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A brand's stretchability is an important avenue for growth and new product introductions. This research examines the role of an individual-difference variable (self-construal) in enhancing a brand's stretchability potential. It is postulated that an interdependent self-construal leads to a superior ability to uncover relationships among stimuli (e.g., an extension and its parent brand) and thus is likely to enhance the perceived fit of an extension and the likelihood of its acceptance. However, these beneficial effects are likely to emerge only under conditions in which the interdependent consumer is motivated to elaborate extensively on the extension information. Five experiments test the underlying mechanism, its implications for different levels of brand stretch (varying from close to far), and the marketing strategy implications of the proposed theoretical framework.

Keywords: relational processing, brand extensions, self-construal, brand stretch, extension consistency

How Far Can a Brand Stretch? Understanding the Role of Self-Construal

Brand extensions have become an important avenue for growth and new product introductions in most companies, and they have generated much research in consumer behavior (e.g., Aaker and Keller 1990; Ahluwalia and Gurhan-Canli 2000; Broniarczyk and Alba 1994; Loken and John 1993; Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991). Simms (2005) identifies 82% of new product introductions as brand extensions. Some recent examples include Godiva ice cream, Jeep strollers, Olay vitamins, and Cheetos lip balm. This growth in brand extensions highlights the importance of identifying factors that influence the "stretchability" or extension potential of a brand into new markets (e.g., Meyvis and Janiszewski 2004).

An important determinant of extension success is its "fit" to the parent brand name. Fit has been conceptualized as the extension's perceived similarity to the parent brand primarily on dimensions such as product category and attributes (e.g., benefits, image) (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994; Keller 2002; Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991). In general, the higher the perceived fit of the extension with its parent

brand, the more positive is the extension evaluation and the greater is the gain from introducing the new product as a brand extension than under a new brand name (Keller 2002; Loken and John 1993). Thus, extensions with lower levels of similarity may have a lower likelihood of succeeding in the marketplace, thus imposing a limitation on the brand's stretchability.

Recent research on self-construal (e.g., Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000; Markus and Kitayama 1991) has opened up the possibility that a consumer's self-construal influences the perceived fit of an extension and, thus, a brand's stretchability potential. Specifically, on the basis of this literature, it is proposed that consumers who have a more interdependent self-view may be endowed with a relational processing advantage or a superior ability to uncover relationships between an extension and its parent brand, leading to a higher perception of fit. The current research examines this processing advantage and delineates conditions under which it is most likely to emerge in the marketplace. More important, self-construal is known to correlate with several demographic (e.g., ethnicity, gender) and geographic (e.g., nationality) variables (e.g., Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002; Han and Shavitt 1994; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier 2002), implying that consumers in these different segments may vary in their perceived fit of and receptivity to an extension. It can be argued that consumer responses to brand extensions may differ in these market segments, with some offering greater

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capacity for stretchability than others, thus opening up possibilities for marketers. The current research examines these possibilities and discusses their managerial implications.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Prior research reveals that because brand stretches present a deviation from expectation, they stimulate heightened elaboration focused on resolving the presented incongruity between the brand and the extension (Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994). A moderate level of deviation (moderate stretch) is imminently resolvable and thus results in favorable extension evaluations; in contrast, the higher level of inconsistency presented by far stretches is less “resolvable” by consumers, resulting in less favorable extension evaluations (Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994). A notable insight from this literature is that reaction to a brand stretch is determined by the extent to which the consumer can resolve the presented deviation. Importantly, this process assumes that incongruent information attracts attention and motivates increased elaboration toward the goal of inconsistency resolution. This article argues that consumers’ self-construal is likely not only to affect their ability to resolve the deviation presented by a brand stretch but also to moderate the extent to which inconsistencies are likely to motivate processing. Thus, self-construal is examined more closely in this section.

Relational Processing Induced by Interdependent Self-Construal

Self-construal refers to a person’s view of self and structure of self-schema (Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002; Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000; Markus and Kitayama 1991). People who have an independent self-construal are expected to hold a view of self that emphasizes the separateness, internal attributes, and uniqueness of the individual, whereas an interdependent self-construal is associated with a more relationship-driven interdependent self-view, which stresses connectedness, social context, and relationships (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Although people can be both independent and interdependent (Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto 1991), for most people, one aspect is likely to be better developed and, thus, more accessible.

On the basis of prior research, it can be argued that high interdependents have a more flexible notion of relationships than low interdependents. Specifically, when grouping objects, respondents who are highly interdependent (e.g., from Eastern countries) are known to organize information in terms of different types of relationships (e.g., mother takes care of child, monkey eats banana, Nike and Wilson can be used in the same sports occasion), whereas those who are low in interdependence (e.g., from Western countries) tend to focus on taxonomic categories (e.g., man and woman are adults, monkey and panda are animals) and traits (e.g., Nike and Polo have similar prestige) (Ji, Zhang, and Nisbett 2004; Ng and Houston 2006). Therefore, low interdependents, who organize information in taxonomic categories, may be likely to focus on similarity in terms of the notions of product category and attributes. Conversely, high interdependents not only are likely to consider these salient dimensions (product category and attributes) for extension evaluations but also may be equipped with the

ability to consider a wider set of thematic relationships (e.g., functional, social, situational) when examining the fit between a brand and its extension. For example, Ng and Houston (2006) find that interdependents are more likely than independents to consider usage situation similarity in their evaluations of brand extensions.

This flexible notion of relationships may help independents identify and consider a wider array of potential connections between an extension and its parent brand (e.g., target market overlap, usage situation, functional similarities), even when relationships on the salient dimensions of product category and attributes are somewhat of a stretch. For example, when exposed to a new product concept (e.g., Johnson & Johnson [J&J] instant noodles), high interdependents might uncover a target market overlap (families with children) with the parent brand even though there does not appear to be an obvious fit with the product category and attribute associations.

In addition to considering a wider set of bases for assessing fit, high interdependents may be likely to engage in a more in-depth and resourceful analysis of each base, given the increased attention they pay to relational stimuli (Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002). For example, when considering possible similarities between instant noodles and the image/attributes of the brand, instead of limiting their search to the most salient J&J associations of “babies” and “gentleness” (for which relationships are less likely to emerge), high interdependents may dig deeper to unearth commonalities on less obvious and lower-salience attributes (e.g., healthy). As such, both of these capabilities—the consideration of a wider array of potential bases of fit and a deeper and more resourceful analysis of each base—imply a superior relational capability in the interdependents. This superior ability to uncover relationships between an extension and its brand is called a “relational processing advantage” in this article.

In summary, a relational processing advantage is hypothesized such that high interdependents are able to consider a wider array of relationships and to search deeper into each base of similarity than low interdependents. These processes are expected to enhance the perceived fit of the extension with the parent brand and, subsequently, its evaluation. Conversely, low interdependents are expected to engage in taxonomic processing, focusing primarily on the category and attribute bases of similarity, demonstrating a lower level of flexibility in the search for and assessment of relationships. As a consequence, low interdependents are expected to perceive the fit of brand stretches as lower than high interdependents and to evaluate them less favorably.

A relevant and important issue that merits some discussion is that differences in information organization between high and low interdependents, which form the basis of the hypothesizing in this section, have thus far been examined in a paradigm in which participants are presented with a set of words (which are potentially related in several ways) and directed to group them in a meaningful manner. Two elements of this paradigm are notable because they raise questions about generalizability to the domain of brand extension evaluations. First, participants are specifically directed to generate relationships (i.e., they have relatively high levels of motivation to elaborate on the stimuli with a view to uncovering relationships). Second, the existence of several

potential associations in the presented stimuli makes the task of uncovering relationships one of low to moderate difficulty.

