The Magnitude of Transfer of Image and Performance Associations to Similar and Dissimilar Extensions

Jean Boisvert, American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

This research examines how the type of brand associations (unique/non-unique, image/performance) affects the magnitude of transfer from an established parent brand to a newly launched extension, whether similar or dissimilar. Research on brand extension has addressed the notion of extension similarity showing that dissimilar extension may be evaluated differently than similar ones without specifying how magnitude of transfer between the parent brand and the extension is affected by image and performance based associations and the fact they are unique or non-unique to the parent brand. The paper suggests that transfer of brand associations to an extension is more automatic for image associations than for performance related associations because of a different categorization process.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14148/la/v2_pdf/LA-02

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research examines how the type of brand associations (unique/non-unique, image/performance) affects the magnitude of transfer from an established parent brand to a newly launched extension, whether similar or dissimilar. Research on brand extension has addressed the notion of extension similarity showing that dissimilar extension may be evaluated differently than similar ones without specifying how magnitude of transfer between the parent brand and the extension is affected by image and performance based associations and the fact they are unique or non-unique to the parent brand. The paper suggests that transfer of brand associations to an extension is more automatic for image associations than for performance related associations because of a different categorization process.

An association is generally « strong » when it is based on direct experience and/or frequent exposure to communications related to it (Aaker, 1991). The strength of an association depends on the pertinence of information for the consumer as well as the consistence with which this information has been communicated overtime (Keller, 1998; Krishnan, 1996). An association is also “favorable” when it is positive and relevant i.e. it communicates to consumers the brand relevant attributes and advantages (Keller, 1998; 1993). Thus, among the associations that are susceptible to be transferred to the extension there are those with positive but also those with negative connotations (Krishnan, 1996). Furthermore, the success of an extension resides on the marketing manager’s capability to foster transfer of positive associations as well as to inhibit transfer of negative ones (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Finally, an association can also be “unique” to the brand when it is not shared by competitors (Keller, 1998; Krishnan, 1996). The literature on categorization and brand associations has suggested the existence of two types of associations i.e. image-based referring to abstract attributes or performance-based which relate more to concrete functional features of the product or service. Research on brand extension has concentrated on the notion of similarity showing that dissimilar extension may be evaluated differently than similar ones without describing the magnitude of transfer between the parent brand and the extension. The paper fills this gap by specifying how image-based or performance-based brand associations affect the magnitude of transfer from an established parent brand to an extension, similar or dissimilar.

Transfer of brand associations maybe affected by the perceived similarity between a new extension and its parent brand (Park et al. 1991; Fiske, 1982; Levy and Tybout, 1989). This attempt matching between a parent brand and its extension is consistent with the top-down transfer processes from a prototype (e.g. parent brand) to a new product/extension (Mao and Krishnan, 2006; Kardes et al., 2004). If the similarity between the parent brand associations and the extension associations increases or diminishes so will the schematic fit which in turn will limit the transfer of associations (Meyvis and Janiszewski, 2004; Boush and Loken, 1991) and may be function of the type of associations whether they are performance or image-oriented (Park et al. 1991).

In order to provide respondents with reliable and valid measures, a series of four pretests was conducted. Given that a visual printed stimulus was used to test the hypotheses, a natural experiment was conducted with two levels (similar / dissimilar) of extensions and four types of brand associations: a) unique image associations, b) non-unique image associations, c) unique performance associations and, c) non-unique performance associations. Respondents were recruited by e-mail (Chernev, 2006) out of a commercial database representative of the target population. 334 questionnaires were returned. Respondents were randomly assigned to two conditions (i.e. similar and dissimilar extension cells) and were asked to evaluate each type of association first in the parent brand and subsequently in the extension using repeated measures analysis of variance.

This paper shows that the effect of image and performance associations depends if they are unique or non-unique to the parent brand on magnitude of transfer to similar and dissimilar extensions. When a brand association is unique to an established parent brand and image based, magnitude of transfer is strong and automatic whether the extension is similar or dissimilar to the core brand. In contrast, when the association is unique and performance related transfer to either a similar or a dissimilar extension. This paper suggests that unique parent brand image associations are easier to categorize in the extension than their unique performance counterparts. It seems that unique concrete performance associations must establish themselves in an extension as opposed to unique abstract image ones that transfer more easily to the same extension.

In the case of non-unique parent brand associations, transfer patterns are quite different than unique associations. Non-unique image associations are suggested to automatically transfer to a similar extension while they don’t appear to transfer when the extension is dissimilar. Here, an image association of an established parent brand even non-unique will be strong enough to transfer to the extension when the latter is similar to the parent brand. However, if the extension is categorized as dissimilar, transfer does not occur. When the parent brand association is non-unique and performance based, transfer is not observed whether the extension is similar or dissimilar to the parent brand as it was the case when associations are unique and performance related.

The implications of this paper are important for brand extension development. First, the image positioning of an established parent brand impacts transfer of its related associations to an extension in a strong fashion so the desirability of any image association, unique and non-unique, must be carefully established as transfer is likely to automatically transfer whether the extension is similar or dissimilar. Performance related associations are less of an issue when launching an extension as they don’t transfer as easily as their image counterparts due to a more piecemeal evaluation in the extension.

REFERENCES

The Magnitude of Transfer of Image and Performance Associations to Similar and Dissimilar Extensions


