

The Relationship Between Brand Equity and Customers' Attitude Towards Brand Extension for High Involvement Consumer Products

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Abstract
This study was aimed at investigating the effects of brand equity on brand extension. Data were collected from 370 University students and University lecturers at Dire Dawa University using convenience sampling. Self-administered questionnaires containing 48 five point likert scale items were distributed. SPSS version 21 has been employed to perform various computations like reliability, correlation, and regression. The findings show that new products bearing the name of a parent brand for which respondents have positive brand awareness, favorable brand association and brand loyalty tend to be accepted by a target market. On the contrary, a new product carrying the name of a parent brand with customers' negative brand equity (poor customers' brand awareness, unfavorable brand association, and no brand loyalty) is challenged with the target market. The likelihood occasion is new product failure or slow rate of adoption.
Keywords:brand, brand extension, brand equity, parent brand, brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty

Introduction

Branding has been given first priority by managers for the last two decades for its deposited value in the market (Keller & Lehmann, 2005). Branding has been viewed as an investment rewarding the company a return (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). DelRõÂo, VaÂzquez, and Iglesias (2001) assumes that the purpose of brand development to establish a favorable brand image about a firm through set of brand associations. By using brands which have well rooted names and experienced customers' loyalty, companies want to extend their existing brands to capitalize on (Hameed, saleem, Rashid, and Aslam, 2014; ENGSTRÖM & SVEDMAN, 2011)). These companies expect benefits from brand extensions as a result of customers' knowledge of the existing brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990). It is coined by Jaulent, Luxin, and Sacko (2007) that the concept of brand extension is traced back to the 1960`s, but it really become popular since the 1980`s. Essentially brand extension implies that using an established brand of a given product category to other new lines or new product categories (Hameed*, et . al* (2014), Tanner and Raymond, 2012; Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). For the past few decades, companies preferred brand extensions instead of launching new product with new brands costing huge investment in order to attain national and international strategic growth (Hariri and Vazifehdust, 2011). Companies launching new products which carry the existing brand name have good success rate; reduced marketing costs and low risks than otherwise (Keller, 2013, Kotler and Armstrong, 2012; Kotler, *et . al*, 2005; Chen Si Jia, Gu Jing, 2012;Jaulent, *et . al*, 2007; Chen & Liu, 2004). The main argument of brand extension strategy is to ensure optimum use of investments made on and strong brand equities established by extending the same to new products (Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, and Bravo, 2005). Powerful brands possess high brand equity which implies customers' discriminated responses to the products and their marketing programs as a result of knowing the brand names (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Successful transfer of an established brand is reflected in an enhancement of the main brand and an increase in sales of both current and the extended products (Kotler, *et . al*, 2005; Aaker, 1991). Their notion is that companies have to scrutinize whether favorable associations exist between the parent brand and potential extensions before doing transfer of the existing brand to extensions.

Conceptual framework

Consumers' attitude towards both the parent brand and the extensions vary depending on the level of similarity between the parent brand and the extension (Doust and Esfahlan, 2012). Aaker (2015) defined brand equity as a set of assets or liabilities linked to a brand that add value to or subtract value from the product under that brand. He developed a brand equity model (also called Five Assets Model) in which he identified five brand equity assets (brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and proprietary assets.

