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   HYPOTHESES

   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

   RESULTS & DISCUSSION

   FINDINGS

   RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

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- Schemenner, R.W., Huber, J.C. and Cook, R.L. (1987), "Geographic Differences and the Location of New Manufacturing Facilities," Journal of Urban Economics, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 83-104.

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MANAGING BRAND EXTENSION

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ABSTRACT
The vast majority of brand extensions reportedly fail, suggesting the need for methodologies that will allow for better strategic prediction of categories a brand should extend or license into. The prior literature suggests that brand extensions are likely to be more successful if a brand extends into another category into which its existing brand associations and imagery "fit" better, and that it may help as well if the extending brand is "atypical" (possessing associations and imagery that are broad and abstract rather than tied too closely to the brand's original product category). A methodology is developed, illustrated and validated in this study to estimate brand and category personality structures, using a Bayesian factor model that separates the two by using brand-level and category-level random effects. This methodology leads to measures of a brand's fit and a typicality.

KEYWORDS
Brand, brand extension, brand image

INTRODUCTION
There is no doubt that the practice of brand extension is very popular with some reports suggesting as many as 75 percent of new products are launched with existing brand names on them. This popularity appears to stem from the rather enthusiastic attention that the practice of brand extension is getting in academic journals and trade publications. Brand extension has been hailed as the way to achieve growth in a cost controlled world (Tauber, 1988), the way of capitalizing on brand assets, the way of redefining the nature/direction of a firm's business (Tauber, 1981), the way of gaining economies of scale in advertising (Roberts and McDonald, 1989), the way to introduce new products without advertising (Hastings, 1990), and the way of assisting a new product's success through endowing it with the goodwill which allows it to more easily gain trial and distribution (Aaker, 1990).

To be fair, these accolades are often tempered with the warning not to "stretch" the brand image too far, that is, attempt to use a brand name on an incongruous extension, e.g. Exxon popcorn, Sara Lee dog food, Reebok computers. However, the warning, while in itself very serious, unfortunately also gives a clear impression that it is quite easy to manage brand extension, all it takes is common sense and a little brand image research.

Ries and Trout (1981) place alone as the only outright critics of the practice, arguing that even if the brand name is not used on an incongruous extension any success for the extension will come at the expense of destroying the brand image of the original brand.

The apparent success of some well known brand extension dampens the power of their argument to convince many. Though this is perhaps unfair; the success of these brand extensions is not sufficient evidence to confirm that an existing brand name assists the success of a new product. Those successful brand extensions might have enjoyed even greater success if they had been launched with their own distinctive brand names.

WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW?
The ability to commercialize new products successfully strikes at the heart of company and national competitiveness. Considering the millions of dollars spent on commercializing new products, and the considerable investments firms have made in their brand names, the thinking manager might be expected to ask where is the research, what does marketing theory say on brand extension?

The answer is that less is known than some would make out and what research results there are turn out to be far less supportive than most would imagine.

Nielsen conducted a large-scale study of 115 new product launches across five USA and UK markets (Peckham, 1981). The study compared the market share gained by products launched under established family or corporate brand names with that gained by products launched with new brand names, and share was measured two years after each brand's launch. The brand extensions performed significantly less well than the products launched with new brand names (see Figure 1)(omitted).

BRAND EXTENSION GIVES LITTLE ADVANTAGE TO A NEW PRODUCT RELEASE
Another study (Sullivan, 1992), compared the survival rates (after six years) of 84 new consumer non-durable products (from firms, nearly all of which, owned established brands) and found no significant difference between the survival rates of the brand extensions and the new brand launches (in both cases 82 percent survived--while this may seem high it should be noted that the sample excluded products with low total advertising expenditures so as to exclude those products which were pulled off the market very early or during market testing).

This evidence suggest that brand extensions gives small advantage to a new product release and is particularly concerning when the inherent disadvantages of brand extension are considered.

SPILLOVER
The continued practice of brand extension exposes a superior variety of brands to the possible spillover of negative publicity. Bad advertising for one brand may spill over to other brands allocation the brand name. Recently, in Australia, Colgate-Palmolive suffered the consequences of having the family unit name on nearly every one of its vast array of brands after a highly publicized extortion attempt involving cyanide contamination.

CANNIBALIZATION
Cannibalization, where a new product gains its sales at the expense of sales of a company's existing product(s) is always a concern in launching a new product. It is easy to follow too far the line that it is better to steal sales from yourself than let a competitor do it. The way of avoiding cannibalization is to ensure that any new product releases are as different as possible from existing brands. Tagging the new product with an existing brand name therefore enhances the likelihood of cannibalization occurring.

