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The impacts of extension consistency, consumer risk perception

on dilution effect in brand extension

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Abstract

This paper studies the impacts of extension products, consumers and marketing environment on brand dilution effect. This study is going to use quantitative methods to carry out empirical research, propose multiple hypothesis based on the current studies on dilution effect and the theories of image value, cognitive decision, risk perception and self-consistency, collect data through experimental intervention and questionnaire survey, and finally have an analysis and test of the research hypothesis through multivariate analysis, regression analysis and structural equation. The results of the study show that: firstly, the inconsistency between extension products and parent brand would cause dilution effect; secondly, extension consistency has a negative correlation with consumer risk perception; thirdly, consumer risk perception has a positive correlation with brand dilution effect; fourthly, consumer risk perception plays a complete mediating role in relation between extension consistency and dilution effect; lastly, attractiveness of brand image spokesman can regulate the relation between extension consistency and dilute effect. Finally, this paper puts forward a new direction of future research on brand dilution effect.

Introduction

Since brand research entered the 1980s, research on brand extension have gradually risen, becoming a hotspot of brand research and a strategy commonly adopted by product managers in international enterprises (Tauber, 1988). However, not all brand extensions were successful. It is learned from reality that failed brand extension, rather than helped the company expand to new product area, harmed the credibility of parent brand and caused great financial and brand image loss to the company.Since the existing theories of brand extension can not fully explain various brand dilution phenomena in reality, and there are just a few studies on the brand dilution effect caused by brand extension, this study chooses brand dilution effect, the not fully valued perspective, as my research object and explores its theoretical basis and operating mechanism through phenomenon in reality.

Literature review

Gibson and Richard (1990) found that brand dilution effect eventually leads to the disappearance of a brand's equity; Zeynep and Maheswarenn (1998) has shown that brand dilution effect is manifested by the reduction of brand equity. Although there is no clear and agreed definition of brand dilution effect, the shared view is that brand dilution effect would decrease brand equity and thus harm parent brand. There are some popular ideas about brand dilution effect. First, it is described as consumer's weakened ability to consciously recognize the brand; second, brand dilution effect refers to the fact that consumer evaluation of the parent brand declines when core brand extends to new products; third, brand dilution effect occurs when consumer awareness of uniqueness of existing brand declines because of the emergence of new brands.

The current researches on brand dilution effect focus on brand extension consistency. In 1990s, scholar John et al. found that brand extension failure would dilute consumer brand association and brand beliefs and the significance of dilution effect is related to the consistency between extension products and parent brand, which means that the higher the brand extension consistency is, the more significant the dilution and negative effect is. With the furthering of study on brand dilution effect, some scholars started to pay attention to the operating mechanism behind brand dilution effect. For example, the research results of Kong Cheen Lau and Ian Phau contradicted with the previous ones. They believed that brand dilution effect is not necessarily attributed to the consistency between brand image and brand image spokesman's personality but influenced by consumer experiences and other factors. Zeynep Gurhan-Canliet al. (1998) have proved that incentives can regulate the effects of extension typicality on brand dilution effect. Martinez & Pina(2003)found that advertising can guide consumer brand association and can regulate the occurrence of dilution effect.

The above studies evaluated brand dilution effect from the perspective of brand value and equity, which the author finds quite incomprehensive. A higher level concept should be employed to define brand dilution effect. Therefore, this paper is going to introduce brand strength to study brand dilution effect.

Research hypothesis and theoretical model

Research Hypothesis

The relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect

Based on classification theory, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The attribute inconsistency between extension products and the parent brand would cause brand dilution effect. That is, the lower the extension consistency is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

H1a: The lower the category consistency is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

H1c:When parent brand with high brand association extends to products with similar attributes yet low image consistency, the dilution effect is significant.

The relationship between extension consistency and consumer risk perception

Based on risk perception theory, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2:Extension consistency has a negative correlation with consumers risk perception. The higher the extension consistency is, the lower consumer risk perception is, which means greater popularity of extension products.

