Prototype Or Exemplar? Effects of Self Construal on Brand Extension Evaluation in a Multi-Product Brand Context

Pronobesh Banerjee, University of Kansas, USA
Ze Wang, University of Kansas, USA
Sanjay Mishra, University of Kansas, USA
Surendra N. Singh, University of Kansas, USA

A brand could extend based on prototype fit (congruency with the beliefs associated with the brand) and/or exemplar fit (similarity with the existing product of a brand). Based on extant research on self-construal, we observe and predict that consumers with different self-construal (interdependence vs. independence) vary in their evaluation of different types of brand extensions. We also see how consumers’ self-construal moderates the dilution effect of extension failure and the enhancement effect on its success. In a series of three studies, this research sheds light on how to leverage consumers’ self-construal in launching a multi-product brand extension.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15487/volumes/v37/NA-37

[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/.
and company positioning’ and measures consumer familiarity with the brand across different countries, and how the product is designed to address the needs and wants of a local versus a global audience. The second dimension relates to ‘business behavior’ and measures the perceived availability of the brand across countries and the company’s ties and relationships with other local and global businesses and institutions, again as perceived by consumers. Finally, the third dimension relates to the brand’s ‘culture positioning’ and investigates how the brand uses associations from the local or the global consumer culture in its promotional activity.

In our proposed model, each brand is measured on the aforementioned three dimensions to arrive at degrees of perceived localness and perceived globalness separately. Next, we investigate how these perceptions translate into consumer benefits under four dimensions of quality, prestige, tradition/values, and price. Finally, perceived benefits feed into determining an overall degree of preference for localness and globalness. We should stress that in all facets of our model, consumers rate both the local and the global dimensions of a brand and report their corresponding preferences. Our simultaneous focus on consumers’ global and local brand preferences makes it possible to investigate the situational factors acting on such preferences. We find that the social signaling value of choice and perceived risk of choice are important moderators relating to product category. Furthermore, susceptibility to external influence, cosmopolitanism, and nostalgia proneness come up as individual difference moderators.

Accordingly, we are able to integrate findings from two streams of research discussed earlier, advocating a dominant consumer preference for global brands versus a dominant consumer preference for local brands, by shedding light into some of the situational contingencies determining such preference. While studying consumer preference, our work also contributes to the literature by systematically measuring the degree of globalness and degree of localness as perceived by consumers. Such attempts to identify global versus local brands through direct measurements of consumer perceptions might clarify some of the confusion about the definition of the global brand itself. Further, the dimensions we use to measure perceptions might guide companies trying to move their brand towards a more global (or local) positioning through signaling globalness (or localness).

Selected References

Prototype or Exemplar? Effects of Self Construal on Brand Extension Evaluation in a Multi-Product Brand Context
Pronobesh Banerjee, University of Kansas, USA
Ze Wang, University of Kansas, USA
Sanjay Mishra, University of Kansas, USA
Surendra N. Singh, University of Kansas, USA

Increasing attention has been paid to the stretchability of a brand (Ahluwalia 2008). The traditional view is that consumers will evaluate a brand extension in a favorable manner if the brand extension fits with the parent brand and the parent brand has a positive evaluation. Recent research (Mao and Krishnan 2006) extends this view by specifying two-dimensional fit construct that are often used by consumers to assess an extension—prototype fit (congruency with the beliefs associated with the brand) and exemplar fit (similarity with the existing product of a brand). For example, Nike kneapad, has a prototype fit, which shares the generalized imagery of Nike—“athletic”; Nike car audio, has an exemplar fit, which is analogous to an existing product—“car audio.” This research attempts to investigate how consumers with different self-construal (interdependence vs. independence) may vary in their evaluation of different types of brand extensions. Also, this research also examines how consumers’ self-construal moderates the dilution effect of extension failure and the enhancement effect on its success.

This research first argues that the evaluation of prototype-based and exemplar-based extensions may be influenced by consumers’ self-construal. Recent research in self-construal (e.g., Lee, Aaker and Gardner 2000; Monga and John 2007) provides robust evidence that the nature of self-construal affects the mode of cognition one adopts in their decision making process. Consumers with independent self-construal see themselves as distinct from others and are more likely to involve in a de-contextualized mode of processing. Thus, they focus on the overall brand beliefs derived from the abstraction of behaviors rather than the concrete examples of the brand. In contrast, consumers with interdependent self-construal see themselves as related to others and are more likely to involve in a contextualized mode of processing when evaluating an object. They are then more concerned about the concrete associations or exemplars of the brand. Therefore, the abstract concept of a brand (stylish for Sony) will be more assessable to consumers with independent self-construal compared to a concrete exemplar of a brand (Sony TV). The reverse will hold true for the interdependent.

Based on this idea, this research also proposes how the brand extension success (failure) may enhance (dilute) consumers’ evaluation of the parent brand and the flagship product of the same brand. We argue that for individuals with independent self-construal (“independents”), brand extension outcome may impact their attitude at the brand level, but not attitude at the flagship product level. More specifically, the success (failure) of prototype-based extension will enhance (dilute) independents’ attitude toward the brand, but not their
attitude toward the flagship product. For individuals with interdependent self-construal ("interdependents"), brand extension outcome will impact their attitude at the product level, but not at the brand level. More specifically, the success (failure) of exemplar-based extension will enhance (dilute) interdependents’ attitude toward the flagship product, but not their attitude toward the parent brand.

