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5   The antecedents and outcomes of online consumer brand experience

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Introduction

Digital consumers are no longer dependent on brands for information to support their consumption and decision-making processes; they now proactively seek information using cyber channels to evaluate the suitability of services or products for their personal needs (Rowley, 2004). This phenomenon has shifted the profound nature of modern customers from passive to proactive. With brands recognising this shift, company websites have become a crucial channel for companies' marketing communication through which they can support and strengthen consumer experience.

Previous research related to consumer experiences has mainly focused on the utilitarian aspects of products and services, while experiences that are evoked and provided by brands have received relatively scant attention (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009). Brand experience is still lacking academic attention, and due to its 'practical relevance' (Khan and Rahman, 2015, p. 10), there have been calls for further research on the topic. Importantly, previous studies on Consumer Brand Experience have mostly considered offline settings, justifying the need to study this topic in an online context (Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman, 2014).

Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to examine (a) how a website's appearance and technical quality dimensions evoke online Consumer Brand Experiences and (b) investigate how online Consumer Brand Experience develops consumer brand trust as well as motivates usage behaviour and eWOM. Next, we discuss Consumer Brand Experience and website quality. This is followed by the research model, hypothesis development and research methodology. Finally, the empirical findings are presented, and we conclude the chapter by discussing the implications, limitations and further research ideas.

Conceptual background

Brand experience is a multidimensional concept and is defined as 'sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments' (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009, p. 52). Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello's (2009) examined Consumer Brand Experience in offline context; however, because the source of experiences does not significantly affect their nature, the model can be adopted for measuring the phenomenon in an online context (Cleff, Walter, and Jing, 2018, p. 11). Consumer Brand Experience in an online context, in turn, is defined as 'a holistic response to the stimuli within a website environment' (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013, p. 22).

Brand-related stimuli are recognised as the foundation of consumer responses, which are defined as brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009). These stimuli consist of visual and cognitive aspects of the brand's identity that can be observed and perceived by consumers when searching/shopping for and consuming a brand. In the online context, brands provide these brand-related stimuli via several interactive touchpoints and a wide range of channels, such as websites, SM and blogs (Cleff, Walter, and Jing, 2018).

Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) constructed a four-factor model for the brand experience dimension scale, including the sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural dimensions. These dimensions were validated within the product and service brand context (Nysveen, Pedersen, and Skard, 2013). *Sensory* brand experience relates to visual or other sensory experiences evoked by the brand and brand related stimuli. The *affective* dimension refers to the emotional experiences evoked by the brand. The *behavioural* dimension is linked to intentions, actions and bodily experiences. Lastly, the *intellectual* dimension is related to the cognitive experiences that a brand evokes and stimulates.

Positive online experiences are positively related to the consumption behaviour of online users, such as the intention to use the web again and the time consumers are willing to spend online (Novak, Hoffman, and Yung, 2000). Consumer brand experiences in the website context refer to 'a consumer's positive navigations and perceptions with a specific website' (Ha and Perks, 2005, p. 440), which affect brand trust and higher consumption of the website.

Aladwani and Palvia (2002) developed an instrument for measuring the concept of web quality that includes three dimensions: technical adequacy, web content (specific content and content quality) and web appearance. Technical adequacy refers to technical aspects, such as security, ease of navigation and search facilities, of the website (Al-Qeisi *et al.*, 2014). According to Aladwani (2006), the technical quality of a website has a major impact on user behaviour. Web content quality refers to how the website is perceived in terms of its usefulness, clarity and accuracy (Al-Qeisi *et al.*, 2014). Specific content quality refers to specific company-related information (i.e. contact information and the company's general information) and information concerning its offerings in more detail, such as product or service information (Al-Qeisi *et al.*, 2014). Web appearance includes the visual design of the website and how the visual elements and their usage in website design correlate with a customer's emotional and behavioural responses (Chang *et al.*, 2014). Appearance quality is one of the most influential web quality elements because it has a major impact on customer-related outcomes, such as satisfaction, perceived service quality (Wang, Hernandez, and Minor, 2010), intentions and purchasing behaviour (Chang *et al.*, 2014), activation of search (Wang, Hong, and Lou, 2010) and attitudes towards the website (Aladwani, 2006).