In other words, prior research does not explain whether interdependents would still be adept at and likely to generate a wider variety of relationships when (1) not explicitly directed or motivated to do so (e.g., when they are exposed to brand extensions under moderate- to low-involvement exposure conditions prevalent in the marketplace) and (2) the underlying relationships are somewhat difficult to unearth (e.g., farther brand stretches). Uncovering the less-than-obvious relationships with farther stretches is effortful and resource intensive (e.g., Maoz and Tybout 2002), and it is unlikely to occur in the absence of high levels of processing motivation. Note that no research to date has examined the relational processing capabilities of interdependents in the domain of low-relational stimuli (similar to farther brand extensions). The next section focuses on the role of motivation in the processing of brand stretches.

The Role of Motivation

Prior research (e.g., Aaker and Sengupta 2000) reveals that people who are higher in interdependence (e.g., Easterners) are more likely to tolerate incongruity than those who are low in interdependence (Westerners). In particular, whereas independents have been known to increase elaboration in response to incongruity with a view to resolving it (e.g., Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994), high interdependents have been known to demonstrate no increase in elaboration when exposed to incongruent information (Aaker and Sengupta 2000). As such, high interdependents regard consistency as less important than low interdependents (Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002). Therefore, the higher tolerance for incongruity combined with the typically lower-involvement product evaluation contexts would likely result in high interdependents not being motivated enough to devote the additional resources required to uncover relationships in the domain of far brand stretches. In other words, although high interdependents may have the ability to uncover relationships, in most naturally occurring marketplace contexts, the utility of this ability might be limited because of motivational constraints.

Therefore, the advantages of relational processing are expected to emerge only when high interdependents are motivated to engage in the effort required to establish the relational connections. A factor that is likely to influence processing motivation is the extent of brand stretch. When the extension stretch is low, the relationship with the brand is fairly obvious, lowering the motivation of the audience to engage in deeper elaboration. However, a moderate stretch presents a deviation, which not only motivates respondents to process it but also is imminently resolvable without a high level of effort. The increased processing motivation is expected to facilitate the emergence of a relational processing advantage. Farther brand stretches necessitate a higher level of effort to uncover the difficult-to-find relationships; given that high interdependents are inherently less motivated to resolve such incongruities, a relational processing advantage is less likely to emerge in this domain (unless they are motivated externally to engage in increased elaboration).

For the hypothesized pattern of effects for different levels of brand stretch under naturally occurring marketplace conditions, see Figure 1. Note that testing the relationships on this curve is a calibration issue. As such, this research attempts to explore the full range of extension stretch.

Figure 2 depicts the proposed theoretical framework. It builds on prior literature to propose an ability-based relational processing advantage for high interdependents, which comprises two distinct processes—a wider and a deeper processing of relational bases of similarity. Note that the proposed processing advantage does not require any particular type of similarity (e.g., usage situation, product category) between the brand and its extension as either a necessary or a sufficient condition for its emergence; instead, it is grounded in a more general notion of flexible relationship assessment. However, it is contingent on the existence of appropriate levels of processing motivation. This contingency not only adds to the novelty and richness of the proposed framework but also has consequential implications for marketing practice in terms of strategies for harnessing this advantage and the marketing of farther brand stretches, as tested in Experiment 4 and detailed in the “General Discussion” section.

The relational processing advantage is distinct from the notion of context-dependent processing that is discussed in the self-construal literature. Context-dependent processing has been examined either by using visual stimuli (e.g., the embedded-figures test, the rod-and-frame test), in which the respondent’s ability to focus on the object versus the entire field or background is assessed (e.g., Kuhnen, Hannover, and Schubert 2002), or by assessing the extent to which respondents focus on the situation/context compared with the disposition of the target in generating attributions for behaviors (e.g., Norenzayan, Choi, and Nisbett 2002).

Figure 1
EXPECTED PATTERN OF EFFECTS FOR HIGH- VERSUS LOW- INTERDEPENDENCE CONSUMERS FOR VARYING LEVELS OF BRAND STRETCH UNDER MODERATE TO LOW PROCESSING MOTIVATION

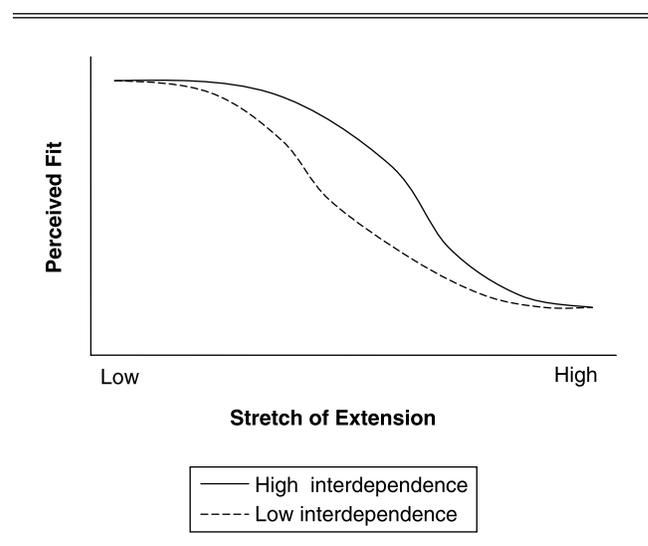
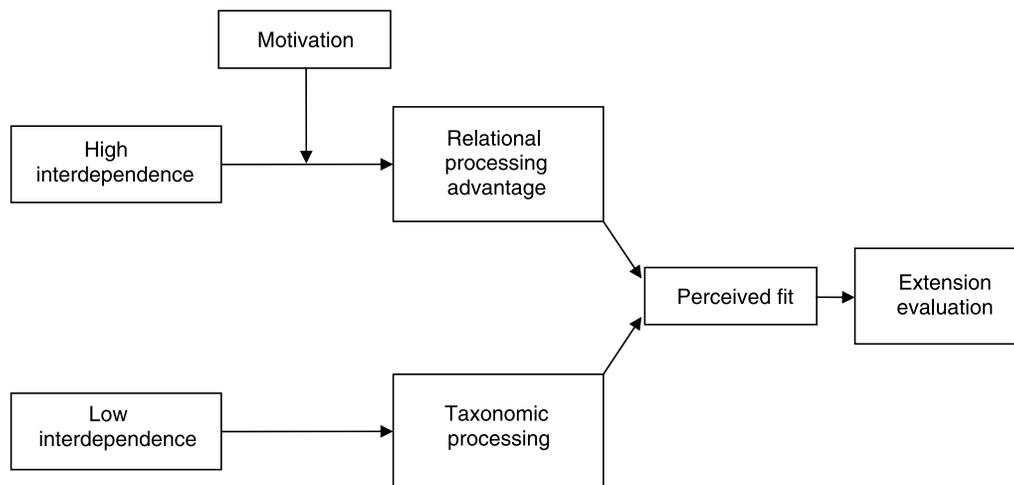


Figure 2
PROCESSING OF BRAND EXTENSION INFORMATION BY HIGH- VERSUS LOW-INTERDEPENDENCE CONSUMERS



Together, these two streams of literature suggest that respondents with an interdependent self-construal direct attention to the context or field when processing and evaluating a stimulus (e.g., being influenced by other items on the shelf when assessing the fat content of a cookie, as in Jain, Desai, and Mao 2007); however, people with a more independent self-construal tend to decontextualize the object from its field and process it analytically in an attempt to establish its category membership (e.g., focusing on the characteristics of the cookie).

As such, interdependents likely consider context more relevant and give it more weight in their evaluations than independents. If the parent brand were viewed as the context of the extension, it would follow that high interdependents are likely to weight an extension's perceived fit more heavily than low interdependents. This might lead to an opposite set of predictions from those that emerge from the model. For example, it could be argued that given their high level of sensitivity to the context, high interdependents are more likely to notice lower levels of feature overlap and to exhibit a contrast effect (Schwarz and Bless 2007) and thus evaluate brands stretches more unfavorably. Jain, Desai, and Mao (2007) make a similar prediction based on the context-dependency literature, suggesting that interdependents could be less open to brand stretches than independents. In contrast, it is argued here that interdependents are likely to be more open to brand stretches, especially when motivated to elaborate on the extension. As such, the context-dependency literature has typically focused on the weight given to the context (e.g., perceived fit) in decision making but does not provide direction as to whether interdependents can also unearth more relationships between stimuli (or perceive the fit as higher). However, the rationale presented in this article is based on interdependents' general ability to uncover relationships (with the context or otherwise), stemming from their flexible notion of relationships. The framework includes additional complexity by factoring in the role of processing motivation in the emer-

gence of this ability-based advantage and thus delineates not only conditions under which this advantage is likely to emerge but also strategies for harnessing it.

