

Perceived fit in the context of brand extensions: a systematic literature review

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Abstract

Purpose – Brand extensions represent an essential growth strategy, allowing companies to remain relevant in increasingly demanding markets. An important success factor for brand extensions that prior research has widely studied and discussed is the perceived fit between an extension and the brand/the parent brand's products. The purpose of this study is to systematically review and summarize the construct of perceived fit and, thus, to explore what exactly perceived fit is and what role it plays in brand extension research.

Design/methodology/approach – This literature review systematically analyzes 102 empirical and conceptual articles that extend perceived fit research.

Findings – This study identifies nine perceived fit dimensions (manufacturing fit, physical fit, situational fit, satisfying fit, complementing fit, targeting fit, servicing fit, pricing fit and conceptual fit) and provides a thorough overview of perceived fit research findings. Furthermore, it derives future research directions.

Research limitations/implications – This study advances the perceived fit literature by identifying future research potential in terms of methodology, underlying theories, perceived fit conceptualization and operationalization, research context and research focus.

Practical implications – By outlining the dimensions of perceived fit and the factors that influence the impact of the construct, this study shows how perceived fit needs to be incorporated into product management to maximize extension and parent brand outcomes.

Originality/value – This study provides a comprehensive, state-of-the-art review of the conceptualization and effects of perceived fit and provides guidance for future research.

Keywords Brand extension, Perceived fit, Systematic literature review

Paper type Literature review



1. Introduction

With the rising costs of introducing new products and the increasing competitive pressure, many brands are struggling to remain relevant in the market. Brand extensions are a vital

growth strategy that builds on a brand's equity to broaden its product portfolio and, thus, market share (Bhat and Reddy, 2001; Völckner and Sattler, 2006). The term "brand extension" refers to the use of an established brand name to introduce a new product (Boush and Loken, 1991; Völckner and Sattler, 2006) either in an existing product category (so-called line extensions) or in a new product category (so-called category extensions) (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Carter and Curry, 2013; Reddy *et al.*, 1994).

Both line and category extensions provide a wide range of benefits. Line extensions, on the one hand, can add variety to the product range in a resource-saving way, serve short-term market developments and effectively address diverse and evolving consumer needs (Kapferer, 2012). For example, the body care brand Dove has recently launched a new fragrance for its deodorant sprays, the alcohol brand Captain Morgan has introduced a nonalcoholic version of its rum and software brand Microsoft has released a premium version of its Teams platform with extra functions. Category extensions, on the other hand, are particularly attractive because they enable brands to enter new product categories at lower risk. Compared with products from new brands, category extensions benefit from the image of an already established brand and therefore simplify product trial and acceptance (Aaker and Keller, 1990). Examples include training weights from the furniture brand IKEA or the mixed reality headset from the electronics brand Apple.

With about half of all new products failing two years after their introduction (Victory *et al.*, 2021), a wealth of research has addressed brand extension success factors (e.g. Reddy *et al.*, 1994; Völckner and Sattler, 2006). One success factor whose importance research has rated as particularly high is the perceived fit between an extension and the parent brand/parent brand's products. A large body of research has demonstrated that this perceived fit leads to better evaluations of both line and category extensions (e.g. Boush and Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994; Dens and de Pelsmacker, 2010b). In the context of category extensions, a high perceived fit has been associated with increased extension perceived quality (Dacin and Smith, 1994), extension purchase intention (Taylor and Bearden, 2002), parent brand evaluation (Mathur *et al.*, 2012) and parent brand image (Milberg *et al.*, 1997). For line extensions, a high perceived fit has been shown to reduce the risk of brand name dilution (Loken and John, 1993), enhance the perceived value of the extension (Dall'Olm Riley *et al.*, 2015) and increase retailer acceptance (Völckner and Sattler, 2006). Despite the high practical relevance of perceived fit in brand management, the research field remains fragmented and faces several conceptual and methodological challenges. A systematic literature review can help address these issues by synthesizing existing knowledge.

First, the terminology used to describe perceived fit is inconsistent. Research applies terms such as typicality (Loken and John, 1993), relatedness (Herr *et al.*, 1996), or similarity (Smith and Park, 1992). This lack of terminological clarity makes it difficult to identify relevant research articles and oversee the current state of conceptual and empirical research. A systematic literature review helps to synthesize previous knowledge and deepen the understanding of the construct beyond terminological difficulties.

Secondly, while research proposes various theoretical frameworks to explain the impact of fit on brand extensions and their parent brands, the field heavily relies on categorization theory. As a result, alternative explanatory approaches, such as schema congruity theory, remain underexplored (Bhat and Reddy, 2001). A systematic literature review can reveal previously little-considered perspectives and expand the theoretical foundation of the construct.

Thirdly, studies show strong disagreement on how to define and measure the perceived fit and its dimensions (e.g. Schmitz *et al.*, 2023; Völckner and Sattler, 2006). They apply various items in many different combinations to measure the perceived fit, which makes it

difficult to compare research findings. A systematic literature review can organize measurement approaches, identify parallels and support standardization.

Fourthly, research on perceived fit is extensive and multifaceted, as it encompasses numerous empirical effects with a variety of variables (Deng and Messinger, 2022). Both researchers and practitioners face significant challenges in understanding how perceived fit affects extension and parent brand outcomes and how the fit can be strategically managed. A systematic literature review can provide a comprehensive overview of the empirical effects of perceived fit and the variables involved.

This systematic literature review addresses the above-mentioned issues in perceived fit research and provides guidance for empirical work and practice. Specifically, it clarifies the theoretical foundations of perceived fit, shows how existing research has conceptualized and operationalized perceived fit to date and examines in which context perceived fit is relevant. Furthermore, the systematic literature review identifies inconsistencies in previous research, reveals underexplored areas and offers detailed future research directions.

In doing so, the review synthesizes and brings structure to a heterogeneous field in which methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, conceptualizations and empirical findings have evolved in parallel rather than cumulatively. It offers an integrative perspective that serves as a robust knowledge base, enabling research findings to be systematically related to one another and compared. The review clarifies the scope and boundaries of perceived fit research, thereby increasing transparency within the literature and providing a clear orientation.

These contributions translate into substantial benefits for both researchers and practitioners. For researchers, it develops a precise roadmap for systematically advancing the complex and fragmented research field of perceived fit. It highlights underexplored perspectives, clarifies conceptual ambiguities and lays the groundwork for in-depth academic investigation. For practitioners, the study translates academic insights into actionable knowledge. It helps to better evaluate extension strategies, anticipate consumer responses and make more confident decisions in brand and product management across diverse market contexts.

2. Procedure

Our methodological approach follows Tranfield *et al.* (2003), who provide a five-stage process for conducting systematic literature reviews in the business and management area (see search process in Figure 1).

