of the concept of tactical fit. Therefore we analyzed our data both with the inclusion and exclusion of this element.

*Procedure and intercoder agreement.* All campaign ads were independently coded by the second author as well as an independent male coder. Before the actual content analysis started, the coders were trained to use the coding instrument by coding material not included in the final sample. Both coders determined for each campaign on all seven elements whether fit between the campaign ads was present (1) or absent (0). Importantly, the medium radio was not included in the coding process because the coding scheme consisted of visual elements only. A campaign got a fit score of 1 for each retrieval cue (e.g., color) only when all advertisements within the campaign had the same cue. If some advertisements within a campaign did not involve the same cue (e.g., color), the coder coded this as no fit (i.e., coded as 0). A total index score of fit was calculated for each campaign by dividing the total fit score by the maximum fit score of 7 ( $\times 100$ ). It is important to note, however, that when one of the advertising elements was absent in all campaign ads the fit score was computed on the remaining elements. For example, in the campaign of a beverage brand, a logo was absent in all campaign ads, and therefore the fit score for this brand was calculated for the six remaining elements. We have chosen to calculate percentage of agreement because not all fit elements were present in all campaigns, which made calculating another statistic very difficult. Intercoder agreement on all elements was very high: 96.4%. Differences were solved through discussion until 100% agreement was achieved.

### Secondary Data Analysis

*Materials, respondents, and procedure.* The data of 12 cross-media tracking studies that were originally conducted between April 2010 and December 2011 were analyzed in this study; the actual duration of the campaigns differed. The tracking studies involved the same Dutch cross-media campaigns that were also analyzed in the content analysis. The fieldwork was carried out by research agency MeMo<sup>2</sup>. MeMo<sup>2</sup> has its own panel, which consists of about 150,000 Dutch panel members. In total, the studies had 18,193 respondents. Respondents were between 12 and 88 years old ( $M = 42.68$ ,  $SD = 14.51$ ), and 51% were male. The samples are representative of the Dutch population. Each tracking study followed the same procedure; when the campaign ended, a random sample of panelists received a URL in their mailbox with an invitation to participate in the survey. Those who decided to participate were first introduced to the topic of the survey and were

informed that, upon participating, they could win one of the three prizes of €50 from MeMo<sup>2</sup>. Then, a series of test items followed that measured cognitive and evaluative campaign results, as well as media exposure. The response rate of the studies was 45% on average (range between 35% and 55%).

## Measures

### *Dependent Variables*

*Cognitive campaign results.* In the present study ad recognition and aided brand recall were measured. Ad recognition was defined as “execution-cued ad awareness because it is recall that is prompted by the ad execution” (Sutherland and Sylvester 2000, p. 277). Ad recognition was assessed by showing respondents—depending on the media included in the campaign—the online, print, radio, TV or online video ads one by one in the survey and asking them whether they recognized the ad (i.e. ‘Have you recently seen/heard the ad that is shown above?’). Respondents could answer by selecting one out of four answering options (*No, definitely not; Yes, maybe; Yes, definitely; Don’t know*). To provide an overall ad recognition score, the recognition scores for all ads within a campaign—excluding radio—were dichotomized (if respondents answered *Yes, definitely* or *Yes, maybe*, this was coded as “recognized,” whereas all other answers were coded as “not recognized”). We chose to collapse the answer categories, because this is typically done in almost all commercial media research (e.g. research presented at Print and Digital Research Forum, e.g., Petric, Bassler, and Gopal 2013). In addition, it is also in line with the use of dichotomous ad recognition measures used in academic research (e.g. Dens et al. 2012; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002; for a review, see Singh and Cole 1985). Then, the number of ads within a campaign that was recognized by the respondents was summed. The average number of recognized ads was 1.17 ( $SD = 0.99$ ). The number of recognized ads was used in further analyses.

Aided brand recall was defined as “the recall of an advertised brand,” prompted by the product category, thus product-category aided brand recall (Wakolbinger, Denk, and Oberecker 2009). Aided brand recall was measured by providing respondents with a list of brands and asking them to indicate for which brands they had recently seen, read, or heard an advertisement (i.e., “From which of the following brands of product category X have you recently seen, read, or heard an advertisement? Multiple answers possible”). If respondents selected the advertised brand this was coded as 1; if they did not this was coded as 0 (Wakolbinger, Denk, and Oberecker 2009). In total, an average of 34% of the respondents reported they recalled an advertisement of the particular brand.