Overview of Experiments

Experiments 1 and 2 test the basic framework. In Experiment 1, participants varying in their self-construal (measured) are exposed to extensions that represent different levels of stretch from the parent brand, from very low to very high. Several brand replicates are included in this study to examine generalizability of the findings. Experiment 2 manipulates (instead of measures) respondents' self-construal to assess the robustness of the effects obtained in Experiment 1. Experiments 3 and 4 manipulate processing motivation in different ways to provide a more stringent test of the proposed framework and the relational processing advantage. As such, the current theorizing opens up the possibility that by enhancing interdependents' processing motivation, marketers might be able to harness the relational processing advantage even for farther brand stretches (for which it is less likely to emerge naturally) and to extend their brand farther. Experiment 4 uses this motivational argument to examine practical implications of the findings (i.e., using motivation-based ad copy strategies to harness the relational processing advantage for farther brand stretches). Finally, Experiment 5 examines the level of support for the underlying process mechanisms.

PRETESTS: IDENTIFYING EXTENSIONS

Several brand extensions, which varied in their level of stretch, were identified on the basis of extensive pretesting. In the first pretest, participants ($n = 53$) rated a series of products on their consistency or extent of stretch with one of several brand names (Adidas, J&J, and Sony) using two seven-point scales anchored by "extremely consistent/extremely inconsistent" and "extremely representative/extremely unrepresentative" ($r = .92$). The following seven

extensions, which represented different levels of inconsistency (ranging from very low to very high) with the parent brand, were selected for use in the main experiment: Sony high-definition television (5.87), J&J skin care lotion (4.60), J&J stuffed toys (3.25), Adidas brown shoes (2.92), Sony vacation resorts (2.15), Adidas calculator (1.40), and J&J instant noodles (1.22).

In a second pretest, participants ($n = 18$) listed any product categories, images, benefits, usage situations, target markets, and other associations that came to mind when exposed to the target brand names (Adidas, J&J, and Sony). These open-ended responses were used to generate a set of items that represented each brand's product category, attribute, usage situation, and target market associations (for the brand associations, see the Web Appendix, "Stimuli Used in Experiments" section; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>). These were used in the next pretest to assess the extent of similarity between each extension replicate and its parent brand.

In the third pretest, participants ($n = 50$) were given two ostensibly unrelated tasks, separated by a filler task. The first involved rating the consistency or stretch of the seven extension replicates using the scales from the first pretest. The second involved rating the level of similarity between each proposed extension product (e.g., vacation resorts) and (1) the product categories, (2) attributes, (3) usage situations, and (4) target market associated with the parent brand of the extension (e.g., Sony), as identified from the second pretest. Note that in this part of the questionnaire, neither the products nor the associations were explicitly identified with any particular brand; participants were simply asked to assess the similarity between the extension product (e.g., vacation resorts) and the corresponding categories (electronics), attributes (high-tech, modern), and so forth, associated with the intended parent brand (e.g., Sony), for each of the seven extension replicates. All assessments were made on seven-point scales. Participants also completed Singelis's (1994) self-construal scale.

The extension consistency ratings were similar to those obtained in the first pretest, but more important, no significant differences by self-construal emerged; both high- and low-interdependence groups (median split) assessed the same level of consistency between each of the extension replicates and their parent brands (all $ps > .20$). Cell means from the similarity ratings on the different dimensions appear in Table 1. Again, no significant differences emerged for the perceiver's level of interdependence (all $ps > .15$). Brief descriptions for each of the extensions, which controlled for favorability and believability of con-

tent, were developed (see the Web Appendix, "Stimuli Used in Experiments" section; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>).

EXPERIMENT 1

Design, Procedure, and Variables

Two hundred forty-six students participated in a 2 (interdependent self-construal: low versus high) \times 7 (brand extension replicates) between-subjects factorial design. Using seven-point scales, respondents evaluated the presented product concept ("very unfavorable/very favorable"), rated the perceived fit of the new product with the brand ("similar/dissimilar," "inconsistent/consistent"), and reported their brand familiarity. All participants completed Singelis's (1994) scale, which assessed their self-construal.

Results and Discussion

Participants who scored 4.50 or below were categorized in the low-interdependence group (median split). The rest were included in the high-interdependence group. Brand familiarity was used as a covariate in all the analyses. (The analyses were also conducted without the covariate and revealed the same pattern of results.)

For the cell means, see Table 2 and Figure 3. Figure 3 displays cell means for the high- and low-interdependence groups (y-axis) for the seven extensions (x-axis). The extensions are in the order of increasing consistency with the parent brand (left to right, representing increasing levels of stretch from the brand). Note that though the extensions do not represent equidistant scale points on the x-axis, their order is roughly indicative of the perceived distance from the parent brand and is helpful in assessing the overall pattern of findings. The difference between evaluations of the two self-construal groups is maximal in the middle of the graph and attenuates toward either end.

Planned contrasts reveal statistically significant differences in extension evaluations between the two interdependence groups for the two moderate stretch extensions (J&J stuffed toys and Adidas brown shoes; both $ps < .05$), such that high-interdependence participants rated them significantly higher than low-interdependence participants. This difference was attenuated as the extensions became less (J&J lotions, Sony high-definition television) or more (Sony vacation resorts, J&J instant noodles, Adidas calculators) of a stretch. More important, as the extensions stretched farther away (a lack of similarity on both product category and attribute associations), the difference between the two interdependence groups decreased to nonsignifi-

Table 1
SIMILARITY OF EXTENSION REPLICATES WITH THEIR PARENT BRAND ON THE FOUR DIMENSIONS: CELL MEANS ($N = 50$)

Extension	Category Similarity	Attribute Similarity	Usage Situation Similarity	Target Market Similarity
Sony high-definition televisions	6.80	6.64	6.76	6.52
J&J lotions	6.74	6.08	6.49	5.74
J&J stuffed toys	2.84	6.12	2.69	6.54
Adidas brown shoes	4.16	4.38	3.35	4.28
Sony vacation resorts	1.98	3.52	5.18	4.00
Adidas calculators	1.68	2.82	2.43	4.34
J&J instant noodles	1.24	1.76	1.16	5.12

Table 2

EXPERIMENT 1: EFFECT OF INTERDEPENDENCE ON THE EVALUATION AND PERCEIVED FIT OF EXTENSIONS VARYING IN THEIR LEVEL OF STRETCH: CELL MEANS AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS)

	Extension Evaluation		Perceived Fit	
	High Interdependence	Low Interdependence	High Interdependence	Low Interdependence
Sony high-definition televisions	5.69 ^a (.80) (n = 15)	6.09 ^a (.76) (n = 20)	6.27 ^a (.80) (n = 15)	5.85 ^a (1.09) (n = 20)
J&J lotions	5.37 ^a (1.01) (n = 14)	5.00 ^a (.99) (n = 15)	5.43 ^a (1.16) (n = 14)	5.07 ^a (.99) (n = 15)
J&J stuffed toys	5.62 ^a (1.05) (n = 16)	4.80 ^b (.98) (n = 17)	4.24 ^a (1.52) (n = 16)	3.38 ^b (1.14) (n = 17)
Adidas brown shoes	5.15 ^a (1.39) (n = 19)	4.26 ^b (1.28) (n = 20)	3.95 ^a (1.71) (n = 19)	3.10 ^b (1.48) (n = 20)
Sony vacation resorts	4.40 ^a (1.43) (n = 22)	4.15 ^a (1.61) (n = 16)	2.86 ^a (1.69) (n = 22)	2.56 ^a (1.54) (n = 16)
Adidas calculators	3.21 ^a (1.74) (n = 17)	3.53 ^a (1.39) (n = 20)	1.41 ^a (.51) (n = 17)	1.79 ^a (.92) (n = 20)
J&J instant noodles	3.55 ^a (1.70) (n = 16)	3.52 ^a (1.22) (n = 19)	2.06 ^a (.85) (n = 16)	1.84 ^a (.90) (n = 19)

Notes: Different superscripts within each row for a dependent variable indicate a significant difference at $p < .05$.

cance, implying that high interdependents may not be motivated to engage in relational elaboration in these contexts. The absence of differences for close extensions (which present easy-to-uncover relationships) was consistent with the hypothesizing presented previously.

