

The Effect of Brand Extension Strategies upon Brand Image in the Mobile Market

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Abstract

This study analyzes the impact of brand extension strategies upon brand image in the mobile market. Questionnaires were designed to measure variables of the Nokia brand and product fit laptops. The samples were selected randomly. Also, SPSS and Amos software were used to analyze data and test hypotheses. The results indicate that the brand image quality after implementing the brand extension strategy has been influenced by brand's image before extension, perceived fit between the new product and other products of the brand and the new product acceptance by consumers. But, the influence of the perceived quality of the product on consumer's attitude to new product has been not approved.

Keywords: Brand, Brand extension strategy, Brand image, Consumer's attitude, Perceived fit and Perceived Quality.

Introduction

Today, many products of one category are not significantly different from each other, but it is brands which cause important distinctions and the preference for one product over the other. These differences are so important that nowadays many market leaders view their brand as a means to create competitive advantages (Mohammadian and Ronaghi, 2010). Although brands are given meaning by a product, they are not products themselves. Brand is the product's meaning (Kapferer, 2006). The American Marketing Association defines a brand

as a name, word or phrase, mark, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them its purpose is to introduce a product or service which a seller or group of sellers offer in order to distinguish them from the products of competing firms. In fact, a brand represents a seller or manufacturer's product (Kotler and Armestrang, 2009). One common strategy which companies use to select a brand for their products is the brand extension strategy. Brand extension is defined as using a successful current brand for the introduction of new categories of products (Arslan and Altuna, 2010: 171). This strategy is not without risk and is not suitable for all brands, besides, it may affect adversely the image of extended brand (Martinez and Pina, 2003). Though new product associations may be positive, a negative association may also arise and unfavorably influence the consumer's attitude to extension and brand image (Katzanis and Pitta, 1995; Chen and Chen, 2000). Meanwhile, one of the most important duties of a brand manager is to create a favorable image of the brand. Brand image is a feeling about a brand as the brand associations are reflected in consumer's memory (Keller, 1993: 3). In addition, brand image may be improved through the use of brand extension strategy. The literature acknowledges that the negative effects of brand extension also are feasible (Martinez and Pina, 2009). This study has evaluated the effect of brand extension strategies upon brand image in the mobile market.

A Review of the theoretical literature

Brand extension

Determining a name and ID for a product is an important process which is considered when designing a product's strategies. Manufacturing companies eventually come to know that their brand is a power source obtained from the market (Kotler, 2008). The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, word or phrase, mark, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them its purpose is to introduce a product or service which a seller or group of sellers offer in order to distinguish them from the products of competing firms (Kotler and Armestrang, 2009).

One strategy in developing a brand is brand extension strategy. By brand extension it means that a successful current brand is used for a new product. It means that the company by using its current brand offers new products in other categories (Arselan and Altuna, 2010: 171). Consumer's awareness of the extended brand can reduce his/her hesitancy and uncertainty about shopping and product testing (Dawar, 1996). Therefore, the brand extension strategy is now being used by many companies and we have seen many successes and failures in companies implementing and adopting this strategy. Brand extension is a strategically important decision. This is mainly because it has risks as well as opportunities. The wrong extension could create damaging associations that may be expensive to change (Ries and Trout, 1981). The failure affects the extension strategy as well as the existing brand either through brand dilution or damaging the existing brand image (Ambler and Styles, 1997; Martinez and Chernatony, 2004). Different companies use different methods for the extension of brand. Either they go for vertical extension of brand or for horizontal extension. Both methods are used by companies in different situations as well as for different products and markets.

Horizontal extension

Horizontal brand extension can be defined as extending a parent brand to a new product in the same product class or to a product which is completely new for a company (Pitta and

Katsanis, 1995). The definition given by Pitta and Katsanis (1995) includes two aspects; one is a new product within the same product class and the other one is a new product which belongs to different category for the company or a new product to the company without having any class. According to Aaker and Keller (1990), horizontal brand extension can be further divided into line extension and franchise extension.

