

Determining the Effect of Brand Extension Strategies on Consumer Attitudes to New Products in the Sports Apparel Market

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Abstract

Developing and introducing new products to the market is one of the costliest strategies of a company with a high failure rate. One way of naming new products is brand extension. Brand extension brings instant fame for the new product and persuades people accept it faster. The aim of this research is to determine the effect of brand extension strategies on consumer attitudes of new products in the apparel market. The statistical population of the research includes students of physical education at The University of Isfahan and Khorasgan Azad University. The appropriate brands and products for the research were selected using two pre-tests. The tests were subsequently conducted on two brands and two products. The consumer's initial brand image (prior to brand extension) was considered as the independent variable, image fit and similarity between products the intermediate variables, and the consumer's attitude to the new product the dependent variable. Data collection was done using a questionnaire and samples were chosen at random. Furthermore, SPSS and Amos software programs were for data analysis and hypotheses testing. The results of the survey indicate that the consumer's attitude to the new product is influenced by their attitude prior to brand extension, perceived fit of the new product and the brand, and similarity between the new product category and the brand's other products. Furthermore, the effect of consumer's innovativeness as a moderator in the relationship between image fit and category similarity of the new product on consumer's attitude to the new product was not proven.

Keywords: brand, brand extension strategy, brand image

1- Introduction

Brand is a wider concept than just a service or product. Nowadays, most products of a category don't differ greatly and it's the brand which creates significant differences in resources and markets. These days, such differences are so important that lead many market leaders to view

their brands as a competitive advantage (Mohammadian and Ronaghi, 2010). Brand is not the product itself but only the meaning of the product (Kapferer, 2006). The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, word or phrase, mark, sign or symbol, design or a combination of them which aims to introduce a product or service that one or a group of vendors offer and differentiate them from their competitors. A brand, in effect, represents the vendor's product (Kotler and Armstrong, 2009).

Brand extension is one of the common strategies which companies use to select the right brand for their products. This strategy has a degree of risk and may even weaken the brand's image (Martinez and Pina, 2003). Although there may be positive associations for the new product, negative associations are also a possibility which can adversely affect the consumer's attitude to the new product and brand image (Katzanis and Pita, 1995; Chen and Chen, 2000). The adverse effects include fading of the extended brand image and sales split between the products of a company (The Economist, 1990). Despite all this, one of the most important tasks in managing a brand is creating a favorable image of that brand and consumer's attitude to the new product is one of the factors with the most impact on the brand's image after extension. Thus, factors that affect the consumer's attitude to the new product need to be distinguished and analyzed.

To this end, this research analyzes the effects of brand extension strategies on consumer attitude to the new product among students of physical education at The University of Isfahan and Khorasgan Azad University.

2- Literature Review

2-1- Brand

Finding a name and identity for a product is an important subject matter which is considered while designing product strategies. Manufacturers eventually realize that their brand is a source of power that they obtain from the market (Kotler, 2008). Brand extension is a brand development strategy. Brand extension means to use a successful brand for new products. Meaning a company uses its current brand to offer new products in other categories (Arselan and Altuna, 2010:171). Consumer's awareness of the created brand can reduce their doubts about buying and testing the new product (Dawar, 1996). Therefore, many companies use the brand extension strategy nowadays and there are many success stories as well as failures in doing so. One reason that may cause the strategy to fail is a weakened brand image after extension.

Brand image is a perceptual phenomenon which the company's activities influence. Keller believes that brand image is a set of perceptions related to the associations created in the consumer's mind (Villargo, 2005). High quality brand image enables consumers to identify the needs that the brand can satisfy and the company differentiates its products from the ones of its competitors which increases the chances of a sale (Hsieh et al, 2004). Thus, insisting on a positive image based on core values and other values that differentiate a brand must be of high priority for every company (Sang-Lin and Hyung, 2008; Aaker, 1997). Overall, brand extension

may have positive and negative effects on the brand and obfuscate the brand's meaning and image in the minds of the consumers (Vazifehdoost et al, 2009). One important factor that impacts brand image is the consumer's attitude to the new product. The following sections discuss this factor.