The perceived fit results were consistent with the pattern obtained for overall evaluations. Planned contrasts revealed that high-interdependence participants perceived the fit of moderate-stretch extensions (J&J stuffed toys and Adidas brown shoes) as higher than the low-interdependence participants (see Table 2); however, there was no difference in the perceived fit of the farther (Sony vacation resorts, J&J instant noodles, and Adidas calculators) or closer (J&J lotions, Sony high-definition television) extensions by the two groups. As expected, the main effect of extension was also significant ($F(6, 231) = 58.21, p < .01$), indicating that the different extensions varied in perceived fit with their parent brands.

These data suggest that the relational processing advantage of high interdependents is most likely to emerge in the context of moderate brand stretches, but it attenuates and then disappears as the extension moves farther from or closer to the parent brand. Experiment 2 examines the robustness of this pattern of findings in the context of a research setting in which self-construal is manipulated with priming instead of measured.

EXPERIMENT 2: REPLICATION WITH PRIMING

Design and Procedure

One hundred twenty-seven undergraduate students participated in a 2 (self-construal: interdependent prime versus independent prime) \times 3 (extension stretch: low, moderate, high) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were told that they would be participating in a series of short, unrelated research studies. The first study included the priming manipulations of self-construal. In the second study, participants were asked to evaluate a new brand extension being considered by J&J. They responded to the key dependent variables. The third task was unrelated to

this experiment; participants were quizzed for potential hypotheses guessing and were debriefed.

Independent and Dependent Variables

Self-construal. Participants' self-construal was primed in accordance with recent research in this area (e.g., Brewer and Gardner 1996; Mandel 2003). Two priming manipulations were used. The first prime was based on Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto's (1991) approach, in which participants read a short story about Sostaras, a Sumerian warrior who must select an officer for an upcoming battle. The second prime was a pronoun-circling task based on Brewer and Gardner's (1996) work (for details related to the priming manipulations, see the Web Appendix, "Methodology" section; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>). All participants completed the priming tasks that corresponded to their condition (independent or interdependent).

Brand extension. Extensions for the J&J brand from Experiment 1 were used in this study (low stretch: skin care lotion; moderate stretch: stuffed toys; high stretch: instant noodles).

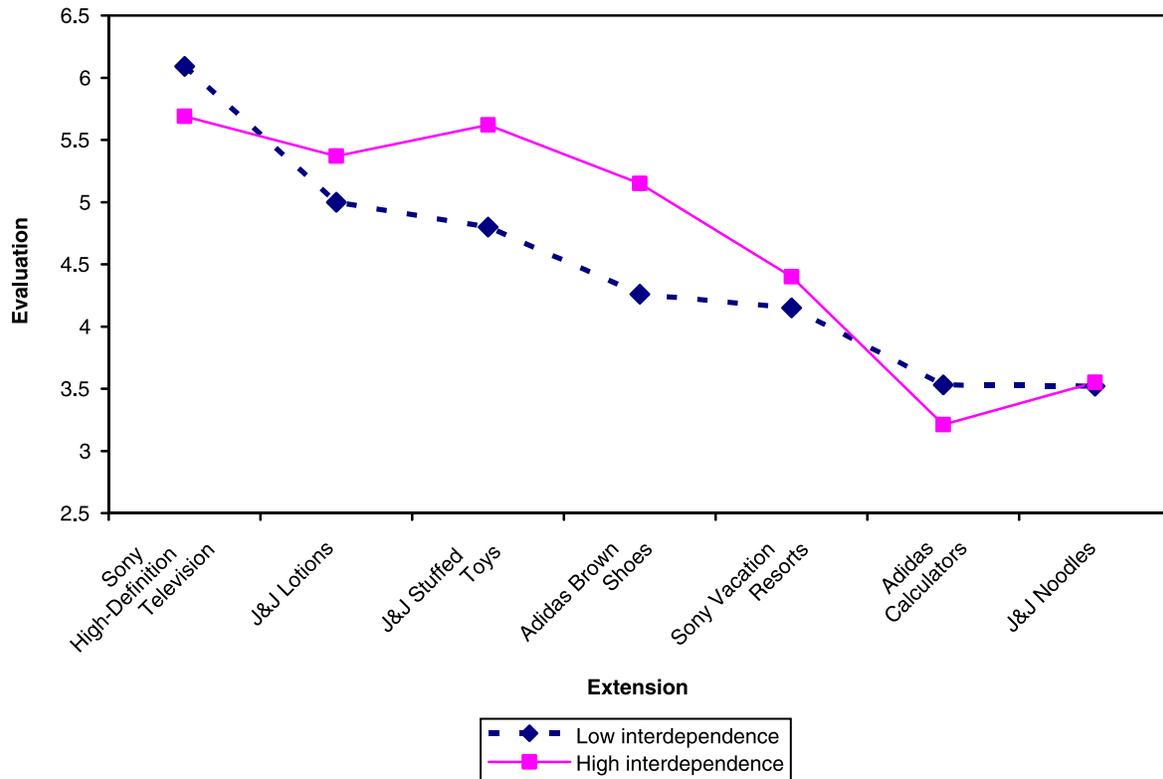
Dependent variables. On a seven-point scale, participants reported the extent to which they would be likely to purchase the new product if they were in the market for that product category (e.g., instant noodles). A two-item measure of perceived fit (seven-point scales anchored by "similar/dissimilar" and "inconsistent/consistent") and a measure of brand familiarity were also included. As in Experiment 1, brand familiarity was used as a covariate in all the analyses.

Results

A 2 (prime) \times 3 (extension) interaction on the purchase intention measure emerged ($F(2, 120) = 2.94, p = .06$). The contrasts supported the pattern of effects from Experiment 1. Specifically, interdependence-primed participants expressed a greater likelihood of purchasing the moderate extension (stuffed toys) than the independence-primed respondents ($M_s = 4.63$ versus 3.81; $F(1, 120) = 3.89, p < .05$); however, no such difference was observed in the case

Figure 3

EXPERIMENT 1: HIGH- AND LOW-INTERDEPENDENCE PARTICIPANTS' EXTENSION EVALUATIONS FOR INCREASING LEVELS OF BRAND STRETCH



of the low-stretch (skin care lotion: $M_s = 4.42$ versus 4.49 ; $F(1, 120) < 1$) and high-stretch (instant noodles: $M_s = 2.35$ versus 2.95 ; $F(1, 120) = 1.61, p > .15$) extensions.

The perceived fit results were consistent with the pattern obtained for purchase intentions. The 2×3 interaction was significant ($F(2, 120) = 3.86, p < .05$). Further analyses revealed that interdependence-primed participants perceived the fit of stuffed toys as significantly higher than independence-primed participants ($M_s = 4.31$ versus 3.47 ; $F(1, 120) = 6.00, p < .05$); however, there was no difference in the perceived fit of instant noodles ($M_s = 1.46$ versus 1.91 ; $F(1, 120) < 1$) and skin care lotions ($M_s = 5.22$ versus 5.46 ; $F(1, 120) < 1$) by the two groups. As expected, the main effect of extension fit was significant ($F(1, 120) = 120.97, p < .01$).