1. Line extension

Line extension uses the current brand name or parent brand name to enter a new market segment in its product class. More precisely, it also includes the cases when a company comes out with new features, such as new flavors, forms, colors, and package sizes and introduces it within the same product category under the same brand name (Kotler, 1997).

2. Franchise extension

Franchise extension can be defined as when a company enters to a market by using the same parent brand name though different category. Tauber (2001) defines franchise extension as follows: "franchise extension takes brand name familiar to the consumer and applies it to products that are in a category new to the parent firm. While a new entry employs a new brand name and the product or service is in a category new to the company, this is a traditional new product" (Tauber, 2001: 37).

Vertical extension

Vertical extension is the second type of brand extension, in which a new brand is introduced on the basis of price and quality. It can be defined as introducing a similar brand to the same product category while being different in prices and quality (Keller and Aaker, 1992). Vertical brand extension additionally can be divided into upscale and downscale brand extension (Xie, 2008).

1. Upscale vertical brand extension

Upscale vertical brand extension is brand extension done on the basis of a higher quality and higher price point as compared to the parent brand (Kim and Lavack 1996). A high price can affect consumers in such a way that consumers expect the same quality or higher quality of a remaining low price.

2. Down scale vertical brand extension

Down scale vertical brand extension is extending a brand with lower quality and price (Kim and Lavack, 1996). There are a lot of discussions between the researchers about down scale vertical brand extension. Great risk is involved in introduction of down scale extension, because it has sometimes a negative impact on a consumer's mind, when a company comes with lower quality while using the same brand name. This can damage the core brand or parent brand.

Brand Image

Brand image is a simple perceptual phenomenon which is influenced by the company's activities. Professor Kevin Keller, a leading scholar and theorist in the field of brand management, defines brand image as the consumer's perception of brand which is reflected in memory by the current brand associations. A positive brand image reduces the consumer's perceived risk about the brand and increases the level of consumer's satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, a brand which has a good image in the consumer's mind will facilitate the process of determining the product's line, because a strong and positive brand image is easier to be carved in the consumer's mind (mohammadian and ronaghi, 2010). In fact, a brand' value is obtained from a general brand image which is perceived by individual consumer through

associations (Michell et al, 2001). Therefore, insistence on a positive image based on core values and other values which distinguish one brand should be a top priority for any company (Sang-Lin and Hyung, 2008 and Aaker, 1997). While the brand image might be improved through the use of brand extension strategy, product naming literature acknowledges that negative effects of brand extension also are possible (Loken and John, 1993; John et al, 1998). Based on what was mentioned, it is possible that brand extension leaves both positive and negative effects on brand position and offers a vague image of the brand concept and costumers' image of the brand (Vazife dust et al, 2009). In this regard, there are factors which influence the brand extension strategy's relationship with brand image. These factors including, initial brand image (before extension), perceived fit between the new product and other products of the brand, perceived quality of extended product and consumer attitude toward extension. These factors have been evaluated in the following.

Consumer Attitude To Extension Or New Product With Extended Brand

There are two main reasons for paying special attention to consumers' attitude. First, consumers' evaluation is very important because researchers believe that consumer attitude is the main factor in successful implementation of brand extension and brand success (Boush and Loken, 1991: 19). Furthermore, consumers' attitude to extension is a necessity to establish brand equity (Pitta and Katsanis, 1995: 54). Attitude is defined as a cognitive state which is reflected in many aspects and makes the consumer give preference to one product or brand. In other words, consumer attitude to new product and extended brand is made by consumers' perception of extended brand and the possibility of buying a new product with that brand (Wilkie, 1994: 281). Consumer attitude to extension is influenced by such variables as initial brand image and perceived fit between a brand and its products and the new product with extended brand (Martinez and Pina, 2009) which are discussed in following.

