

The Effect of Brand Extension Strategy on Brand Image to Customers

ABSTRACT

The present research has been conducted with the aim of studying the effect of brand extension strategy upon brand image to LG customers. In this study, random sampling method was used and questionnaires have been distributed among customers of LG in Qom city. After data collection, hypotheses were analyzed by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equations model using the software Amos 18. In this research customers' primary image of LG was as independent variable and perceived fit between the extended product and main product, perceived quality of original products and consumer attitude towards the extended product were mediator variables that their effects on the final brand image were examined. The results showed that initial image of the brand has the greatest impact on the final image and on the attitude towards the brand extension after the impact on perceived quality.

Keywords: brand extension, brand image, perceived fit, perceived quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand extension strategy refers to any attempt to develop a successful brand to offer a new or modified product on the market. Good brand reduces marketing costs and increases the probability of success [1]. When brand has a good reputation it not only makes customer trust in the brand but also acts as a powerful barrier against competitors [2]. There are many corporations trying to improve brand image within customers' mind using brand. Strong image of brand is a competitive advantage for corporations because customers who have positive assumptions about brand decide based on it [3]. When consumers encounter the phenomenon of brand extension for the first time they want to find whether their views about the product category is consistent with the new product or not [4]. One of the factors that can affect the mentality of the customer about the brand is the brand extension. Of course there is always the risk that the brand extension hurts the brand image [5]. Many managers of domestic and foreign companies use the method of brand extension when presenting new products to market and their argument is that the subjective views and characteristics of the product is also transferred to the new product with the same name [6]. Using this strategy has advantages and disadvantages that if they be used wrongly or without studying they would have negative effect on brand image within customers' mind. Therefore it seems necessary the companies who use this strategy evaluate its effectiveness constantly. It might failure of this strategy for a product have a negative impact on the customer's brand image [7]. The brand image is an intuitive and attractive concept which is the company's valuable asset and it must be properly managed [8]. When a company has an acceptable brand image in the eyes of customers it can increase the amount of its sales through enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty and can also attract more investors and employees [9]. On the other hand it will be able to better compete with other companies and makes more profit for company [10]. Therefore examining how consumer evaluate the brand extension as well as reviewing it with the brand image is inevitable necessity. Thus, in this research we studied the effect of brand extension strategy on brand image in the eyes of customers of LG.

2. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Brand extension

Brand extension means using the existing brand. Brand extension is seeking to exploit directly the available brand value or asset. A brand has its own customers who have positive memory of it and brand extension can convey this positive association. Of course this does not ensure the success of this strategy, but at least you can be encouraged to use new products. Aaker and Keller believe that

brand extension can not be successful if there is no fitness between new product and previous product and it may hurt brand quality if the new product has lower quality than the previous product [11].

2.2 Perceived fit

A very important aspect of brand extension is fitness between original brand and the extended brand extension similarity [12]. Fitness is defined as the amount of perceived similarity that consumers find between the product with original brand and the extended product. Consumers evaluate new product from the brand extension based on their perceptions of fitness between the new product and the original brand [13]. Consumer favourable attitude towards the new product involves existing high fitness between the brand and the new product of that brand [6].

2.3 Perceived quality

Perceived quality is consumer perception of general quality or an item/service superiority in comparison to available options. So for creating and managing a strong brand the perceived quality should be studied by consumers [14]. The perceived quality is one of the beliefs which determines mental associations. Consumers construct their perceptions about risk according to the perceived quality. By improving the quality, corporations can affect decision process through reducing perceived risk [15].

2.4 Consumer attitude towards extended product

Attitude is defined as response to a stimulus phenomenon. these responses include three components: cognition, affection, and behaviour. cognitive component refers to beliefs in an object. Beliefs are information that a person has about people, objects and subjects. These beliefs usually result from processing information and learning processes. The affection component refers to evaluating a subject by person. In particular the affective component indicates good or bad emotional relation to the subject. The behavior component is generally inherent and with commitment, because person decides and this decision leads to a behavior (e.g purchasing product). In order to evaluate the brand extension, consumer decides according to his mental associations of the brand and the extent of the associations relation with the new product [16].

2.5 Brand image

The brand image is the simple perception phenomenon, which is affected by company activities. Keller regards the brand image as consumer perception about the brand that is reflected by the brand associations in the mind. The brand image is bundle of perceptions within the mind of consumer. In other words consumer perception of the prominent features of product is consumers mental image of the whole set of brand which has been created by company.