Discussion

Using a priming paradigm, this study replicated the findings obtained with the J&J extensions in Experiment 1 (in which self-construal was measured). Data from the two studies converge, revealing that when a moderate relationship exists between the parent brand and its extension, people with an interdependent self-construal perceive its fit as higher. This enhanced perception of fit increases their extension evaluation. Note that the pattern of effects obtained with the brand evaluation measure in Experiment 1 was replicated using a purchase-likelihood measure in Experiment 2.

Although the results suggest that differences by self-construal do not emerge in the evaluation of farther extensions because the high interdependents are not motivated to engage in the effort required to uncover these difficult-to-find relationships between the brand and an extension, an alternative explanation for these effects is also possible—namely, that high interdependents simply lack the ability to uncover relationships in the domain of farther extensions. As the extensions move farther from the parent brand, perhaps it becomes difficult for both high and low interdependents to uncover any meaningful relationships. The issue that needs further examination is whether the absence of an enhancement for high interdependents with the farther extensions in these data is due to motivational (proposed herein) rather than ability-related (alternative explanation) constraints.

Experiment 3 tests this notion. High levels of processing motivation were induced for half the participants by manipulating the cover story. Participants were then exposed to the lowest-fit extension from the pretests (i.e., J&J instant noodles) for which no enhancement emerged for the high interdependents consistently across the first two studies and regardless of whether interdependence was measured or primed. Cognitive responses data were also included to examine whether, as implicated by the relational processing advantage, high interdependents were likely to engage in

relational processing when motivated to process information in this low-relational context.

EXPERIMENT 3: THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION

Design, Procedure, and Variables

Eighty-five students participated in a 2 (interdependent self-construal: low versus high) \times 2 (processing motivation: high versus low) between-subjects factorial design. Respondents were told that they were participating in a survey to provide feedback to the Institute for Product Research (a fictitious organization), which was conducting research on new product ideas that corporations were considering. In the high-processing-motivation condition, participants were directed to read the information carefully and were informed that their evaluations would play an important role in the institute's recommendations and analysis because they were among only a few students who had been asked to provide input on this new product concept (e.g., Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991).

Participants were then exposed to information about a new product introduction, J&J instant noodles. They evaluated the extension, its perceived fit, and brand familiarity (as in Experiment 1). They were also asked to list all the thoughts that came to mind when evaluating this new product.

Two independent judges coded the thoughts into four categories: (1) relational thoughts, which described similarities/associations or ways to relate the extension to the brand; (2) positive extension evaluations, which indicated a favorable response to the extension; (3) negative extension evaluations, which indicated unfavorable reactions to it; and (4) other brand and extension thoughts (for a detailed description of the thought categories, see the Web Appendix, "Methodology" section; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>). The interrater reliability was .86, and differences were resolved with discussion.

Brand familiarity was used as a covariate in all the analyses. Self-construal was measured using Singelis's (1994) scale. A median split of the data was conducted to identify respondents who were high versus low on interdependence.

Results

Manipulation check. An index of total elaboration was computed to assess success of the processing motivation manipulation. Thoughts in all four categories (described previously) were summed to compute this index. In support of this manipulation, only a main effect of processing motivation emerged ($F(1, 80) = 8.07, p < .01$), such that participants generated significantly more thoughts in the high-motivation condition than in the baseline condition ($M_s = 2.30$ versus 1.74).

Extension evaluation. An interaction effect emerged for the evaluation measure ($F(1, 80) = 3.95, p < .05$). High-interdependence participants who were motivated to process the extension information evaluated it more positively than their counterparts in the baseline condition ($M_s = 4.80$ versus $3.86; F(1, 80) = 4.62, p < .05$). However, no significant differences emerged in the extension evaluations of the low interdependents in the high-motivation versus baseline conditions ($M_s = 3.96$ versus $4.25; F(1, 80) < 1$) (for a detailed table of means, see the Web Appendix; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>).

Perceived fit. A similar pattern of data emerged for the perceived fit measures. The interaction effect ($F(1, 80) = 3.23, p < .08$) indicated that increasing the processing motivation of high interdependents enhanced their perceived fit assessments ($M_s = 2.70$ versus $2.01; F(1, 80) = 4.17, p < .05$); however, processing motivation did not influence the perceived fit assessments of the low interdependents ($M_s = 2.05$ versus $2.19; F(1, 80) < 1$).

Relational thoughts. The interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 80) = 4.49, p < .05$). Increasing processing motivation led to an increased number of relational thoughts for the high interdependents ($M_s = .27$ versus $.05; F(1, 80) = 4.91, p < .05$) because they attempted to "search" for potential relationships. However, low interdependents were unable to detect more relationships even when they were motivated ($M_s = .00$ versus $.09; F(1, 80) < 1$).

Net thoughts. A net thoughts index was computed as the difference between all positive (relational plus other positive) and negative thoughts. A significant interaction emerged for the net thoughts index ($F(1, 80) = 6.95, p < .01$). Recall that the product in question is a far extension; therefore, net thoughts are expected to be negative (reflecting the low fit) in the baseline condition for both interdependence groups. The pattern of means for high interdependents indicated that though their net reaction to the extension was negative in the baseline condition, when they were motivated to process, their net response was no longer negative ($M_s = -.99$ versus $.02; F(1, 80) = 6.59, p < .05$). However, the low interdependents, who also exhibited negative net thoughts in the baseline condition, continued to do so under conditions of high motivation ($M_s = -.94$ versus $-1.33; F(1, 80) = 1.10, p > .30$).

Mediational analyses. According to the process model, the relational processing advantage is likely to emerge for high interdependents under elevated processing motivation but not when processing motivation is low. The expected pattern of effects for the high-motivation conditions is as follows: self-construal \rightarrow relational elaboration \rightarrow perceived fit. However, mediation by relational thoughts (or relational processing advantage) is not expected under low-motivation settings. Given this expectancy and the null effects in low-motivation settings (both in analysis of variance and in regression), mediation analyses (Baron and Kenny 1986) are reported only for the high-motivation conditions.

Under high-processing motivation, self-construal emerged as a predictor of perceived fit of the extension ($\beta = .28, t = 1.88, p < .07$) and the amount of relational elaboration ($\beta = .39, t = 2.74, p < .01$). When both self-construal and relational thoughts are used in the same regression equation to predict perceived fit, the effect of self-construal becomes nonsignificant ($\beta = .09, t = .606, p > .50$), whereas relational thoughts emerge as a significant predictor of perceived fit ($\beta = .50, t = 3.41, p < .01$). These analyses suggest complete mediation of the effects of self-construal on perceived fit by relational elaboration under high-processing motivation (Sobel test-statistic = $2.13, p < .05$).

Discussion

Data from this experiment reveal that motivating high-interdependence respondents to process the extension information increased their likelihood of uncovering relation-

ships between the brand and the extension. This discovery of relationships appears to have enhanced the perceived fit of the extension, changing the negative reaction in the baseline condition to a more favorable one, resulting in greater acceptance of this brand stretch. These findings support a relational processing advantage for high interdependents; specifically, higher levels of elaboration elicited a more favorable response for high interdependents; however, there was no influence on the likelihood of the low interdependents uncovering relationships or the nature of their response.

Together, the findings from Experiments 1–3 suggest that despite their relational processing advantage, high interdependents are not likely to evaluate far extensions favorably under naturally occurring marketplace conditions (unless they are explicitly motivated to elaborate on them). A natural question that follows is, How can marketers harness the relational processing advantage of the high interdependents in marketplace contexts to increase acceptability of brand stretches to this segment of consumers? For example, can marketers enhance the acceptability of farther brand stretches for this segment by including ad copy strategies that motivate these consumers to elaborate on the extension information? This would be an important insight for marketers.

Experiment 4 examines these vital managerial implications of the proposed theoretical framework. Processing motivation was manipulated with an ad copy variable— inclusion of a question in the headline. Prior research indicates that when presented with a question in the ad heading, respondents are motivated to answer it covertly by elaborating on the message content (Ahluwalia and Burnkrant 2004; McQuarrie and Mick 1996; Mothersbaugh, Huhmann, and Franke 2002). In other words, inclusion of a question in the heading is likely to enhance the consumer's motivation to elaborate on the extension information. Experiment 4 tests whether the inclusion of copy-based techniques for increasing processing motivation enhances the acceptance of farther extensions by highly interdependent consumers.