*Evaluative campaign results.* Evaluation of the ad was measured by asking respondents to grade each ad separately on a scale from 0 (*negative*) to 10 (*positive*), (i.e., “If you would express your evaluation of this ad by giving a report mark, what grade would you give?”). This measure is the most

common general evaluation measure in the Netherlands; it is, for example, used to evaluate children’s school performance and has been successfully used in academic research (e.g., Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2007). An overall ad evaluation score for each campaign was calculated by averaging the scores per ad (note that radio again was not included). The average evaluation score was 6.33 ( $SD = 1.61$ ).

### *Independent Variables*

*Media exposure.* Using self-report measures to assess whether people have been exposed to an ad in a particular medium is risky because the accuracy of recall is problematic and may also be affected by social desirability (Slater 2004). By using media buy records provided by the advertisers that include specific information about the amount, type, and placement of advertising, it is possible to estimate exposure. This method is preferable, according to Slater (2004), because exposure can be measured exogenously instead of through self-reports.

To measure campaign exposure in the different media, information about respondents’ media consumption behavior (e.g., frequency/duration of media consumption for different TV channels/print titles) was collected. To be able to assess campaign exposure per medium, this was compared to media buy records. Based on Dutch national audience research into readership of print media (measuring average issue readership by showing people the covers of magazines and ask them whether they read the issue; also see Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia [NOM] 2014) and ratings of television (based on registration by means of an audience meter; also see SKO 2013), it was calculated whether respondents had the chance to be exposed to the specific advertisements. Respondents who consumed the “right” media but not at the specific time that the advertisements ran are assigned to the “unexposed.” This resulted in an “opportunity to see” (OTS) per medium (TV and print) for each respondent. When the OTS was above 1 (or 1), this was recoded as “exposed” (i.e., 1 = *exposed*, 0 = *not exposed*).

To assess exposure to outdoor advertising, Dutch Outdoor Research was used. The main research elements of this research are the collection of traffic counts, a large national travel survey, and the classification of individual poster sites (also see Dutch Outdoor Research 2014). To calculate opportunity to see for outdoor advertising, the information from this research is connected to information on locations on which the ads are placed, delivered by the advertiser.

Exposure to online (video) advertisements was assessed in a different way. For each online (video) ad, a tracking pixel was added to the banner or online video ad. This way, when an individual is exposed to the ad (e.g., has browsed a website at the moment the ad was visible, thus during a certain campaign), this is registered on the individual’s computer by means of a cookie. When panel members subsequently

participate in the survey, a built-in script tracks whether people have been exposed. This method allows one to measure exposure to online advertisements. The measurement is limited to the specific campaign and is activated only when a panelist participates in a certain study. When consumers decide to join the panel they are informed about the use of these pixels.

Each respondent was assigned an OTS score for each medium (1 = *exposed*, 0 = *not exposed*). These scores were then combined for each respondent by counting the number of media to which participants were exposed ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SE = .61$ ).

*Control variables.* To control for possible effects of brand use, respondents were asked to indicate which brand they currently used (e.g., “What brand of product category X do you use at the moment? Multiple answers possible.”). If respondents used the advertised brand, this was coded as 1. If they did not use the advertised brand, this was coded as 0. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their sex and age.

Because the possibility that respondents recognize at least one of the ads increases as the number of media within a campaign rises, the number of media used in each campaign was included as a control variable (“number of media”) ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SE = 1.11$ ). Furthermore, the number of media each respondent was exposed to was taken into account (“media exposure”; see previous section) ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SE = .61$ ), because it is likely that the more often respondents are exposed to the campaign, the easier they will recognize and recall the campaign. In addition, an increased frequency of exposure could enhance the evaluation of the ad, as the mere exposure hypothesis predicts (Zajonc 1968).