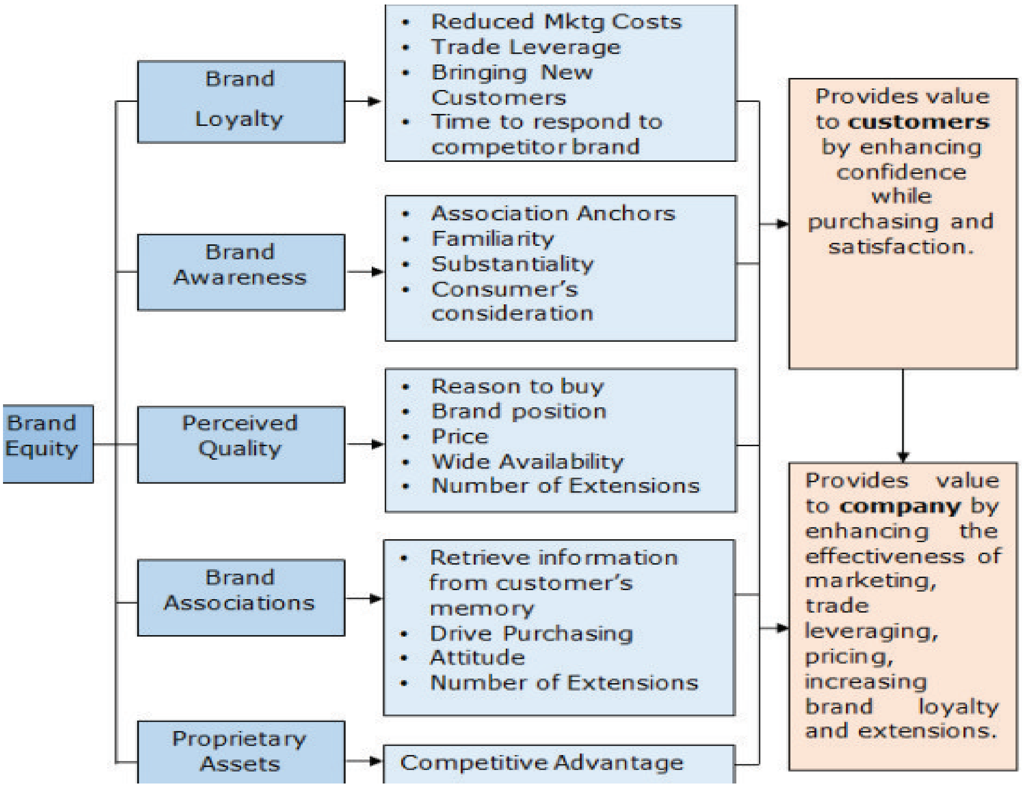

Fig. 1.1. Brand equity model

The diagram illustrates that a longstanding company's brand equity which is sourced from the five components affects customers' satisfaction, confidence, and retention and in turn brand extension. Among those dimensions of brand equity, the researcher is interested in dealing with three dimensions i.e. brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty.

From the stand point of Ghodeswar, (2008), brand awareness is the potential buyers' recognizing and recalling ability of a brand's belongingness to a certain product category. When an established strong brand is leveraged to new products, it makes consumers feel familiarity and it facilitates the transfer of favorable brand attributes and attitudes to the new products (**Dawar & Anderson, 1994, Milewicz & Herbig, 1994)**. The other dimension of brand equity is brand loyalty which is a customers' discriminated reaction for a brand that can be expressed in repurchase and other affiliations over a period of time (Ishak, and Abd Ghani, 2013). Brand loyalty implies a consumers' intense commitment to continue their purchase and patronage of a preferred product over time (Yoo, 2009). Kwon & lennon (2009) believed that brand loyal customers probably buy the brand repeatedly; spread favorable word of mouth; willingly pay more, and accept brand extensions. The more is a consumer loyal to a parent brand the higher is the probability to accept the extension for lessening the risks attributed to a new product (Rundle-Thiele & Maio Mackay, 2001, Anwar A., *et al*, 2011)). Brand association is defined by Aaker (1991) as anything that resides in memory about a brand and which can be strengthened when customers develop recurrent experiences with the brand. Customers may develop brand related or product related associations. As explained by DelRõÂo, *et al* (2001), unlike product functions, brand functions are associations sourced from intangible attributes or images added to the product and offer unique benefits only through products with a brand.

In general, brand management literature dealt with the relationship between brand equity and brand extension. It is believed that when an existing brand name or other brand elements are extended to new products, the extension maintains a sort of linkage with the parent brand. In return, the extension contributes to the parent brand.

The researcher's driving motive is to determine the effect of brand equity on brand extension. Thus, this research is devoted to prove the following hypothetical assumptions.

$H_{1a:}$ Customers' brand awareness has significant relationship with customers' attitude towards brand extension
H_2a: Customers' brand association has significant relationship with customers' attitude towards brand extension
H_3a: Customers' brand loyalty has significant relationship with customers' attitude towards brand extension