EXPERIMENT 4: IMPLICATIONS OF RELATIONAL PROCESSING ADVANTAGE

Design, Procedure, and Variables

Eighty-six students participated in a 2 (interdependent self-construal: low versus high) \times 2 (processing motivation: high versus low) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were told that they were participating in a survey to provide feedback to the Institute for Product Research (a fictitious organization), which was conducting research on new product ideas that corporations were considering. They read the draft copy of an advertisement for the target extension. A different far extension (Sony vacation resorts) was included in this study to examine generalizability of the motivation-based findings across brand replicates. The content of the advertisement was based on the product description developed for Sony vacation resorts in the first experiment (for a copy of the advertisements, see the Web Appendix, "Stimuli Used in Experiments" section; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>).

Participants' processing motivation was manipulated with the headline of the advertisement. In the high-processing-motivation condition, the headline asked, "What would you expect from Sony vacation resorts?" In the low-processing-motivation condition, the headline was a statement: "Sony vacation resorts."

The key dependent measures followed Experiment 3; respondents evaluated the extension, its perceived fit, and brand familiarity and listed all the thoughts that came to mind when evaluating this new product. In addition, two behavioral intent measures (assessed on seven-point scales) were included in this experiment to examine the scope of outcomes. The first assessed participants' likelihood of searching for additional information about the new product, and the second measured the likelihood of considering the new product when making a purchase in the vacation resorts category. Participants' self-construal was assessed with Singelis's (1994) scale.

Results

Manipulation check. Only a main effect of ad version emerged for the total thoughts index ($F(1, 81) = 7.23, p < .01$). Participants generated significantly more thoughts in the question condition than in the statement condition ($M_s = 2.05$ versus 1.55), indicating that the question version motivated participants to elaborate more extensively on the advertisement.

Extension evaluation. An interaction effect was significant for the evaluation measure ($F(1, 81) = 6.07, p < .05$). The high-interdependence group demonstrated significantly more positive evaluations of the extension after viewing the question version of the advertisement than after viewing the statement version of the advertisement ($M_s = 4.60$ versus 3.85 ; $F(1, 81) = 3.99, p < .05$); however, the low-interdependence groups did not differ in their extension evaluations when exposed to the question versus the statement advertisement ($M_s = 2.92$ versus 3.38 ; $F(1, 81) = 2.33, p > .10$) (for a detailed table of cell means, see the Web Appendix; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>).

Behavioral intention. A similar pattern also emerged for the behavioral intention measures. The interaction effect was significant for the information search measure ($F(1, 81) = 8.39, p < .01$) and purchase intentions ($F(1, 81) = 6.48, p < .05$). The high-interdependence participants exposed to the question (versus statement) advertisement expressed a significantly greater intention to search for information about Sony resorts ($M_s = 4.47$ versus 3.39 ; $F(1, 81) = 4.47, p < .05$) and to consider this new product extension ($M_s = 4.44$ versus 3.41 ; $F(1, 81) = 4.59, p < .05$). In contrast, low-interdependence participants expressed a lower information search desire when exposed to the question advertisement ($M_s = 2.19$ versus 3.01 ; $F(1, 81) = 4.06, p < .05$), and there were no differences by ad version on the purchase intention measure ($M_s = 2.34$ versus 2.85 ; $F(1, 81) = 2.28, p > .15$).

Perceived fit. The pattern of effects for perceived fit mirrored the other dependent variables. The interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 81) = 5.17, p < .05$); high-interdependence participants perceived the fit of the extension as significantly higher in the question than in the statement condition ($M_s = 2.92$ versus 2.13 ; $F(1, 81) = 5.10, p < .05$).

.05); however, no differences in perceived fit by ad condition emerged for the low-interdependence participants ($M_s = 1.74$ versus 1.98 ; $F(1, 81) = 1.01, p > .30$).

Relational thoughts. The cognitive responses coding scheme followed that used in Experiment 3. A two-way interaction effect emerged for the relational thoughts ($F(1, 81) = 5.08, p < .05$). The pattern of data indicated that, consistent with expectations from a far extension, in the statement condition, high interdependents reported low levels of relational thoughts; however, their relational processing advantage clearly emerged when they were exposed to the question version of the advertisement, which motivated them to elaborate ($M_s = .23$ versus $.99$; $F(1, 81) = 7.52, p < .01$). Note that despite the higher processing motivation in the question condition, low interdependents were unable to uncover relationships (average close to 0), reporting means that were not significantly different from the statement condition ($M_s = .06$ versus $.15$; $F(1, 81) < 1$).

Net thoughts. A significant interaction also emerged for the net thoughts index ($F(1, 81) = 6.47, p < .05$). The pattern of means indicated that, consistent with expectations from a far extension, the net reaction to the statement version of the advertisement was negative for the low and high interdependents ($M_s = -1.11$ versus $-.76$). However, inclusion of a question in the advertisement, which motivated the high interdependents to engage in relational elaboration, changed it to a positive net response ($M = .58$ versus $-.76$; $F(1, 81) = 12.03, p < .01$) for this group. However, net thoughts of the low interdependents were equally unfavorable in the question and statement conditions ($M_s = -1.08$ versus -1.11 ; $F(1, 81) < 1$).

Mediational analyses. As in Experiment 3, mediational analyses were conducted for the high-motivation (question-based advertisement) condition. For these participants, self-construal emerged as a significant predictor of perceived fit of the extension ($\beta = .47, t = 3.47, p < .01$) and also significantly predicted the amount of relational elaboration ($\beta = .40, t = 2.88, p < .01$). When both self-construal and relational thoughts were used in the same regression equation to predict perceived fit, the effect of self-construal was no longer statistically significant at conventional levels ($\beta = .21, t = 1.87, p > .05$), whereas relational thoughts remained a significant predictor of perceived fit ($\beta = .64, t = 5.73, p < .01$). These analyses suggest mediation of the effects of ad version on perceived fit by relational elaboration (Sobel test-statistic = $2.58, p < .01$).

Discussion

Using a marketer-relevant manipulation of motivation and a different brand replicate, Experiment 4 replicated the pattern of data obtained in Experiment 3 and thus enhances confidence in the robustness of a relational processing advantage for high interdependents. In addition, these data converge with the findings of Experiment 3 and suggest that marketers can effectively tap into this relational advantage by enhancing the processing motivation of these consumers (potentially with ad copy variables). Finally, the emergence of strong effects with the behavioral intention measures (information search and purchase intention) is a promising indicator of the relevance of these findings to the marketplace.

Although data from Experiments 3 and 4 are supportive of an ability advantage, it is plausible that these effects are driven by differences in the perceived diagnosticity of various types of brand associations for the high- versus low-interdependence participants. In high-motivation conditions, although the low interdependents are able to discern the tenuous connections used by high interdependents, they might perceive them as less diagnostic for fit assessments and extension evaluations and therefore might not use them as an input. Importantly, prior research suggests that diagnosticity largely determines which associations are used in extension evaluations (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994). Experiment 5 was run to clarify the mechanism underlying the emergent relational processing advantage.

EXPERIMENT 5: THE UNDERLYING MECHANISM

Design, Procedure, and Variables

Seventy-nine students participated in a 2 (interdependent self-construal: low versus high) \times 2 (brand-extension relationship: generated versus given) between-subjects design. The cover story and extension (J&J instant noodles) were similar to those in Experiment 3; minor modifications were made to accommodate the manipulations. In the relationship-generated condition, participants were explicitly directed to assess the fit of the extension with its parent brand and to write down all similarities and possible relationships between the brand and the extension that they could perceive. In the relationship-given condition, instead of the direction to generate relationships, an additional sentence was added to the product description. It stated that this new product introduction would help bring to the market yet another high-quality J&J product for healthy families and children. The relational connections of "families," "children," and "healthy" were chosen from the open-ended responses in Experiment 3, which revealed that these were the most frequent relational connections participants generated when they were exposed to the instant-noodles extension. Participants rated the extension and its perceived fit. Brand familiarity was used as a covariate in all the analyses. Self-construal was measured using Singelis's (1994) scale. A median split was conducted to identify respondents who were high versus low on interdependence.