2-2-1- Consumer's attitude to the new product with an extended brand

Attitude is defined as the response to a stimulus or event. The response includes three components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The cognitive component refers to the beliefs about an item. Beliefs are pieces of information that a person has about an item, subject, or another person. Beliefs are usually the result of information processing and the learning process. The emotional component refers to a person's evaluation of a subject or item. It specifically represents the desirable or undesirable emotional bond with the subject. The behavioral component is usually innate and has a sense of commitment because the person has made a decision and this decision has led to a certain behavior such as making a purchase (Rapp and Stan, 2000). In brand literature, attitude is defined as a cognitive state which is reflected in various aspects and creates preference for one product or brand. In other words, the consumer's attitude to the new product and the extended brand is the result of the consumer's perception of the extended brand quality and the chances of buying a new product of the brand (Wilkie, 1995).

The most important variables that affect the consumer's attitude to the new extended product of the brand are initial brand image, image fit and similarity of categories (Martinez and Pinna, 2009). These variables are explained in the following sections.

2-2-2- Brand image before brand extension to new products

Brand extension has higher chances of success when relying on its assets such as consumer's familiarity with the brand and favorable image (Zhang and Sood, 2002:131; Klinik and Smith, 2001:328). Consumer's attitude to the new extended products is more positive for brands with higher quality standards (Van Reil et al, 2001; Völckner and Sattler), more fame (Hem et al, 2003), prestige (Park et al, 2001) or affection (Sheinin and Schmitt, 1996). In both the manufacturing and services sections, the consumer's positive brand image creates positive perceptions of the new extended product (Brown and Dacin, 1997, Deruyter, k. wetzels, 2000).

2-2-3- Perceived fit (image fit and similarity)

Due to the widespread use of brand extension strategies, researchers are trying to find the reasons consumer accept them. The majority of researchers believe the perceived fit between the new product and the brand to be key success factor of this strategy (Lau and Phau, 2007: 431). If consumers feel there is a degree of consistency between the brand and the new product the chances of acceptance increase (Lahiri, I. and Gupta, A, 2005: 29). Keller and Aaker (1990) believe that the perceived fit is the consumer's perception of the fit between the new product and the brand. In brand extension studies, fit is referred to using many aspects such as product similarity and brand concept consistency (Park et al, 1991: 188) in addition to fit

between brand image and new product. The results of studies on consumer attitude to the new product reveal that the higher the fit between the new product and the extended brand, the more positive the consumer's evaluation. In other words, products with a low fitness weaken the consumer's attitude to the brand and the new product (Lahiri, I. Gupta, A, 2005).

"Similarity" is the most important aspect of fitness as referred to in many studies (Bhat and Reddy, 1997). "Similarity" is the degree of sameness between the current and new product categories based on properties, traits, and benefits (Boush and Loken, 1991: 20). Consumer research has revealed that higher similarity between the current and new products increases the chances of positive or negative beliefs being transferred to the new product. Increasing the similarity between the current and new products increases the chances of successfully transferring positive beliefs from the brand to the new product (Martinez and Pina, 2005: 266; Völckner and Sattler, 2006: 154). Recent studies have identified moderating variables such as communication strategy (Lane, 2000: 84), number of products by the brand, perceived price and quality of the new product, and consumer innovativeness (Martinez & Pina, 2009) that affect fitness acceptance. When the consumer seeks novel and cutting-edge items it is attributed to their sense of innovativeness. Regers (1995) believes that innovative consumers enjoy purchasing new items, don't pay much attention to social norms, and are confident and bold. These personality traits create better attitudes to the new product/service of the current brand (Völckner and Sattler, 2006; Ham et al, 2003, Siu et al, 2004). Some scholars believe that innovative consumers are more open to taking risks (Klink and Smith, 2001; Ham et al, 2003) and thus more open to new ideas, product categories, and services from a certain brand. Klinik and Smith suggest that perceived fit has a smaller effect on the consumer's attitude the new product in innovative consumers, who are more likely to buy a new product of the current brand. According to theoretical literature the following hypotheses are proposed for this research:

H₁- Initial brand image affects the consumer's attitude to the extended product in the sports apparel market.

H₂- Initial brand image affects category similarity between the extended and the main products of the brand in the sports apparel market.

H₃- Initial brand image affects perceived image fit of the brand and the new product in the sports apparel market.

H₄- Category similarity between the extended product and the other products of the brand affects the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market.

H₅- Brand image and new product fit affect the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market.

H₆- Consumer innovativeness affects the relationship between brand image fit, the new product, and the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market.

H7- Consumer innovativeness affects the relationship between brand image fit, the new product, and the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the research which was created according to the theoretical literature and the proposed hypotheses.