In the first step, we systematically identified relevant research. To address inconsistent terminology, we began with a scoping study to identify relevant keywords and synonyms for perceived fit (Grant and Booth, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). We then combined these synonyms with both the terms “brand extension” and “line extension,” with the former generally being the term for category extensions in research, to create the search string (“fit” OR “similarity” OR “distance” OR “congruity” OR “congruency” OR “consistency” OR “typicality” OR “relatedness”) and (“brand exten*” OR “line exten*”). Given that different databases can yield different sets of relevant studies, we aligned our database selection with prior systematic reviews (Dempsey-Brench and Shantz, 2022; Ego, 2023; Schmitz *et al.*, 2023). Following this review practice, which also includes work in brand management and brand extension research, we used Business Source Complete and ABI/INFORM for the database search, both of which belong to the major databases in the management field (Mukendi *et al.*, 2020). The search was conducted in April 2025 using search field tags to specify English-language and peer-reviewed journal articles, yielding 900 search results.

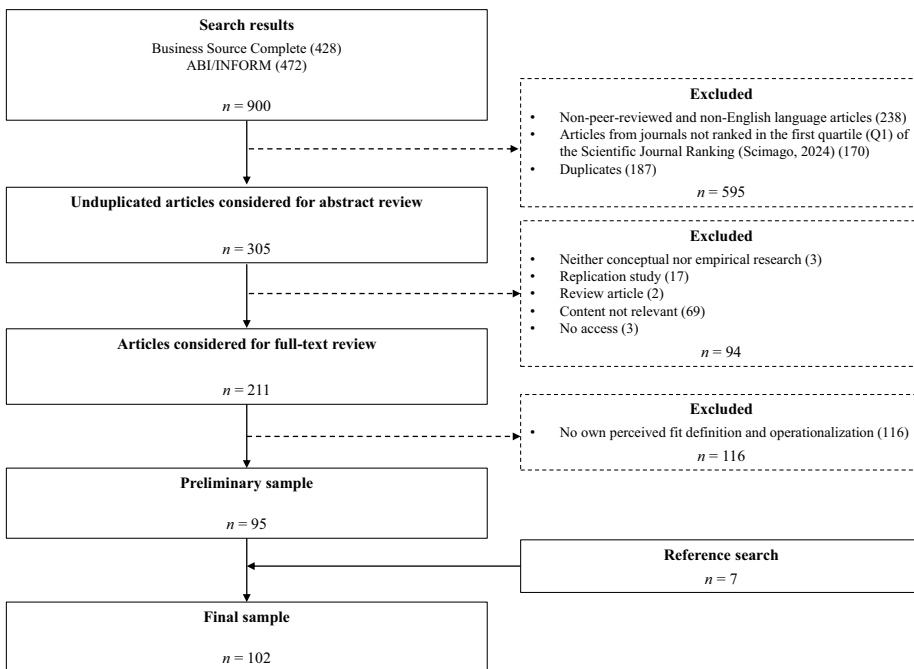


Figure 1. Overview of systematic search process
Source: Authors' own work

In the second step, we assessed study quality. In line with [Tranfield et al. \(2003\)](#) and [Zahoor and Al-Tabbaa \(2020\)](#), we applied a quality filter based on journal ratings. Given the size and heterogeneity of the perceived fit literature, journal rankings provide a transparent means of focusing the review on studies that offer substantial contributions to the field and demonstrate methodological robustness, as they reflect established and rigorous peer-review standards. Accordingly, we only included high-quality articles from journals listed in the first quartile (Q1) of the Scientific Journal Ranking ([Scimago, 2024](#)). As a result, we arrived at 305 unduplicated articles from 72 leading marketing and consumer psychology journals.

In the third step, we examined these articles for their suitability for our sample based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria in a two-stage screening process conducted by two independent researchers ([Tranfield et al., 2003](#); [Xiao and Watson, 2017](#)). The screening followed a sequential logic, with different inclusion criteria applied at the abstract and full-text levels. Overall, the inclusion criteria required that studies be empirical or conceptual research that examines perceived fit in the context of brand extensions and make a substantive conceptual and/or methodological contribution to the perceived fit literature. These criteria were chosen to ensure that the final sample captures relevant research that meaningfully advances understanding of perceived fit rather than merely referencing the construct. In the first stage (abstract screening), we applied the first inclusion criterion and retained only empirical and conceptual studies addressing the role of perceived fit in the context of brand extensions. We excluded announcements, replication studies, review articles and contributions not relevant to the topic. This stage resulted in 211 articles. In the

second stage (full-text screening), we applied the second inclusion criterion by requiring that studies provide an original definition and/or operationalization of perceived fit, thereby making a significant contribution to the field. Accordingly, we excluded articles that do not define and operationalize perceived fit and those that merely adopt existing definitions and operationalizations. This stage resulted in 95 articles. We then added seven additional articles through a reference search, arriving at a final sample of 102 articles. [Table 1](#) gives an overview of all included articles.

In the fourth step, we systematically extracted data from all included studies using standardized digital extraction forms implemented in Excel ([Palmatier *et al.*, 2018](#); [Tranfield *et al.*, 2003](#)). The extraction forms consisted of multiple worksheets and predefined columns to ensure consistency across studies and to allow for structured comparison of the extracted information. Specifically, we recorded methodological characteristics of each study, including the type of contribution (conceptual vs empirical), the research approach (quantitative vs qualitative), the research design (e.g. experiment vs interviews), the type of sample (consumers vs managers) and the geographical context. In addition, we extracted detailed information on how perceived fit was conceptualized, including the terminology used, formal definitions, measurement items and the research contexts examined (line vs category extensions and products vs services). Furthermore, we documented the underlying theoretical perspectives applied in each study. Finally, we extracted the research effects in which perceived fit was examined, distinguishing whether perceived fit was modeled as an independent variable, mediator, or dependent variable, and recorded all independent, mediating, and dependent variables involved in these effects.

In the fifth step, we analyzed the extracted data by systematically comparing studies across the predefined extraction categories and identifying similarities, differences, recurring patterns, as well as points of divergence. In addition, we examined how frequently specific elements appeared across studies, which allowed us to identify dominant research streams, underrepresented perspectives and areas that would benefit from further empirical attention. Building on this structured comparison, we synthesized the findings by organizing and integrating insights across studies, thereby developing a coherent overview of the state of research on perceived fit and deriving key directions for future research ([Palmatier *et al.*, 2018](#); [Tranfield *et al.*, 2003](#)).

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 *Perceived fit methodology*

Methodologically, research on perceived fit shows several commonalities. Firstly, apart from one conceptual contribution (1.0%), all articles in the sample are empirical (99.0%). These empirical studies are primarily quantitative (experiments or surveys), with only three additionally using qualitative methods ([Aaker and Keller, 1990](#); [Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2015](#); [Deng and Messinger, 2022](#)) and another three incorporating secondary data ([Carter and Curry, 2013](#); [Swaminathan *et al.*, 2001](#); [Wang and Liu, 2020](#)).