Initial Brand Image (Before Brand Extension)

Brand extension based on its assets (such as consumers' awareness and favorable image) is more likely to be successful (Zhang and Sood, 2002: 131; Maoz and Tybout, 2002: 121; Klink and Smith, 2001: 328). Consumers' attitude to extension is better for those brands related to high quality standards (Van Riel et al, 2001; Völckner and Sattler, 2006), reputation (Hem et al, 2003), prestige (Park et al, 2001) or affection (Sheinin and Schmitt, 1996). In the field of products and services, consumer's positive image of the brand generates favorable perceptions of the new product with extended brand (Brown and Dacin, 1997, Deruyter and wetzels, 2000).

Perceived Fit Between A Brand's Products And The New Product With Extended Brand

According to the widespread acceptance and use of brand extension strategies, researchers have examined the reasons for its acceptance by consumers. Most researchers believe that the perceived fit between the new product and brand is the main factor in the success of this strategy (Lau and Phau, 2007: 431). If the consumers feel that there is some degree of consistency between the brand and the new product, that product is more likely to be accepted (Lahiri and Gupta, 2005: 29). According to Keller and Aaker (1990) perceived fit is the consumer's perception of the new product's fit or consistency with initial brand. In researches related to the brand extension, fit is referred to, based on several aspects, as product similarity and brand concept consistency (Park et al, 1991: 188) as well as fit between brand image and new product. The results of studies on consumer attitude toward new

product indicated that if there is more fitness (congruency) between extended product and initial brand, new product's evaluation will be more favorable. In other words, products with poor fitness lead to dilute consumers' attitude toward the new product and brand (Lahiri and Gupta, 2005). "Similarity" or category fit is the most important aspect of fitness which is referred to in most researches (Bhat and Reddy, 1997). "Similarity" is defined as resemblance between current and new product groups in terms of features, characteristics or benefits (Boush and Loken, 1991: 20). Studies related to the consumers have shown, when similarity between current and new product is more the transfer probability of the positive and negative beliefs to new product will be higher. By increasing similarity between current and new products, success and the transfer of positive attitude from the initial brand to the new product is more likely (Martinez and Pina, 2005: 266; Völckner and Sattler, 2006: 154). Recent studies have led to the identification of some moderating variables which influence the acceptance of fit. These variables including communication strategy (Lane, 2000: 84); number of the products related to brand; perceived price and quality of the new product and consumer innovativeness (Martinez and Pina, 2009). Seeking novel and newfangled things by consumer depends on individuals' innovativeness. According to Rogers (1995), innovative people enjoy buying new products, have little faith to social norms and are self-confident and courageous. These personal characteristics lead to a better attitude toward the new product/service with current brand (Völckner and Sattler, 2006; Ham et al, 2003; Siu et al, 2004).

Perceived Quality Of The Extended Product

Perceived quality plays an important role in the success of a brand. Once the company has created brand awareness in consumers, they will purchase a product. For continuous purchase of a product, the customer quality perception should be positive. A new product can be a good idea, but if the product does not meet expectations, it will not be sold. If a consumer goes for a purchase trial but the product does not meet his/her expectations, then the continuous process of purchasing will stop (Apéria and Back, 2004).

Perception of quality differs from actual quality. The consumer can be affected by earlier impressions made by poor quality. According to Aaker (1996), decisive is to protect the brand from a bad image of shady quality. Otherwise it will be difficult or almost impossible to recover the image and reputation of a brand in the market. Perceived quality differs from objective quality. Making difference between product attributes and consumer perception in them is very important. In perceived quality value and emotional reward are seen on high level by customer. Perceived quality becomes the assessment through which it creates the image of a product in a customer's mind that governs his/her attitude toward a product.

Perceived quality can be in the intrinsic or physical make up (taste, color, consistency) and extrinsic cues (price, brand name, publicity, warranties). Internal or intrinsic is about the product quality, working duration and physical composition of the product. External or extrinsic dimension all which is not included in the physical product. This can be price, marketing or the brand itself. Therefore, brand should develop itself to associate with the quality in a customer's mind both in internal cue and external cue (Apéria and Back 2004).

According to the theoretical literature, the hypotheses of this research are:

H1- Initial brand image influences perceived fit between the extended product and other products of the brand in the Mobile Market.