Related Literature review

The purpose for which brands are developed is to help a company's customers establish a favorable brand image through set of brand associations which are regarded as vital to the formation of brand equity and management (DelRõÂo, VaÂzquez, and Iglesias, 2001). Customers rely on brands to simplify their buying decisions and assign responsibilities to companies for potential promise, risks and quality level (Keller & Lehmann, 2005). By using brands which have well rooted names and experienced customers' loyalty, companies want to extend their existing brands to capitalize on (Hameed, saleem, Rashid, and Aslam, 2014; ENGSTRÖM & SVEDMAN, 2011)). These companies expect benefits from brand extensions as a result of customers' knowledge of the existing brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990). It is coined by Jaulent, Luxin, and Sacko (2007) that the concept of brand extension is traced back to the 1960`s, but it really become popular since the 1980`s. Essentially brand extension implies that using an established brand of a given product category to other new lines or new product categories (Hameed*, et . al* (2014), Tanner and Raymond, 2012; Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Hameed*, et.al* (2014) described that companies' brand extensions rely on popular brands which bear positive image in the market. For the past few decades, companies preferred brand extensions instead of launching new product with new brands costing huge investment in order to attain national and international strategic growth (Hariri and Vazifehdust, 2011). Companies launching new products which carry the existing brand name have good success rate; reduced marketing costs and low risks than otherwise (Keller, 2013, Kotler and Armstrong, 2012; Kotler, *et . al*, 2005; Chen Si Jia, Gu Jing, 2012;Jaulent, *et . al*, 2007; Chen & Liu, 2004). On the same token, the process of brand extensions is considered secure and advantageous because it reduces costs accompanying marketing research and other promotional activities and at the same time increases success rate of the new product it capitalizes on already existing brand equity (Chen & Liu, 2004) as cited by Anwar, Gulzar, Sohail, and Akram (2011). Thus, the main argument of brand extension strategy is to ensure optimum use of investments made on and strong brand equities established by extending the same to new products (Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, and Bravo, 2005). Powerful brands possess high brand equity which implies customers' discriminated responses to the products and their marketing programs as a result of knowing the brand names (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). As indicated by these writers, brand extensions are not always successful meaning that a given brand may not be suitable to a particular product regardless of its outstanding performance. In the form of brand image dilution, customers fail to notice or recognize any association between the extensions and the parent brand (Kotler, *et . al*, 2005). Popularly brand value is expressed in terms of brand equity (Carlson & Johansson, 2006). Customers do not simply welcome brand extensions rather they refer parent brands to evaluate the extensions. According to the idea of Grim, 2002 as cited in Hariri and vazifehdust (2011), the fitness between the parent brand and extensions either accelerates or retards market acceptance of the extensions. Therefore, consumers' attitude towards both the parent brand and the extensions vary depending on the level of similarity between the parent brand and the extension (Doust and Esfahlan, 2012). Aaker (2015) has defined brand equity as a set of assets or liabilities linked to a brand that add value to or subtract value from the product under that brand. He developed a brand equity model (also called Five Assets Model) in which he identified five brand equity elements.

Brand awareness

From the stand point of Ghodeswar, (2008), brand awareness is the potential buyers' recognizing and recalling ability of a brand's belongingness to a certain product category. When an established strong brand is leveraged to new products, it makes consumers feel familiarity and it facilitates the transfer of favorable brand attributes and attitudes to the new products (**Dawar & Anderson, 1994, Milewicz & Herbig, 1994)**. For Homer (2007), a brand can be understood as what is implanted in customers mind as a result of their senses overtime.

Brand loyalty

Brand Loyalty is a customers' discriminated reaction for a brand that can be expressed in repurchase and other affiliations over a period of time (Ishak, and Abd Ghani, 2013). From the view point of Yoo (2009), brand loyalty implies a consumers' intense dedication to continue their purchase and patronage of a preferred product/service over time. Loyal customers of a brand probably buy the company's products repeatedly; spread word of mouth favorably; and willingly pay more in order to have their favorite brand (Kwon & lennon, 2009). Anwar A., *et al* (2011), believed in the existence of direct relationship between brand extension and the consumers' brand loyalty. The more is a consumer loyal to a parent brand the higher is the probability of that consumer to accept the extended brand for lessening the risks attributed to a new product (Rundle-Thiele & Maio Mackay, 2001). The risks assumed while buying new brands are financial, functional, physical, social, psychological, and time accompanying (keller, 2013, Whalley, 2010). The findings of a study conducted by Reast (2005) suggested that customers trust to a brand determines the success or failure of brand extension strategies.

