This is a thesis on how established brands can enhance their strength, interestingness, and vitality. A threat to contemporary established brands is that they may in fact be too well established to be interesting and stimulate curiosity among consumers. A managerial fixation in maintaining consistency in brand communications may have put a straitjacket onto advertising executions for established brands. Therefore, managers for established brands facing communication objectives of enhanced salience in memory, better top-of-mind awareness, and greater consumer interest in the brand, may need to devise communication strategies in ways which are different – and even considerably different – from what they used to execute in the past. This thesis examines one such way – communications which are incongruent with consumers’ established brand associations.

In this thesis, I seek to challenge the popular adage in maintaining consistency in brand communications, by examining effects of brand incongruent communications for established brands from a schema congruity theory perspective. I do this in a series of six articles, each highlighting different types of brand-incongruent communication elements and effects on consumer memory and evaluations. Whereas conventional advertising wisdom, as well as traditional literature on brand management, would discourage a conduct which goes against established brand associations, this thesis argues that – for established brands – the employment of communication executions which challenge existing brand associations may actually improve marketing communication effectiveness.

The aim of this thesis is to spur insight among academics and practitioners into the advancement of established brands. I argue that methods, which are successful to build brand equity for new brands, may be less effective when the objective is to enhance brand equity and consumer interest in already well established brands. The results of the studies presented in this thesis imply that the popular tendency of embracing consistency in brand communications may have to be revisited since brand-incongruent communications can generate more attention, better memory of ads and brands, improve evaluations and purchase intentions, as well as enhance brand associations and brand interest.