Secondly, perceived fit research is strongly dominated by consumer perspectives. Of the 101 empirical articles, 95 examine consumers (94.1%), while only six consider managers (5.9%). Just two of these six focus exclusively on managers ([Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2015](#); [Smith and Andrews, 1995](#)).

Thirdly, most studies were conducted in North America, with 54 accounting for 65.9%, followed by 14 in Asia (17.1%), 11 in Europe (13.4%) and three in cross-regional settings (3.7%) (see [Table 1](#) for an overview of research design, sample and geography).

Table 1. Overview of included articles

Authors and year	Journal	Geography	Research design	Sample	Theory	CE	LE	Category	Fit term	FD	FO
Aaker and Keller (1990)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	USA	Exp./survey/qual.	C	Categorization theory	x		P, S	Perceived fit, similarity	x	
Ahluwalia (2008)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x	x	P, S	Perceived fit, consistency	x	x
Albrecht et al. (2013)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	Not specified	Survey	C	/	x		P, S	Extension fit	x	
Athanasopoulou et al. (2015)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	Not specified	Survey/qual.	M	/	x		P	Brand product portfolio similarity	x	x
Barone (2005)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Core brand-extension similarity	x	
Barone et al. (2000)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Perceived fit, core brand-extension similarity	x	
Batra et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Survey	C	/	x		P	Fit	x	
Bhat and Reddy (2001)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	USA	Survey	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit, similarity	x	
Boisvert and Ashill (2018)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Extension fit	x	
Boush and Loken (1991)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Perceived typicality, similarity	x	x
Bridges et al. (2000)	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x
Bristol (2002)	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	USA	Survey	C	/	x		P	Fit	x	
Broniarczyk and Alba (1994)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Product category similarity, extension relevance	x	x
Buil et al. (2009)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	Spain, UK, Norway	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit, similarity	x	x
Carter and Curry (2013)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	USA	Survey/sec.	C	Associative network theory, categorization theory	x	x	P	Parent brand-extension fit, congruence	x	
Chang et al. (2011)	<i>Marketing Letters</i>	Taiwan	Exp.	C	Accessibility–diagnosticity theory	x		P	Product category similarity, core benefit overlap	x	x
Chiu et al. (2017)	<i>Journal of Electronic Commerce Research</i>	Taiwan	Survey	C	/	x		S	Perceived fit	x	
Chun et al. (2015)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Extension fit	x	x
Consumer Behavior Seminar (1987)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	x	P	Similarity	x	
Cunningham et al. (2013)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C, M	Categorization theory, dissonance theory	x		S	Perceived fit	x	

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors and year	Journal	Geography	Research design	Sample	Theory	CE	LE	Category	Fit term	FD	FO
Czeellar (2003)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	/	Con.	/	Categorization theory	x	/		Perceived fit	x	
Dacin and Smith (1994)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp./survey	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Parent brand-extension similarity, parent brand-extension fit	x	
Dall'Olmo Riley et al. (2014)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	UK	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Dawar (1996)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	Canada	Exp.	C	/	x	P		Brand-extension fit	x	
Dawar and Anderson (1994)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P, S		Perceived fit, perceived coherence, distance	x	
DelVecchio (2000)	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	USA	Survey	C	/	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
DelVecchio and Smith (2005)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Deng and Messinger (2022)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	USA	Exp./survey/qual.	C, M, A	Categorization theory, schema congruity theory	x	P		Brand-extension fit	x	
Dens and de Pelsmacker (2010a)	<i>Marketing Letters</i>	Belgium	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Dens and de Pelsmacker (2010b)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Belgium	Exp.	C	Associative network theory, categorization theory	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Dimitriu and Warlop (2022)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	UK, USA	Exp./survey	C	/	x	P, S		Fit	x	
Dimitriu et al. (2017)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/	x	P		Perceived similarity	x	
Dwivedi et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	India	Survey	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Eren-Erdogmus et al. (2018)	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i>	Turkey	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Fang et al. (2024)	<i>Electronic Commerce Research and Applications</i>	Japan, Taiwan, Thailand	Survey	C	/	x	S		Perceived fit	x	
Fedorkhin et al. (2008)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P		Fit, similarity	x	
Gfert and Huettl (2011)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	Germany	Exp.	C	Categorization theory, schema congruity theory	x	P, S		Perceived similarity	x	
Guo et al. (2018)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	China	Survey	C	/	x	P		Perceived fit	x	
Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x	P, S		Perceived fit	x	

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors and year	Journal	Geography	Research design	Sample	Theory	CE	LE	Category	Fit term	FD	FO
Han and Schmitt (1997)	<i>Journal of International Marketing</i>	USA, China	Exp.	C	/	x		P, S	Perceived fit	x	x
Hem et al. (2003)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	Norway	Survey	C	/	x		P, S	Similarity	x	x
Herr et al. (1996)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P, S	Relatedness	x	x
Hill and Lee (2015)	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management Psychology and Marketing</i>	USA	Survey	C	/		x	P	Perceived fit	x	x
Huang et al. (2017)		China	Exp.	C	Construal level theory	x		P	Brand-extension fit	x	x
Huber et al. (2013)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	China	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit, perceived congruity	x	x
Jung and Tey (2010)	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Schema congruity theory	x		P	Fit, extension similarity, incongruity	x	x
Kalamas et al. (2006)	<i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i>	Not specified	Survey	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Extension fit	x	x
Kapoor and Heslop (2009)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing Research</i>	Canada	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Fit	x	x
Keller and Aaker (1992)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit, similarity	x	x
Kim and John (2008)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Construal level theory	x		P, S	Perceived fit	x	x
Kim et al. (2014)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Korea, Canada	Exp./survey	C	/	x		P	Parent-extension fit	x	x
Klink and Smith (2001)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x
Lane (2000)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research Letters</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Fit, consistency, incongruity (In)congruity	x	x
Lane and Jacobson (1997)		USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	(In)congruity	x	x
Lee (1994)	<i>Journal of Business and Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Consistency	x	x
Lei et al. (2004)	<i>Journal of Service Research</i>	Europe	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P, S	Perceived similarity	x	x
Leong (1997)	<i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i>	Singapore	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Similarity	x	x
Liang and Fu (2021)	<i>Journal of Marketing Analytics</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Schema congruity theory	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x
Liu and Hu (2012)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	China	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Product fit, extension similarity	x	x
Loken and John (1993)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Typicality	x	x
Mao and Krishnan (2006)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Extension fit	x	x