H2- Initial brand image influences perceived quality of extended product in the Mobile Market.

H3- Initial brand image influences consumer attitude toward the extended product in the Mobile Market.

H4- Perceived fit between the extended product and other products of the market influences consumer attitude to extension in the Mobile Market.

H5- Perceived quality of extended product influences consumer attitude to extension in the Mobile Market.

H6- Consumer attitude to extension influences final brand image in the Mobile Market.

H7- Initial brand image influences final brand image in the Mobile Market.

Considering available theoretical literature in the study and mentioned hypotheses, the conceptual model of this research is shown in figure 1.

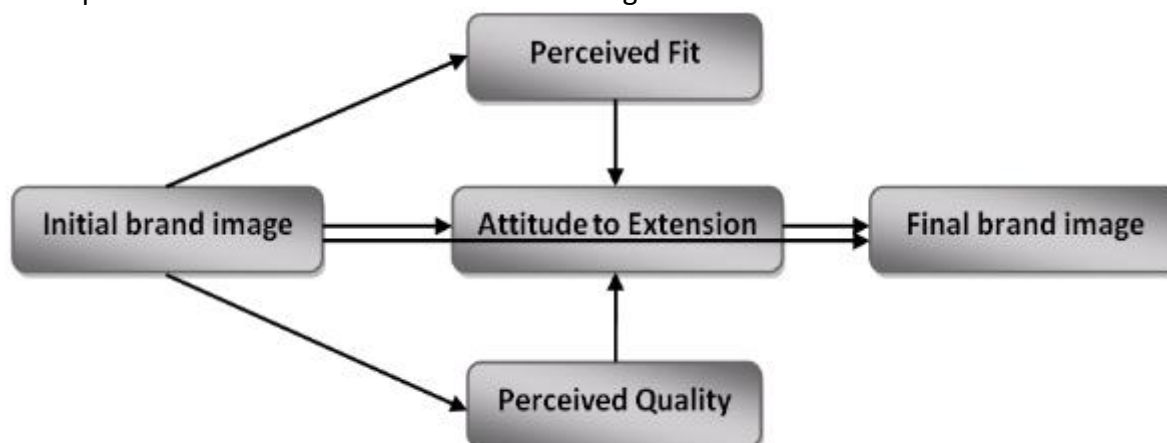


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

Research Population and Sample

This research, from the viewpoints of practical purposes and methods of data collection is a descriptive survey research. The research's statistical population is customers of Mobile Market that are available at the time of data collection. For data collection, based on the subject's literature, a questionnaire was designed. 600 questionnaires were distributed randomly among customers of Mobile Market. The questionnaires used in this study had two parts. The first part included demographic variables such as gender, age and educational level and the second part was devoted to measure this research's considered variables. Rating scale for each question was prepared based on a score of 1 to 5 that is from very agreeing to strongly disagree.

Research Variables Measurement

Content validity of this questionnaire was approved by Isfahan University authorities and professors. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the test. For this purpose, an initial sample of 50 questionnaires was distributed. By using obtained data, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Cronbach's alpha for all the questions related to the variables in the research analytical model was calculated as 0.94% which is acceptable. Criteria used in evaluating research variables are shown in Table 1.

Analytical Findings Of The Research Conceptual Model

In the first step, measurement models get fitted. Models' fit indexes are listed in Table 1:

Table 1: overall indexes of fit in measurement models

Variables Indexes	Initial brand image	Fitness and similarity	Perceived quality	Consumer attitude to extension	Final brand image
CMIN/DF	2.39	2.71	3.07	-	2.70
RMR	0.014	0.009	0.012	0.000	0.014
GFI	0.981	0.996	0.995	1.000	0.984
AGFI	0.965	0.973	0.965	-	0.960
IFI	0.991	0.999	0.997	1.000	0.993
NFI	0.985	0.998	0.996	1.000	0.990
CFI	0.991	0.999	0.997	1.000	0.993

Measurement models have a good fit, in other words, overall indexes confirm that models are clearly supported by data. Variables' loading factor, as the most important fit index, has been considered in the consumer attitude model and is widely used in results' interpretation. The questions loadind factors are mentioned in appendix.