The role of ability differences in explaining the relational processing advantage would be strongly supported if a higher number of relational thoughts were generated by high interdependents than by low interdependents in the relationship-generation condition (in which participants were explicitly directed to list all connections they could discern between the brand and the extension) and an enhancement was observed in the evaluation and fit perceptions of low interdependents when they were explicitly provided with connections between the brand and the extension, a condition that would help them overcome their ability deficit. The perceived diagnosticity differences would receive support as the underlying mechanism for the relational processing advantage if extension evaluations and fit assessments of low interdependents did not improve even when the ability deficit was bridged by provision of explicit relationships, indicating that they did not factor these connections into their extension evaluation, because they perceived them as irrelevant for extension assessments.

Results

Cognitive responses. Open-ended responses in the self-generation condition were coded as they were in Experiment 3. The high-interdependence group generated significantly more relational thoughts than the low-interdependence group ($M_s = .45$ versus $.09$; $F(1, 36) = 4.27, p < .05$), demonstrating their superior ability to uncover relationships. Note that the average number of relationships generated was fairly low, even for the high interdependents, indicating the difficulty of generating relationships for this far brand stretch. Analysis of the net thoughts data revealed that the high interdependents' net thoughts were significantly less negative than those of the low interdependents ($M_s = -.44$ versus -1.29 ; $F(1, 36) = 8.44, p < .01$). These patterns of data support the notion that the relational processing advantage is driven by an ability difference in the high versus low interdependents in searching for relationships.

Extension evaluation. A significant interaction emerged for the evaluation measure ($F(1, 74) = 4.80, p < .05$). Explicitly providing the relational connections led to a significant evaluation enhancement for the low interdependents ($M_s = 4.42$ versus 2.84 ; $F(1, 74) = 13.38, p < .01$) but not for the high interdependents ($M_s = 4.14$ versus 3.89 ; $F(1, 74) < 1$), who were presumably able to generate connections on their own. In addition, when participants were asked to generate relational connections, the high-interdependence group evaluated the extension more positively than the low-interdependence group ($M_s = 3.89$ versus 2.84 ; $F(1, 74) = 6.03, p < .05$); however, when the ability differential was bridged, no significant difference emerged between the two groups ($M_s = 4.14$ versus 4.42 ; $F(1, 74) < 1$).

Perceived fit. A similar pattern of data emerged for the perceived fit measures. The interaction effect ($F(1, 74) = 4.10, p < .05$) indicated that explicitly providing the relationships significantly enhanced the perceived fit of the low interdependents ($M_s = 3.09$ versus 1.81 ; $F(1, 74) = 9.53, p < .01$) but did not change the fit assessments of high interdependents ($M_s = 2.97$ versus 2.87 ; $F(1, 74) < 1$) (for a detailed table of means, see the Web Appendix; <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrjune08>).

Discussion

The pattern of data obtained in Experiment 5 suggests that the relational processing advantage is driven by an ability differential between high- and low-interdependent consumers in hunting for and perceiving relationships, given high interdependents' more flexible notion of relationships. There is strong support for an ability differential between the high- and the low-interdependence groups: (1) High interdependents generated more relational thoughts when motivated to elaborate (in Experiments 3 and 4) and when explicitly directed to list all relational connections in Experiment 5; (2) they perceived the extension's fit as higher and demonstrated greater openness to the extension idea, and their net thoughts were less unfavorable; and (3) low interdependents exhibited significantly higher evaluations and fit assessments when provided with explicit connections, which helped overcome their ability deficit.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In today's marketplace, not only is stretching a brand a potential avenue for growth and return on investment, but it may also allow the brand to reap further stretchability advantages that accompany broad brands (e.g., Meyvis and Janiszewski 2004). Under these circumstances, understanding the factors that are likely to enhance a brand's stretchability is a consequential issue for researchers. The current research uses an individual-difference approach to identify one such variable—the extent to which the consumer's self-construal is interdependent.

This article proposes and tests a theoretical framework for understanding when and how the consumer's level of interdependence is likely to enhance his or her acceptance of brand stretches. At the heart of the conceptualization is the notion of a relational processing advantage or the superior ability of highly interdependent consumers to uncover relationships between a brand and its extension. This article builds on the literature on differences in grouping and organization of objects by people who vary in their self-construal, but it integrates this literature with findings in the brand extensions area and examines the implications for marketplace settings (which tend to differ from the research paradigm in which this research has been conducted). Specifically, brand extension information, as with most other product information, is typically processed under lower levels of motivation; in addition, as a brand stretches farther, the relationships might be less evident and, therefore, effortful to uncover. In contrast, most prior self-construal research has been conducted under higher processing motivation using stimuli that are relational in nature. This research examines the processing of low-relational stimuli under low-processing-motivation conditions for consumers who vary in their self-construal.

The theorizing and empirical findings reported in this research suggest that the relational processing advantage of high interdependents can be tapped to influence extension evaluations, but only when these consumers are motivated to employ their superior relational abilities. A relational processing advantage emerges in the domain of moderate-fit extensions, partly because a moderate level of deviation is known to be a motivator and is likely to engage and draw the person into resolving the presented deviation (e.g., Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994). Note that the effort required to resolve the deviation is not likely to be very demanding in the context of moderate brand stretches. In contrast, as the relationships become more difficult to uncover, identifying them necessitates not only a more flexible notion of relationships but also motivation to employ the significant level of effort required to unearth them. Under these conditions, a relational processing advantage is likely to emerge if the consumer is motivated to process the extension information or is provided explicitly with these connections. Data from three studies that use different manipulations of motivation and two brand replicates (J&J instant noodles and Sony vacation resorts) support this finding. Finally, as the relationship between the brand and the extension becomes more obvious (close extensions), it is less likely to motivate the audience to engage in elaboration beyond the evident product category and/or attribute similarities. A relational processing advantage is not likely to emerge under these conditions.

There was no clear relationship between the emergence of a relational processing advantage and the presence/absence of a particular base of similarity between the extension and the brand (see Table 1). These findings indicate that though high interdependents may be more likely to uncover some types of similarities (e.g., usage situation, target market overlap) when motivated to search for relationships (e.g., Ng and Houston 2006), they may not need these similarities as a prerequisite for the relational processing advantage to emerge (e.g., J&J stuffed toys), and neither are they likely to benefit from them, unless they are motivated to engage in high levels of elaboration (e.g., Sony resorts). These findings support (1) the flexible notion of relationships (both a wider and a deeper consideration of possibilities) that is proposed as the basis of the relational processing advantage and (2) the motivational requirement for this effect to emerge.

A question is, What might happen if high levels of processing motivation were externally induced at moderate stretch levels (e.g., through processing instructions or copy strategies)? As such, this level of deviation is already expected to motivate consumers to elaborate (especially if some information about the extension is provided). If motivation were increased to higher levels with an external manipulation, low interdependents might be driven to search harder for relationships and, consequently, to uncover more of them (e.g., Maoz and Tybout 2002). However, high interdependents will likely also be driven to expand their search efforts. Given the higher relational ability of high interdependents, relative differences between the two groups, in terms of fit assessments and extension evaluations, might still emerge under externally induced high-motivation conditions.