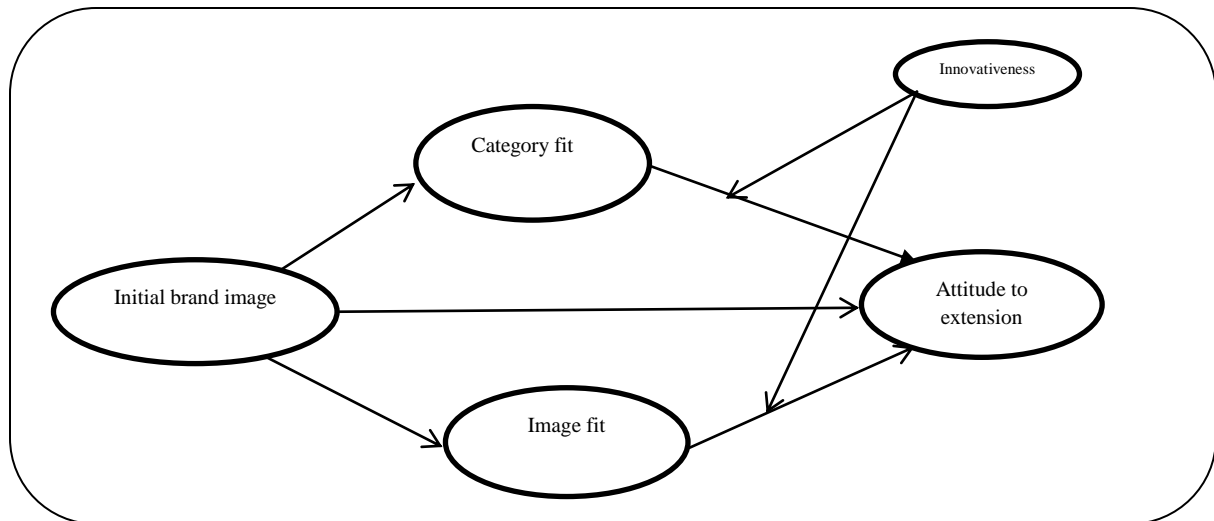


Figure 1: conceptual model of the research

3- Research Methodology

3-1- Research population and sample

This research has practical purposes and is a descriptive survey regarding data collection methods. The statistical population includes students of physical education at The University of Isfahan and Khorasgan Azad University. There were a total of 1070 students with an estimated sample size of 150. To select the appropriate brands and products for the survey, two pre-tests were conducted, with 50 participants in each pre-test. Finally, two brands and two products of each brand, one with a high fit and the other with a low fit, were selected. Four identical questionnaires were designed using the theoretical literature and used for data collection, one for each product of each brand. 150 copies of each questionnaire were distributed among the students in both universities at random. The questionnaires were composed of two sections. The first section included demographic variables such as gender, age, and degree. The second section measured the research variables. Rating was designed on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

3-2- Measuring Research Variables

Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by professors and experts at the University of Isfahan. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the test. To this end, an

initial sample of 50 questionnaires was distributed. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated using the obtained data. It was 0.937% for all questions related to the variables in the analytical model of the research which is acceptable.

Table 1 presents the criteria used for evaluating the variables of the research

Table 1- aspects of measuring research variables

Variable	Aspect	Researcher
Consumer innovativeness	desire-seeking innovativeness, social innovativeness	Roehrich (1995)
First and final brand image	Applicative, emotional, fame	Martin & Brown(1990) Aaker(1996),Villarejo(2002)
Perceived fit	category similarity, image fit	Aakar & Keller (1990) Taylor & Bearden(2002)
Consumer’s attitude to the new product of the brand	desirability, perceived quality, purchase likelihood	Aakar & Keller (1990) Pryor & Brodie(1998)

4- Results

4-1-Results of pre-tests 1 and 2

The purpose of the first question in pre-test 1 was to identify familiar and appropriate brands for the research. Four brands: Nike, Puma, Adidas, and Reebok had a higher intermediate mean and were thus better candidates. The second question aimed to identify appropriate brands for the research i.e. brands that participants were familiar with but had images of different quality. The three brands Nike, Puma, and Adidas has similar averages but Reebok had a lower average. Therefore, Nike was selected as the familiar brand with a favorable brand image and Reebok as the familiar brand with a lower brand image. The second pre-test was conducted to identify appropriate products for the research. Jeans had the highest average fit (4.88) and laptops had the lowest average fit (1.93) among the products of Nike. Therefore, jeans were selected as a product broadly similar to the Nike brand and its products and laptops as a roughly similar product. Furthermore, jeans had the highest average fit (4.82) and laptops had the lowest average fit (1.71) among the products of Reebok. Therefore, jeans were selected as a product broadly similar to the Reebok brand and its products and laptops as a roughly similar product.