Herein lies something of a brand extension "Catch 22"; "stretching" a brand image too far can cause failure, yet if the extension is too similar to the original brand then cannibalism occurs.

BLURRING THE ORIGINAL BRAND'S IMAGE

Since the original brand in many cases is a well-established profit earner and the brand extension is something of an unknown, any potentially negative effects on the original brand should be considered very seriously indeed. One of the strong arguments against the practice of brand extension has been that it weakens the overall core brand image. It has been suggested that Miller Lite's success came at the expense of Miller High Life and that Heinz Ketchup's success came at the expense of Heinz's position in the pickle market (Ries and Trout, 1981). It is certainly true of many industries that a company which gains a reputation as a "jack of all trades" is often easily out competed by specialists.

MOST CONSUMERS ASSOCIATE PRESTIGE WITH RARITY AND FOCUSSED PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Experimental research on subjects' attitudes to various potential brand extension has suggested, rather unsurprisingly, that a brand image which is primarily symbolic rather than functional, can be stretched further to a wider range of products than the brand image which is linked closely with functional product characteristics (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park et a, 1991). While these brands may appear more extendible in such experimental settings which do not consider the effect on the core brand image, such extension might actually have the greater effect in blurring the brand image of some symbolic brands. This would be true with prestige-oriented brands since most consumers associate prestige with rarity and focussed production activity. Recent times have seen comments that both Gucci and Pierre Cardin have suffered from over-enthusiastic extension.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Considering these inherent disadvantages, brand extension would not be worthwhile to any company in the long run unless it can significantly improve on a product's performance, enough to compensate for these inherent disadvantages. The figures from the two cited studies (Peckham, 1981; Sullivan, 1992) of the success rates of brand extensions versus new brand name products are averages. They do not necessarily refute that in some circumstances success was enhanced by having an existing brand name. It is these circumstances which need to be identified if managers are to know when it is appropriate to use the strategy of brand extension to launch a new product and when it is not.

From the existing research conducted in this area it is possible to form some tentative rules which might improve the success rate of brand extensions.

KEEP PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING SUPPORT AT NORMAL LEVELS

In both of the cited studies (Peckham, 1981; Sullivan, 1992) it was noted that the brand extensions were launched with lower levels of promotional support than the products launched with new brand names. This is probably due to management subscribing to the argument that brand extensions meant savings in promotional costs, a belief which apparently ended up costing the companies market share.

When the results of the Nielsen study (Peckham, 1981) were adjusted for the differences in per point share of advertising expenditure, the differences between the market shares gained for the two groups are negligible. It should be noted though that these results do not suggest that all that is needed is to keep advertising and promotional support at "normal" levels, they only suggest that this should prevent the brand extension from significantly underperforming.

However, this recommendation does reduce one of the supposed advantages of brand extension, namely cheaper launch costs.

AVOID "ME TOO" BRAND EXTENSION

Along with inadequate promotional support, operational difficulties and incorrect positioning/targeting, one of the major reasons for product failure is that the product offers no new benefit to the consumer. While this point would seem to apply equally to products with new brand names as it does to brand extensions there is an extra danger of this occurring with brand extensions. Managers may be tempted to launch "me too" products against their better judgement because they feel the use of the existing brand name will make up for the lack of added benefit.

USE THOSE FUNCTIONAL FEATURES WHICH GAVE THE ORIGINAL BRAND ITS DIFFERENTIAL ADVANTAGE

Commentators have often urged that brand extensions should have common functional features with the original brand. This may be true but it would be incorrect to suppose that having just any functional features in common will justify sharing the brand name.

When purchasing non-durable consumer goods, consumers rely predominantly on intrinsic functional product characteristics to assess perceived quality, rather than extrinsic factors such as brand name. For these sorts of products, the brand name operates mostly as a reminder of the functional features which are present. Brand extension seems most sensible when there is the opportunity to capitalize on both the successful functional feature which gives the original brand its differential advantage, and the brand name which signals that the feature consumers know, and perhaps love, is present in the new product.

If the original brand had, for example, rice in it and the extension had rice in it too then such an extension might be less likely to break the "stretching too far" rule but the brand name would not (probably) be acting to signal the competitive advantage or consumer plus of the original brand. It is where this is possible that the brand name is playing an important role which perhaps justifies using it rather than a new name. An example of an extension where this does happen is Cadbury chocolate biscuits where the Cadbury name correctly informs the consumer that these biscuits are not coated in just any type of chocolate but are coated with chocolate which has that distinctive Cadbury chocolate taste. Diet Coke, Mars Ice Cream Bars and Mars milk drink are all other such examples. The Mars Bar extensions being particularly good in that cannibalization is likely to be at an acceptable level since these extensions are all in quite distinct categories (solid food, cold food and drink, respectively) and yet distinctive functional features (the Mars taste) have been transferred from the original brand to the extensions.