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors and year	Journal	Geography	Research design	Sample	Theory	CE	LE	Category	Fit term	FD	FO
Maoz and Tybout (2002)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Schema congruity theory	x		P	Perceived fit, (in)congruity	x	x
Martin et al. (2005)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Fit, perceived similarity	x	x
Mathur et al. (2012)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/			P	Extension fit	x	x
Mathur et al. (2023)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/			P	Brand extension fit	x	x
Meyers-Levy et al. (1994)	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Schema congruity theory	x		P	Congruity	x	x
Meyvis and Janiszewski (2004)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Accessibility-diagnosticity theory	x		P	Similarity	x	x
Milberg et al. (1997)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived consistency	x	x
Milberg et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/			P	Perceived fit	x	x
Milberg et al. (2013)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/			P	Extension fit	x	x
Miniard et al. (2018)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	Not specified	Exp./survey	C	Inclusion/exclusion model	x		P	Fit	x	x
Monga and John (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/			P	Extension fit, similarity, distance	x	x
Morrin (1999)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/			P,S	Extension fit	x	x
Morrin and Jacoby (2000)	<i>Journal of Public Policy and Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Associative network theory	x		P,S	Category similarity	x	x
Nan (2006)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived congruity	x	x
O'Reilly et al. (2017)	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	USA	Survey	C	/			S	Extension fit, similarity	x	x
Oakley et al. (2008)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/			P	Perceived fit	x	x
Park et al. (1991)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x
Peev and Kumar (2023)	<i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Structure-mapping theory	x		P	Fit, perceived similarity	x	x
Pina et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	Norway, Spain	Survey	C	Associative network theory	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x
Pontes (2018)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/			P	Perceived fit, perceived consistency	x	x
Pontes and Pontes (2021)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	/			P	Fit	x	x
Pontes et al. (2024)	<i>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</i>	USA	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit	x	x

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors and year	Journal	Geography	Research design	Sample	Theory	CE	LE	Category	Fit term	FD	FO
Ramanathan and Velayudhan (2015)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	India	Survey	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Fit		x
Salinas and Pérez (2009)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Spain	Survey	C	Associative network theory, categorization theory	x		P, S	Perceived fit		x
Sar et al. (2011)	<i>Psychology and Marketing International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Extension fit		x
Sattler et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Not specified	Survey	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Perceived fit		x
Shine et al. (2007)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Korea	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived similarity / parent-extension similarity		x
Smith and Andrews (1995)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	USA	Survey	M	Categorization theory	x		P, S	Perceived fit		x
Smith and Park (1992)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Survey	C, M	/	x		P	Perceived similarity		x
Spiggle et al. (2012)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	USA	Exp./survey	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Brand extension fit		x
Swaminathan et al. (2001)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Not specified	Survey/sec.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit		x
Taylor and Bearden (2002)	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived similarity		x
Tonelli and Ahluwalia (2012)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit		x
Völckner and Sattler (2006)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Germany	Survey	C, M, A	/	x	x	P	Perceived fit		x
Wang and Liu (2020)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	China	Exp./survey/sec.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit, distance		x
Wu et al. (2015)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	China	Exp.	C	/	x		P, S	Perceived product category fit		x
Yeo and Park (2006)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	Korea	Exp.	C	Categorization theory, schema congruity theory	x		P	Parent-extension similarity		x
Yeung and Wyer (2005)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Categorization theory	x		P	Core-extension fit, core extension similarity		x
Zhang and Sood (2002)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Category similarity		x
Zhang et al. (2020)	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	USA	Exp.	C	/	x		P	Perceived fit		x
Zheng et al. (2019)	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	Not specified	Exp.	C	Comparison theory	x		P	Perceived fit		x

Note(s): Exp. = experiment; Sec. = secondary data; Qual. = qualitative; C = consumers; M = managers; A = academics; CE = category extension; LE = line extension; P = product; S = service; FD = new perceived fit definition; FO = new perceived fit operationalization

Source(s): Authors' own work

3.2 Perceived fit conceptualization

3.2.1 Perceived fit definition. Disagreement remains in research on how to name the construct of perceived fit; we uncovered 11 different terms used to describe it. While “fit” ($n = 77$) and “similarity” ($n = 32$) appear most frequently (in 75.5% and 31.4% of the articles, respectively), the remaining terms are applied only occasionally: “(in)congruity” ($n = 7$), “consistency” ($n = 5$), “distance” ($n = 3$), “typicality” ($n = 2$), “relevance” ($n = 1$), “congruence” ($n = 1$), “overlap” ($n = 1$), “coherence” ($n = 1$) and “relatedness” ($n = 1$). Almost one-quarter of the articles ($n = 25$) use two or three different terms that either appear to be synonyms or cannot be distinguished sharply from each other, as the definitions do not show significant differences. This causes difficulty in comparing research findings from different articles and in tracking fit results within a study.

A total of 39 of the 102 articles (38.2%) create their own perceived fit definition in a brand extension context. The remaining articles in the sample either apply existing definitions or use no definition at all. To obtain an overview of the existing definitions, we extracted all fit definitions from our sample (see examples in [Table 2](#)) and examined them for similarities. The definitions commonly refer to the degree of similarity and/or the degree of shared associations. Though similar in content, the definitions are rather generic and imprecise in their wording. Mostly fit synonyms are used to define the construct (e.g. “similarity,” “match,” “closeness,” “consistency”). In addition, there are no further explanations as to how exactly the extension should resemble the brand and its products or which associations should be shared. Thus, the definitions provide little insight into what exactly a fit is and what it consists of.

3.2.2 Perceived fit dimensions. While the existing perceived fit definitions are rather vague, the items used in empirical articles to measure perceived fit provide more insight into the characteristics of the construct. However, with 95 articles creating their own operationalization of perceived fit, the items used to measure fit are rather diverse and inconsistent. Indeed, research applies 34 different items either individually or in various

Table 2. Examples of perceived fit definitions

Article	Definition	Key term
Boush and Loken (1991)	The degree of similarity between the extension and the parent brand’s products	Degree of similarity
Broniarczyk and Alba (1994)	The degree of similarity and shared associations between the extension category and the parent brand category	Degree of similarity; degree of shared associations
Dawar and Anderson (1994)	The degree of match between the extension and the parent brand	Degree of match
Deng and Messinger (2022)	The degree of similarity, consistency, or congruity between the extension (category) and the parent brand (category)	Degree of similarity, consistency, or congruity
Han and Schmitt (1997)	The degree of closeness between the extension category and the parent brand category	Degree of closeness
Kim and John (2008)	The degree of shared connections between the extension and the parent brand	Degree of shared connections
Meyers-Levy et al. (1994)	The degree of shared associations between the extension (category) and the parent brand	Degree of shared associations
Park et al. (1991)	The degree of membership of the extension to the parent brand category	Degree of membership

Source(s): Authors’ own work

combinations. A total of 20 articles measure fit with a single item (21.1%), 74 articles use two to seven items (77.9%) and one article even uses 10 items (1.1%). Concrete definitions of the items are mostly missing, and precisely the items requiring a high degree of additional explanation appear most frequently: (dis-)similar ($n=53$) and bad/good fit ($n=32$). In addition, only one study has empirically derived the items (Deng and Messinger, 2022). Otherwise, there is often a lack of justification as to why specific items were selected or combined in a certain way. Research results are, therefore, difficult to compare.

