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**Consumer Attitude Towards Brand Extensions:
An Integrative Model and Research Propositions**

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**Consumer Attitude Towards Brand Extensions:
An Integrative Model and Research Propositions**

The paper proposes an integrative model of the antecedents and consequences of brand extension attitude based on the dominant cognitive paradigm. The four key processes of the model are: (1) the perception of fit, (2) the formation of primary attitudes towards the extension, (3) the link between extension attitude and marketplace behaviour and (4) the reciprocal effect of brand extension attitude on parent brand/extension category attitude. Moderator and control variables of these processes are identified and classified into three groups: (1) consumer characteristics, (2) marketer-controlled factors and (3) external factors. This integrative model leads to the identification of missing links and variables in past research, resulting in a propositional inventory for future studies. The paper ends with a reflection on the long-term perspectives of scientific inquiry on brand extensions.

Keywords: Brand extensions, Consumer Attitudes, Brand Associations, Brand Affect, Cognitive Psychology

Introduction

Brand extension is the "use of established brand names to enter new product categories or classes" (Keller & Aaker, 1992, p. 35). The past fifteen years have witnessed the development of an important body of empirical evidence on consumer attitude vis-à-vis brand extensions. Systematic research on consumer behaviour towards brand extension was initiated by two seminal North American studies (Boush et al, 1987; Aaker & Keller, 1990). Since, research on the matter has been conducted not only in the US but also around the world, including countries like the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand and Taiwan to name but a few (e. g. Holden & Barwise, 1995; Sunde & Brodie, 1999; Chen & Chen, 2000). Many of the effects identified in original studies were later re-investigated by replication studies (e. g. Glynn & Brodie, 1998; Pryor & Brodie, 1998). The important evolution of the field is reflected by the appearance of the first empirical generalisation based on secondary analysis (Bottomley & Holden, 2001). Brand extension research findings have also been extensively treated from an applied managerial perspective (e.g. Kapferer, 1997; Keller, 1998).

Recently, Klink and Smith (2001) have warned about a limitation in current research on consumer attitudes towards brand extensions, stating that "in this area, as is often the case during the initial stages of knowledge development, concerns about external validity have taken a back seat to those about internal validity" (Klink & Smith, 2001, p. 326). Indeed, the bulk of research investigates, essentially through experimental designs, the main and interaction effects between a handful of cognitive and affective attitude constructs. Although the studies' internal validity seems high, their generalisation to real-life decisions and consumption contexts is debatable. Most of them fail to take into account background factors such as individual consumer heterogeneity, marketer-controlled factors and competitive

activity, which might exert a significant impact on their generalisation. This article responds to Klink and Smith's (2001) call by offering a guideline for future inquiry on consumer attitudes toward brand extensions in the form of an integrative model and research propositions.

The paper is organised according to a three-step logic, following the structure of previous review studies on other marketing topics (e. g. Gatignon & Robertson, 1985; Alpert & Kamins, 1994; Bettman, Luce & Payne, 1998). First, a conceptual model of consumer attitude towards brand extensions is proposed based on the theoretical and empirical developments in the area. Second, the model serves as a guideline for the identification of gaps and underdeveloped areas in past research. Third, research propositions are advanced aiming for the encouragement of empirical inquiry on these underdeveloped areas. The article ends by calling on researchers to adopt alternative conceptual and research paradigms to deepen our understanding of consumer attitude vis-à-vis brand extensions.

An Integrative Model of Consumer Attitude Toward Brand Extensions

The epistemological stance of research on brand extensions follows the neo-positivist, hypothetical-deductive paradigm of mainstream consumer research (Jacoby, Johar & Morrin, 1998; Lehmann, 1999). With notable exceptions, the empirical methods used rely on experimental approaches to identify the main effects, moderators, mediators and control variables in the process of brand extension evaluation. Thus, the bulk of research strives for the development, extension and validation of a general process-based model of the antecedents and consequences of brand extension evaluation.

The following lines offer a description of the evolution of scientific inquiry on consumer attitudes towards brand extensions from the point of view of two attitude paradigms: information-processing and affect transfer. Two seminal articles laid the ground and, to a large extent, shaped the theoretical basis for empirical research: Boush et al. (1987) and Aaker and Keller (1990). Boush et al (1987) investigated the process of affect transfer from parent brand to the extension (Cohen, 1982, Fiske, 1982). On the other hand, Aaker and Keller (1990) focussed on the cognitive process of brand extension evaluation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1995). Loyal to these origins, researchers after 1990 have studied either the information processing side or the affective side of extension evaluation or, more recently, both² (Footnote 1). Figure 1 depicts an integrative model of consumer behaviour towards brand extensions based on a review of published literature between 1987 and 2001, which is summarised in the Table. The elements and processes involved in the model are described below.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

INSERT TABLE AROUND HERE

Basic Process

Just as the majority of models of consumer decision-making (see Jacoby 2002 for a review), the integrative model proposed here is process-based. It is dominated by knowledge and affect

² A limited number of researchers have adopted an information economics perspective on brand extensions (Wernerfelt, 1988; Erdem, 1998; Choi, 1998). These authors view an existing brand name in a new product category as a signal of quality and a means to reduce consumer-perceived risk.

transfer processes in the following sequence. Before the appearance of the brand extension in a given product category, consumers already possess established attitudes both towards the parent brand and the target extension product category. These attitudes are composed of cognitive and affective dimensions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Eagly, 1992; Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1995). On the one hand, the cognitive component is brand/category knowledge, defined in terms of the product-related and non-product related associations linked to a brand/category in long-term consumer memory (Keller, 1993; 1998). The product-related associations refer to the functional and experiential attributes of the existing products of the brand/category. The non-product related associations comprise the symbolic benefits stemming from the brand name (such as human personality dimensions, prestige etc). On the other hand, the affective component refers to the feelings associated with a brand name or a product category (Boush & Loken, 1991; Loken & John, 1993).

When the new extension is launched, consumers evaluate it on the basis of their attitude towards the parent brand and the extension category. If a consumer does not know the parent brand and its products at all, she will evaluate the new extension solely on the basis of her experience with the extension category (Sheinin, 1998). Conversely, if the extension product category is new to her, an attitude towards the extension will be formed only on the basis of her attitude toward the parent brand. If the consumer knows both the parent brand and the extension category, a third effect arises: the perception of fit between the parent brand and the extension category (the components of fit are discussed later in the article). Research has shown that the perception of fit influences extension attitude in two ways. First, it can *mediate* the transfer of attitude components from the parent brand and extension category to the new extension. Second, fit can *moderate* the relative influence of brand- and category attitude on extension attitude.

Brand extension attitude formation leads to concrete consumer behaviour in the marketplace in terms of intentions, choice and repeat purchase. These experientially based changes in extension attitude give rise to reciprocal effects at different levels. Attitude towards the new extension may affect parent brand attitude in terms of knowledge structure and affect. In a similar vein, attitude to the new extension may influence extension category attitude in terms of knowledge and affect. Both of these reciprocal effects may be moderated by perceived fit.