This reasoning is not in contrast to the suggestion that brand names which trigger brand images of more abstract qualities (e.g. fashionable, stylish) might be transferred to a broader range of products (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park et a)., 1991). This may very well be so, but it is in areas where key functional product features are also transferred, and where the brand name plays an important part in signaling this that the brand name will be of greater strategic value to the new product. This is particularly important for products which require consumption to truly assess functional performance.

Put simply, transfer of brand image which is (merely) acceptable to consumers is one thing, but transfer of image which actually assists in the success of the new product is another. This point seems to have been somewhat brushed over by some researchers who have examined brand extension in laboratory experiments to see what sort of image transfer subjects were comfortable with (see, for example, Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park et al., 1991).

USE BRAND EXTENSION FOR PRODUCTS LAUNCHING LATE INTO A CATEGORY RATHER THAN PIONEER PRODUCTS

Research into the effect of the timing of entry into markets shows that late entry brand extensions have better survival rates than early entry brand extensions (Sullivan, 1992). Perhaps this point is already understood by practitioners because the same study showed that brand extensions did tend to be launched later rather than earlier into a category. Of course, a less flattering interpretation is to repeat the earlier observation that brand extension may discourage innovation, hence the majority of brand extension follow other products into a market.

There is, however, strong support for early entry into a market providing a brand with a competitive advantage such that "pioneers" tend to outperform "followers" in gaining market share (Lambkin, 1988). The question then arises, is it better to extend early and gain greater share or to wait and extend later when the chances of survival will be greater? One study of brand extension performance and order-of-entry (Sullivan, 1992) implies that waiting can be advantageous as the use of extension reduces a brand's cost of waiting, because it moderates that loss of market share to earlier entrants.

Unfortunately though, the implication that a late extension performs better than an earlier extension, to the extent that it makes up for any loss due to the pioneering advantage effect, is not exactly an implication of great practical significance since a new product development manager is seldom faced with such a question. Instead, they will usually have a product which has finished its development process and is ready to launch at that particular point in time, either early or late for the category. So the questions which are likely to need answering are:

(1) If the product is ready to go early into the category, is it best to launch with a new brand name or as anextension? The answer from both studies of brand extension performance (Peckham, 1981; Sullivan, 1992) is emphatically in favor of a new brand name.

(2) If the product is ready to go early, is it worth waiting till later when an extension is less likely to fail? Possibly, but again, the answer is to use a new brand name and not throw away the pioneering advantage. Brand extension might possibly moderate the loss of share caused by the pioneering advantage effect but it certainly does not make up for it.

(3) If the product is ready to go late into a category, is it better to use brand extension or a new brand name? Here the answer is fewer clear. The small sample of late entry new brands (N=8) in the order of entry study (Sullivan, 1992) means it does not provide insight into the relative success rates.

The need for further research is clear, but it seems fair to draw the conclusion that if brand extension is going to be used, it is better to use it for late launch products rather than for an early product launch. First, because early market uncertainty results in high failure rates and failure for a brand extension has spillover costs. Second, because ideal positioning strategies are generally not known until the market begins to mature and thus a brand needs to be flexible in manipulating its image. Brand extensions are less flexible since they carry with them the image from the original brand which will be well established.

SUMMARY

Support for widespread use of brand extension does not seem to exist but that is not to say that under some conditions, and under the control of management who understand the potential dangers of the practice, the practice might be strategically appropriate. The inherent disadvantages of brand extension, such as spillover risks, mean it should only be used where it might significantly increase the performance of the new product release.

This article has attempted to put forward some tentative rules for using and managing the marketing strategy of brand extension. Put very simply the trick seems to be to:

- use brand extension only on products which are going into a mature category. If you are in the happy position to be bright to start on a pioneering product then keep maximum positioning flexibility by using a new brand name;
- use brand extension for products which preferably share those features of the original brand which were an important part of the original's differential advantage;
- avoid "me too" product launches and try to think of your brand name the same way you would your advertising, that is, it can do wonders to a product with a true differential advantage but no amount of advertising will help a product which does not offer anything new to the customer;
- give the same amount of advertising and promotional support as you would a new name product, do not expect the existing brand name to automatically give you high awareness.
- Maintaining brand equity is about keeping your bond with the customer. Brand extension may have an important part to play in building and maintaining this equity but it does not seem to be the avenue for cheap product launches. Using brand extension properly seems to be about respecting the things that built your brand in the first place, by making sure any brand extensions are quality product releases which are well supported by marketing effort.

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