Brand association

Companies in their brand positioning function commit to implant key brand associations which are important to ensure competitive advantage (Keller, 2002). Brand association is defined by Aaker (1991) as anything that resides in memory about a brand and which can be strengthened when customers develop recurrent experiences with the brand. This recurrent experience signifies customers' personal identification with the brand and viewing the brand as active relationship partner bearing meaningful psycho-socio-cultural context (Raut & Brito, 2014). Consumers associate a brand with their self-concept and use it to express a significant aspect of the individual self (Fournier, 1998). As explained by DelRõÂo, *et al* (2001), unlike product functions, brand functions are associations sourced from intangible attributes or images added to the product and offer unique benefits only through products with a brand. The highest point of brands association is brand attitude which is the strongest way of forming the basis of consumer behavior (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Keller (2013) justified that brand may be linked with secondary entities other than the brand itself like source factors, countries/regions, distribution channels, other brands, characters, spokespeople, sporting or cultural events, or some other third-party sources.

Brand extension

Accumulated customer-based brand equity opens an avenue for a firm to engage in competent line or brand extensions (Ishak and Abd Ghani, 2013). As pointed out by Luxin, *et al* (2007), brand extension strategies save companies marketing costs that would be spent if they launch new products with new brand name. Firms recognize that their brand live through brand extension which means committing an established brand to bear new products of a company (Noursina, Madani, and Madani, 2015). As part of their marketing strategy, firms use brand extensions to influence consumers' brand preferences (Kushwaha, 2012). According to Soomro, Kaimkhani, Hameed, & Shakoor (2013:9) customers' evaluations of brand extensions rely on the parent brand's innovativeness, multiple extensions, concept and consistency and fitness between the parent brand and it extensions. The findings of a study conducted by Vukasovič (2012) shows the relationship between parent brand and brand extensions by taking 800 chicken products consumers of "poli" brand in Slovenia in a chicken pariser sausage product category. The results show the positive influence of the parent brand "poli" when it entered into another product category i.e. the group pate. Companies doing brand extensions assume many benefits, as there are already brand associations established with the parent brand, therefore consumers may consider the extension credible and trustworthy which go along with the parent brand (Laforet, 2010). In addition to this, Davis (2010), stated that the introduction of the brand extension evokes curiosity among customers of the parent brand, which can renovate interest in the brand as a whole. In a study examining the relationship between brand associations and consumers' behavioral and perceptual responses, DelRõÂo, *et al*. (2001) explained that consumers' positive brand image is reflected in terms of paying premium price, recommending others and accepting extension. Hameed, *et al* (2014) concluded that brand extension, brand awareness, brand familiarity, and customer attitude have an impact on parent brand image. (Shahrokh, Sedghiani, and Ghasemi, 2012; Rastogi, 2012) proved that the consumers' attitude towards brand extension has a bearing effect on the parent brand. According to Soomro, Kaimkhani, Hameed, & Shakoor (2013), customers' evaluations of brand extensions rely on parent brand's innovativeness, multiple extensions, concept & consistency and fitness between the parent brand and its extensions. SI JIA, & Jing (2012) claim that brand extensions are worthless when competitors occupied a solid customer loyalty and still the extension is worthless for brands for which customers have no clear brand association. In addition, customers who experienced a brand annoyingly likely reject the upcoming new products carrying the same brand (Whalley, 2010).

Methodology

This explanatory research was initiated to investigate the relationship between brand equity and brand extension. Brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty are constituents of brand equity and in this research considered as predictor variables which influence customers' attitude towards brand extension (dependent variable).

Self-administered questionnaires containing five point likert scale type items were distributed to students and lecturers. The selection of the respondents was through convenience sampling. The sample size was determined using Cochran's correction formula for a finite population. $n=\frac{n0}{1+\frac{(n0-1)}{N}}$ which is derived from $n_0 = \frac{Z^2Pq}{e^2}$, accordingly from a total of 10,000 Dire Dawa University students and lecturers in 2017, 370 respondents chosen and participated. The questionnaire was structured and close-ended. Fundamentally the data are qualitative in nature in that respondents' level of agreement for items is not numerically measurable. However, for ease of analysis, the respondents' level of agreement for each item is assigned numbers and the method becomes quasi-quantitative. Accordingly, strongly agree through strongly disagree receives 5 up to 1 for favorable statements and 1 up to 5 for unfavorable statements respectively. Questionnaires were distributed at times soon after final examination administration. The hypotheses are tested based on 95% confidence level. Accordingly, p-values which are lower than α-values (0.05) enable to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Instrument pre-test process

Prior to final questionnaire distribution, 35 questionnaires were distributed to pre-test the instrument's completeness, ambiguity, relevance, clarity, and consistency by taking 35 individuals from students and instructors which resemble the final respondents. In addition, the reliability of the data collection instrument has been tested using test-retest reliability. The instrument was accepted for a consistency coefficient value of r = 0.87.