*Construction of the data set.* Data from the content analysis—the fit index scores—were used as the independent variable. Data from the survey were used as the dependent variables in the subsequent analyses. Data from the 12 tracking studies were merged to create a single raw data file containing the data of 18,193 respondents. To examine whether fit among media influenced consumer responses, respondents needed to be exposed to at least two different media within each campaign. Therefore, respondents who were exposed to fewer than two different media were excluded from further analyses, as well as respondents who were exposed to only two media, one of which was radio (because radio was not included in the coding process). Respondents who either had not finished the survey or had indicated they were unable to view or hear the advertisements in the survey due to technical problems were also excluded from further analyses. This data-cleaning process resulted in a data file containing 6,325 respondents. To create equal group sizes, 75 respondents were then randomly selected from each of the 12 tracking studies. Thus, the resulting data file, which was used for all further analyses, consisted of 900 respondents, aged between 15 and 88 ( $M = 42.94$ ,  $SD = 15.02$ ), of which 53% were female.

## RESULTS

### Content Analysis

To provide insight into the state of fit in cross-media campaigns, we calculated the mean percentage of fit for all seven coding elements separately. Cross-media campaigns had the best fit on the presence of the logo (fit present in 100% of the campaigns) and the key visual (fit present in 92% of the campaigns). The greater part of the campaigns also consistently used the same colors (fit present in 92% of the campaigns). Fit with regard to the slogan was also present in the majority of the campaigns (fit present in the 75% of the campaigns). Campaigns were the least fitted with regard to the spokespeople and single most important message in the ads (fit present in 33% of the campaigns). Across all elements, cross-media campaigns on average scored moderate on fit ( $M = 70.3$ ,  $SE = 20.99$ ).

### Combining Content Analysis and Survey Data

*Control variables and checks.* First, we checked whether control variables need to be included in the analyses. A one-way analysis of variance with brand as the independent variable and age as the dependent variable confirmed that the respondents selected from each tracking study differed significantly with respect to their age,  $F(11, 888) = 11.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, a chi-square test indicated a significant association between the brand and sex ( $\chi^2(11, N = 900) = 102.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\phi = .34$ ). These results indicate there are differences in age and sex between the respondents acquired from the data of the 12 studies. Furthermore, correlation analyses showed that age, sex, and brand use, as well as number of media and media exposure, significantly correlated with one or more of our three dependent variables (brand recall, ad recognition, and ad evaluation,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, these five variables were included in our analyses as control variables. Preliminary analyses ensured that the assumption of multicollinearity was not violated. We have calculated the correlation between the independent variables, which are all below  $r = .13$  (except for the variables media exposure and number of media,  $r = .59$ ), and variance inflation factors, which are all above 1.028, suggesting no strong multicollinearity. However, checking for outliers did identify seven respondents as outliers. They were excluded from further analyses; including these outliers did not change the results.

*Ad recognition.* To test to what extent fit between ads in cross-media campaigns contributed to ad recognition (per research question 1a), a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The levels of fit among ads, age, sex, brand use, number of media, and media exposure were entered as predictors, and ad recognition was entered as a dependent variable. The total variance explained by the model was 13.5%,  $F(6, 886) = 23.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, fit did significantly predict ad recognition ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the negative



beta value suggests that campaigns with a higher fit were recognized less instead of more often. The same analyses were repeated without the element of single most important thought, because this convoluted the original conceptualization of tactical fit by Sheehan and Doherty (2001) a bit, but results remained similar when excluding this element ( $\beta = -.17, p < .001$ ). Thus, regarding research question 1a, it can be concluded that the level of fit among ads in cross-media campaigns contributes negatively to ad recognition (see Table 1).

To test to what extent fit among ads in cross-media campaigns contributed to brand recall (research question 1b), a logistic regression analysis was conducted. The level of fit between ads, age, sex, brand use, number of media, and media exposure were entered as predictors, and brand recall was entered as the dependent variable. Again, the model as a whole was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(6, N = 893) = 64.37, p < .001$ . Our model explained 9.6% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in brand recall. Fit significantly predicted brand recall ( $B = -.015, \text{Exp } B = .96, p < .001$ ). However, the negative beta value indicates that fit negatively influenced brand recall; respondents thus were less likely to recall campaigns with a higher fit. This result also remained similar when we excluded the single most important message as an element of tactical fit ( $B = -1.93, \text{Exp } B = .15, p = .000$ ). Thus, regarding research question 1b, it can be concluded that the level of fit contributes negatively to brand recall (see Table 1).