Research model and hypotheses

The proposed conceptual model (Figure 5.1) suggests that two central antecedents to Consumer Brand Experience exist: Website Technical Quality (TQ) and Website Appearance Quality (AQ). Moreover, the research model suggests that TQ and AQ are positively related to Consumer Brand Experience and its's outcomes, brand trust, eWOM intentions and behavioural intentions. The following subsections explain these linkages and propose hypotheses for testing these direct effects.
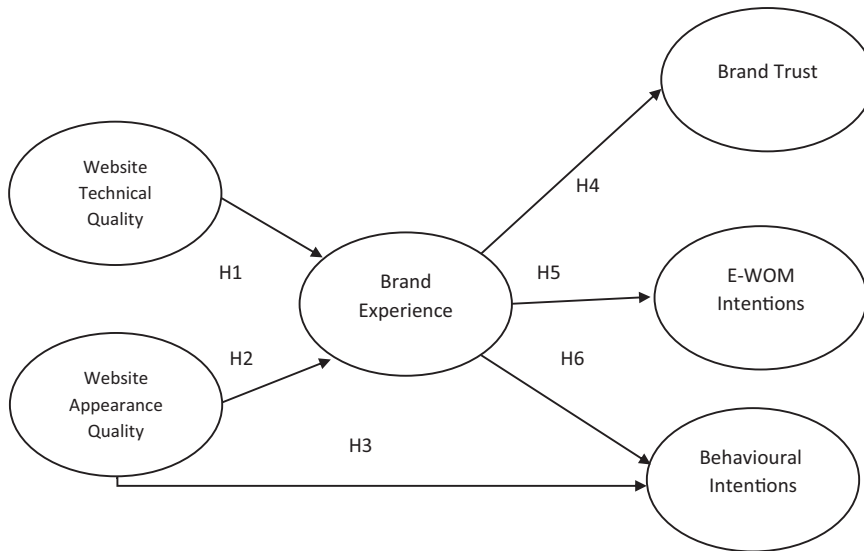
Figure 5.1 Structural model.

Antecedents of Consumer Brand Experience

The technical quality dimension refers to technical features of a website (such as ease of navigation and security). This dimension can be tied to the cognitive experiential state in the online context because it includes similar utilitarian aspects that affect cognitive information processing (Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman, 2014). Chang (2014) suggested that the evoked experiences correlate to the user's perception of the product's ease of use and usefulness. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Website technical quality is positively related to consumer brand experience.

Brand-related websites include brand-related cues as aesthetic features of the website's design and often integrate several recognised brand-related stimuli, such as colour schemes, shapes, typefaces, designs and logos. The appearance quality dimension by Aladwani (2006) can be justified as part of the research model because it includes almost identical variables and characteristics as those of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello's study (2009). They state that 'These brand-related stimuli appear as part of a brand's design and identity (e.g. name, logo and signage), packaging, and marketing communications (e.g. advertisements, brochures and Web sites)' (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009, p. 53). The criteria for brand-related stimuli are attractiveness, organisation, proper use of fonts, proper use of colours and proper use of multimedia (Aladwani, 2006).

A brand-related cue can evoke experiential states that are not constrained to only one dimension of the brand experience framework (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009) and can stimulate multiple experience dimensions. Wang, Hernandez and Minor (2010) suggested that a website's aesthetic qualities can also affect the consumer's informational processing route and produce positive emotional, experiential states. Whereas the appearance quality dimension can be argued to evoke consumer brand experiences with brand-related

stimuli and clues, it is recognised as an important part of the Marketing Communications Mix (Khan and Fatma, 2017). Brand websites can evoke brand experiential states (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Website appearance quality is positively related to consumer brand experience.