Channels to disseminate the findings to the beneficiaries: Best results which are poorly communicated remain unconvinced of the appropriate target group. The researcher tries to publicize the finding through presenting in national and international conferences, presenting in events organized by professional associations like marketing professionals association, getting it published on organizational proceedings, getting it published on internationally reputable journals, pursuing press releases in media, etc.

Analysis

Through multiple regression analysis, this research has testified the hypothesis stating the significant relationship between brand equity and customers' attitude towards brand extension.

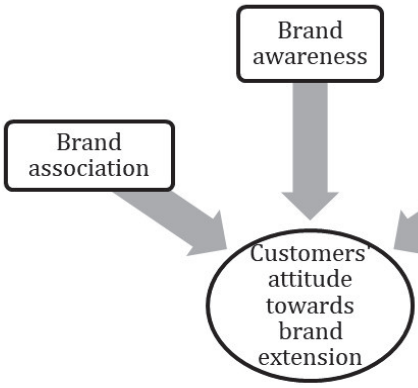

Figure1: Relationship between brand equity (brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty) and customers attitude towards brand extension

Table 1: reliability of the variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Brand awareness	0.720	6
Bran association	0.839	10
Brand loyalty	0.870	8
Customers' attitude towards brand extension for a given brand awareness level	0.703	6
Customers' attitude towards brand extension for a given level of brand association	0.882	10
Customers' attitude towards brand extension for a given brand loyalty	0.847	8

The reliability measure of the variables indicates Cronbach's Alpha value for all the variables and all the values fallen above the limit of reliability acceptance i.e. 0.7. Relatively, customers' attitude towards brand extension because of brand association is the highest of all.

Table 2. Correlation between predictor variables and the independent variable on the one hand and the correlation among the predictor variables:

		Customers' attitud towards brand extension	Brand awareness	Brand association	Brand loyalty
Pearson Correlation	Customers' attitude tow brand extension	1.000	.595	.933	.911
	Brand awareness	.595	1.000	.362	.341
	Brand association	.933	.362	1.000	.876
	Brand loyalty	.911	.341	.876	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Customers' attitude towards brand extension	.	.000	.000	.000
	Brand awareness	.000	.	.000	.000
	Brand association	.000	.000	.	.000
	Brand loyalty	.000	.000	.000	.
N	Customers' attitude towards brand extension	370	370	370	370
	Brand awareness	370	370	370	370
	Brand association	370	370	370	370
	Brand loyalty	370	370	370	370

It is illustrated in table 2 that customers attitude towards brand extension is guided by customer-based brand equity which is reflected in brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty. Accordingly, the dependent variable (customers' attitude towards brand extension) has established relationships with the predictor variables (brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty) with a correlation coefficient of 0.595, 0.933 and 0.911 respectively. Thus, all the alternative hypotheses are accepted for p value = 0.000.

Among the variables, brand awareness is relatively weakly correlated with customers' attitude towards brand extension. On the other hand, brand association is relatively strongly correlated with the criterion variable.

As indicated in table 2, independent variables have correlation each other with varied strength levels. The table signifies strong correlation between brand association and brand loyalty which numbers 0.876. On the other hand, brand association and brand awareness have weaker relationship. In general, the three brand equity components (brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty) have reinforcing effect each other to influence customers' attitude towards brand extension. For instance an increase in brand association bears some results on brand awareness and brand loyalty and viceversa.

In this research the correlation between independent variables and the dependent variable was assessed in the context of high involvement consumer products.

Table 3. **Model Summary**[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.989[a]	.978	.978	2.532	.331

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association
b. Dependent Variable: customers' attitude towards brand extension

As you can seen form table 3, the variation in customers' attitude towards brand extension is highly explained by the predictor variables which numbers 0.978. This implies that market acceptance or resistance of a new product which is extended from existing brands depends to a larger extent on level of awareness, association and loyalty that customers have for the parent brand.