The notion of a relational processing advantage is consistent with and builds on prior research on relational processing, or similarity-based processing (e.g., Hunt and Seta 1984; Malaviya, Kisielius, and Sternthal 1996; Meyers-Levy 1991). Prior research has identified task (e.g., processing instructions, processing cues) and stimuli (e.g., level of similarity in items) factors that are likely to induce relational processing. This article adds to this literature by proposing and testing an individual-difference variable (self-construal) that is likely to influence the extent of relational processing. More important, relational processing is defined more broadly not only to include consideration of a larger number of different category associations (e.g., attributes, usage situation), as is typically defined in prior research (e.g., Hunt and Seta 1984; Malaviya, Kisielius, and Sternthal 1996), but also to signify a flexibility in the perceiver's notion of relationships (e.g., extent of relational elaboration within each category and between different categories, consideration of the more tenuous connections).

Prior research has typically examined the role of relational processing in domains in which distinctiveness tends to be more diagnostic than similarity for product evaluations and therefore has found the role of relational processing to be somewhat more limited in influencing brand evaluations (e.g., Malaviya, Kisielius, and Sternthal 1996; Meyers-Levy 1991). In contrast, the current research examines a context in which similarities are crucial for evaluations—namely, brand extensions—because the equity associated with the parent brand is most likely to be transferred

to the extension when it is perceived as relatively similar to the parent brand (Keller 2002). Therefore, relational processing, which focuses on finding similarities among stimuli, is likely to be extremely influential in this domain in determining the extent to which a brand name can be leveraged in the marketplace.

Extension Consistency and Its Predictors

Although the level of extension consistency is sometimes discussed as a discreet variable in this research (e.g., moderate, lower), it is important to understand that assessing the level of consistency is ultimately a calibration issue. As such, this article examines the general nature of relationships in the full range of extension consistency.

Prior research has examined several determinants of extension consistency; however, there is still a lack of clarity regarding its most critical drivers and how a manager would assess the degree of stretch that an extension represents. This research, in particular the analysis of the data collected in the third pretest, provides some clarity and further insights in this regard. The means from the third pretest (Table 1) reveal that higher consistency levels appear to be typically associated with high levels of similarity on the category and attribute dimensions (but not necessarily usage situation and target market overlap). Recall that extension consistency was also assessed in this pretest. To examine empirically the relative influence of the different bases of similarity on the extension's perceived consistency with the parent brand, the extension's similarity ratings on the four dimensions assessed in this pretest were regressed on the participants' extension consistency ratings. The results revealed that similarity to brand on the four assessed dimensions (category, attribute, usage situation, target market) explained a high level of variance in extension consistency (adjusted $R^2 = .79$, $F(4, 335) = 324.20$, $p < .01$). Most important, category similarity emerged as the best predictor ($\beta = .82$, $t = 19.82$, $p < .01$) of extension consistency, followed by attribute similarity ($\beta = .13$, $t = 3.34$, $p < .01$). However, neither of the other two dimensions (usage situation: $\beta = -.04$, $t = -1.08$, $p > .25$; target market: $\beta = .02$, $t = .69$, $p > .45$) approached significance. When usage situation and target market variables were dropped from the model, the adjusted R-square and fit indexes were unchanged (adjusted $R^2 = .79$, $F(2, 344) = 653.34$, $p < .01$), indicating that these dimensions are not likely to be important in determining extension consistency. Recall that participants' self-construal was also assessed in this pretest. Therefore, the data were also analyzed (using median splits) to assess whether a similar pattern emerged for high versus low interdependents. Notably, no significant effects of self-construal emerged ($ps > .15$). Therefore, it can be concluded that in evaluating extension consistency, consumers tend to focus on product category and attribute similarity.

Another key finding is that in the absence of similarity on these key dimensions (product category and attributes), even a reasonable similarity on the other bases (target market or usage situation) does not seem to enhance the consistency ratings. Perhaps these bases are elaborated on only after an initial threshold, which is based on similarity assessments of the primary dimensions (category and attributes), is met and motivates further elaboration, even for the high interdependents. In the case of the vacation resorts and

instant-noodles extensions, the initial consistency assessment might have been low enough to dissuade any further elaboration of the other bases of similarity, even by high interdependents (who could have uncovered similarities, if motivated to elaborate). In summary, these findings indicate that researchers and practitioners should focus on category and attribute similarity when assessing an extension's consistency.

This research revealed that different combinations of similarity ratings could result in a relatively similar level of consistency. For example, a high level of similarity on one dimension (e.g., attributes) but a low level on another (e.g., category, as with J&J stuffed toys) resulted in an equivalent consistency rating as a moderate level of similarity on both these dimensions (e.g., Adidas brown shoes). This finding suggests that the consistency rating is based on an averaging of similarity assessments across these two dimensions.

In summary, this research suggests that if an extension has consistency on one of these two dominant bases or at least a moderate similarity on both, it has a reasonable chance of success, especially if its target market tends to include highly relational thinkers (e.g., Easterners). However, as the levels of similarity on these two dimensions become lower, so does the likelihood of an extension's success, even though it might have a target market or even usage situation overlap. A cursory examination of recent brand extensions in the marketplace supports these conclusions. Recent extensions that have failed include Lamborghini notebook computer, Maxim hair color, Heinz cleaning vinegar, Bic underwear, and Harley-Davidson cake decorating kit. Notably, each extension lacks a similarity with its parent brand on product category and attributes. Although several of the extensions have some target market overlap (e.g., Maxim magazine hair color, Lamborghini computers) or even usage setting similarity (Heinz cleaning product for use in the kitchen, where other Heinz food products are used), apparently that was not sufficient to drive sales. Conversely, recent brand stretches that have been successful include Jeep strollers, Olay vitamins, Harley-Davidson footwear, Godiva ice cream, and Red Cross emergency radios. These successful brand stretches have similarity with at least one of the two main bases—product category or attributes (e.g., Jeep attributes of durability and smooth ride, Olay attributes of skin and beauty care, Harley-Davidson product category of motorcycle apparel/accessories and attribute of ruggedness, Godiva attributes of richness and indulgence, Red Cross product category of emergency and disaster services).

Managerial Strategies to Increase the Acceptance of Brand Stretches

This research provides three general directions. First, it identifies target markets that are likely to be most open and receptive to brand stretches and thus opens the door for strategies that tap into this advantage. Second, on the basis of the motivational argument, this research suggests marketing techniques for enhancing the acceptance of brand stretches for high interdependents. Third, it opens up a discussion of strategies to increase the appreciation of farther brand stretches by the ability-strapped low interdependents.

Prior literature indicates that consumers' self-construal might present a viable approach for segmenting markets. As

such, consumers in several East Asian countries (e.g., Han and Shavitt 1994; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Monga and John 2007) and the Mediterranean region (e.g., Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier 2002), ethnic groups such as Asian Americans and Hispanics (e.g., Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier 2002), and female consumers (e.g., Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002) are likely to rank high on interdependent self-construal. Therefore, these segments may present the most return for investment with extensions that represent moderate to farther levels of brand stretch. The success likelihood of these brand stretches could also be increased by initially targeting it to these segments and, perhaps even more so, by motivating them to elaborate more extensively on these extensions (e.g., through ad copy strategies).

Although this research examines one ad copy technique (question-based headings) for enhancing elaboration of the extension information (motivation), several other possibilities exist. For example, other rhetorical figures (e.g., puns, metaphors), which present a moderate level of deviation and thus are likely to motivate consumers to elaborate (McQuarrie and Mick 1996), could be included in the marketing messages. These would be especially beneficial if the target market includes high-interdependence consumers and the extension represents a brand stretch. Similarly, provision of samples or interaction with the product (direct experience) is also likely to enhance the likelihood of increased elaboration and therefore may augment the acceptability of farther extensions for these target markets.

This research suggests that low interdependents are not likely to be influenced by these motivational attempts. Such consumers are likely to be more limited in their ability to uncover relationships, especially as the extension moves farther from the traditional bases of category and attribute similarity. However, the findings of Experiment 5 suggest that message and ad copy strategies that attempt to bridge these consumers' ability deficit could prove to be helpful. Further research could also examine whether copy strategies focused on enhancing the relational processing ability of these consumers (e.g., priming interdependence through ad copy, providing explicit relational links in the advertising) are likely to be more effective (than motivational attempts) in enhancing their acceptability of farther extensions.

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