2.6 Primary brand image

Brand extension based on brand asset (such as consumer awareness, good mental image,...) has higher chance of success [17]. One of the factors influencing consumer's attitude towards new product is Customer's primary mental image before brand extension. Consumer 's attitude towards new product is better to those brands with high quality standards [18], reputation [19], prestige [20]. In the field of manufacturing as well as services consumer 's positive brand image causes good perceptions of new product with the existing brand.

2.7 Primary brand image and attitude towards the extended product

Today companies invest remarkable sources in extension of names with good images. Among all the possible advantages, a positive image facilitates development of business through brand extension. Linking an existing brand to a new nature such as geographical name, name of a person or a product affects brand image relations [21]. For brands of products a positive mental image helps probability of success of extension [22] , [19]. Known and strong brands help consumers promote their positive

perceptions of current products and the extended ones [3] , [23]. [12] showed that customers have positive attitudes towards the extended products of those brands with unique and good images than brands lacking such images. Indeed, when mental image of the existing brand is strong consumer 's attitude towards new product is more favourable because consumers have higher trust in strong brand. Therefore we expect that positive brand image affects consumer's attitude towards the extended product.

H1: primary brand image has significant effect on consumer's attitude towards the extended product.

2.8 Primary brand image and perceived fit

Many studies show that existing a lot of fitness between original brand and the extended brand can cause a more positive reaction from consumers to extension because they transfer easier positive features that they have within their minds, to the extension [24]. As an extension differences of original brand is higher, the importance of focusing on reference framework is higher [25]. The perceived fit is a strategic factor in the process of evaluating new product by consumer which fills the gap between brand image and consumer's attitude towards new product. Several studies have found interactive effects of the perceived fit and consumer brand image [6], thus perceived fit may have mediation effect between consumer's attitude towards new product and primary brand image. With more favorable brand image, we expect that the amount of perceived fit between new product and other products of brand increases, because consumers use the image of original brand, when evaluating new product for deduction from advantages, applications and characteristics.

H2: primary brand image has significant effect on perceived fit between the extended product and original product.

2.9 Primary brand image and perceived quality

Perceived quality is one of the most important factors influencing success of brand extension [18]. On the other hand [26] argued one of the most important aspects of brand extension is protection of quality in all categories related to product. The perceived quality is consumer evaluation and judgment about a product preference [14]. Although there is discussion about relations between the perceived quality and brand image, it is possible that the perceived quality is affected by consumers brand image found before any extension [27], [28], [29]. Consumers regard brand image or corporation image as a descriptive criterion of product quality or service from brand. Furthermore, products brands with positive image within the minds of consumers enhance qualitative perceptions of all presented products [28], [9], [30]. Indeed, the perceived quality is affected by consumer brand image before the brand extension.

H3: primary brand image has significant effect on perceived quality of original products.

2.10 Perceived fit and attitude towards the extended production

If customers find high fitness between product or extended service and original product, brand value will increase and its potential negative impacts reduce . Some researchers argued that customers focus on image fitness and category fitness. That is to say customers can regard new product similar to other products in appearance (category fitness) or consistent with other brand associations (image fitness). Therefore, similarity and consistency can improve evaluation of brand extension. As fitness is higher, the evaluation of extension is more positive [6]. Customers believe that extensions unrelated with category of original product are not trustworthy and they have low quality that lead to negative evaluation. According to the research literature, category/image high fitness leads to success. Indeed, consumer good attitude towards new product involves existing high fitness between brand and new product of the brand [6]. Therefore, we expect that consumer's attitude towards new product becomes better by increasing consumers perceptions of fitness.

H4: perceived fit between the extended product and original products has significant effect on consumer 's attitudes towards the extended product.

2.11 Perceived quality and attitude towards the extended product

Due to transferring perceived quality from original brand to the extended product there are contradictory evidence about perception of high quality of original brand and increasing consumers evaluation of brand extension. For example while [31] found evidence based on direct impact of

original brand quality, [6]presented evidence indicating the lack of direct relation between parent brand perceived quality and evaluation from extension [31]. In the perceived quality the main assumption is that beliefs or attitudes towards the parent brand will transfer to its extension and as the perceived quality of original brand is higher it will have more positive effect on the extended product acceptance [32]. Therefore, we expect that the perceived quality before the extension affects consumers attitudes towards the extended product.

H5: the perceived quality of original products has significant effect on consumer attitude towards the extended product.