From this we can infer that when customers brand awareness increases, the tendency of customers to behave favorably or unfavorably for a new product sourced from the parent brand is significantly affected. An increase in level of brand awareness may be positively or negatively and the consequence also happens in the respective direction for an extension. Therefore, it is only customers' awareness in a positive way that spreads positives to an extension.

Strong brand association between customers and the brand means that there exists significant influence towards an extension either favorably or unfavorably. When customers have favorable strong brand association, the probability to transfer those favorable associations to new product extensions is high. As it does positively, brand association may also work negatively for a brand extensions if the association between the customers and the parent brand is unfavorable. Thus, a new product is hardly accepted by the market if the market has negative connection with the parent brand.

Regarding brand loyalty, high level of customers' brand loyalty means high inclination to favor brand extensions. They believe that the brand attributes and benefits connecting the brand and the customers will also exist in the extension.

For high involvement consumer products, parent brands have carry over effects on brand extensions. Attributes and benefits of a parent brand spread to the extensions.

Table 4. ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	106818.274	3	35606.091	5552.178	.000[b]
1	Residual	2347.156	366	6.413		
	Total	109165.430	369			

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' attitude towards brand extension
b. Predictors: (Constant), brand awareness, brand association, Brand loyalty

Table 5. Coefficients[a]

Model		Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Co-linearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-3.464	.754		-4.591	.000	-4.947	-1.980					
	Brand awareness	1.065	.031	.286	34.679	.000	1.005	1.125	.595	.876	.266	.867	1.154
	Brand association	1.098	.035	.503	31.290	.000	1.029	1.167	.933	.853	.240	.227	4.398
	Brand loyalty	.956	.041	.373	23.382	.000	.875	1.036	.911	.774	.179	.231	4.325

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' attitude towards brand extension

Linear regression was calculated to predict the effects of brand equity on customers' attitude towards brand extension. The result shows that customers' level of brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty significantly exert influence on customers' attitude towards brand extensions with B =.286, .503, and .373 respectively and R^2 of .978 with F= 5552.178.

In this research, all the alternative hypotheses are accepted because p-value is below 0.05 for a 95% confidence level. Thus, customers' attitude towards brand extension is influenced by level of brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty.

Conclusion

Branding, brand equity and brand extension are excessively debated concepts. In branding literature, it is argued that brand extensions are more likely to occur than new brand developments. It is because of a relationship existing between brand equity and brand extension. In this research, the finding has implied a strong correlation between brand equity and brand extension. According to Farjam and Hongyi (2015), it is believed that brand equity is an important driver of consumers and firms to relieve from perceived risk for new product adoption.

The more a brand accumulates positive customer-based brand equity, the higher is the probability of customers to accept extensions of the parent brand. High level of brand awareness, strong brand association and customers' brand loyalty for a given brand matter customers to behave in a certain way. All favorable situations that bond customers with a parent brand are transferable to new products bearing the parent brand name. According to this finding, customers tend to accept new products extended from customers' favorite brands in order to minimize the risks of buying unknown brands, attach responsibility, be sure that they are buying the same all the time. Therefore, by patronizing some brands and brand extensions, customers want to simplify their brand comparison and evaluation efforts all the time they think buying. A company launching new products and new brands is found to be costly compared to brand extensions. The former suffers from market resistance and research & development costs.

Therefore, it is unwise for a brand which is known and accepted by the market for a particular item to last working only on that particular item. This brand can easily leverage the existing brand equity to new product as a line extension or category extension.

Recommendation

Relying on the findings, the researcher has found appropriate to suggest brand managers the following: 1) brand managers should work on customers' familiarity with the parent brand then this familiarity takes customers forward to favor brand extensions among other brands in the competitive sphere. 2) The more customers have unique, strong and favorable association; the higher is the customers' inclination to favor new product extensions from the parent brand. 3) Brand managers need to be potent to anticipate that not all longstanding brands are extendable. Rather, only brands with favorable image in the market. However, brands with unfavorable brand image are liabilities for the extensions. 4) It should be understood that customers' brand loyalty can be reflected in repetitive purchase, spreading positive word of mouth, willingly paying price premium, favoring brand extensions. 5) Brand managers had better pursue brand extensions to a related product category in which customers can easily visualize fitness between the parent brand and the extension. 6) Lastly, brand managers should understand that the three brand equity components reinforce each other. It is to mean that an increase in one strengthens the other variables.

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