The Results Of Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

After evaluating and verifying the measurement models in the first step, in the second step, to test hypotheses, structural equation model is fitted and analyzed. Overall indexes of model fitness are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: model fitness indexes

RMR	IFI	CFI	NFI	AGFI	GFI	RMSEA	CMIN/df	df	CMIN
0.024	0.988	0.988	0.981	0.945	0.971	0.057	2.92	35	102.31
Close to zero	0.90>	0.90>	0.90>	0.90>	0.90>	0.08<	1> 3<	Reception area	Close to zero

Results obtained from the information provided in Table 2 are as follow:

Amos output results in estimating the standard model indicates that path analysis model is an appropriate model. The normal Chi-square value is 2.92 which stand between two values of 1 and 3. RMSEA value is 0.057 which is appropriate, also the values of GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI and IFI are all above 90%; and finally RMR value is close to zero. All the values of model fitness indexes are in the reception area and these indexes indicate that model has a goodness-of-fit which is obtained by data and model is well supported by collected data. Hypotheses and regression coefficients as well as partial indexes values for each hypothesis are shown in table 5. Research's final model is presented in the appendix.

Table 3: hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Sample size	Significance number	Corroboration coefficient	Critical ratio	Test result
Initial brand image→ consumer attitude	600	0.000	0.15	4.94	accepted
Initial brand image→ perceived fit	600	0.000	0.36	8.02	accepted
Initial brand image→ perceived quality	600	0.018	0.10	2.36	accepted

perceived fit→ consumer attitude	600	0.000	0.86	20.70	accepted
perceived quality→ consumer attitude	600	0.000	-0.03	-1.02	rejected
consumer attitude→ final brand image	600	0.000	0.60	12.02	accepted
Initial brand image→ final brand image	600	0.000	0.40	16.48	accepted

In the significance level of 0.05, if the table's significance number is smaller than 0.05, relationship between each pair of variables is confirmed.

Discussion and Conclusion

As it is perceived from the results in Table 3, it can be concluded that implementation of brand extension strategy in any condition has diluted brand image but this dilution, when the extension is applied to a dissimilar product is more tangible. Also, the following results were obtained through testing hypotheses:

H1- Initial brand image influences perceived fit between the extended product and other products of the brand in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said that initial brand image, with a certainty of 95 %, positively influences perceived fit between the new product (extended product) and main products of the brand in the mobile market. As expected, with a more favorable brand image, perceived fit between the extended product and other products of the brand is increased because consumers when evaluating the extended product use the initial brand image to understand the benefits, applications and features. This research's result is in line with the results of Martinez and Pina (2009), and Martinez et al (2009).

H2- Initial brand image influences perceived quality of extended product in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said that initial brand image, with a certainty of 95 %, positively influences perceived fit between the new product (extended product) and main products of the brand in the mobile market. As expected, with a more favorable brand image, perceived quality of extended product is increased because consumers when evaluating the extended product use the initial brand image to understand the benefits, applications and features. This research's result is in line with the results of Martinez and Pina (2009), and Martinez et al (2009).

H3- Initial brand image influences consumer attitude toward the extended product in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said that initial brand image, with 95 percent of certainty, positively influence consumer attitude to the extended product in the mobile market. In fact, when there is a strong current brand image, consumer attitude to the extended product will be more favorable, because consumers excessively trust in a strong brand. This research's result is in line with the results of Martinez and Pina (2009), and Martinez et al (2009).

H4- Perceived fit between the extended product and other products of the market influences consumer attitude to extension in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is more than 0.05, it can be said that this hypothesis, with 95% of certainty is rejected. In other words, it can be said, with 95% of certainty that perceived fit between the extended product and other

products of the market does not influence the final brand image in the mobile market. Usually, perceived fit influence brand image through attitude to the extended product and has no direct impact on brand image. This research result is in line with Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) but is not in line with the result of Perverian's study (2008).