Background effects

The basic model depicted in Figure 1 focalises on the process of extension attitude formation and its effects from the perspective of an individual consumer in isolation. Indeed, past research has essentially investigated consumers' attitude toward extensions in controlled conditions in a marketplace vacuum. In real marketplace conditions though, consumers are exposed to a host of information about the extension through different media. Their attitudes towards the extension are sensitive to competitor activity, retailer-level decisions as well as other information sources like press, consumer reports and word-of-mouth. Moreover, the basic model does not account for any heterogeneity in terms of consumer tastes, preferences or consumption situations. In agreement with Klink and Smith (2001), it is argued that the basic model may strongly depend on a series of background factors whose effect should be isolated, investigated and put in perspective with the basic effects of the model. We suggest that these effects be classified into three broad categories: consumer characteristics, marketer-controlled factors as well as external factors. This article investigates a series of variables belonging to these three categories.

Our critical review of research is organised around four themes, which correspond to the major stages of the extension evaluation process. Thus, the article examines successively the processes of:

- (1) Fit perception,
- (2) Formation of primary attitudes towards the extension,
- (3) Link between brand extension attitude and behaviour,
- (4) Reciprocal effects of brand extension attitude on parent brand/extension category attitude.

In each of these themes, the state of the art of past theoretical and empirical research is reviewed, leading to the identification of missing links and research gaps. Then, research propositions are formulated that take into account the effect of tentative background factors. The propositions vary in their level of detail depending on the extent of theoretical and empirical evidence on the subject. Thus, some propositions constitute testable hypotheses while others only identify a tentative association between two or more variables. The paper ends with a methodological reflection on the future of brand extension research.

Process of Fit Perception

Past research

Figure 2 summarises the current state of research on the process of fit perception. The bold characters and lines in this figure – just as in the subsequent figures 3 to 5 - indicate the topics that have already been subject to scientific inquiry. However, as the reader will see it in the following paragraphs, the depth of inquiry on the research topics has been variable. Some relationships are backed with strong empirical evidence while others have only recently been tackled by pioneering work and deserve further replication.

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

Basic model. Research in this area is based on the categorisation theory of cognitive psychology (Barsalou, 1985). Brands and product categories are conceptualised as cognitive categories in consumer memory (Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). A brand extension in a new product category is viewed as a new instance that can be more or less similar to the brand and its existing products. Perceived similarity, called also *perceived fit* is characterised by the number of shared associations between the extension product category and the brand. Researchers have identified two dimensions of the fit construct (Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991; Bhat & Reddy, 2001). The first is *product category fit*, which refers to the perceived similarity between the extension category and the existing product categories of the parent brand. The second is *brand-level fit*, referring to the match between the specific image of the brand and the extension product category. To illustrate these two aspects of fit, consider Marlboro launching a ball-pen. The perceived fit between Marlboro and the ball-pen category will be composed of a category-level fit (the shared product attributes between cigarettes and ball-pens) and a brand-level fit (e. g. the match between Marlboro's rough, Western brand image and the image the consumer holds about the ball-pen category).

Background factors. Research on the background factors of this basic fit perception process is relatively scarce. It deals mainly with the effect of consumer mood and advertising on fit perceptions. Thus, recent research shows that positive consumer mood improves fit perceptions for moderately far extensions (Barone, Miniard & Romeo, 2000). To our knowledge however, research on other consumer-level factors has not yet been undertaken. Advertising can be used in several ways to directly improve consumers' fit perceptions. Through increased exposure, it can facilitate information retrieval processes and thus improve

fit perceptions (Lane, 2000; Klink & Smith, 2001). By manipulating the informative content of ads through priming and distancing techniques, marketers can also enhance fit perceptions (Boush, 1993; Pryor & Brodie, 1998; Kim, Lavack & Smith, 2001). However, marketers can also use marketing-mix variables other than advertising to improve fit perceptions. These as well as other possible background factors such as competitor and distributor activity have not yet been studied. The following lines indicate several paths for future research in these underdeveloped areas.

Research propositions

This section investigates the effect of a series of consumer-, marketer-controlled- and external factors that can influence the role of parent brand- and category knowledge on fit perception (see the plain characters and lines in Figure 2).

Consumer characteristics. Research on consumer memory shows that expertise with a specific product category leads to more and more elaborate and complex knowledge structures (Hutchinson & Alba, 1987). It also appears that brand ratings by expert consumers are based on concrete product attributes whereas the brand ratings of novices stem from more general impressions about the brand (Dillon et al., 2001). On the other hand, less experience leads to less concrete category- and product knowledge and more reliance on symbolic associations and general impressions about the brand (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Dillon et al., 2001). Therefore, the following statement is advanced:

P 1. Higher consumer expertise leads to the greater relative role of product-related brand associations vs. non-product related brand associations in fit perception.

According to self-monitoring theory, people differ substantially in the way they regulate their self in public situations (Snyder, 1974; Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Low self-monitors tend to project a stable self in diverse settings of social interaction. Their behaviour is guided more by inner psychological factors than social influences. High self-monitors, on the other hand, exert more expressive control over their social behaviour and tend to adapt their appearance and acts to specific situations. Empirical research has shown that high self-monitors respond more favourably to status-oriented advertising claims (DeBono, 1987; DeBono & Harnish, 1988) and prefer brands in congruence with social situations (Aaker, 1999; Hogg, Cox & Keeling, 2000). Note that the role of non-product related brand associations is primarily symbolic and self-expressive (Solomon, 1983; Keller, 1993). Therefore, during the entire process of brand extension evaluation, high self-monitors can be expected to confer more importance to these associations than their low self-monitor counterparts. In this section, it is argued specifically that high self-monitors perceive fit more on the basis of non-product related associations than low self-monitors. In formal terms:

P 2. Non-product related associations have a greater effect on fit perceptions for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

Marketing strategy. Independently of the product category, Park, Jaworski and McInnis (1986) defined three broad types of brand positioning derived from basic consumer needs. Functional needs stem from motivations to solve externally generated concrete problems and trigger search for products that provide solutions to these problems. Brands with a functional positioning offer these solutions; their value is dependent on satisfaction after use. Experiential (called also hedonic) needs correspond to a desire for sensory pleasure and stimulation. Therefore, brands with an experiential positioning emphasise satisfaction-in-use.

A third category of needs, that of symbolic needs concerns the individual's desire for self-identity creation, maintenance and enhancement. Thus, brands with a symbolic positioning enable their consumers to be associated with a desired group, role or self-concept. Park et al. (1991) showed empirically that symbolic brands, characterised by the dominance of non-product related associations, are easier to stretch to more dissimilar product categories than functional brands. In the same spirit, we argue here that fit perceptions of symbolic brands are influenced mainly by non-product related associations; the fit of a functional or experiential brand with the extension category, on the other hand, will be determined basically by product-related associations.

Furthermore, the consumer's personal characteristics may interact with the effect of brand positioning. It is argued that the effectiveness of the brand's positioning strategy depends on the targeted consumers' characteristics in terms of expertise, cognitive capacity and self-monitoring. Expert consumers possess elaborate and complex knowledge structures about a given product category (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). It is therefore relatively more difficult to alter these structures by new pieces of information than the less elaborate knowledge structures of novices. Human cognitive capacity is strongly linked to age. Research shows that the cognitive capacity of the elderly, especially over 65, declines progressively (Chasseigne, Mullet & Stewart, 1997; Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2002). For these people, the learning of new information becomes difficult and they tend to rely on existing information in long-term memory rather than on active short-term memory to make judgements and decisions (Salthouse, 1991). We therefore expect elderly people to be less sensitive to new information on the product's positioning than younger people. In addition, it is argued that the self-monitoring level of the consumer may also impact on her/his sensitivity to external

information since high self-monitors are more influenced by external contexts than low self-monitors. Hence,

P 3. For brands with a functional or experiential positioning, providing product-related information influences fit perceptions more than providing non product-related information. Expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people are less sensitive to these actions than novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people.