2.12 Primary brand image and final brand image

According to associations network, brand image is a mental plan created by a network of concepts which have inner relationship together through associations or communications. When a company takes action to extend a brand which is consistent with previous associations, assumptive brand image accepts new concept without change and adapts itself [33]. In contrast, if the new concept or product differs from mental plan there will be changes in mental associations. Indeed, when the extended product with the existing brand is offered to the market most brand associations and general image of brand remain unchanged. Primary brand image variable has direct effect on final brand image and thus it can be expected if the primary brand image is positive it affects the final brand image.

H6: primary brand image has significant effect on final brand image.

2.13 Attitude towards the extended product and final brand image

Attitudes are the general evaluations of brand by consumers [34]. Consumer's attitude towards a brand determines whether he will like product, whether he will purchase product, whether he will remain loyal to product,... . When a negative attitude formed within the mind of a consumer this negative attitude would almost be unchangeable and it usually leads to be avoided that brand by consumers. For this reason, attitude towards the extended product is an important variable in determining whether the extension will be accepted or not. If attitude towards the extended product is strong it will have positive effect on brand image. However, if this variable is weak it will have negative or insignificant effect on brand image [34].

Therefore, identifying how consumers attitudes towards brand extension is and its effect on final brand image is very important. The variable of consumers attitudes towards brand extension has direct effect on final brand image. So we expect that this variable has the most effect, because it is a combination of factors evaluated by consumers.

H7: consumer's attitude towards the extended product has significant effect on final brand image.

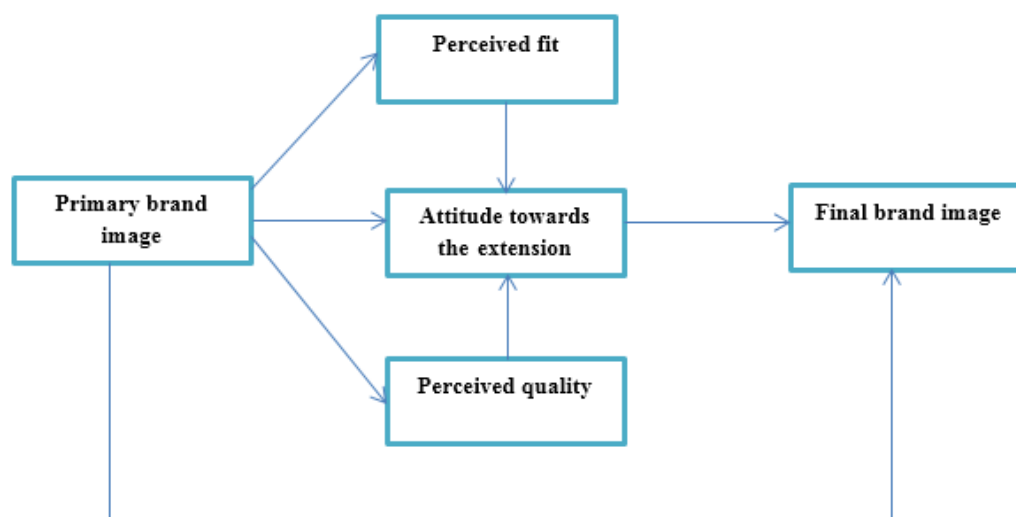


Figure. 1. Research Conceptual Model

177 The above conceptual model is a combined and modified model of Salinas and Perez [4], the model
178 of Martinez et al [21] and model of Pina et al [35].

179 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

180 3.1 population and statistical sample

181 statistical population just includes customers of Qom city that their common characteristic is
182 purchasing LG products (home appliances and mobile phone). This research does not belong to
183 specific class of age, social, educational and job and if people purchase the products they will be
184 considered among the statistical universe. Also the sampling method in the research is random
185 sampling method, Cochran formula has been used to calculate the sample size which 379 samples
186 has been determined for the analysis required. The questionnaire has two parts. The first part
187 includes demographic variables such as gender, age and education level and the second part
188 measures variables of the research.

189 3.2 Research tools validity and reliability

190 Questionnaire validity is confirmed by management professors of Tehran university. Cronbach's alpha
191 coefficient has been used to measure reliability. For this, 30 questionnaires have been distributed
192 among customers and Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient
193 was obtained 0.82 for all questions of variables in the research analytic model which is acceptable.

194 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

195 In order to study the fact that how much indexes are acceptable for measurment models, all the
196 measurement models should be analyzed separately. Overal indexes of fit of model have been
197 presented for the measurement models (confirmatory factor analysis) in the table 1.