H2a:The higher the category consistency of extension products is, the lower consumer risk perception of product effect is.

H2b:The higher the image consistency of extension products is, the lower the consumer risk perception of physical injury is.

H2c:The higher the image consistency of extension products is, the lower the consumer risk perception of financial loss is.

H2d:The higher the image consistency of extension products is, the lower the consumer's social risk perception is.

The relationship between consumer risk perception and brand dilution effect

Based on cognitive decision-making theory, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3:Consumer risk perception is positively correlated with brand dilution effect. That is, the higher the consumer risk perception is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

H3a:The higher the consumer risk perception of financial loss is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

H3b:The higher the consumer risk perception of product effect is , the more significant the brand dilution effect is .

H3c:The higher the consumer risk perception of physical injury is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

H3d:The higher the consumer social risk perception is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is.

The mediating effect of consumer risk perception

When the consistency between parent brand and extension product is high, consumer risk perception is

low. Because of the low risk perception, consumer evaluation of parent brand strength after extension has not changed much. That is to say, the dilution effect after extension is not significant in this case. According to that, brand extension consistency impactsbrand dilution effect as consumer risk perception after extension changes. Therefore, it is believed that consumer risk perception plays a mediating role between extension consistency and brand dilution effect. As a result, the hypothesis are proposed as follows.

H4:Consumer risk perception plays a complete mediating role in the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect.

The moderating effect of attractiveness of brand image spokesperson on the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect

Based on self-congruity theory, the following hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H5:The attractiveness of brand image spokesperson can moderate the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect. High spokesperson attractiveness can reduce the dilution effect caused by inconsistency between extension products and parent brand.

H5a:The appearance attractiveness of brand image spokesperson has a negative moderating effect on the dilution effect caused by the inconsistency between the extension products and the parent brand category.

H5b:The personality attractiveness of brand image spokesperson have a negative moderating effect on the dilution effect caused by the inconsistency between the extension products and the parent brand category.

Theretical Model

This paper proposes a theoretical model for the relationship between extension consistency, consumer risk perception, brand image spokesperson's attractiveness and brand dilution effect. In the model, extension consistency is an independent variable, brand dilution effect is a dependent variable, consumer risk perception is an intermediary variable for the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect, and brand image spokesperson's attractiveness is a moderating variable. Accordingly, the specific framework is shown in Figure 1.
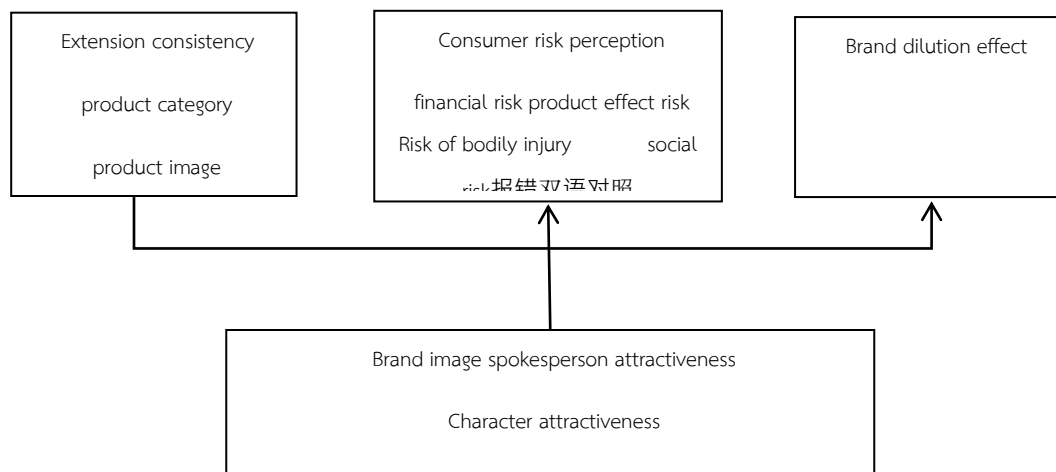
Figure 1 Theoretical Model for the Relationship Between Extension Consistency, Consumer Risk Perception, and Brand Dilution Effect.