P 4. For brands with a symbolic brand positioning, providing non-product related information influences fit perceptions more than providing product-related information. Novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people are more sensitive to these actions than expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

External information. Competitor activity refers to all the marketing actions that competing brands - already present in the extension product category or newly entering it - might undertake. It is reasonable to assume that the only effect that might jeopardise the new extension is the one emanating from competitors offering a similar positioning. Thus, if Marlboro decided to launch a low-end, mass-market deodorant, consumer attitudes towards this extension would not be influenced by the marketing activity of luxury brands like Chanel or Dior but rather by cheaper brands like Denim or Nivea. It is thus assumed that direct competitors provide the consumer with rather similar product-related or non-product related messages, similar to those of the company's new extension. By processing this external information, consumer fit perceptions may be altered. For the same reasons as in the case of marketer-controlled factors, the effectiveness of competitive activity depends on the targeted consumers' characteristics in terms of expertise, self-monitoring and age. Another source of information for consumers is the point-of-purchase, which is controlled by the brand's current

distributors. The distributors' marketing activities may also provide potential consumers with information that is relevant for their judgements about the fit between the brand and the extension category. Other external information such as word-of-mouth may also have an impact on fit perceptions. It is therefore advanced that:

P 5. Competitor marketplace activity, distributor activity and other external information directly affect the perceived fit between the brand and the extension. Novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people are more sensitive to these actions than expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

Preliminary empirical evidence suggests that product categorisation processes are context dependent (Wanke, 1999). That is, depending on the context, the same objects can be categorised in different sets by the same consumer. The importance of this phenomenon for brand extensions may depend on the self-monitoring style of the consumer. A basic tenet of self-monitoring theory is that low self-monitors show a more stable behaviour across contexts than do high self-monitors (Snyder, 1974). It is argued that low self-monitors, whose social behaviour is relatively invariant, will tend to keep the same categorisation sets across consumption situations. High self-monitors, on the other hand, will adapt their categorisation schemas to the social context. For example, they may perceive a new Marlboro deodorant as having a higher fit in private consumption situations than in public ones. By opposition, the fit perceptions of low self-monitors are expected to be more invariant across consumption situations. We can therefore expect that:

P 6. Fit perceptions vary more across situations for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

Extension evaluation process

Past research

Basic model. Bold lines and characters in Figure 3 depict the concepts and relations referring to the formation of brand extension attitude that have already been investigated to some extent in past research. As mentioned in the introductory section, cognitive processing and affect transfer theories dominate current research on brand extension attitudes. Research shows that, all else being equal, there is a direct knowledge/affect transfer from the parent brand to the extension (see the references in the Table). For example, the perceived high quality of the parent brand results in positive extension evaluations (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Similarly, positive feelings are directly transferred from the parent brand to the extension (Bhat & Reddy, 2001).

INSERT FIGURE 3 AROUND HERE

The concept of fit is central in past research on brand extension attitudes. One of the most frequently studied topics is the direct effect of fit on brand extension attitude (see the references in the Table). The general conclusion from these studies is that the higher the perceived fit, the more positive the consumer's attitude toward the extension. The vast majority of studies have examined the direct effect of category-level fit; only few studies are devoted to the effect of brand fit (e. g. Park et al., 1991; Bhat & Reddy, 1997, 2001).

Apart from being modelled as a direct effect, researchers have also considered the moderating role of fit on brand knowledge and affect transfer. The level of fit determines the ease of

transfer of positive knowledge and affect from the parent brand to the extension. Researchers have extensively studied the moderating role of fit on several aspects of knowledge transfer: general quality, technological level, specific product attributes (see references in the Table). Also, the higher the perceived fit, the higher the affect transfer from the parent brand to the extension (e. g. Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998).

Background factors. Past research has included a series of consumer-specific moderators in the basic effects model, namely motivation, expertise, implicit personality theory, innovativeness and mood (see the Table). Strong empirical evidence supports the moderating effect of motivation (Nijssen, Uijl & Bucklin, 1995; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998). Specifically, Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (1998) shows that under high-motivation conditions, elaborate cognitive processing is expected: consumers consider every piece of information about the extension piecemeal. Conversely, under low-motivation conditions, cognitive processing is less elaborate and more categorical; in this case, more affect transfer is expected from the parent brand to the extension. Also, in high-motivation conditions, perceived fit has less impact than in low-motivation conditions. Consumer expertise is also shown to moderate the effect of product-related brand associations, brand affect and fit on brand extension attitude (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994). According to the findings, expert evaluations are based on the processing of product-related associations whereas novices tend to evaluate the extension more on the basis of brand affect and fit. Consumer innovativeness is another factor that influences the basic effects of the extension evaluation model (Klink & Smith, 2001). Highly innovative early adopters are less sensitive to risk; fit therefore plays less role in their extension evaluations than in those of late adopters.

Flaherty and Pappas (2000) show the effect of psychological evaluation process (implicit personality theory) on affect transfer. Research in personality psychology shows that entity theorists easily form global judgements based on prior trait information; whereas incremental theorists tend to make more conditional judgements upon situational cues (Hong et al, 1997). Flaherty and Pappas (2000) show that affect transfer from brand to extension occurs more easily for entity theorists, who are more sensitive to existing parent brand beliefs than for incremental theorists, whose information processing is more elaborate.

Still on the consumer-specific side, recent research suggests that positive consumer mood enhances attitude transfer from brand to extension (Barone, Miniard & Romeo, 2000). The effect of mood is strongest in moderately far (vs. near or far) extensions in terms of fit.

Ample empirical evidence shows that elements of advertising strategy such as information type, information amount, exposure as well as techniques such as priming and distancing can affect consumer attitude toward extensions (see references in the Table). That is, by providing and manipulating the information about the new extension, marketers can directly improve consumer attitude, thereby reducing the importance of cognitive processing, affect transfer and fit in consumer evaluations. This issue is particularly relevant in situations where the proposed extension is highly incongruent with the existing products of the brand or when consumer attitude towards the parent brand is rather negative.

In sum, research has mainly investigated the cognitive and affective processes of attitude formation toward extensions at an individual level. To our knowledge, only Sheinin (1998) has investigated the effect of knowledge transfer from the extension product category to the new brand extension. Another topic scarcely investigated in the basic model is the role of

non-product related associations in attitude formation. Moreover, future research should broaden the scope of the model by an in-depth examination of its sensitivity to further consumer-level, marketer-controlled and external factors. The research propositions advanced below serve to foster such research efforts.

Research propositions

The research propositions investigated below refer to the concepts and relations in plain characters and lines in Figure 3.

Consumer characteristics. Previous research has established the role of consumer expertise in the processing of the product-related associations of the parent brand (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). However, more and more brands are positioned on axes like personality traits and user imagery, which are relatively independent of the product features. These non product-related associations are typically less experience-based than the concrete, product-related features of the brand. Novice consumers are therefore expected more to rely on non product-related associations in extension evaluation than their experimented counterparts. Furthermore, this effect can be generalised to category-related associations, by assuming that these associations follow the same pattern of processing as that of brand-related associations.

P 7. Higher consumer expertise with the parent brand/ extension category leads to a greater transfer of product-related associations vs. non-product-related associations from parent brand/extension category to the brand extension.

Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) have also shown that experience with the parent brand leads to a lesser reliance on fit in brand extension attitude formation. At the same time, affect transfer declines with consumer experience to the benefit of cognitive effects. The next two propositions generalise these conclusions to the experience with the extension product category, too.

P 8. The higher the consumer's expertise with the parent brand/extension category, the lesser is the impact of perceived fit on extension attitude.

P 9. Knowledge transfer increases with consumer expertise with the parent brand/extension category, whereas affect transfer decreases with consumer expertise.

As it was explained previously, research in social psychology shows that high self-monitors attach more importance to the self-expressive and social meaning of products than low self-monitors (DeBono, 1987; DeBono & Harnish, 1988; Aaker, 1999). In this respect, non product-related associations, which are related to the self- and value-expressive benefits of the brand, are expected to play a greater role in brand extension knowledge for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors. Hence,

P 10. Non-product related associations of the parent brand/extension category are transferred more easily to the extension for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

Marketing strategy. Previous research has mainly examined the effect of advertising content, amount and frequency on brand extension evaluations. The long-term positioning of the

brand, supported by all the elements of the marketing-mix, is likely to play an important role in brand extension evaluation. Consumers tend to have more product-based expectations about brands with functional or experiential positioning. Symbolic brands, on the other hand, are expected to convey more non product-related associations. It is also proposed that consumer sensitivity to these marketing actions is dependent upon expertise, self-monitoring and age.

P 11. For brands with a functional or experiential positioning, product-related information is processed more than non-product related information in brand extension evaluation. Novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people are less sensitive to these actions than expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

P 12. For brands with a symbolic positioning, non product-related information is processed more than product-related information in brand extension evaluation. Novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people are less sensitive to these actions than expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

External information. As mentioned in the previous section, competitor activity refers to all the marketing actions that competing brands may envisage in the extension category. It was assumed that only competitors offering a similar positioning might endanger the new extension. Consumers process the information communicated by competitors, which leads to changes in their knowledge structures vis-à-vis the extension. By the same logic, point-of-purchase distribution decisions may also provide consumers with further information about the extension and its competitors. The effectiveness of competitive and distributor activity as well as any other external information related to the extension may depend on the targeted consumers' characteristics in terms of expertise, self-monitoring and age.

P 13. Competitor marketplace activity, distributor activity and other external information directly affect brand extension knowledge. However, novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people are more sensitive to these actions than expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

Link between extension attitude and marketplace behaviour

Past research

Past research has devoted relatively little attention to the study of the direct link between brand extension attitude and marketplace behaviour (see the Table and the bold lines and characters in Figure 4).

INSERT FIGURE 4 AROUND HERE

Experimental studies show that positive affect leads to higher purchase intentions for the extension (Lane, 2000; Bhat & Reddy, 2001). Empirical evidence on the role of extension knowledge structures in the extension attitude – behaviour relationship is scarce and rather indirect. Sullivan (1992), based on secondary sources, used aggregate brand-level data to show that brand extensions introduced early in the life cycle of a product category did not perform as well as extensions introduced at later stages. Reddy, Holak and Bhat (1994) used aggregate secondary data and expert judgment to demonstrate that the brand's symbolic associations have a positive impact on the extension's market share. Swaminathan, Fox and Reddy (2001) illustrated with panel data that prior experience with the parent brand lead to a

higher probability of extension trial. The results of these three studies seem to suggest that the more elaborate the consumer's brand extension knowledge, the more likely she is to purchase the extension.

However, to our knowledge, no academic studies have systematically investigated the link between extension attitude and the marketplace behaviour of the individual consumer.

Consider the following intriguing questions: What is the relative role of extension knowledge and extension affect on intentions, choices and repeat purchase? Which part of brand knowledge (product-related or non product-related associations) is more important in consumer decision-making? How does concrete experience with the extension product impact extension attitude? What are the consumer characteristics that shape these effects? The following lines offer a series of propositions to guide future research on these topics.

Research propositions

In the present context, this section focalises only on the link between extension attitude and behaviour; other internal and external factors directly affecting consumer market behaviour vis-à-vis the extension are beyond the scope of this article (e.g. socio-economic status, deal proneness, competitive activity, fashion trends etc). The research propositions investigated below refer to the concepts and relations in plain characters and lines in Figure 4. The framework is based on the assumption that, depending on the consumer's characteristics, specific attitude components will guide the relationship between extension attitude and marketplace behaviour. That is, specific extension attitude components (shaped by parent brand and category knowledge, brand marketing activity and other information sources) exert an impact on consumer marketplace behaviour. Later, positive and negative experiences with

the extension will impact on specific extension attitude components, depending on personal characteristics.

The research propositions about the role of consumer characteristics are formulated in the spirit of our arguments in the previous sections. Just as consumer characteristics can moderate the basic effects of fit perception and extension attitude, it is proposed here that they can also moderate the link between extension attitude and behaviour. Specifically, it is argued that consumer expertise leads to the dominance of the concrete product knowledge about the parent brand and the extension. For experts, purchase intentions, choice as well as repeat purchase will be guided by detailed product-related knowledge about the brand. Their experiences with the extension will also focalise on product-related aspects, which will further contribute to their extensive knowledge about the product. Novices, on the other hand, know relatively little about the concrete product characteristics of the parent brand and its proposed extension. Their purchase intentions, choice and repeat purchase will be based more on non-product related associations and affect. Through experience, they can progressively acquire more knowledge about the product-related aspects of the brand extension. It is therefore proposed that:

P 14. Consumer expertise moderates the relationship between extension attitude and marketplace behaviour. Specifically, non-product related associations and affect play a greater role on this relationship for novices than for experts.

The previous sections dealt with the moderating role of self-monitoring on fit perceptions and extension attitude. It can be argued that self-monitoring can affect the link between extension attitude and behaviour, too. High self-monitors are more sensitive to the social symbolic

meaning of brands (prestige, status, personality) than low self-monitors (DeBono, 1987; Hogg et al., 2000). It is likely that for high self-monitors, considerations about the non product-related associations will play a greater role in purchase decisions than product-related associations. Also, the performance of the brand will be judged more on the basis of its symbolic value than on its experiential or functional value, contributing mainly to the non product-related knowledge about the brand. The following proposition is therefore advanced:

P 15. Consumer self-monitoring moderates the relationship between extension attitude and marketplace behaviour. Specifically, non-product related associations play a greater role on this relationship for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

The third consumer-specific variable examined here is age. As mentioned before, the progressive decline of the cognitive abilities of elderly people has been documented in psychology (Chasseigne et al., 1997). Elderly people tend to extensively rely on their long-term memory whereas fluid, working memory is more limited in its accessibility and acceptance of new information. It is argued that, with the increase of age, knowledge will play a lesser role whereas affect will play a greater role in consumer decision-making. That is, older people will judge products more on affective bases than on cognitive bases.

P 16. Consumer age moderates the relationship between extension attitude and behaviour. Specifically, affect plays a greater role in this relationship for elderly people than for younger people.

Reciprocal effects of brand extension attitude on parent brand - and category attitude

As discussed in the previous sections, through diverse information sources (marketing actions, competitor information, distributor activity etc) and/or direct experience, consumers form either a positive or a negative attitude toward the extension. Attitude valence may take a cognitive form in terms of favourable/unfavourable associations or an affective form of liking/disliking the extension. Attitude toward the extension may alter the consumer's original attitude toward the parent brand or the extension category. This phenomenon is known in the literature under the term "reciprocal effect" of brand extension, which may lead to dilution/enhancement of the original brand/category attitude (Romeo, 1991; Loken & John, 1993; John, Loken & Joiner, 1998).