For the existing fit dimensions, we first extracted the items from perceived fit scales in research literature, then identified similarities between these items, grouped them accordingly and, finally, derived the perceived fit dimensions. The 34 items could be grouped into nine superordinate dimensions (see Figure 2):

- (1) Manufacturing fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products require the same manufacturing skills.
- (2) Physical fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products have the same physical features/component parts.
- (3) Situational fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products have the same usage situations.
- (4) Satisfying fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products satisfy the same needs.
- (5) Complementing fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products can be used together in certain usage situations.
- (6) Targeting fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products have the same target market.
- (7) Servicing fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products require the same servicing.
- (8) Pricing fit: The degree to which the extension and the parent brand's products have the same price level.
- (9) Conceptual fit: The degree to which an extension corresponds to the parent brand concept. The term "brand concept" refers to the extent to which the extension

Dimension	Manufacturing fit	Situational fit	Physical fit	Satisfying fit	Complementing fit	Targeting fit	Servicing fit	Pricing fit	Conceptual fit																		
Item*	(dis-)similar/ (un-)helpful manufacturing skills	(dis-)similar product usage situations	(dis-)similar physical features/component parts	(dis-)similar needs satisfied	(not) use together	(dis-)similar target market	(dis-)similar servicing	(dis-)similar price																			
Number of namings	27	13	11	6	5	3	1	1																			
Item*	(dis-)similar bad/good fit (p-)logical (dis-)similar image (p-)consistent (p-)appropriate (dis-)similar associations makes (not) sense (p-)typical (un-)related (un-)representative (un-)expressed (un-)surprising (dis-)similar impressions (dis-)similar concept (un-)likely to be offered goes (not) well (not) understanding the connection (un-)like (un-)similar attributes (un-)natural extension bad/good/service credentials (dis-)similar core benefits (un-)congruent (not) integral part (un-)suitable																										
Number of namings	53	32	20	20	15	14	13	13	13	10	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1

*Excluded items because of missing extension/fit link:
 • "The brand represents few product categories" (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2015)
 • "Confidence in explanation of why the firm is planning to introduce the extension" (Bridges *et al.*, 2000)
 • "How appropriate is it to use the parent brand's products to [specific goal]?" (Martin *et al.*, 2005)
 • "The level of the parent brand attribute beliefs" (Milberg *et al.*, 1997)

Figure 2. Overview of perceived fit dimensions
Source: Authors' own work

shares parent brand-specific abstract meanings. These meanings result from a certain interplay of attributes, benefits and the company's marketing effort and help differentiate a brand from competitors (Kirmani *et al.*, 1999; Monga and John, 2010; Park *et al.*, 1991).

Dimensions 1–8 deal with the fit between the extension and the parent brand's products and are each created from one item. Only dimension 9 addresses the fit between the extension and the parent brand itself and consists of 26 items. Although the dimension of conceptual fit is most frequently found in research and seems to have a particularly high relevance in the measurement of fit, it is the most unclear. It consists of fit synonyms that are not defined and give much room for interpretation.

Apart from Dimitriu and Warlop (2022), who provide a service-specific item, no dimensions or items are developed for specific contexts. The items are transferred from one context to another without modification or additional research. However, fit dimensions and items are not universally applicable. For example, with fit being considered almost exclusively in the context of category extensions (category extension, $n = 86$; category and line extensions, $n = 12$; line extensions, $n = 4$), the dimensions are primarily tailored to this extension type. However, complementary fit, for example, is not applicable to line extensions, as line extensions, by definition, are in the same product category as the core product and are typically not purchased to be used in combination with other products in the category.

In addition, most articles deal with products rather than services (products, $n = 80$; products and services, $n = 17$; services, $n = 4$) and mix different categories (e.g. electronics, fast-moving consumer goods [FMCG], sports and outdoors, clothing and accessories, transport, hospitality and leisure) without having a specific focus in the study. This leads, on the one hand, to dimensions such as servicing fit not being reasonable for products that are consumed quickly and do not require maintenance (i.e. FMCG) and, on the other hand, to dimensions appropriate for the physical properties of a good (e.g. manufacturing fit or physical fit) but not for service extensions.

3.3 Underlying theories

Research uses nine theories to explain the role of fit in brand extension research. A total of 48 articles (about half the articles) do not use any theory to explain fit (see overview of theories in Table 1). The theories are used for two purposes.

Construal level theory, comparison theory and structure-mapping theory explain why consumers put more or less weight on fit in extension evaluation. Construal level theory (Huang *et al.*, 2017; Kim and John, 2008) and structure-mapping theory (Peev and Kumar, 2023) deal with how consumers cognitively process individual extensions. They suggest that consumers who process information abstractly (vs concretely) or focus more on similarities (vs differences) place more weight on fit. In contrast, the comparison theory looks at how an extension is evaluated in the context of alternative options. It proposes that consumers assign the most value to the factor that is not shared among the alternatives. Thus, if the alternatives come from different brands (the same brand), the perceived fit becomes more (less) important in consumers' evaluations (Zheng *et al.*, 2019).

Categorization theory (e.g. Boisvert and Ashill, 2018; Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994), schema congruity theory (e.g. Jung and Tey, 2010; Liang and Fu, 2021), associative network theory (e.g. Morrin and Jacoby, 2000; Pina *et al.*, 2010), accessibility–diagnosticity theory (Chang *et al.*, 2011; Meyvis and Janiszewski, 2004), dissonance theory (Cutright *et al.*, 2013) and inclusion/exclusion model (Miniard *et al.*, 2018) explain the level of fit. All but one of these theories (including the most widely used theory, categorization theory, $n = 41$) assume that a high fit has

a positive effect on consumer extension evaluation. Only schema congruity theory ($n=7$) proposes that extensions with a moderate fit might be evaluated better than those with a high or low fit (e.g. Gierl and Huettl, 2011). Both categorization theory and schema congruity theory hold that consumers evaluate brand extensions by trying to assign them to existing mental categories or schemas (Deng and Messinger, 2022; Loken and John, 1993). According to categorization theory, the higher the perceived fit, the greater the chances of successfully categorizing an extension into the parent brand's category and of transferring favorable beliefs and attitudes from the parent brand to the extension (Boush, 1997). Schema congruity theory assumes that the evaluation differs depending on the cognitive effort required to assign an extension to the parent brand schema. While high-fit extensions arouse only little consumer interest and low-fit extensions are difficult to assign to the parent brand schema, moderate-fit extensions can usually be integrated with some cognitive effort, giving consumers a feeling of success and the extension a good evaluation (Meyers-Levy *et al.*, 1994).

3.4 Perceived fit research results

Perceived fit itself occurs in research as an independent variable, a dependent variable and a mediator. The variables considered together with perceived fit address five categories: extension (70 variables), parent brand (34 variables), consumer (22 variables), competitor (four variables) and retailer (one variable).