Research Design

1.Selection and development of scales

The adoption of existing scales can ensure the scientific nature of the research, but because the scales are not completely able to measure the relevant variables with the advance of the times, it is necessary to develop new scales according to the needs of the research itself. This study combines previous scales and new ones. On the one hand, the mature scales of scholars around the world are adopted; on the other hand, a set of scales has been developed according to the needs of the study.

This paper selects the seven-point semantic difference scale with four items developed by Keller & Aaker (1990) and Reddy & Baht (2001) to construct a scale for extension consistency.In the study, the selected scale categorizes consumer perceived risks into four dimensions: financial risk, product effect risk, physical injury risk and social risk, totaling 12 measurement questions. This paper chooses the scale of appearance attractiveness developed by Wang Huaiming and Ma Mouchao (2004) and the scale of personality attractiveness by Mckirnan et al. (1983) to measure the attractiveness of brand image spokesperson.

This paper develops a set of scales for brand strength. In the scale development, this study refers to the basic paradigm and method of scale development proposed by Churchill (1979). Accordingly, a total of 23 items are designed to measure brand strength from the 4 dimensions of brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, brand popularity and brand trust. Then, the factor analysis method is used to analyze the designed scale and to test the data of 23 items involved. By using the method of of maximum variance orthogonal rotation, 16 representative indicators are extracted from the test results and then accordingly, 4 common factors are further extracted. Statistical results show that the cumulative contribution rate of the extracted 4 common

factors is 68.763%. Besides, Bartlett's ball test is carried out on the scale, and the results shows that the variables had significant uniqueness and the KMO value was 0.910 > 0.8, which further indicates that the scale can be used for factor analysis. At last, Cronbach's a value test is carried out on the four factors. The analysis results of the factor loading and the value are shown in Table 5 and the results show that the 16 indicators reflect the validity of the four dimensions of brand strength.

Experiment design

This paper chooses laboratory experiments. That is, in a controlled environment, two variables, namely, extension consistency and brand image spokesperson's attractiveness, are manipulated to construct 4 experimental groups, which are exposed to different experimental conditions respectively, as shown in Table 2. In the experiment design, the four experimental groups are randomly chosen to eliminate selection error.

Table 2 Experiment Design

Group	Pre-test	Experiment Stimuli	Post-test
X1	Brand Strength; ConsumerRisk Perception;	high extension consistency; high attractiveness of brand imagespokesperson's attractiveness	Brand Strength; Extension consistency; Consumption Risk Perception; Consumer appeal;
X2	Brand Strength; Consumer Risk Perception;	high extension consistency; low attractiveness of brand image spokesperson;	Brand Strength; Extension consistency; Consumption Risk Perception; Consumer appeal;
Y1	Brand Strength; Consumer Risk Perception;	low extension consistency ; high attractiveness of brand image spokesperson;	Brand Strength; Extension consistency; Consumption Risk Perception; Consumer appeal;
Y2	Brand Strength; Consumer Risk Perception;	low extension consistency; high attractiveness of brand image spokesperson	Brand Strength; Extension consistency; Consumption Risk Perception; Consumer appeal;

Selection of Parent Brand, Extension Product and Brand Spokesperson

Selection of Parent Brand

This paper selects college students as the subjects and among them, the most popular items are mobile phones. In Sample1, 184 valid questionnaires are collected, and they show that the top three mobile phone brands used by college students in Sichuan are Apple, Huawei and Xiaomi. In order to identify the brand strength of the three mobile phone brands, this paper selects 60 college students (Sample 2) to do the pre-test 1.According to the descriptive statistics of the results, among the three pre-tested brands, Huawei mobile phone brand extends less and enjoys upper-middle level brand strength, which indicates that it is the most suitable brand for the test. Therefore, this paper chooses Huawei as the research object.