Table 2- Selected brands and products for the research

Similarity between the new product and other products of the brand				
Dissimilar	Similar	Brand		
Laptop	Jean	NIKE	Favorable	Brand image desirability
Laptop	Jean	REEBOK	medium	

4-2- Results of analyzing the conceptual model

Table 3- overall fit indexes of the model

Variables Indexes	Initial brand image	Image fit	Category similarity	consumer attitude to the new product
CMIN/DF	2.397	-	-	-
RMR	0.014	0.000	0.000	0.000
GFI	0.981	1.000	1.000	1.000
AGFI	0.965	-	-	-
IFI	0.991	1.000	1.000	1.000
NFI	0.985	1.000	1.000	1.000
CFI	0.991	1.000	1.000	1.000

The first step is to evaluate the fit of the measurement models. Table 3 presents the model's fit indexes. Measurement models are well-fit and in other words, overall indexes verify that the data supports the models well. It is worth mentioning that three questions evaluate the consumer's attitude to the new product, image fit, and category similarity. The mentioned measurement models are a saturated model, for which Chi-square is not a suitable criterion. In other words, fit indexes are not useful for saturated models and only the loading factor is considered as the most important fit index and the most useful in interpreting the results. Only one of the questions pertaining image fit had to be eliminated due to a loading factor below 0.5.

4-3- Results of structural equations modeling analysis

After analyzing and verifying the measurement models in the first step, the second step is to analyze the structural equations model in order to test the hypotheses. Furthermore, Table 4 presents the overall indexes of model fitness.

Table 4- overall indexes of model fitness

RMR	IFI	CFI	NFI	AGFI	GFI	RMSEA	CMIN/d	df	CMIN
0/02	0/97	0/97	0/96	0/88	0/94	0/07	2/92	3	105/27
								6	
Clos e to zero	0.90 >	0.90 >	0.90 >	0.90 >	0.90 >	0.08<	1> 3<		Receptio n area

The results obtained from the information in Table 4 are as follows:

The output obtained from Amos software program in estimating the standard model suggests path analysis to be a suitable model. The Chi-square value equals 2.9 that falls between 1 and 3. The RMSEA of the model is 0.07 which is appropriate, also GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, and IFI are all above 90 percent; and finally the RMR value is near zero. All model fitness indexes have values in the reception area and these indexes indicate that model has a goodness-of-fit which is obtained by the data and the collected data support the model well. Table 5 shows the hypotheses along with their regression coefficients and partial index values.

Table 5- results of testing the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Sample size	Significance number	correlation coefficient	critical value result	Test result
Initial brand image → Image fit	600	0/000	0/38	8/56	accepted
Initial brand image → consumer attitude	600	0/000	0/18	6/15	accepted
Initial brand image → category fit	600	0/000	0/32	7/20	accepted
image fit → final brand image	600	0/000	0/68	18/16	accepted
Category fit → consumer attitude	600	0/000	0/50	14/82	accepted

In the significance level of 0.05, if the table's significance number is smaller than 0.05, relationship between each pair of variables is confirmed.