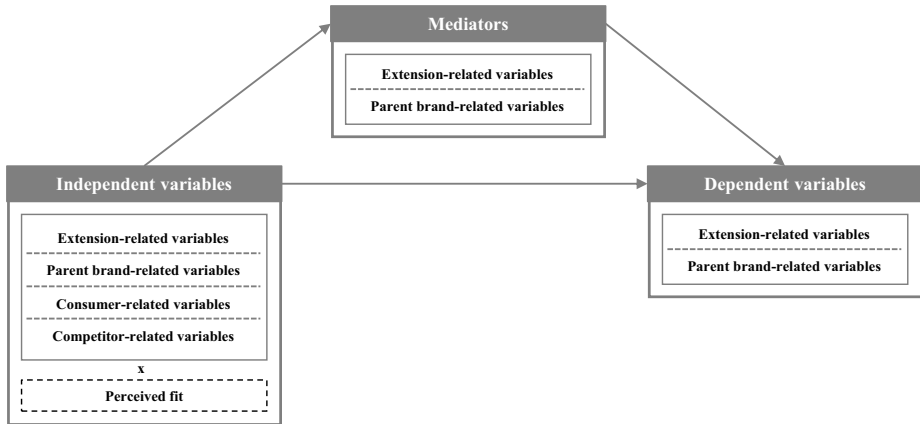
Perceived fit research examines parent brand and extension outcomes. Accounting for more than half the effects (52.5%), extension evaluation is by far the most studied dependent variable. While in general the majority of effects (86.5%) deal with extension outcomes, effects of perceived fit on the parent brand are relatively less researched (13.0%).

3.4.1 Perceived fit as independent variable. Research has concentrated on examining perceived fit as an independent variable. Figure 3 shows the variables used in direct and indirect effects of fit as an independent variable, as well as in interaction effects of fit (see Supplementary Table 1 for individual effects).

Most research focuses on the effect of perceived fit on extension evaluation. While a substantial number of articles ($n=46$) reports a direct positive effect of perceived fit on extension evaluation, a smaller group of studies suggest that this effect may be indirect, operating through mediators such as certainty that the parent brand can deliver the extension (Smith and Andrews, 1995), extension information processing (Huang *et al.*, 2017), extension purchase risk (Milberg *et al.*, 2010; Milberg *et al.*, 2013) and relative emphases of extension benefits versus extension risks (Chang *et al.*, 2011).

In contrast to the predominant view that high fit positively influences extension evaluations, several studies identify an inverted U-shaped relationship, indicating that both low and high fit lead to worse outcomes than a moderate fit. Meyers-Levy *et al.* (1994) provide evidence for exactly this inverted U-shaped relationship between fit and extension evaluation. While Maoz and Tybout (2002) find this connection under conditions of high involvement, Jung and Tey (2010) observe that in addition to high involvement, high innovativeness is also necessary for the U shape to occur (for both better extension and parent brand evaluations). Kim *et al.* (2014) show that consumers with a strong brand relationship quality prefer moderate-fit extensions to those with a high or low fit.

The inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived fit and extension evaluation illustrates that the influence of fit is not consistent across all situations, but can vary depending on specific conditions. Building on this insight, a large body of research has explored interaction effects, examining the circumstances under which the impact of perceived fit becomes stronger or weaker. Although interaction effects have been widely studied, only four findings have been replicated across multiple articles. Fit is more important for extension evaluation when advertising appeals

**Independent variables:**

- **Extension-related variables:** amount of information about the extension, attitude toward the extension ad, consumption type of an extension, emergent extension attributes, extension advertising appeal, extension attribute performance, extension authenticity, extension benefit innovativeness, extension differentiation, extension display format, extension durability, extension evaluation, extension evaluation/similarity measurement order, extension offering, extension order of entry, extension price, extension purchase risk, extensions service intensiveness, extension strategy, extension success, extension trial, extension type, familiarity with the extension, information cue about fit being important for extension success, physical distance to extension, presence of the product element in the extension logo, temporal distance to extension introduction, type of extension information, visual distance to extension
- **Parent brand-related variables:** attitude-transfer source, company size, core product portrayal, parent brand affect, parent brand architecture, parent brand breadth, parent brand competence type, parent brand concept, parent brand conviction, parent brand dominance, parent brand evaluation, parent brand familiarity, parent brand knowledge, parent brand portfolio relatedness, parent brand quality, parent brand relationship quality, parent brand reputation, quality variance of the products affiliated with the parent brand
- **Consumer-related variables:** age, attachment, cognitive resources, construal level, consumer loyalty, context (in)dependence, creativity, distraction, feelings of control, implicit theories, innovativeness, mood, opportunity to structure, product involvement, self-regulatory focus, situational involvement
- **Competitor-related variables:** associations about competitor brands, competitive setting, competitors' relative brand familiarity

Mediators:

- **Extension-related variables:** extension evaluation, extension information processing, extension performance goal, extension purchase risk, motivation to process extension benefit information, relative emphases of extension benefits versus extension risks
- **Parent brand-related variables:** certainty the parent brand can deliver the extension, trust in the parent brand's ability to deliver promised extension benefits
- **Consumer-related variables:** consumer loyalty

Dependent variables:

- **Extension-related variables:** affect transfer to an extension, cognitive responses evoked by an extension, cognitive structure for an extension, confidence in extension quality evaluations, extension ad information processing, extension advertising efficiency, extension categorization, extension choice, extension consumption experience, extension difficulty to make, extension evaluation, extension evaluation time, extension perceived quality, extension perceived value, extension price premium, extension purchase intention, extension purchase risk, extension sales, extension service synergy, extension success, extension usage consideration, global thoughts about an extension ad, intention to spread positive word-of-mouth about an extension, learning of an extension, motivation to process extension benefit information, perceived effort of an extension, perceived performance of an extension, surprise about the extension, thoughts concerning extension ad message, willingness to pay a premium for an extension, willingness to pay for an extension, willingness to recommend the extension
- **Parent brand-related variables:** parent brand affect, parent brand categorization, parent brand choice, parent brand dilution, parent brand equity, parent brand evaluation, parent brand image, parent brand personality, parent brand reliability, parent brand spillover effects, risk of brand name dilution, willingness to forgive the parent brand

Figure 3. Overview of research results with perceived fit as independent variable

