The Influence of Romantic Mindsets on Brand Extension Evaluation

Alokparna Monga, University of South Carolina, USA
Zeynep Gurhan-Canli, Koc University, Turkey

In this research, we propose that romantic mindsets can influence brand extension evaluations, particularly for male consumers. Specifically, we find that romantic mindsets (e.g., thinking about a mate) induce male consumers (vs. female consumers) to engage in greater relational processing, increasing fit perceptions, and evaluations for dissimilar brand extensions. These differences are more likely to emerge when the parent brand concept is narrow (vs. broad), and when cognitive resources are available (vs. unavailable). Three studies demonstrate the effect and reveal the underlying process mechanism.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Prior research on brand extensions has focused on identifying a variety of factors that influence brand extension evaluations among consumers (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994; Loken and John 1993). One key factor is the degree to which consumers are able to see a connection between the parent brand and the extension. When consumers perceive some kind of fit between the parent brand and the extension (e.g., Gillette shampoo), the brand extension is evaluated favorably. However, when consumers perceive less fit (e.g., Gillette floor cleaner), the brand extension is evaluated negatively (Aaker and Keller 1990; Loken and John 1993).

Missing, however, from this research is a consideration of how transient mindsets might influence brand extension evaluations. Recent research in consumer behavior attests to the wide variety of situations in which transient mindsets affect consumer behavior (Chandran and Morwitz 2005; Liu and Aaker 2008; Xu and Wyer, 2007). In our research, we focus on a specific type of mindset—the romantic mindset, which is an emerging area of research in psychology (Griskevicius et al. 2006).

Recent research demonstrates that individuals in a romantic mindset show boosts in creativity (Griskevicius et al. 2006). For instance, male participants when primed with thoughts about short-term romantic relationships (that is, a romantic mindset) generated stories that were more creative, imaginative and original. In contrast, females did not show this effect. Since romantic mindsets increase the ability to find relationships between remote ideas and associations, they are likely to enhance perceptions of brand extension fit for a dissimilar brand extension. We draw upon this research to propose that male consumers in a romantic mindset would be able to find novel ways to connect the brand and the extension leading to more favorable brand extension fit perceptions and evaluations. This effect would not emerge for female consumers.

Study 1 tested our hypothesis in a 2 (mindset: romantic, non-romantic) x 2 (gender: male, female) between subjects design. Seventy-five students at a southern university participated in our study. Our results demonstrate that male consumers in a romantic mindset perceive higher fit and evaluate a dissimilar brand extension more favorably, compared to those in a non-romantic mindset. Female consumers, however, are not affected by thinking about a short-term mate. An analysis of relational thoughts reveals that male consumers in the romantic mindset are able to think more relationally (connecting the parent brand to the extension) than those in a non-romantic mindset, indicating that the accessibility of relational thoughts may be driving the differences in brand extension responses across romantic and non-romantic mindsets. Results of a mediation analysis demonstrate that relational thoughts mediate the effect of mindset on brand extension evaluations for male consumers but not for female consumers. Importantly, our results are not driven by positive mood, positive arousal or negative arousal. Next, we replicated the results of this study using a different parent brand from the one used in study 1.

Now, we focus on providing stronger evidence for the process mechanism. Prior research suggests that finding relations between words requires cognitive resources (Wegner and Erber 1992). We draw upon this research to propose that when cognitive load is low, male consumers would be able to engage in relational thinking and respond more favorably to a dissimilar brand extension under a romantic mindset than under a non-romantic mindset. However, when cognitive load is high, the ability of male consumers to uncover relationships between the brand and the extension will be constrained. Therefore, the effect of a romantic mindset will diminish under these conditions.

We tested this hypothesis in a 2 (mindset: romantic, non-romantic) x 2 (cognitive load: low, high) between subjects design. One hundred and twelve male students at a southern university participated in our study. Specifically, male consumers under low cognitive load perceived higher fit and reported more favorable brand extension evaluation in a romantic mindset than in a non-romantic mindset. In contrast, when cognitive load is high, male consumers in romantic mindset respond similar to those in a non-romantic mindset. An analysis of relational thoughts reveals a similar pattern. Results of a mediation analysis show that relational thoughts mediate the effects of the mindset on brand extension evaluation when cognitive load is low, but not when it is high. Importantly, mood or arousal was not an explanation for our findings.

**REFERENCES**