Basic model. The direct effects of reciprocal knowledge transfer (e. g. Loken & John, 1993; Milberg, Park & McCarthy 1997; John, Loken & Joiner, 1998) and affect transfer (e. g. Keller & Aaker, 1992; Romeo, 1991) have been extensively documented in past research. However, research focussed mainly on knowledge transfer effects (see Figure 5 and the Table). It is evidenced that product-related negative associations with the extension dilute product-related parent brand associations whereas non product-related extension associations dilute non-product-related parent brand associations (Chen & Chen, 2000). In addition, general product-related parent brand associations (e. g. quality) are more difficult to alter than specific product related associations (e. g. taste) (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Loken & John, 1993). Information accessibility also plays a role in knowledge transfer from extension to the brand (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). Less accessible knowledge structures about the extension, stocked in long-term memory have less effect on the parent brand than highly accessible new information.

INSERT FIGURE 5 AROUND HERE

The moderating role of fit on reciprocal effects has also received sustained attention (e. g. Boush & Loken, 1991; Morrin, 1999; Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). Increased fit generally leads to increased knowledge and affect transfer from the extension to the parent brand. However, it seems that dilution effects in terms of parent brand knowledge and affect are more likely to occur for close extensions whereas enhancement effects are more likely to occur for far extensions (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000).

Background factors. Consumer characteristics as moderators have also been included in the basic model, namely motivation and expertise. In high motivation conditions, consumers process every piece of new information in detail. In these situations, associations with the extension may alter the parent brand's association network regardless of fit (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998). In low-motivation conditions, however, this effect is dependent on fit because less similar extensions will be quickly categorised as atypical instances and will not alter parent brand knowledge. Consumer expertise also moderates the dilution/enhancement effect of brand extensions on parent brand knowledge. Experts possess strong brand-related memory structures, which are difficult to affect by either negative or positive extension information (John, Loken & Joiner, 1998; Morrin, 1999). More specifically, extensions influence more the product-related associations of unfamiliar parent brands than those of familiar parent brands (Sheinin, 2000).

At the level of firm-related background factors, Morrin (1999) shows that exposure to extension advertising might strengthen existing parent brand knowledge structures. Retailer-level decisions, on the other hand, can weaken parent brand knowledge. Thus, the

concentration of the new extension with competing brands on shelf space tends to confuse consumers and makes extension advertising less effective.

Research propositions

In sum, past research has mainly investigated the reciprocal effect of extension attitude on the parent brand; the effect on the consumer's attitude toward the extension product category has scarcely been investigated. Moreover, past studies have essentially dealt with the transfer of product-related associations and less with the transfer of non product-related associations or affect from the extension to the parent brand. A series of propositions are advanced aiming at filling these gaps. The research propositions refer to the concepts and relations in plain lines in Figure 5. The reasoning behind them is quite similar to that put forward in the section on the primary attitude transfer from parent brand/category to the extension.

Consumer characteristics. The first proposition refers to consumer expertise. It was mentioned before that expert consumers possess a more elaborate product-related knowledge structure about the parent brand and the product category than novice consumers. Through external information search and concrete product experience with the new brand extension their knowledge about the new extension will also be mainly product-related. Concrete product-related associations are therefore more likely to be transferred from the extension to the parent brand / product category than non product-related associations, which are more abstract and symbolic.

P 17. Higher consumer expertise leads to the greater relative transfer of product-related associations vs. non product-related associations from the extension to the brand/category.

The next proposition posits that self-monitoring also moderates the process of reciprocal attitude transfer from the extension to the parent brand and the product category. High self-monitors value more the symbolic attributes of the extension than low self-monitors. Their attitude towards the extension is shaped essentially by the extension's capacity to provide self-expressive or social symbolic benefits. It can be hypothesized that their extension attitude will only enhance parent brand / extension category attitude inasmuch as it provides non-product related benefits. It is hence expected that:

P 18. Non-product related associations are easier transferred from the extension to the brand/category for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

In the previous sections, the tentative effect of age on brand extension evaluations was investigated. Based on prior literature in cognitive psychology, it was argued that for elderly consumers, learning and processing of information about a new extension is difficult. Their extension attitude will be more of a matter of affect transfer from the parent brand and the product category. Following this reasoning, the next proposition states that affect transfer dominates the reciprocal effect of extension attitude on parent brand/product category.

P 19. Affect transfer from extension to parent brand/category increases whereas knowledge transfer declines for elderly consumers.

Marketing strategy and external information. The last two propositions investigate the effect of extension marketing strategy and external information sources on reciprocal effects. As mentioned earlier, the effect of information amount and exposure length has already been studied in this respect (Morrin, 1999). Here, the focus is on the effect of information type. Any information about the brand extension might alter not only the consumer's attitude toward the extension but also directly her/his attitude toward the parent brand and the product category. The hypothesis is that the reciprocal effect is dependent upon the positioning of the parent brand or the product category (functional, experiential, symbolic). For brands/categories with a functional or experiential positioning, positive (negative) product related information will weigh more than non product-related information. Further, it is proposed that the size of this effect is dependent upon the characteristics of the consumer in terms of expertise, self-monitoring and age.

P 20. For brands/categories dominated by experiential/functional positioning, consumer knowledge about the brand/category is more sensitive to product-related extension information than non product-related extension information. This effect is stronger for novice consumers, low self-monitors and younger people than for expert consumers, high self-monitors and elderly people.

P 21. For brands/categories dominated by symbolic positioning, consumer knowledge about the brand/category is more sensitive to non product-related extension information than to product-related extension information. This effect is stronger for novice consumers, high self-monitors and younger people than for expert consumers, low self-monitors and elderly people.

Future Research Directions

The first fifteen years of research on consumer attitude toward brand extensions have seen the development of an elaborate process-based model grounded in cognitive psychology. Ample empirical evidence attests about the main effects in the model and interactions between them. Researchers have also started to investigate consumer-, marketer-controlled as well as external factors that moderate the relations in the model. This critical review has identified a certain number of gaps, underdeveloped aspects and possible extensions of this essentially cognitive model. To advance knowledge, future experimental studies can be guided by the empirical investigation of the propositional inventory presented here. Also, new consumer-level, marketer-controlled and external factors could be added and tested in the proposed integrative model.

This brings me to conclude the article with a critical note on the current research paradigm. On the methodological side, experimental studies have largely dominated scientific inquiry on brand extensions. Yet such a confinement may jeopardise the long-term perspectives for the development of a field. Eagly (1992) warns that “if investigators look to only the most obviously relevant research, not only do they miss many potentially useful theoretical ideas, but also they allow their theories to be seriously limited by the constraints of their research paradigms, which often allow only certain processes to be manifest. Theory encapsulated within an experimental paradigm is thus limited in scope” (Eagly, 1992, p. 704). In agreement with Eagly, this article encourages researchers to broaden their perspectives in future investigations of consumer attitudes towards brand extensions.