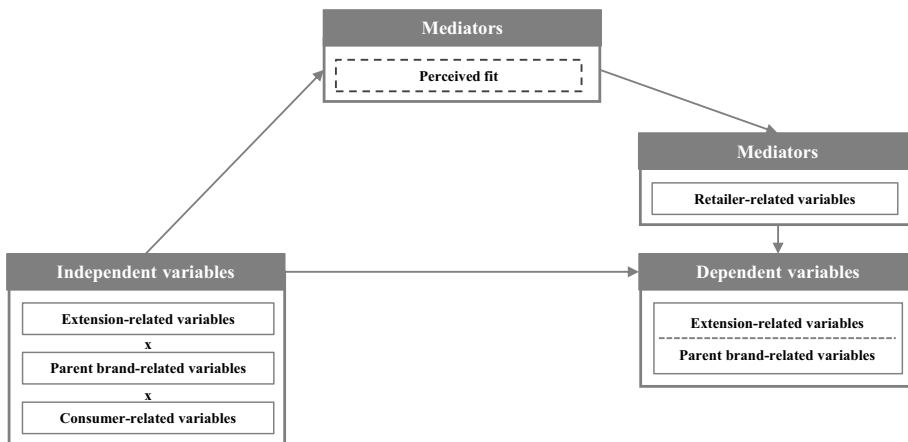
Source: Authors' own work

are emotional rather than informative (Dens and de Pelsmacker, 2010a, 2010b), when fit is measured before rather than after extension evaluation (Barone, 2005; Zhang and Sood, 2002), when product involvement is high rather than low (Dens and de Pelsmacker, 2010a; Huber *et al.*, 2013), and when innovativeness is low rather than high (Klink and Smith, 2001; Salinas and Pérez, 2009). All other interaction effects have been identified in single studies only, using a wide range of variables. As a result, the field is broad and lacks a clearly defined research focus.

3.4.2 *Perceived fit as mediator.* Figure 4 shows the variables used in effects with perceived fit as a mediator (see Supplementary Table 2 for individual effects). Compared with perceived fit’s impact as an independent variable, its influence as a mediator has been studied considerably less in brand extension research. However, even in this smaller group of articles, the primary focus remains on how fit influences extension evaluations. Across all effects reviewed, perceived fit consistently has a positive effect on consumers’ extension evaluations. This holds true regardless of whether the independent variable is competition fit (Peev and Kumar, 2023), parent brand affect (Yeung and Wyer, 2005), parent brand concept (Pontes *et al.*, 2024), parent brand image (Salinas and Pérez, 2009) or parent brand price range (Pontes, 2018). Interestingly, one article finds a double mediation that is also the only effect in which a retailer-related variable occurs. As marketing support for the extension increases, so does its fit, which in turn leads to greater acceptance by retailers and ultimately greater success for the extension (Völkner and Sattler, 2006).

3.4.3 *Perceived fit as dependent variable.* While the impact of perceived fit on various extension and parent brand outcomes has been studied extensively, scant research has explored how perceived fit itself can be influenced. Figure 5 shows the variables used in direct, indirect and interaction effects on fit (see Supplementary Table 3 for individual effects).

The findings suggest that perceived fit can be positively influenced by different brand-, product- and consumer-related factors. These include consistent extension direction (Dawar and



Independent variables:

- Extension-related variables: extension ad art presence, extension evaluation/similarity measurement order, marketing support for an extension
- Parent brand-related variables: parent brand affect, parent brand concept, parent brand image, parent brand price range
- Consumer-related variables: attention focus, consumer believability
- Competitor-related variables: competition fit

Second mediators:

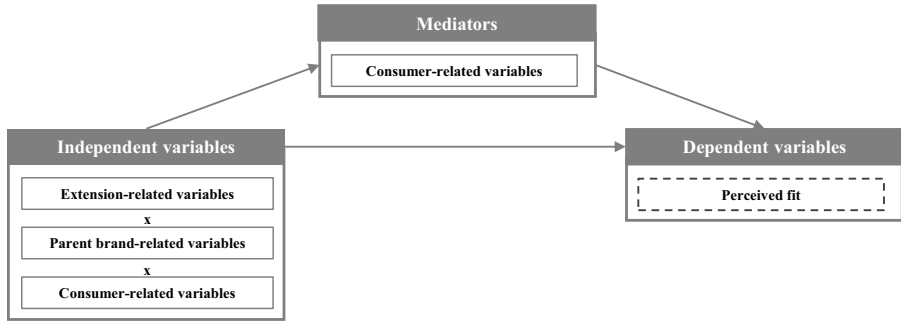
- Retailer-related variables: retailer acceptance

Dependent variables:

- Extension-related variables: extension evaluation, extension success
- Parent brand-related variables: parent brand extendibility

Figure 4. Overview of research results with perceived fit as mediator

Source: Authors’ own work

**Independent variables:**

- Extension-related variables: exposure to the extension, extension ad art presence, extension ad message, extension communication frame, extension communication strategy, extension direction, extension goal, extension type, extension-parent brand relationship
- Parent brand-related variables: dominant parent brand association, parent brand affect, parent brand architecture, parent brand buyers, parent brand concept, parent brand image, parent brand knowledge
- Consumer-related variables: interdependent self-construal level, mood, processing motivation, style of thinking

Mediators:

- Consumer-related variables: relational elaboration

Figure 5. Overview of research results with perceived fit as dependent variable

Source: Authors' own work

Anderson, 1994), goal (Martin *et al.*, 2005) and product category (Carter and Curry, 2013); frequent exposure to an extension (Klink and Smith, 2001); art presence in extension ads (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008); a good consumer mood (Barone *et al.*, 2000; Sar *et al.*, 2011); a good parent brand image (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2010; Salinas and Pérez, 2009); high parent brand affect and knowledge (Hill and Lee, 2015); and a high number of parent brand buyers (Dall'Olmio Riley *et al.*, 2014). Although the direction of these effects is consistent, the underlying mechanisms remain largely unexplored. Only one study investigates mediation, showing that relational elaboration mediates the effect of an interdependent self-construal level on fit under high processing motivation (Ahluwalia, 2008). In addition, only a few studies have examined the conditions under which the effects on perceived fit are most pronounced. In particular, Monga and John (2010) examined such interaction effects and found that holistic (vs analytic) thinkers perceived the fit to be higher for extensions from functional brands, from direct brands, from brands being presented holistically and from brands without any information.

4. Synthesis and future research directions

By systematically reviewing the research literature on perceived fit, we can identify some core findings with future research potential that will help to further structure and advance the broad research field around perceived fit. First, previous research has relied on a largely uniform methodology, with most articles being empirical, quantitative, focused on consumers and conducted in North America. This lack of methodological diversity limits theoretical innovation, reduces the generalizability of findings and restricts the practical applicability of insights. Employing more diverse approaches (e.g. qualitative methods to conceptualize the construct of perceived fit, managerial perspectives to understand how fit is used in product development processes and studies in underrepresented regions such as South America or Africa to capture cultural differences) could strengthen the theoretical foundations of the perceived fit and develop more robust and nuanced recommendations for managing brand extensions.

Second, even though the role of perceived fit in brand extensions is mainly explained by categorization and related theories, only a few authors deal with the different explanatory approaches within this theory stream. While categorization theory links higher fit with more favorable outcomes, schema congruity theory suggests that a moderate fit may be more beneficial. Research, therefore, needs to determine the circumstances under which each of the two explanatory approaches is more likely to hold. For example, studies could manipulate different levels of perceived fit in combination with varying parent brand conditions (e.g. high vs low brand familiarity) or consumer characteristics (e.g. high vs low loyalty). Doing so would help shed light on the conditions under which a brand extension is assigned to its parent brand and enable practitioners to align their product development and marketing strategies more specifically with consumer expectations.