H5- Perceived quality of extended product influences consumer attitude to extension in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is more than 0.05, it can be said that perceived quality of extended product, with 95% of certainty has no effect on consumer attitude to extended product in the mobile market. If quality of original product is good, new product will not necessarily have the same quality. The result of this research is in line with the results of Apéria and Back (2004).

H6- Consumer attitude to extension influences final brand image in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said that consumer attitude to extension, with 95% of certainty influence final brand image in the mobile market. New extended products, if have a poor quality or are faced with negative evaluations will damage brand image, for the new product becomes a member of the brand family and shape the brand image. The result of this research is in line with the results of Martinez and Pina (2009), Martinez and de Chernatony (2004) and Martinez et al (2009).

H7- Initial brand image influences final brand image in the Mobile Market.

Based on testing research hypotheses and the Sig of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said that initial brand image, with 95% of certainty, positively influences the final brand image in the mobile market. When a new product with the current brand is offered to the market, brand's most associations and the overall image of the brand remain unchanged. As a result, initial brand image influences final brand image after extension. This research's result is in agreement with the results in Martinez and Pina (2009), and Martinez et al (2009) studies.

In this study, the effect of brand extension strategy upon brand image has been the subject of discussion. According to the results of this study, brand image dilution risk in all conditions is likely, thus, performers of this strategy should know that they will not be able to avoid possible dilution of their own brand and just are able to reduce this dilution by doing this strategy in a right way and a realistic cost-benefit calculation. In the most optimistic condition they can maintain the level of their brand image. Based on the results obtained from the research model as a whole, it can be said that in implementing brand image strategy some factors such as initial brand image, perceived fit between the new product perceived quality of extended product and either the remaining products and consumer attitude to extension, influence the final brand image. initial brand image strongly influences the implementation of brand extension strategy since it has effects on the perceived fit and consumer attitude to extension as well as on the final brand image. When there is a better and stronger initial brand image, there will be a higher perception of perceived fit between the new product and either the remaining products of the brand. This higher perception strengthens consumer attitude to the extended product that enhances success chances of brand in performing the brand extension strategy and reduces brand image delusion. An important point to be noticed here is that extensions that seem successful in terms of consumer acceptance can also lead to brand image dilution. If the extended product has a low fit, it will negatively influence attitude toward the brand. However, a high fit extension, when extension attitude is unsatisfactory, does not guarantee the protection of brand image, because the new associations of seemingly

successful extensions can also lead to brand image dilution. If the new product is carefully chosen so that it can have good quality, new product will not necessarily have the same quality than brand. Results indicate that the most important aspect of brand extension success is the new product's fit with brand image and its similarity with other products of the brand.

In this study, the products which were selected as brands extensions were not actual products. Using actual brand extensions requires the companies' cooperation which is not easily possible. This issue has certainly influenced the results, because consumers are not in an actual market condition and an actual implementation of brand image strategy and thus their answers are merely based on an unreal implementation. Therefore, it is possible that in real conditions and implementation of communication strategies which organizations make with consumers, their (consumers) opinions change. This model has only been evaluated in the mobile products category and its extension capability to other products is limit, since consumers' preoccupation with different products may be diverse.

This study was conducted in Iran, Isfahan and among consumers of mobile market. Thus, its extension to other countries and provinces is limited because different cultures may lead to different results. Another limitation is related to the variables used in the study. Although other variables can also be effective on brand extension strategy, in this study only some variables such as initial brand image, perceived fit and consumer attitude to extension were evaluated. As a result, this study has not considered all the variables existed in brand extension, that this issue influences research's results. Future researchers should investigate real market conditions to find whether validated relationships still remain under the effect of other variables (such as, marketing mix, competition actions, etc). In order to analyze the effects on brand image, other researches should develop the study both before and after the introduction of the extended product. For validation, researchers can use the research model in the field of other products. Also, this study can be applied to other countries and provinces with different cultures. Researchers can examine such variables as brand familiarity and brand's prestige and power as main variables in brand extension and consumer preoccupation with the product as the moderating variable.

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