Selection of Extension Products

This paper designs four kinds of extension products after discussing with three marketing experts and 30 college students. In order to verify whether the designed product meets the expectation, a pre-test 2 is conducted (Sample 3).According to the descriptive statistics of the results, digital camera has high overall extension consistency, including high category consistency and high image consistency; mobile phone for the elderly have relatively higher extension consistency with high category consistency while low image consistency; the overall extension consistency of sports shoes is low with low category consistency and high image consistency; the extension consistency of Gel pens is low, with low category and image consistency.

Selection of Brand Spokesperson

The purpose of pre-test 3 is to select highly attractive spokespersons and to manipulate spokesperson's attractiveness. In the test, 60 college students (Sample 4) are selected and surveyed by the 7-point Likert Scale with 11 items in two dimensions of Table 4. They are asked to rate the attractiveness of 20 celebrities popular in Chinese. According to the results of the survey, Li Yifeng is selected as the spokesperson of high attractiveness. In order to make comparison, an ordinary college student A f is randomly selected from the school as a spokesperson of low attractiveness.

Questionnaire survey

This paper collects questionnaire data through "pre-test and post-test". In the pre-test, the students are randomly grouped to do the questionnaire; in post-test two week later, the grouped students are given questionnaire again to collect comparison data. In both tests, the questionnaires are in paper forms, and the students organized by the author are expected to fill them out on the spot. The questionnaire surveys are conducted strictly in accordance with standard procedures. On one hand, before questionnaires are distributed, students are told about the the purpose of the survey. The survey eliminates student's concerns by asking no real name and involving no privacy. On the other hand, they area also told to fill in each item conscientiously and truthfully. The participation to the survey should be voluntary, and not students is forced to take part in.

Reliability and validity test of the questionnaires

In this chapter, this paper analyzes the data of the questionnaires, and then verify the hypothesis proposed in this study. In this way, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires is first tested to ensure the feasibility of the questionnaires. Through the statistics of reliability and validity test of the four experimental groups, X1, Y1, X2, Y2, it can be seen that the Cronbach's a coefficient of all variables in the table is greater than 0.7, and the coefficient of the Measurement Dimension (CITC) is higher than 0.3，which means that the four groups of questionnaires enjoy good reliability and validity. Besides, the KMO values of all latent variables in the table are greater than 0.6, and the cumulative percentage of explained variance of the variables is more than 50%, which means questionnaires enjoy good construct validity.

Hyhypothesis test

The impact of extension consistency on brand dilution effect

This paper tests the hypotheses of H1, H2 and etc. proposed in this paper with paired-simple T test and independent-sample T test, and the test results are shown in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

Table 3 Independent Sample T-test Results of Brand Strength

	Mean Value of Brand Strength	F value	Significance	T value	Significance
High Extension Consistency					
Before Extension	5.159	10.234	0.001	4.121	0.001
After Extension	4.509				
Low Extension Consistency					
Before Extension	5.108	8.324	0.001	3.135	0.001
After Extension	3.954				

It can be concluded from Table 3 that the brand strength of extension products would decrease and brand dilution effect on parent brand would occur especially when there is attribute inconsistency between extension products and the parent brand. The dilution effect of products of low extension consistency is much more significant than that of high consistency. Therefore, it can be assumed that hypothesis H1 is valid.

Table 4 Paired Sample T-test Results of the Brand with Low Extension Consistency Before and After Extension

	brand strength				
	Brand Satisfaction	Brand Loyalty	Brand Popularity	Brand Trust	Mean Value
Huawei sports shoes					
before extension	4.987	5.321	5.213	5.101	5.156
after extension	3.954	4.032	4.198	4.087	4.068
T value	3.587	4.143	4.031	3.894	4.153
significance level	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Huawei Gel pen					
before extension	4.876	5.109	5.215	5.043	5.061
after extension	3.321	4.214	3.876	3.953	3.841
T value	3.645	3.978	4.342	4.215	4.132
Significance level	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05

From Table 4, after extension with low consistency, the strength of parent brand significantly decreases. Therefore, it can be concluded that the low category consistency of extension product can cause significant brand dilution effect. As a result, H1a hypothesis is valid.