Study 1 tests the hypotheses that consumers’ self-construal level will moderate their evaluations of prototype-based and exemplar-based extensions. Based on the pretest results, we designed two fictitious extensions of Johnson & Johnson—hair color (exemplar fit with J&J shampoo) and fabric softener (prototype fit with “softness”). We manipulated the self-construal level using standard procedures (Aluwalia 2008). The hypotheses were supported. Independents evaluated the prototype based extensions more favorably compared to the interdependents, while the interdependents evaluated the exemplar-based extensions more favorably compared to independents.

Study 2 and 3 tested the hypotheses that consumers’ self-construal will also impact the dilution/enhance effect based on the failure/success of the extension. We manipulated self-construal using similar methods as in study 1. Two news paper articles were used to manipulate extension failure/success. The pattern of results supported the proposed hypotheses.

In summary, we show that companies should be cautious in designing an extension of a multi product brand for consumers with different self-construal. Findings of this paper show that differential accessibility of the various brand associations across self construal exerts a disproportionate influence in evaluating an extension in the multi product brand context. Therefore, companies should take into consideration the differential accessibility of the various brand associations while launching a multi-product brand extension. We also demonstrate the moderating role of consumers’ self-construal in the dilution effect of extension failure and the enhancement effect on its success. Interestingly, we find that a brand’s flagship product is not always shielded from the effect of dilution as previously found (e.g., John et al. 1998). Our research shows that consumers with interdependent self-construal will negatively evaluate the flagship product on failure of an exemplar-based extension.

References
The Production and Dissemination of Conscious Consumption Discourse in Brazil

Denise Barros, EBAPE/FGV-RJ, Brazil
Alessandra Costa, EBAPE/FGV-RJ, Brazil
Eduardo Ayrosa, EBAPE/FGV-RJ, Brazil
João Felipe Sauerbrom, ECSA-Unigranrio, Brazil

The consumption-driven society holds consumption as central in social life (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Consumers live not only for the things, but also through them (Baudrillard, 1995; Belk, 1988). The relationship between consumers and organizations seems to take a central role in consumption studies. However, the study of consumer resistance movements is still a new area (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007; Hemetsberger, 2006), particularly in Brazil, one of the most important markets for big corporations such as Nestlé, Volkswagen and Coca Cola (O Globo, 2005). This paper aims to suggest a wider discussion on the movements of resistance to consumption in Brazil.

In Brazil, softer forms of resistance predominate: consumers or companies discourses do not emphasize the end of consumption, but rather, more consensual forms of relationship between consumers and markets, based on the concepts of conscious and sustainable consumption. Brazil’s most important voice in this subject is “Akatu Institute for Conscious Consumption”, created in 1990 by major Brazilian and global companies to promote responsible consumption. Considering the wide penetration of Akatu’s ideas among Brazilian consumers and companies, it would not be an overstatement saying that the discourse of conscious consumption in Brazil has been created by the market itself. So, we ask whether such discourse actually represents a legitimate society claim, or, at the other end, it simply serves to the interest of the big corporations that fund Akatu. By raising such question, we intend to discuss, with a critical approach, the process of social construction of the concept of conscious consumption in Brazil.

An initial discourse analysis of Akatu’s website shows that the conscious consumption discourse in Brazil can embed a shift of responsibility from the producer to the individual consumer. Saha & Darnton (2005) point out that ‘green’ consumption refers to environment, corporate social responsibility, social investment, labor and job conditions, fair trade, responsible communication, transparency and so on. Cohen (2007) posits that more emphasis has been given in the “more efficient consumption”, as opposed to “less consumption”. It is interesting to notice how the addition of the idea of efficiency can change the direction of the actions. This author says that even if the sustainable development has been described as a “three-party process that gives rise to a careful balance among the social equity, economical and environmental objectives, it has been proven in practice that keeping this multi-objective focus is very difficult” (p. 58).

In Brazil, the discussion seems to be restricted to the so-called sustainable and conscious consumption. Back in the 1970s, several institutions were created in Brazil with the purpose of offering some room for businessmen to discuss and implement projects related to the social, environmental and human rights practices. Such institutions have become experts in the defense and promotion of the collective interests of businessmen, also working as reference models that guided business strategic choices (Cappellin et al., 2002). The most successful one, Ethos Institute for Social Responsibility has created Akatu Institute in 1990 with the mission of “mobilizing and making Brazilian citizens aware of their major role, as consumers, in the construction of sustainability of life on the planet” (Akatu, 2008).

Akatu’s guiding principles seem to focus solely on individual consumption choices. It assumes that the best way to reach the ideal of a ‘cleaner’ world is through consumer education. Such principles, stated in Akatu’s homepage, are: (1) plan your purchases; (2) evaluate the impact of your consumption; (3) consume only the necessary; (4) reuse products and packages; (5) separate your garbage; (6) use your credit consciously; (7) value company’s social responsibility practices; (8) do not buy pirate or smuggled products; (9) contribute with the improvement of products and services; and (10) spread conscious consumption. Note that, as Akatu has been born in the market and is nurtured by corporations, it does not question business’ objectives.

The arguments used in the construction of the concept of conscious consumption follow a clear and accurate logic. First, a situation of crisis is presented: “humanity already consumes 25% more natural resources than the capacity of renewal of the Earth (...) if consumption and production standards are kept on current level, in less than 50 years two planets Earth will be necessary to meet our needs of water, energy and food” (Akatu, 2008).