The Mediation of Family Brand Entitativity on Extension Feedback Effects

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This research examined the effects of family brand entitativity on extension feedback effects under high and low accessibility situations. Research results indicated that family brand entitativity mediated extension feedback effects on family brand evaluations under both high and low accessibility situations. In comparison, family brand entitativity yielded complete mediation under high accessibility situation, whereas partial mediation on extension feedback effects was observed under low accessibility situation.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1009131/volumes/ap09/AP-09

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZATION
Crawford and colleagues (2002) propose the model of group-level trait transference (GLTT) to interpret the impact of group members on the information processing of their group. In the GLTT model, perceived entitativity is the pre-determinant of the three-stage information processing of trait abstraction (or trait inference), stereotyping (or group impression formation), and trait generalization (or trait transference).

At the first stage, motivated perceivers engage in on-line processing for both high and low-entitative groups, where traits are abstracted from, and associated with, the behaviors of individual members. However, as the underlying essences of stereotype are not expected for low-entitative groups, less effort is made to further process the abstracted traits for the next step of stereotyping. The processing is more individuated or piecemeal represented (Brewer 1988; Fiske and Neuberg 1990). In contrast, as high-entitative groups suggest the underlying essences of stereotype, the abstracted traits are further processed to form or revise group impression (Stage 2) and transfer across group members (Stage 3). The information processing of high-entitative groups go through the whole process of three stages, while the further processing of stereotyping and trait transference (Stages 2&3) is not salient for low-entitative groups.

Following the trait abstraction at the first stage, the abstracted traits of high-entitative group are applied as the underlying essences of stereotype to update group impression and associate group members (Stage 2: stereotyping). As the stereotypes of high-entitative groups are formed by the underlying essences of behavioral traits, the cognitive frameworks of high-entitative groups are more prototypic represented (Brewer and Harasty 1996). In contrast, as low entitativity does not suggest underlying essences of stereotypes, the processing of low-entitative groups is significant only at the first stage of trait abstraction. As a result, the cognitive frameworks of low-entitative groups are more exemplar represented (Brewer and Harasty 1996).

Following the stereotyping of group impression formation, the traits of stereotype transfer across, and become interchangeable (or common) traits of group members (Stage 3: trait generalization). As the underlying essences of stereotypes are highly inductive, the behavioral traits of group’s stereotypes are associated with each group member once the stereotypes of high-entitative groups are captured. Perceivers make spontaneous dispositional inference on behavioral traits for high-entitative groups. The abstracted trait exclusively belonging to a group member turns to be a common trait associating with every group member, which consequently multiplies the perceived magnitude of the abstracted trait and yields polarization or asymmetric effects. As a result, the properties of high-entitative groups (i.e., honest or intelligent) are more disproportionately judged (Hamilton and Sherman 1996; Sherman et al. 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al. 2007).

As with social groups, the attribute generalization of brand extensions is more likely to emerge for high-entitative family brands. Perceivers make more extreme judgments and form more disproportional impressions on high-entitative groups (Hamilton and Sherman 1996; Sherman et al. 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al. 2007). As a result, the multiplied perceived magnitude of brand extensions polarizes the quality of high-entitative family brands. Therefore, high- (vs. low-) entitative family brands are more extremely evaluated. This result yields asymmetric (or disproportionate) impacts of positive and negative extension information on family brand evaluations, which is likely mediated by the prior perceived entitativity of family brands. Hence, prior perceived entitativity of family brands mediates feedback extension effects on subsequent family brand evaluations.

METHOD
The first study involved eight experimental conditions with respondents randomly assigned to groups in a 2 (information valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (categorical similarity: similar vs. dissimilar) x 2 (perceived entitativity: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were told that the purpose of study was to investigate consumers’ opinions about brands. In the beginning, they were asked to read the semantic information about XXX or YYY family brand carefully and evaluate the entitativity and the quality of XXX or YYY family brand. They were then requested to carefully read information about a newly launched extension and evaluate the brand extension with the identical measures of family brand attitudes. Finally, they re-evaluated XXX or YYY family brand immediately after the evaluation of new extension. In all, a total of two hundred and forty-three undergraduates participated in this study, including one hundred and twenty-five respondents in the main study and one hundred and eighteen respondents in pre-tests. The second study was similar to the first study, except intervening tasks were added to manipulate the low accessibility of brand extension information. A total of one hundred and ninety-four undergraduates participated in this research, including sixty-nine respondents in the pre-test of information accessibility and one hundred and twenty-five respondents in experiments.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS
Research findings indicate that family brand entitativity mediates the feedback effects of brand extension on family brand evaluations under both high and low accessibility situations. In comparison, family brand entitativity yielded complete mediation under high accessibility situation, whereas partial mediation on feedback extension effects was observed under low accessibility situation. The impression about family brand entitativity is more salient when extension information is highly accessible, which leads to the result of complete mediation. In contrast, the impression about family brand entitativity is relatively ambiguous when extension information is locally accessible, which yields partial mediation. In terms of family brand entitativity, the mediation effect of family brand entitativity is more salient for high (vs.
low) entitative family brands, regardless of the accessibility of extension information. The result supports the GLTT model, which suggests that group members of a high (vs. low) entitative group are more influential on the impression formation of groups. As underlying essences are expected for high (vs. low) entitative family brands, on-line processing of extension information is more salient and goes through the three stages of trait abstraction, stereotyping, and trait generalization, which yields more salient mediation effect of family brand entitativity.

The discussion of previous research in extension feedback effects focused on the categorical fit between brand extensions and their family brands and the accessibility and diagnosticity of brand extension information. This research moved a further step beyond these scopes and, as with group perception in social cognition, identified the perceived entitativity of family brands as a mediator of extension feedback effects.

REFERENCES