According to Wang, Hong and Lou (2010), web aesthetics and their evoked affective and positive experiential states can enhance purchase intentions (p. 126). Wang, Hernandez and Minor (2010) argue that web aesthetics affect a user's perception of the web service's quality and satisfaction and consequently enhance brand-related behavioural outcomes. Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides, and Alarcón-del-Amo (2013) argue that, in the online context, impulsive shopping results from experiential processing and emotions that web aesthetics and design elements create. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Website appearance quality is positively related to behavioural intentions.

Outcomes of Consumer Brand Experience

The outcomes of Consumer Brand Experience have been widely studied, with the most recognised including brand-related concepts, such as brand trust, brand credibility, brand attitude, satisfaction (Ha and Perks, 2005; Khan and Fatma, 2018) and behavioural intentions (Khan and Rahman, 2015; Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Here, the studied outcomes of Consumer Brand Experience include brand trust, eWOM intentions and behavioural intentions.

Brand trust, a behavioural outcome related to brand experience (Khan and Fatma, 2017; Khan and Rahman, 2015; Ha and Perks, 2005), has a particularly strong relationship with evoked sensory brand experiences (Huang, 2017). Ha and Perks (2005) defined brand trust as 'a feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, such that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer' (p. 443).

Brand trust is a vital link between the consumer and a brand's success because consumers tend to purchase from companies with which they have formed a trusting relationship; this is vital in the online environment (Ha, 2004). From a company perspective, brand trust is a crucial element in building a competitive advantage, and according to Ha and Perks (2005), positive experiences that generate brand trust have a major influence on online purchasing behaviour. By generating brand trust, the Consumer Brand Experience can be suggested as an antecedent for building brand trust between a company and a consumer. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Consumer Brand Experience has a positive influence on brand trust.

In the context of this study, we examine Word-of-Mouth (WOM) in the online context (eWOM). Chen *et al*. (2014, p. 582) define WOM as 'informal communication relating to the characteristics of a business or product occurring between consumers'. Consumers' brand experiences are easily reflected in their messages about those brands in various digital channels (i.e. SM and product reviews and recommendations) (Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi, 2018). Customers' online experiences are highly related to their behaviour and intentions, and eWOM and WOM are identified outcomes of online customer experience (Bilgihan, Kandampully, and Zhang, 2016). WOM as a behavioural

construct is affected by the emotions and motives of the customer, thus emphasising the importance of customer satisfaction; satisfied customers are likely to produce favourable WOM related to brand offerings (Chen *et al.*, 2014). Positive Consumer Brand Experiences can produce eWOM and eWOM intentions (i.e. in the form of referrals) (Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi, 2018). On this basis, we propose the following:

H5: Consumer Brand Experience positively influences eWOM intentions.

Behavioural intentions, such as repurchase intention, willingness to pay (Risitano *et al.*, 2017) and eWOM intentions (Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi, 2018), are typical outcomes of Consumer Brand Experience (Moreira *et al.*, 2017; Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi, 2018). In addition, brand-related outcomes, such as brand satisfaction and loyalty (Khan, Rahman and Fatma, 2016; Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi, 2018), are often identified. Rahman and Mannan (2018) studied brand experiences' relationship to online purchase intentions and found that consumer brand experiences positively influence purchase intentions in the online context. Against this backdrop, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Consumer Brand Experience positively influences behavioural intentions.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative research design, including an online survey, as the data collection tool. The study participants were randomly selected using a university newsletter where the study was advertised. Participants were asked to visit IKEA's website briefly before completing the questionnaire. IKEA is a furniture and home appliance producer from Sweden with a well-established and recognisable brand. Notably, this study was not conducted in cooperation with the brand; rather, the brand was chosen for data collection due to its brand recognition and familiarity. The survey was distributed to respondents via SM channels and email newsletters. In addition to SM and email, the questionnaire was distributed by a research company specialising in collecting research data online.