Table 1. Overall indexes of fitting in mesearment models

198

Variables Indexex	Primary brand image	Perceived fit	perceived quality	attitude towards the extension	final brand image
Chi-Square	000.0	003.0	000.0	300.0	000.0
GFI	959.0	984.0	979.0	997.0	932.0
AGFI	905.0	922.0	895.0	984.0	795.0
RMR	040.0	032.0	031.0	011.0	057.0
TLI	930.0	949.0	944.0	998.0	835.0
NFI	949.0	980.0	979.0	996.0	912.0
CFI	958.0	983.0	981.0	999.0	918.0
RFI	915.0	939.0	937.0	988.0	824.0
IFI	958.0	983.0	982.0	999.0	918.0
CMIN/DF	359.5	736.5	240.8	204.1	088.13
RMSEA	108.0	112.0	139.0	023.0	180.0

199
200 Given that indexes values of CFI, NFI, IF, AGFI, GFI are higher than 0.9 for the research variables
201 showing very good fit of the measurement models. RMR value is close to zero in all models that the
202 value of this indicator is also very good. Therefore, it is concluded that the measurement models have
203 good fitness and they confirm the overall indexes of this case that the data support models well.

204 According to the confirmation of fitted model, structural equations modeling with regression weights
205 are shown in figure 2.

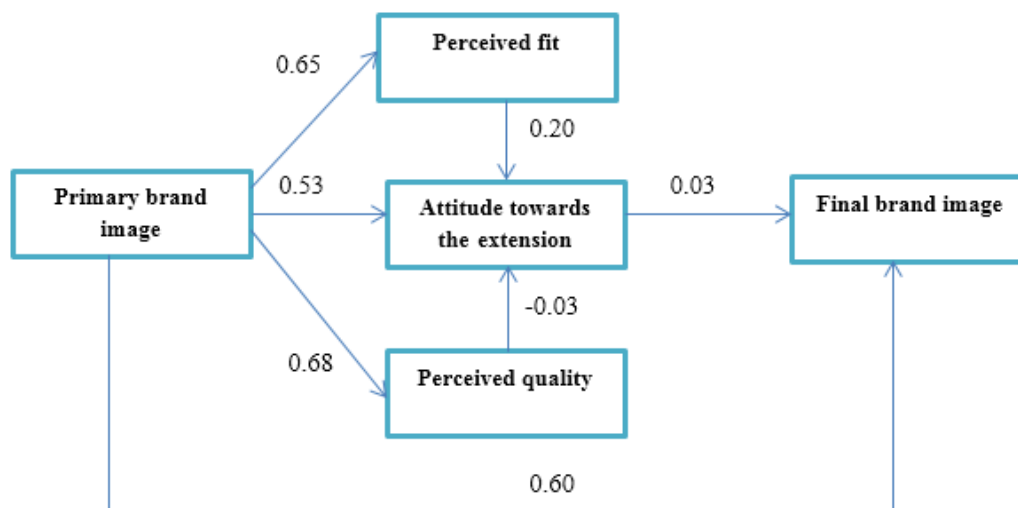


Figure 2. Structural Equations Model

209 Then, covariance matrix - correlation has been used to study existing relationship between variables
210 for each hypothesis. According to the table 2 the relationship between all variables have been shown,
211 neither correlation between variables is more than 0.9 and it does not need to delete or integrate
212 them.

Table 2. correlation between variables

Variable	Primary brand image	perceived quality	Perceived fit	attitude towards the extension	final brand image
Primary brand image	-				
perceived quality	0/660	-			
Perceived fit	0/616	0/629	-		
attitude towards the extension	0/634	0/449	0/520	-	
final brand image	0/625	0/370	0/366	0/412	-

214 Finally, the results of hypotheses test based on the structural equation modelling have been shown in
215 table 3:
216

220

Table 3. Hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Coefficient	Sig.	Result
Effect of primary brand image on attitude towards the extension	0/629	0/000	Accepted
Effect of primary brand image on Perceived fit	0/623	0/000	Accepted
Effect of primary brand image on perceived quality	0/876	0/000	Accepted
Effect of perceived fit on attitude towards the extension	0/237	0/008	Accepted
Effect of perceived quality on attitude towards the extension	-0/026	0/697	Rejected
Effect of Primary brand image on final brand image	0/698	0/000	Accepted
Effect of attitude towards the extension on final brand image	0/028	0/699	rejected

221

222 4.1 First hypothesis test

223 Given that p-value is 0.000 and less than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that
 224 primary brand image with regression weight 0.52% has significant and positive effect on consumer's
 225 attitude towards the extended product (mobile phone) of brand LG. Thus, the first hypothesis was
 226 confirmed. The result of the first hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [18], [21], [12] and
 227 Aaker and [34].