Table 5 Paired Sample T-test Results of the Brand with High Extension Consistency Before and After Extension

	Brand Strength				
	Satisfaction	Brand Loyalty	Brand Popularity	Brand Trust	Mean Value
Huawei digital camera					
before extension	4.324	5.798	5.321	5.432	5.219
after extension	4.251	5.532	5.124	5.352	5.065
T value	4.012	4.522	5.012	4.893	4.921
Significance level	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05
Huawei mobile phones for the elderly					
before extension	4.452	5.425	5.153	5.364	5.099
after extension	3.653	4.532	3.983	3.642	3.953
T value	3.742	4.764	4.432	4.321	4.341
significance level	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05

From Table 5, the parent brand strength decreases greatly and the dilution effect is significant. Therefore, it can be inferred that when the parent brand with strong brand association extends to products with similar category characteristics but low image consistency, the brand dilution effect is significant. As a result, H1c is assumed to be valid.

From the analysis of Table 4 and Table 5, Huawei mobile phones and Huawei Gel pens are extension products with low image consistency and the strength of parent brand decreases significantly after extension. Therefore, it can be inferred that low image consistency of extension products would cause significant brand dilution effect. As a result, H1b is assumed to be valid.

The Impact of Extension Consistency on Consumer Risk Perception

This paper uses linear regression analysis to verify the respective and overall relationship between extension consistency and these of consumer risk perception. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Regression Analysis Results of the Relationship Between Extension Consistency and Consumer Risk Perception

variables		Consumer risk perception				
		product effect risk	physical injury risk	financial risk	social risk	Consumer risk perception
extension consistency	category consistency	-0.431**	-0.356**	-0.021	-0.001	-0.532**
	image consistency	-0.015	-0.003	-0.418**	-0.571**	
F		32.311**	43.259**	28.382**	30.245**	50.114**
R^2		0.432	0.364	0.521	0.498	0.562
$\triangle R^2$		0.421	0.387	0.489	0.435	0.521

From the table above, regression analysis shows negative correlation between the extension consistency and each dimensions of consumer risk perception, and passes the significance test, which indicate H2 is valid. Among them, product image consistency has a significant correlation with product effect risk and physical injury risk while insignificant one with financial risk and social risk, which indicates H2a and H2b are valid. Product image consistency has a insignificant correlation with product effect risk and physical injury risk while significant one with financial risk and social risk, which indicates H2c and H2d are valid.