*Evaluative campaign results.* To test our hypothesis that fit positively contributes to the evaluation of the ad (hypothesis 1), another multiple regression analysis was conducted. Again, the levels of fit among ads, age, sex, brand use, number of media, and media exposure were entered as predictors, and ad evaluation was entered as the dependent variable. The total variance explained by the model was 3.9%,  $F(6, 886) = 6.06, p < .001$ . Our findings indicate that fit positively contributed to the evaluation of the ad ( $\beta = .097, p < .01$ ). This result also remained the same when we excluded the single most important message as an element of tactical fit ( $\beta = .10, p < .01$ ).

This means that the evaluation of the ad was generally more positive when fit was high (see Table 1). In conclusion, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

By combining a content analysis with a secondary data analysis of tracking studies, the current research aimed to investigate the role of the fit between campaign ads in generating cross-media effects in a real-life setting. This research shows that fit is an important factor in understanding cross-media synergy. The current research also revealed that fit contributed negatively to ad recognition and brand recall, thus campaigns with a higher fit were recognized and recalled less instead of more often. Regarding the role of fit in driving cognitive campaign results, different expectations could be formed based on the cross-media literature and literature from other fields. Based on the cross-media literature it could be expected that fit positively contributed to recall and recognition, while based on literature message consistency, context effects, brand placement, endorsements, and sponsorships, it could be expected that campaigns with a higher fit were recognized and recalled less instead of more often. The fact that a higher fit is related to lower recall and recognition is in line with the expectation formed based on literature on fit in other fields. It can be explained by the idea that a campaign with a low level of fit (or incongruence) is more prominent and attracts more attention—and therefore provides a route to visibility (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). When consumers see ads in multiple media that use the same visual and verbal elements or retrieval cues, there is probably less need to pay attention because the ads are consistent with the existing brand schema and associations, resulting in lower memory.

The finding that a lower level of fit between ads in cross-media campaigns is related to higher levels of recall and recognition has an important theoretical contribution. Current cross-media studies assume that variation is an important

TABLE 1  
(Logistic) Regression Analyses for Influence of Fit on Campaign Results

	Ad recognition			Aided brand recall			Ad evaluation		
	B	SE	$\beta$	$\beta$	SE	Wald	B	SE	$\beta$
Fit	-.007	.002	-.138***	-.015	.004	17.518***	.008	.003	.097**
Brand use <sup>a</sup>	.250	.080	.099**	.598	.182	10.749**	.413	.138	.100**
Number of media	.231	.035	.259***	-.040	.084	.227	-.121	.061	-.083*
Media exposure	.122	.064	.075 <sup>†</sup>	-.039	.152	.067	-.046	.110	-.017
Age	-.006	.002	-.095**	-.019	.005	14.645***	-.006	.004	-.055
Sex <sup>a</sup>	.174	.063	.088**	.556	.148	14.036***	-.170	.108	-.053

Note. <sup>a</sup> = Dummy coded, with non-brand users (0) and females (0) as the reference category.  
<sup>†</sup> < .10; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

explanatory mechanism for the effectiveness of cross-media campaigns in comparison to campaigns that only use one medium (for an overview, see Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Vandeberg et al. in press). By showing that a low level of fit is related to higher levels of recall and recognition than high levels of fit, the current study demonstrates that the variability principle is also an important driver of cognitive responses to different sorts of cross-media campaigns.

Whereas fit negatively contributed to recall and recognition, campaigns with a higher fit were evaluated more positively. The ads within campaigns that use retrieval cues consistently across different media were awarded a higher report mark. The finding that a higher fit among ads in cross-media campaigns leads to more positive ad evaluations is in line with our expectations based on the psychological processes underlying cross-media effects and earlier assumptions in the literature that similarity and congruence of the ad execution would be an important factor in creating cross-media synergy (Bronner 2006; Assael 2011). Based on the psychological processes of forward encoding and image transfer it was predicted that consumers process information that uses the same retrieval cues more thoroughly, which may result in a greater liking of the ads (e.g. Lee 2000; Dahlén et al. 2008). It seems that ads with overlapping cues or elements may be processed more fluently, which eventually leads to more positive evaluations (Fransen, Fennis, and Pruyn 2010).