We used existing multi-item scales to measure the study constructs (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Measurement items

Item	Adapted from
TECHNICAL QUALITY	Aladwani (2006); Hasan and Abuelrub (2011)
TQ1: Website looks secure for transactions.	
TQ2: Website is easy to use, understand and operate.	
TQ3: Website has proper search functions.	
TQ4: Website loads fast.	
TQ5: Website URL is clear and easy to remember.	
APPEARANCE QUALITY	Aladwani (2006); Hasan and Abuelrub (2011)
AQ1: Website looks attractive.	
AQ2: Website looks organised.	
AQ3: Website uses fonts and text properly.	
AQ4: Website uses colours properly.	
AQ5: Website uses images properly.	

(*Continued*)

Table 5.1 Continued

Item	Adapted from
BRAND EXPERIENCE SBE1: This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses. SBE2: I find this brand interesting in a sensory way. SBE3: This brand does not appeal to my senses. ABE1: This brand induces feelings and sentiments. ABE2: I do not have strong emotions for this brand. ABE3: This brand is an emotional brand. IBE1: I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand. IBE2: This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem-solving. IBE3: This brand does not make me think. BBE1: I engage in physical actions and behaviour when I use this brand. BBE2: This brand results in bodily experiences. BBE3: This brand is not action oriented.	Brakus (2009)
E-WOM INTENTIONS EWOM1: I often tell others about this brand in my online networks. EWOM2: I am proud to say to others that I am this company's customer. EWOM3: I strongly recommend people buy products online from this company. EWOM4: I have spoken favourably of this company to others.	Hur, Ahn, and Kim (2011)
BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS BI1: I will continue to shop online at this retailer. BI2: I encourage others to shop online at this retailer. BI3: I will use this retailer website more often for online purchases.	Jiang, Yang and Jun (2013)
BRAND TRUST BT1: I am confident in brand's ability to perform well. BT2: I trust brand. BT3: I rely on brand. BT4: Brand is safe. BT5: I expect brand to deliver on its promise.	Koschate-Fischer and Gärtner (2015)

Results

In total, 202 usable responses were received. The demographic profile of the participants is shown in Table 5.2.

The respondents had significant online shopping experience; close to half (41%) reported having 6–10 years of experience, and around one-third (33%) reported having more than 10 years of experience.

Factor analysis

We first analyzed the data with exploratory factor analysis. The results indicated that the data were suitable for confirmatory factor analysis, which was run using partial least squares analysis.

Measurement model

The model included a multidimensional construct (Consumer Brand Experience); there-fore, it presented the Consumer Brand Experience construct as a second–order factor

Table 5.2 Demographic profile of the respondents

Gender	N	%
Female (1)	136	67.3
Male (2)	66	32.7
Total	**202**	**100%**
Age		
15–25	41	20.3
26–35	119	58.9
36–45	28	13.9
46–55	13	6.4
56–65	1	0.5
Total	**202**	**100%**
Profession		
Student	65	32.2
Employee/Professional	111	55.0
Unemployed	14	6.9
Entrepreneur	10	5.0
Retired	2	1.0
Total	**202**	**100%**

Table 5.3 Discriminant validity

	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Appearance Quality (1)	0.649	**0.805**								
Technical Quality (2)	0.546	0.728	**0.739**							
Affective BE* (3)	0.664	0.295	0.256	**0.815**						
Sensory BE* (4)	0.791	0.552	0.468	0.547	**0.889**					
Behavioural BE* (5)	0.803	0.132	0.139	0.367	0.315	**0.821**				
Intellectual BE* 6)	0.660	0.284	0.285	0.584	0.529	0.486	**0.813**			
eWOM Intentions (7)	0.674	0.321	0.231	0.461	0.496	0.395	0.505	**0.821**		
Behavioural Intentions (8)	0.803	0.363	0.294	0.358	0.496	0.269	0.362	0.690	**0.896**	
Brand Trust (9)	0.687	0.422	0.466	0.428	0.545	0.342	0.403	0.536	0.473	**0.829**

*BE = Brand Experience.