In addition to experimental research, large-scale studies based on longitudinal data can be employed to extend the empirical evidence of the cognitive model outlined in this article. Specifically, they can shed light on the influence of increasing category familiarity and expertise on brand extension evaluations. Periodically repeated surveys with the same consumers (e. g. panel data) are particularly useful for the investigation of the effect of consumer expertise on fit perception (propositions 1, 3, 4 and 5), primary extension attitude (propositions 7 to 9 and 11 to 13), the attitude – behaviour link (proposition 14) and reciprocal effects (propositions 17, 20 and 21). Specifically, such longitudinal studies might uncover a possible non-linear effect of an increase in consumer expertise on extension attitude formation. For example, could it be that the effect of expertise increase follows an S-shaped curve, whereby its effect is weak at early periods, then grows progressively and becomes roughly linear, while decreases down again at later stages?

Beside survey-type research, qualitative methodologies may also prove useful in broadening the scope of our knowledge about brand extension evaluations. In-depth interviews with consumers may extend research within the current cognitive theoretical paradigm, essentially through a deeper understanding of the role of non-product related associations in fit perception (propositions 1 to 4) and extension attitude formation (propositions 7 and 10 to 12). Quantitative studies have failed to identify a typology of possible non-product related associations that might shape extension evaluation, such as user imagery and brand personality dimensions (Keller, 1998). Indeed, consider these questions: Are these concepts applicable to both brands and product categories? If so, what is the relative role of user imagery and brand personality in brand-level fit perception? Is brand/category *user imagery* or brand/category *personality* more important in the consumer's evaluation of a brand extension? Under which consumer-level, marketer-controlled and external background factors

is the former more salient, and therefore more easily transferred, than the latter? In this respect, researchers may use the critical incident method, advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985): the analysis of detailed consumer narratives about recent or older brand extension experiences may elucidate answers to the questions raised.

In-depth interviews with brand managers and case studies offer other promising paths for future research. They can enhance our knowledge about the influence of managerial decisions, competitive activity and other external factors on the extension evaluation process. In particular, these information sources may help us to better understand which specific elements of the marketing mix are more effective than others in increasing fit perceptions (propositions 3 to 5) and favourable extension knowledge (propositions 11 to 13). In addition, insights from managers may also show if the same marketing mix elements have the same weight on extension evaluations, whether the company or its competitors use them.

Last but not least, in the spirit of Fournier and Mick (1999), qualitative consumer research can be used to challenge the dominant cognitive paradigm and test alternative theoretical perspectives on brand extensions. One of such perspectives is the emergent relationship paradigm, which sees brands as humanlike partners in types of relationships with the consumer that vary both in quality and intensity (Fournier, 1998). From this standpoint, brand extension can be conceptualised as an important type of brand behaviour that affects the relationship developed between the consumer and the brand. What is the impact of a brand extension announcement on the evolution of brand relationship quality? How do concrete experiences with the extension affect the relationship? Also, which relationship types are conducive to which types of brand extension in terms of positioning and level of fit? Indeed, do consumers with stronger brand relationships tolerate more dissimilar extensions than

consumers with looser brand ties? Or is it the opposite, in the sense that some strong relationships may lead to a “possessive” brand attitude, whereby the consumer becomes less favourable to drastic changes in the brand offer? Future inquiry is warranted to answer these interesting questions. Indeed, such an enterprise is likely to move us from the current linear, individual and predominantly process-based view of brand extension evaluation towards a holistic understanding of the relation between a consumer and a brand extension.

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Table
Review of literature on consumer attitudes to brand extensions, 1987-2001

Topic	Major findings	Relevant literature
Fit perceptions	<p>Conceptualisation and empirical evidence on the two dimensions of the fit construct</p> <p>Positive consumer mood may improve fit perceptions</p> <p>Brand advertising can improve fit perceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exposure - priming - distancing - improving association salience 	<p>Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991; Park & McCarthy, 1993, Bhat & Reddy, 1997, 2001; Bridges, Keller & Sood, 2000; Swaminathan, Fox & Reddy, 2001</p> <p>Barone, Miniard & Romeo, 2000</p> <p>Lane, 2000</p> <p>Boush, 1993; Pryor & Brodie, 1998</p> <p>Kim, Lavack & Smith, 2001</p> <p>Bridges, Keller & Sood, 2000</p>
Factors affecting extension evaluation	<p>Direct effect of category fit</p> <p>Direct effect of brand fit</p> <p>Knowledge transfer from the parent brand to the extension:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality - technological level - specific product attributes <p>Affect transfer from the parent brand to the extension</p> <p>Knowledge transfer from the extension category to the brand extension</p> <p>Consumer characteristics moderating the effects of the basic model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - motivation - consumer expertise - positive consumer mood - implicit personality theory - innovativeness <p>Elements of marketing strategy affecting brand extension attitude:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exposure - information content - information amount 	<p>Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Sunde & Brodie, 1993; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Nijssen & Hartman, 1994; Holden & Barwise, 1995; Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Flaherty & Pappas, 2000; Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Bhat & Reddy, 1997, 2001; Klink & Smith, 2001</p> <p>Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991; Bhat & Reddy, 1997, 2001</p> <p>Aaker & Keller, 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991; Boush & Loken, 1991; Dacin & Smith, 1994; Sunde & Brodie, 1993; Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Bottomley & Holden, 2001</p> <p>Jun et al 1999</p> <p>Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Glynn & Brodie, 1998; Bhat & Reddy, 2001</p> <p>Boush et al., 1987; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Glynn & Brodie, 1998; Bhat & Reddy, 1997, 2001; McCarthy, Heath & Milberg, 2001</p> <p>Sheinin, 1998</p> <p>Nijssen, Uijl & Bucklin (1995), Gürhan-Canli & Maheshwaran (1998)</p> <p>Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994</p> <p>Barone, Miniard & Romeo, 2000</p> <p>Flaherty & Pappas, 2000</p> <p>Klink & Smith, 2001</p> <p>Lane, 2000; Klink & Smith, 2001</p> <p>Lane, 2000; Sheinin, 1998</p> <p>Klink & Smith, 2001; McCarthy et al., 2001</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - priming techniques - distancing techniques 	Boush, 1993; Pryor & Brodie, 1998 Kim, Lavack & Smith, 2001
Attitude-behaviour link	<p>Brand affect positively impacts purchase intention</p> <p>Early brand extensions do not perform as well as extensions introduced at late stages in the category's life cycle</p> <p>Brand and category experience positively influence extension trial but not repurchase</p> <p>Role of parent brand strength and non-product related brand associations on market share</p>	<p>Lane, 2000; Bhat & Reddy, 2001</p> <p>Sullivan 1992</p> <p>Swaminathan, Fox & Reddy, 2001</p> <p>Reddy, Kollat & Bhat, 1994</p>
Reciprocal effect on parent brand and extension category	<p>Direct reciprocal attitude transfer from extension to the parent brand</p> <p>Extension knowledge transfer to the parent brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - type of association - knowledge accessibility <p>Effect of fit on reciprocal attitude transfer</p> <p>Consumer characteristics moderating the basic processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - motivation - expertise <p>Marketing strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advertising exposure <p>External factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - distributor activity 	<p>Loken & John, 1993; Romeo, 1991; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park & McCarthy, 1993; Milberg, Park & McCarthy, 1997; John, Loken & Joiner, 1998; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998; Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000; Chen & Chen, 2000</p> <p>Keller & Aaker, 1992; Loken & John, 1993; Chen & Chen, 2000 Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000</p> <p>Romeo, 1991; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park, & McCarthy, 1993; Milberg, Park & McCarthy, 1997; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998</p> <p>Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998 Morrin 1999; Sheinin, 2000</p> <p>Morrin, 1999</p> <p>Morrin, 1999</p>