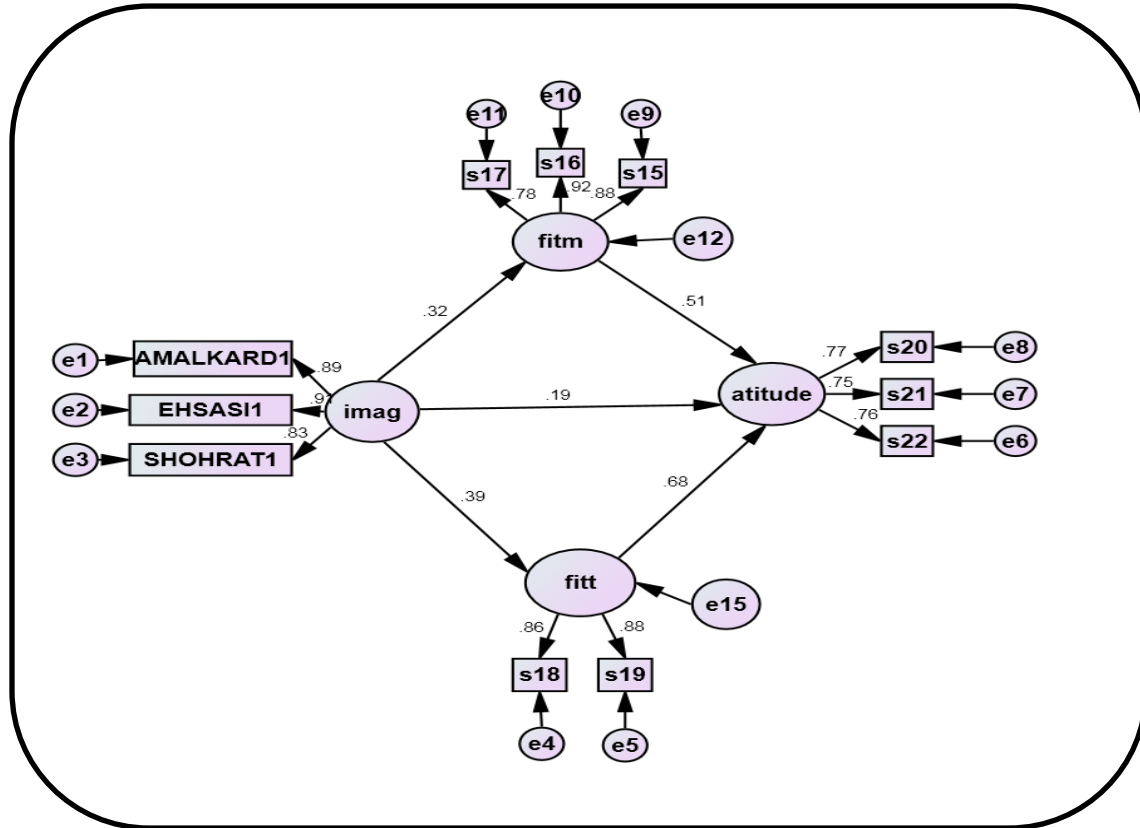


Figure 2: Structural Equation Model

Testing hypotheses 6 and 7: The moderating effect of consumer innovativeness on how image fit and similarity influence consumer's attitude to the new product

As can be seen in the general model, consumer innovativeness is considered as a moderating variable which moderates the effect of image fit and product category similarity on consumer's attitude to the new product. Two groups of people, one highly innovative and the other less innovative, are identified. To compare the two groups, two models are constructed: one without constraints and limitations and another with equality constraints on the mentioned relationship between the perceived fit and consumer's attitude. The models are then compared. If the two models don't have a significant difference then the consumer's innovativeness will have no effect on the mentioned relationship. On the other hand, if the second model's fit is worse than that of the first one and there is a significant difference then the consumer's innovativeness will have an effect on the relationship. The difference between the path coefficients is determined from the results. If the absolute value of the difference is larger than 1.96 then there exists a meaningful difference. Table 6 identifies regression weights and critical ratio of causal pathway for both groups.

Table 6- Comparison of regression weights of both groups

Innovativeness	n	H6	H7
Low innovative group	287	0/42	0/52
High innovative group	313	0/59	0/43

Table 7- Difference of the two models with and without equality constraint

Difference indices in two models	The amount of difference
CIMIN	1/89
DF	2
P	0/38
NFI	0/000
IFI	0/000
The difference of two critical ratios H6	1/27
The difference of two critical ratios H7	-1/79

The amount of difference in relationship between image fit and category similarity and consumer attitude to the new product was -1.79 and 1.27 in each group which is smaller than 1.96 (z value in the level of 0.05). Thus, we can conclude with a certainty of 95% that consumer innovativeness has no effect on the two relationships.

5-Discussion

The following results were obtained by testing the hypotheses:

H₁- This hypothesis stated that initial brand image affects consumer's attitude to the extended product in the sports apparel market. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses and the sig value of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said, with a certainty of 95 percent, that initial brand image positively affects the consumer's attitude to the extended product in the sports apparel market. In other words, when the consumer has a strong image of the brand their attitude to the new product is more favorable. This is because they have a stronger sense of trust towards the brand. The results of this research match those of Martinez and Pina (2009) and Martinez et al. (2009).