(Duarte and Amaro, 2018) to study the individual effects of the dimensions on the main construct. As suggested by Duarte and Amaro (2018), using the same measurement metrics with first- and second-order constructs is valid, and the produced results include path coefficients, predictive relevance and explained variance (p. 295).

The measurement model was acceptable because the factor loadings, alphas and convergent and discriminant validity were well within the range of the suggested cut-off values (Hair *et al.*, 2017) (see Table 5.3).

Structural model assessment

We tested the hypotheses (Table 5.4) by running the structural model with 1,000 subsamples, with a significance level of 0.05.

The strongest path coefficient was found between sensory brand experience → Consumer Brand Experience ($\beta = 0.819$, $p < 0.01$). All the path coefficients between Consumer Brand Experience and its dimensions were significant, with the lowest (β of 0.588, $p < 0.01$) between the behavioural dimension and consumer brand experience.

Table 5.4 Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	β	f^2	t-value	Hypothesis support
H1: Technical Quality → Brand Experience	0.153 *ns*	0.014	1.628	No
H2: Appearance Quality → Brand Experience	0.368***	0.084	3.923	Yes
H3: Appearance Quality → Behavioural Intentions	0.046 *ns*	0.003	0.671	No
H4: Brand Experience → Brand Trust	0.626***	0.629	12.773	Yes
H5: Brand Experience → eWOM Intentions	0.683***	0.938	17.168	Yes
H6: Brand Experience → Behavioural Intentions	0.701***	0.787	11.821	Yes
	R^2			
Brand Trust	0.512			
Behavioural Intentions	0.533			
eWOM Intentions	0.388			

***: $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, *ns* = not significant.

No support was found for the effects of technical quality on Consumer Brand Experi-ence ($β = 0.152$, *ns*), thus rejecting H1. The effect of appearance quality on Consumer Brand Experience was supported ($β = 0.368$, $p < 0.01$), confirming H2. However, appear-ance quality had no effect on behavioural intentions ($β = 0.046$, *ns*); thus, we reject H3. We found strong support for H4–6, confirming that Consumer Brand Experience is strongly related to brand trust (H4), eWOM intentions (H5) and behavioural intentions (H6).

As Consumer Brand Experience was a second-order construct, the effects of the four dimensions of Consumer Brand Experience were also measured. The sensory brand experience dimension showed that Consumer Brand Experience was high, with an R^2 value of 0.670 (67%). The lowest value among the dimensions was found in behavioural brand experience, with an R^2 value of 0.345 (35%). The intellectual and affective brand experience dimensions explained 62% ($R^2 = 0.617$) and 55% ($R^2 = 0.549$) of the vari-ance of consumer brand experience, respectively. The results of the structural model are shown in Figure 5.2.

Discussion

This chapter aimed to investigate the role of Consumer Brand Experience and its pro-posed outcomes within the online context and gain insights into the aesthetics and tech-nical attributes of websites, including their relationship with evoking consumer brand experience.

This study presents three main implications:

1   This study contributes to the existing Consumer Brand Experience literature by examining web quality dimensions and Consumer Brand Experience with their related outcomes and by investigating which attributes evoke the most experien-tial processing related to consumer brand experience. Website aesthetics was the
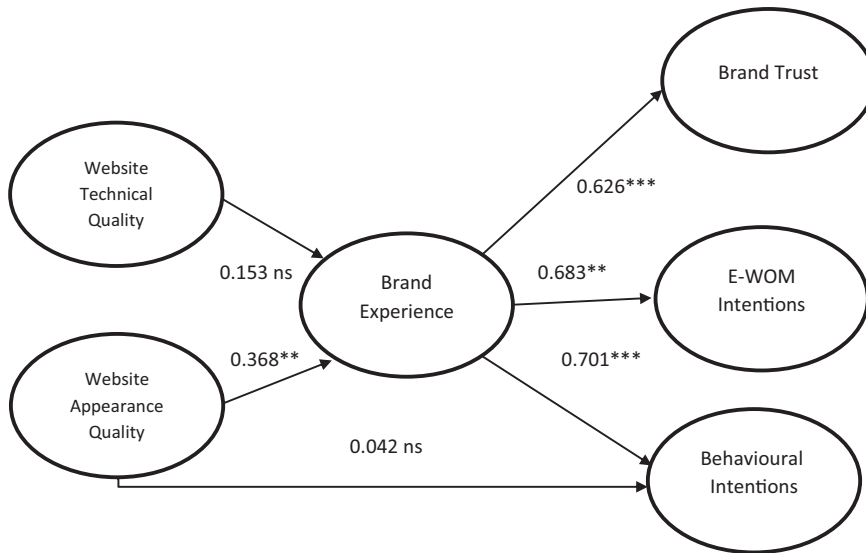
Figure 5.2 Structural model.