Figure 1
Basic Model of the Extension Evaluation Process

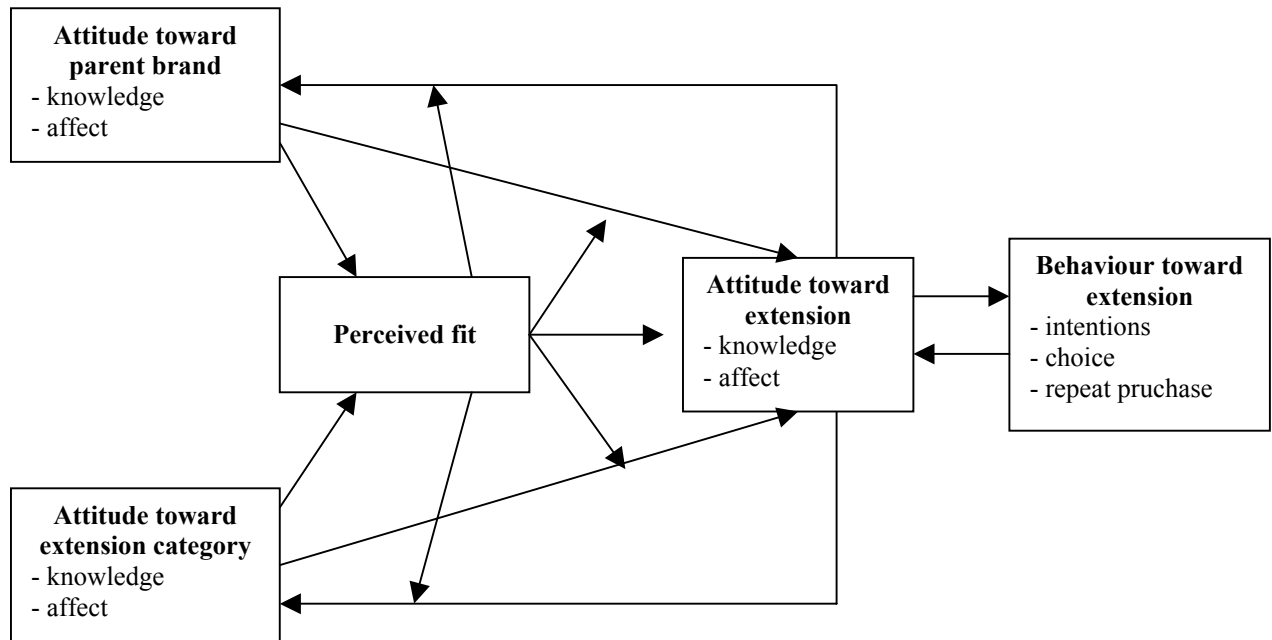
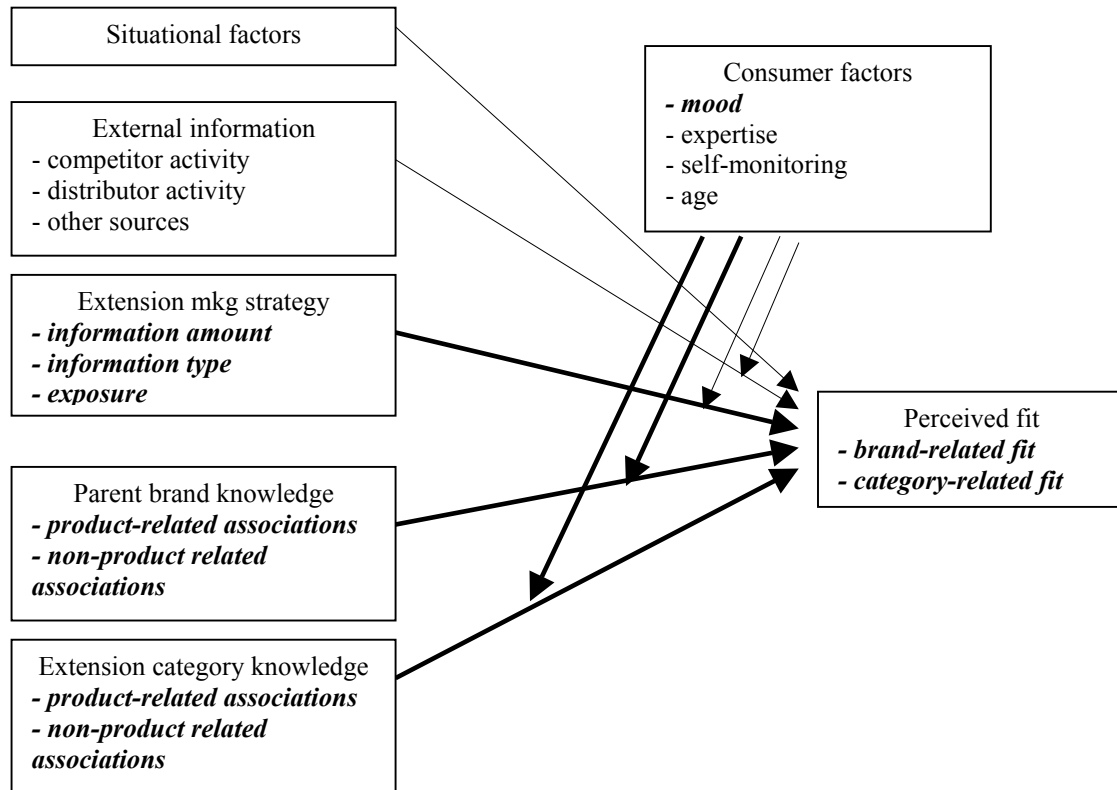
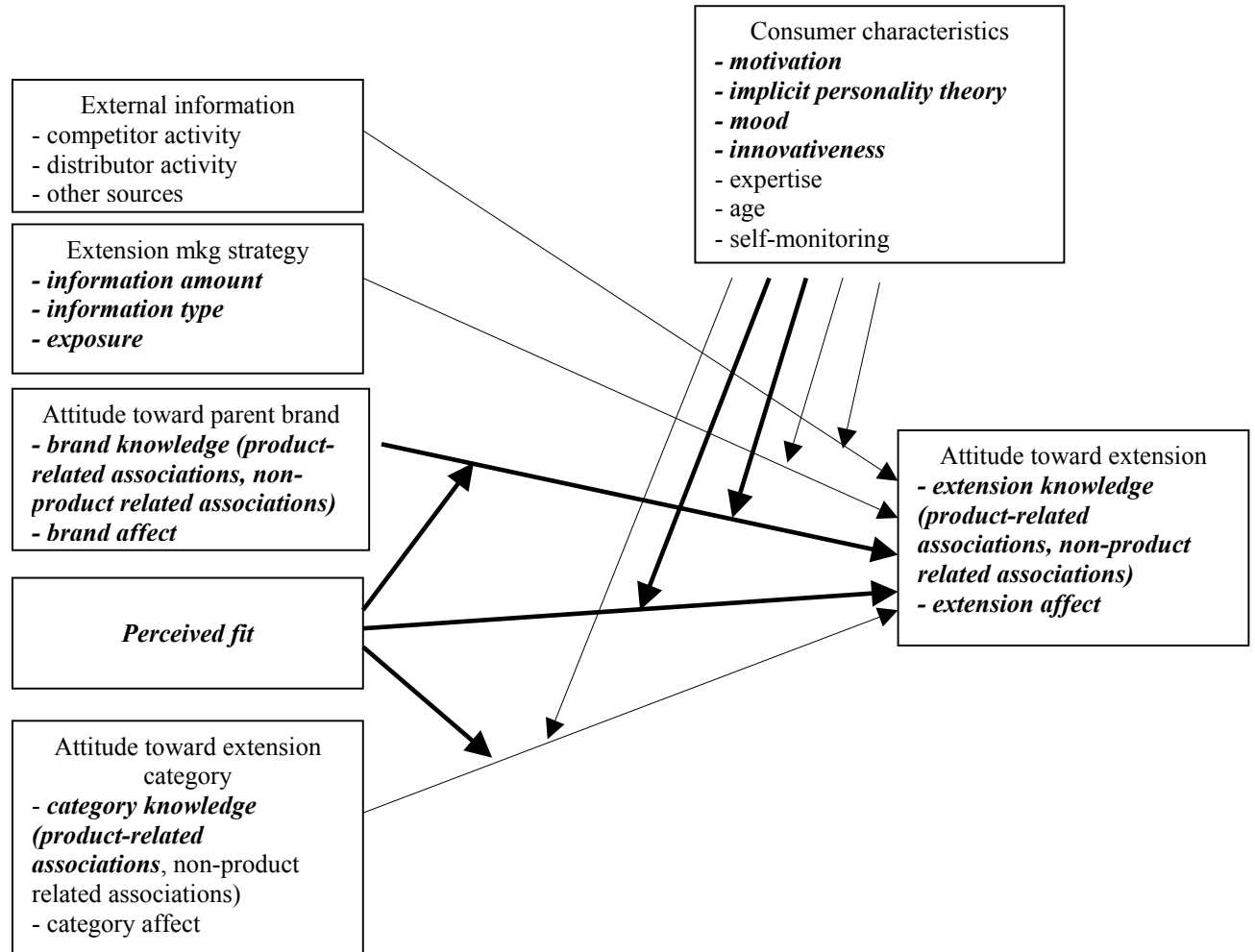