H₂- This hypothesis stated that initial brand image affects category similarity between the extended and the main products of the brand in the sports apparel market. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses and the sig value of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said, with a certainty of 95 percent, that initial brand image positively affects category similarity between the extended and the main products of the brand in the sports apparel market. As expected, a more favorable brand image leads to an increased perceived similarity between the extended product and the other products of the brand. This is because when evaluating the new product, consumers use their initial brand image to deduce the benefits, uses, and features of the product. This result matches that of Martinez and Pina (2009), Martinez et al. (2009), and Iyer et al. (2011).

H₃- This hypothesis stated that initial brand image affects perceived image fit of the brand and the new product in the sports apparel market. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses and the sig value of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said, with a certainty of 95 percent, that initial brand image positively affects perceived image fit of the brand and the new product in the sports apparel market. This result matches that of Martinez and Pina (2009), Martinez et al. (2009), and Matinez, Polo, and de Chernatony (2007).

H₄- This hypothesis stated that category similarity between the extended product and the other products of the brand affects the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses and the sig value of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said, with a certainty of 95 percent, that category similarity between the extended product and the other products of the brand affects the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market. If consumers feel that the new product is similar to the other products of the brand there is a higher chance that they will believe that the company has capability and the necessary resources to make the product with high quality. This result matches that of Martinez and Pina (2009), Matinez, Polo, and de Chernatony (2007), Aaker and Keller (1990), Van Riel et al. (2001), Völckner and Sattler (2006), Kheiri and Nobandegani (2008), Hamidizadeh et al. (2009) and Martinez et al. (2009).

H₅- This hypothesis stated that perceived brand image and new product fit affect the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market. Based on the results of testing the hypotheses and the sig value of this relationship which is less than 0.05, it can be said, with a certainty of 95 percent, that perceived brand image and new product fit affect the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market. If consumers sense a degree of consistency between the brand image and the new product the chances of accepting the new product increase. This result matches that of Martinez and Pina (2009), Aaker and Keller (1990), Van Riel et al. (2001), Völckner and Sattler (2006), Kheiri and Nobandegani (2008).

H_{6,7}- These hypotheses stated that consumer innovativeness affects the relationship between brand image fit, the new product, and the consumer's attitude to the new product in the sports apparel market. Results show that the degree of consumer's innovativeness does not affect the relationship between perceived fit and consumer's attitude to the new product. This result does not match with that of Martinez and Pina (2009). In their research they concluded that the

effect of the perceived category fit on the consumer's attitude to the new product decreases in very innovative consumers.

6-Conclusion

This research analyzed the effects of brand extension strategies on consumer's attitude to the new product. To identify brands and products appropriate for this research pre-tests were conducted the model and hypotheses were tested using structural equations modeling, regression weights of causal pathways. Based on the results obtained from the general model of the research, it can be said that in implementing brand extension strategies factors such as initial brand image, perceived fit between the new product and the brand, and similarity between the new product and the other products of the brand affect consumer's attitude to the new product and its acceptance after extension. The higher and stronger the initial brand image, the higher the perceived fit of the new product and brand and its products. This high perceived fit leads to higher acceptance of the new product by the consumers. This has made it possible for brands to have higher chances of success in introducing new products to the market. It is worth mentioning that if the new product has a low fit it will adversely affect the consumer's attitude to the brand. If the new product is selected according to its fit in a way that it conforms to the current brand's name, image, and meaning and is very similar to the other products of the brand there will be a higher chance of success. The results indicate that the most important factor in success of brand extension is the fit between the new product and the brand image. The participants of this research were not directly involved with the real conditions of the market and their responses are based merely on the assumption of these extensions being implemented. Therefore it is possible that their responses change in real market conditions. The proposed model was only analyzed in the sports apparel market which limits its extendibility to other product categories. This research was conducted among young university students in the province of Isfahan in Iran which limits its extendibility to other regions and countries due to cultural differences that may lead to different results. Another limitation of the research concerns its variables; there are other variables that can affect attitude to and acceptance of the new product however, only initial brand image, perceived image fit, and category similarity of the new product were considered in this research. Future researchers should conduct a longitudinal study over an extended time period on products that are to be extended to determine whether or not validated relationships are still affected by other variables (market mix, competitive activities, etc.). Furthermore, they can use the research model in other subject areas. They can also consider perceived quality of the brand, brand familiarity and, brand prestige and power as main variables and consumer's mental involvement as the moderating variable.

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