most influential factor regarding the outcomes of the research model presented here, which contrasts with previous studies, where website technical qualities and usability-related attributes outperformed aesthetic properties as a strong predictor of favourable outcomes (Wang, Hong and Lou 2010). Notably, aesthetics attributes have been strong predictors in attitudes related to websites in the past (Aladwani, 2006), but these studies mostly investigated the relationship between a website's attributes and certain outcomes, such as behavioural intentions. The results of the current study suggest that website aesthetics evoke brand-related experiential states, leading to favourable outcomes, whereas technical attributes have no significant effect on the outcomes.

2   The results of this study indicate that the studied technical qualities of websites do not translate to experiential and behavioural responses, whereas website appearance stimulates the experiential dimensions that lead to behavioural outcomes. The results indicate that the appearance qualities of a website evoke the most processing, which has a significant positive effect on brand trust, behavioural intentions and eWOM intentions.

3   This study proposes that the most favourable and reliable option for measuring Consumer Brand Experience is measuring it as a second-order construct.

The implications of this study for managers include emphasising the role of consumer brand experiences as a wider concept and its predictive capabilities on consumer behaviour in online settings. Our findings suggest that managers should consider website aesthetics attributes not for their direct effect on outcomes but as an enhancer of consumer brand experience. The effect of sensory brand experience should be considered an important aspect of web design for brands due to its strong and significant relationship with behavioural and eWOM intentions and brand trust. In the online context, the sensory brand

experience can be considered a major influencer of favourable outcomes. By enhancing the information processing routes stimulated by pleasurable consumer brand experiences and building technically solid websites with direct effects on behavioural intentions, companies may utilise the favourable relationships and their outcomes of these constructs. By evoking several of the Consumer Brand Experience dimensions, companies can enhance the probability of behavioural intentions and brand trust. Lastly, the effect of Consumer Brand Experience on eWOM intentions can be emphasised.

Limitations and future research directions

The main limitations of this work relate to the sample, which was obtained through convenience sampling and examined only two web quality dimensions and the brand used (IKEA) in the study. Thus, the results are not widely generalisable. Given that the conceptualisation of Consumer Brand Experience is still highly scattered, this study calls for further studies to identify and establish a unified conceptualisation of Consumer Brand Experience in online context studies. Further studies are suggested to incorporate other aspects of web quality dimensions, general content and specific content, with the research model to pursue a more holistic understanding of the effects of web quality in evoking consumer brand experiences.

Key lessons for future research

- Given that the conceptualisation of Consumer Brand Experience is still highly scattered, this study calls for further studies to identify and establish a unified conceptualisation of Consumer Brand Experience in online context studies.
- Further studies are suggested to incorporate the remaining aspects of web quality, general content and specific content dimensions with the research model.
- Further studies could also investigate other brand-related concepts, such as brand familiarity and brand reputation as predictors of perceived qualities of the website.

Disclaimer

The research presented in this chapter was collected for my University of Jyväskylä Master's thesis examining the antecedents and consequences of web brand experience (2019). The copyright for this JYU thesis belongs to Joel Konttinen as the Author. Research presented here has not been otherwise previously published.

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