The impact of consumer risk perception on brand dilution effect

This paper adopts linear regression analysis to test the relationship between each dimension of consumer risk perception and the decline of brand strength, thus verifying the relationship between consumer risk perception and brand dilution effect. The analysis results are shown in Table 7.
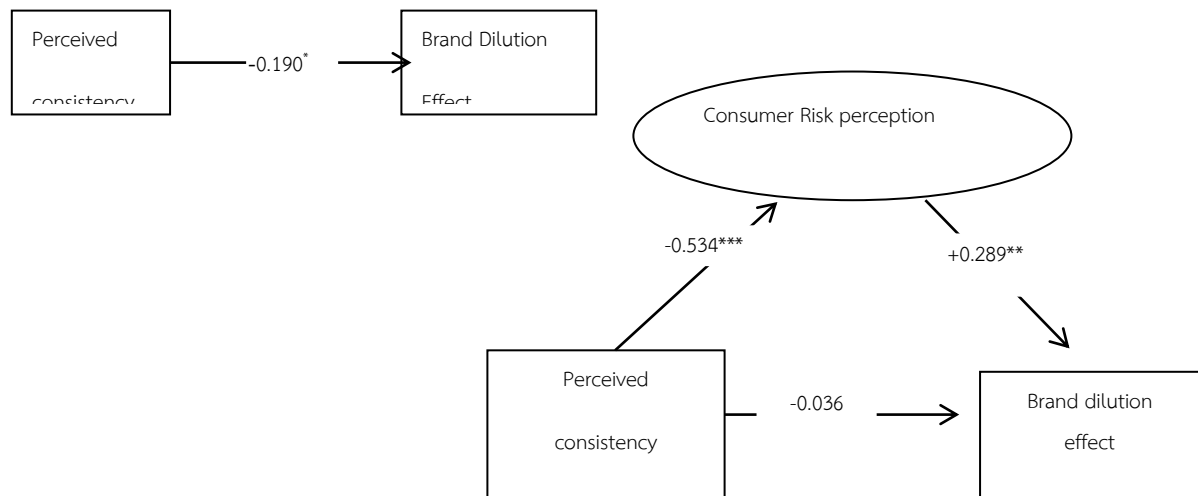
Table 7 Regression Analysis Results of the Relationship Between Consumer Risk Perception and Brand Dilution Effect

Variables		Brand Dilution Effect	Brand Dilution Effect
Consumer Risk Perception	Product Effect Risk	0.532**	0.667**
	Physical Injury Risk	0.489**	
	Financial Risk	0.548**	
	Social Risk	0.631**	
F		232.312**	350.324**
R^2		0.532	0.589
$\triangle R^2$		0.484	0.564

From the table above, regression analysis shows that consumer risk perception and its each dimension has a positive correlation with brand dilution effect, and pass the significance test, which indicate that H3 is valid. Among the dimensions, product effect risk, physical injury risk, financial risk and social risk have positive correlation with brand dilution effect and passed significance test; as a result, H3a, H3b, H3c and H3d are assumed to be valid.

The mediating role of consumer risk perception

In order to test the mediating effect of consumer risk perception, this paper carries out regression analysis with SPSS21.0 proposed by Baron and Kenny(1986). The coefficients c, a, b and c', are calculated respectively and the results show significant coefficients c, a and b while insignificant c'. It shows that consumer risk perception has a mediating effect on the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect (see Figure 2). Therefore, H4 is valid.
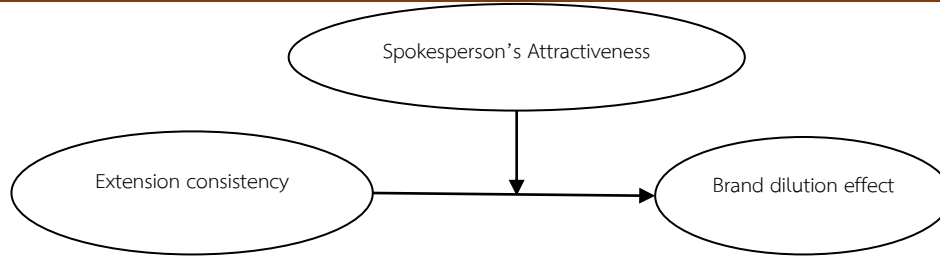

Figure 2 The mediating effect of consumer risk perception on the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect

** means P<0.05，***means P<0.01

The Impact of brand image spokesperson's attractiveness on extension consistency and brand dilution effect

This paper uses nested model to verify the matching of models with the method of multi-group (SEM). Unconstrained model is first selected as the benchmark model, and then is matched with the parameter-constrained model. As a result, a theoretical model for hypothesis testing is constructed as shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3 Theoretical Model for the Moderating Effect of Brand Image Spokesperson's Attractiveness on the Relationship Between Extension Consistency and Brand Dilution Effect

Based on the theoretical model above, this paper employs structural equation model to identify the fit index and thus the fit indexes are obtained in Table 8.