228 4.2 Second hypothesis test

229 Given that P-value is 0.000 and less than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 65% that
 230 primary brand image with regression weight 65% has significant and positive effect on the perceived
 231 fit between the extended product and original products of the brand LG. Thus, the second hypothesis
 232 was confirmed. The result of the second hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [18], [4], [21]
 233 and [13].

234 4.3 Third hypothesis test

235 Given that P-value is 0.000 and less than 0.05. it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that
 236 primary brand image with regression weight 68% has significant and positive effect on the perceived
 237 quality of original products of the brand LG. Thus, the third hypothesis was confirmed. The result of
 238 the third hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [35] and [21].

239 4.4 Fourth hypothesis test

240 Given that P-value is 0.000 and less than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that the
 241 perceived fit between the extended product and original products with the regression weight 20% has
 242 significant and positive effect on consumer's attitude towards the extended product (mobile phone) of
 243 the brand LG. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was confirmed. The result of the fourth hypothesis
 244 conforms to the results of studies of [35], [21], [4] and [36].

245 4.5 Fifth hypothesis test

246 Given that P-value is 0.697 and higher than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that the
 247 perceived quality of original product with regression weight -0.03 has not significant and positive effect

on consumer's attitude towards the extended product (mobile phone) of the brand LG. Thus, the fifth hypothesis was rejected. The result of the fifth hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [6] and [21].

4.6 Sixth hypothesis test

Given that P-value is 0.000 and less than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that primary brand image with the regression weight 60% has significant and positive effect on the final image of the brand LG. thus, the six hypothesis was confirmed. The result of the six hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [35], [21] and [4].

4.7 Seventh hypothesis test

Given that P-value is 0.699 and higher than 0.05, it can be concluded with a certainty of 95% that consumer's attitude towards the extended product with the regression weight 03% has not significant effect on the final image of the brand LG. Thus, the seventh hypothesis was rejected. The result of the seventh hypothesis conforms to the results of studies of [21].

5. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the present research is studying the effect of brand extension strategy on its image with customers of the brand LG. In the research customer's primary image of the brand LG was as independent variable and the perceived fit between the extended product and original products, the perceived quality of original products, and attitude towards the extended product were mediator variables that their effects on final brand image were studied. For this, according to the model of Salinas and Perez [4], the model of Martinez et al [21] and model of Pina et al [35], a model was offered for the impact of brand extension on mental image and hypotheses were proposed. We measured the amount of effect of each variable on mental image through factor analysis method and Structural equations model based on data from distributing and collecting questionnaires from customers of the brand LG at stores in Qom using random sampling. The findings suggest that: 1- primary brand image has significant and positive effect on consumer's attitude towards the extended product, 2- primary brand image has significant and positive effect on the perceived fit between the extended product and original products, 3- primary brand image has significant and positive effect on the perceived quality of original products, 4- the perceived fit between the extended product and original products has significant and positive effect on consumer's attitude towards the extended product, 5- the perceived quality of original products has not significant and positive effect on consumer's attitude towards the extended product, 6- primary brand image has significant and positive effect on final brand image, and 7- consumer's attitude towards the extended product has not insignificant effect on final brand image. In the research final image of the brand LG has directly been affected by primary brand image variable and consumer's attitude towards the extended product (the variable indicate the effect of combination of factors evaluated by consumers). Given to the importance of primary brand image, it is suggested that the company LG increases the amount of its communication activities and since advertising is proper mechanism to improve the corporation communications, it tries to transfer an integrated message to customers in its communications activities. Also given to not being significant the relationship between consumer's attitude towards the extended product and final image of the brand LG and marketing managers of the company need to reconsider the company's extended product. Given to data analysis it was found that the fifth and seventh hypotheses were rejected and about not being significant the fifth hypothesis we can express that today consumers do not evaluate the extended product of a brand just by the perceived quality of original products of that brand but other factors are considered such as reputation of the extended product, quality of the extended product, being innovative the extended product and etc. As to not being significant the seventh hypothesis from questions related to the variable of consumer's attitude towards the extended product we can express that today the companies can promote their brand images who are leading and innovative in the field of consumers attitudes towards the extended product. For instance we can refer to Samsung brand that could promote customers mental image towards its brand by leading and innovation in the field of mobile phone.

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