Figure 2
The process of fit perception



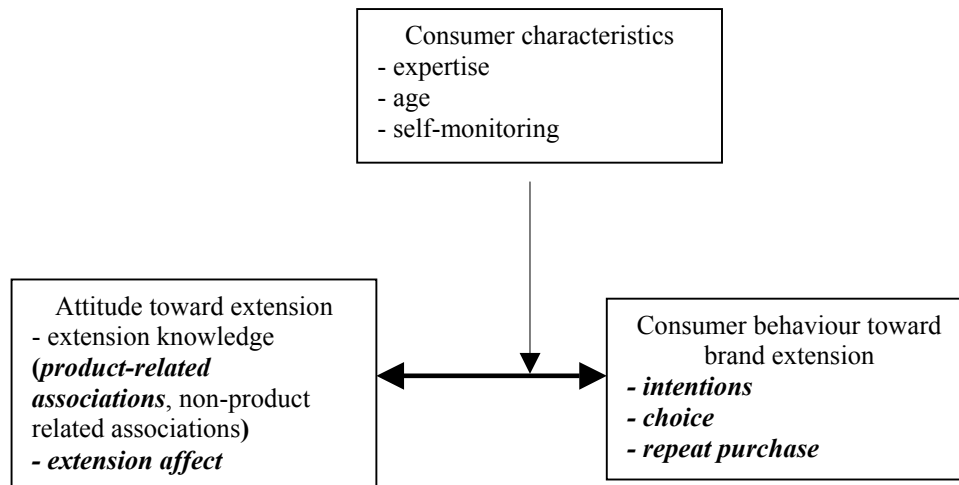
Note. Concepts & relationships in bold have already been studied to some extent in past research.

Figure 3
The process of brand extension attitude formation



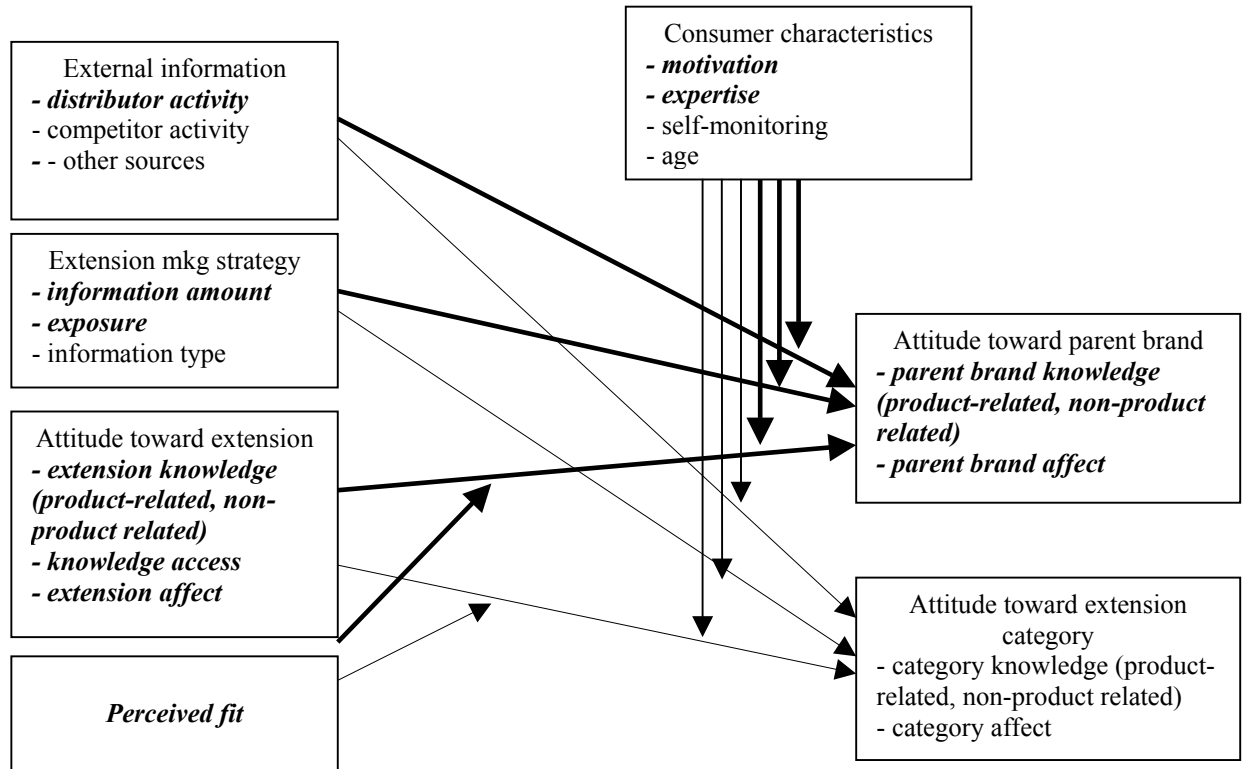
Note. Concepts and relationships in bold have already been studied to some extent in past research.

Figure 4
Link between brand extension attitude and behaviour



Note. Concepts and relationships in bold have already been studied to some extent in past research.

Figure 5
Reciprocal effect of the attitude toward the extension
on the attitude toward the parent brand/extension category



Note. Concepts and relationships in bold have already been studied to some extent in past research.