Table 8 Fit Indexes of Multi-group SEM Analysis Model

Statistical Value	$\triangle x^2$	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	RMSEA	TLI	IFI
Unconstrained Model	53.356	0.005	1.535	0.965	0.025	0.958	0.970
Constrained Model			1.564	0.957	0.029	0.949	0.971
Fit Criteria		<0.05	（1，2）	>0.9	<0.05	>0.9	>0.9
Model Fit Evaluation		significant	fit	fit	fit	fit	fit

The path coefficients of extension consistency's impact on brand dilution effect under different spokespersons' attractiveness are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Path Coefficients of Extension Consistency's Impact on Brand Dilution Effect under Different Spokesperson's Attractiveness

	Spokespersons with High Attractiveness			Spokespersons with Low Attractiveness		
Extension consistency—>brand dilution effect	appearance attractiveness	personality attractiveness	integrated value	Appearance attractiveness	personality attractiveness	integrated value
	-0.435[*]	-0.632[*]	-0.567[*]	-0.089	-0.158	-0.132

As shown in Table 9, the spokesperson's attractiveness has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect, which leads to the conclusion that hypothesis H5 is valid. Besides, as shown in Table 18, the spokesperson's appearance attraction and

personality attraction can negatively moderate the brand dilution effect caused by the category inconsistency between the extension product and the parent brand, which lead to the conclusion that H5a and H5b are valid.

Conclusion

This paper come to conclusions through empirical research as follows:

1.1 The attribute inconsistency between the extension product and the parent brand would lead to dilution effect of the parent brand. Compared with high extension consistency, low extension consistency would cause more significant one. The two dimensions of extension consistency, namely product category and product image, have impacts on brand dilution effect respectively. When the parent brand with strong brand association extends to products with similar category characteristics but low image consistency, the brand dilution effect is significant.

1.2 Extension consistency has a negative correlation with consumer risk perception. The higher the extension consistency is, the lower the consumer risk perception is, and the more popular the extension product is. The category consistency of the extension products mainly affects consumer risk perception of product effect and physical injury; image consistency of the extension product mainly affects consumer's financial and social risk perception.

1.3 Consumer risk perception is positively correlated with brand dilution effect. That is, the higher the consumer risk perception is, the more significant the brand dilution effect is. The dimensions of consumer risk perception, such as product effect risk, physical injury risk, financial risk and social risk, can have respective or integrated positive impact on brand dilution effect.

1.4 Consumer risk perception plays a complete mediating role in the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect. When consumer risk perception is highly controlled, extension consistency almost has no impact on brand dilution effect, which can prove that consumer risk perception plays a mediating role between extension consistency and brand dilution effect.

1.5 Brand image spokesperson's attractiveness moderates the relationship between extension consistency and brand dilution effect. High attractiveness of spokesperson can reduce the dilution effect caused by inconsistency between extension products and parent brand. Spokesperson's appearance attraction can negatively moderate the dilution effect caused by the category inconsistency between the extension product and the parent brand; Spokesperson's personality attraction can negatively moderate the dilution effect caused by the image inconsistency between the extension product and the parent brand.

Suggestions for future research

Firstly, due to limited conditions, this paper only studies the brand dilution effect in brand extension from three dimensions: product, consumer and marketing. However, the research dimensions are not comprehensive. For example, it lacks research on the factors of parent brand, and therefore the results can

not fully reflect the impact of brand dilution. Secondly, in sample choosing, college students with good internal validity yet relatively low external validity are selected. Furthermore, mobile phones are chosen for this brand extension research and the simulated extension products in this paper are fast consumer goods, so there is the problem of simplicity of brands and its extension products. Whether the research conclusion can be applied in other types of products remains to be further studied and tested. Lastly, Chinese consumers are chosen as samples in the study. However, consumer risk perception in different countries may be affected by different factors, which would affect the attractiveness of brand image spokespersons. In this way, the results of same research may be different in different countries with different cultures. The above problems will be the focus of our future research.

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