The overall conclusion that fit positively influences ad evaluations, yet negatively influences recall and recognition, is in line with research on fit in other fields (i.e., message consistency, context effects, brand placement, endorsements, sponsorships, and cobranding) and can be explained by congruity theory. Congruity theory states that information that is incongruent with prior expectations or schema is related to more effortful and elaborative processing and therefore is remembered better (Stangor and McMillan 1992), whereas information that is congruent or very mildly incongruent is related to more positive evaluations because people like objects that conform to their expectations and allow predictability (Mandler 1982; Jagre, Watson, and Watson 2001; Heckler and Childers 1992).

### Limitations and Future Research

An important contribution of the present study is that it advances our understanding of the role of fit in generating cross-media effects in real life. However, the real-life nature of the present study is also related to some limitations. First, although our results seem to indicate that a high level of fit among different ads in cross-media campaigns decreases recall and recognition, these results should be treated with some caution. Not only did this research not include campaigns with a low fit but instead included campaigns with a suboptimal fit (thus we cannot speak of the effects of low fit), there is also always some fit present in cross-media campaigns, if only

because the same brand is mentioned in all ads. In addition, future research could investigate the role of *perceived* fit instead of actual fit between campaign ads in cross-media effects, because consumers' perceptions are probably as important as the objectively defined fit among ads in a cross-media campaign.

Second, using real-life campaigns of existing and well-known brands allows for the possible confounding effects of brand-related factors other than fit such as the position of the brand, the media budget, the campaign's media pressure or the effects of prior advertising campaigns. Yet we aimed to eliminate these effects as much as possible by focusing on campaign-related effects instead of brand-related effects such as brand preference, because these are especially likely to be influenced by factors other than fit.

Third, ad evaluation was measured with a single item on a scale from 0 (*negative*) to 10 (*positive*). Despite the familiarity of this measure to respondents in the Netherlands, future research should measure evaluations using multiple items. Fourth, whereas all of our data were coded by two coders independently, it should be noted that the second author of the paper served as one of the coders. While it would have been better to have two external coders, we do not believe this issue influenced the results because the content analysis was performed some weeks before the construction of the data set used in the secondary data analysis. In addition, no expectations about the level of fit of the different campaigns were formed prior to coding.

Finally, the current study excluded radio ads and focused solely on tactical fit, rather than strategic fit. Future research might include both radio ads and strategic fit, as both might enhance our understanding on the role of fit in cross-media campaigns. Radio commercials can evoke radio replay, which is mentally replaying a visual commercial or ad while being exposed to a radio commercial (Edell and Keller 1989). Unfortunately, our coding instrument based on Sheehan and Doherty (2001) was not able to measure fit for radio commercials because it focused on visual elements. The role of strategic fit might be an interesting issue for future research because ads can be tactically well fitted while essential strategy differs.

### Implications for Advertisers

In the light of the scarcity of research on cross-media effects (Bronner, Neijens, and van Raaij 2003; Assael 2011), this study using real advertising campaigns including different media such as TV, print, outdoor, and online (video) is a valuable contribution to the literature. Yet the real-life nature of this study makes our findings also particularly valuable for advertisers and marketers. Our findings have shown that the fit among the ads in cross-media campaigns is indeed an important factor in understanding cross-media synergy. However, its role is not as straightforward as advertisers might presume;

this study demonstrates that in real-life situations a higher fit across the ads in cross-media campaigns may work counter-effectively and lower the recall and recognition of the ads despite its positive effects on the evaluation of the ads. Advertisers should thus—depending on their goals (e.g., creating awareness or enhancing brand evaluations)—carefully consider whether they should use the same retrieval cues consistently across the different ads or should vary the ad execution to some extent.

## NOTE

1. We would like to thank the associate editor and an anonymous reviewer for raising this interesting point.

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