Third, few articles have addressed theories that explain why consumers place more or less weight on fit in extension evaluations. Moreover, these theories offer different perspectives. Construal level and structure-mapping theory link the weighting of fit to cognitive processing (Kim and John, 2008; Peev and Kumar, 2023), whereas comparison theory attributes it to the context of alternative options (Zheng *et al.*, 2019). Future research should examine the conditions under which these theories best explain the role of fit in extension evaluations (e.g. the influence of situational factors such as time pressure or information availability). Doing so would advance theoretical integration and provide managers with clearer guidance on when fit is a decisive factor in extension success.

Fourth, although research on the success factors of brand extensions has used perceived fit excessively, only limited work has been done on the construct itself. The literature review showed that research has unsystematically used different terms, such as similarity, consistency, or congruity, to describe the construct of perceived fit. In addition, while research defines perceived fit as the degree of similarity and/or shared associations between the extension and the parent brand or its products, it does not reveal much about what characteristics need to be similar or what associations need to be shared. Developing a general perceived fit definition would help advance knowledge on the construct and facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between scholars and practitioners.

Fifth, although the items used to measure perceived fit provide insights into the characteristics of the construct, the underlying dimensions have not yet been examined in depth. Future research needs to empirically test the dimensions derived in this article (manufacturing, physical, situational, satisfying, complementing, targeting, servicing, pricing and conceptual fit) and specifically investigate the dimension of conceptual fit, which is frequently applied but least explored. This is important for developing a sound operationalization of perceived fit and for effectively applying perceived fit in product and brand management. For example, managers can better assess whether a new extension should emphasize physical features (e.g. materials or packaging) or manufacturing skills (e.g. technology or human resources) to increase its success.

Sixth, previous research has used many different items in a wide variety of combinations. These items [e.g. (dis-)similar and bad/good fit] are rather imprecise and (for the most part) lack definitions as well as empirical evidence. A grounded operationalization would help develop knowledge about perceived fit in a structured way, to address open research gaps precisely and to explore connections with other constructs (such as parent brand image and willingness to pay for an extension) more thoroughly.

Seventh, the identified perceived fit dimensions are mostly seemingly randomly applied to various contexts. However, depending on extension type, products, services, or industry, different dimensions might be relevant and of varying importance. For example, physical fit and satisfying fit might be particularly important in line extensions (vs category extensions), as they share the

same product category. In contrast, conceptual fit may play a larger role in services (e.g. insurance or banking), which are immaterial and may lead consumers to rely more on abstract brand cues. Conceptual fit might also be more relevant for high-involvement, slow-moving products (e.g. cars), where the brand relevance might be especially high. In turn, pricing fit may be more relevant for low-involvement, fast-moving consumer goods categories such as food. Understanding how fit dimensions behave across contexts helps assess the robustness of the construct and refine existing theories, especially categorization theory. It also offers guidance to practitioners on which dimensions to prioritize when designing and positioning brand extensions.

Eighth, our systematic literature review showed that the comprehensive research results on perceived fit (as well as the effects demonstrated multiple times by different studies) are hardly comparable, because studies have measured perceived fit in multiple ways. For example, some studies use single-item scales [e.g. "(a-)typical"], while others rely on multi-item scales including usage, target group and image overlap. Research needs to replicate found effects with a consistent perceived fit operationalization to improve reliability and provide practitioners with a stronger basis for the effective use of corporate resources such as marketing budgets.

Ninth, previous research has only marginally explored the role of perceived fit in feedback effects on the parent brand. This is surprising because brand extensions can have profound effects, for example, on parent brand image (Milberg *et al.*, 1997) and evaluation (Jung and Tey, 2010). Future research should explore how perceived fit affects variables such as parent brand reputation, credibility, concept, or trust. As a result, practitioners can reinforce positive effects and better manage risks (e.g. through communication campaigns or product adjustments).

Tenth, retailer-related variables have received only marginal consideration in perceived fit research so far, even though they are highly relevant, especially in the FMCG sector, where products are mainly distributed indirectly. Retailers are crucial for the success of an extension, as they decide whether an extension is listed. Future research should thoroughly explore the impact of perceived fit on retailers to increase the listing chances and, thus, the sales figures of brand extensions. Relevant mediators of the effect of perceived fit on retailer acceptance may include perceived sales potential or assortment consistency.

Eleventh, the focus of research to date is on examining the impact of perceived fit on the extension and its parent brand. Little attention has been paid to the factors that influence fit itself. This is surprising, as it is still unclear how the positive effects of perceived fit can be enhanced and the negative effects can be weakened. Thus, research needs to investigate which factors affect fit both positively and negatively to maximize the desired impact. In particular, research should explore marketing variables such as advertising appeals or extension naming strategies and consumer variables such as consumer age or involvement more closely, which may shape how fit is perceived. Table 3 shows possible research questions for future research.

5. Conclusion

Research on perceived fit has been evolving for more than 30 years and has accordingly produced a large amount of research findings. This systematic literature review summarizes the extensive knowledge in this field and contributes to both academic research and managerial practice.

Until now, researchers have had to navigate a broad and fragmented research landscape characterized by different terminologies, vague definitions and diverse measurement approaches. This study provides an overview of the current conceptual and empirical status of perceived fit in the context of brand extensions. It sharpens the understanding of the construct, highlights theoretical explanations and offers a consolidated view of how perceived fit operates across different research contexts. Furthermore, the article identifies inconsistencies in previous research, reveals critical research gaps and presents a clear agenda for advancing the field in the future.

Table 3. Future research questions

Research questions	Directions
<p><i>Perceived fit methodology</i> How can diverse methodological approaches advance perceived fit research?</p>	Existing studies have been methodologically homogeneous, being largely quantitative, consumer-focused and concentrated in North America. Future research should adopt more varied approaches (e.g. qualitative, managerial, cross-regional) to broaden theoretical foundations and enhance the practical relevance of research findings
<p><i>Underlying theories</i> Under what conditions do different theoretical perspectives on perceived fit levels best explain extension evaluations?</p>	Researchers largely rely on the theory stream around categorization theory to explain the role of perceived fit in the evaluation of brand extensions. However, there is disagreement about the optimal level of fit. Future research should investigate the conditions under which different theories (particularly categorization theory and schema congruity theory) offer the most explanatory power to broaden the understanding of consumer decision processes
<p>Under what conditions do different theoretical perspectives on the importance of perceived fit best explain extension evaluations?</p>	Previous research has rarely addressed the diverse theories explaining why consumers place differing weight on fit in extension evaluations (e.g. construal level theory, comparison theory). Future research should identify the circumstances under which these perspectives apply to specify the conditions shaping consumer evaluations of brand extensions
<p><i>Perceived fit conceptualization</i> How can perceived fit be defined?</p>	Research to date has produced many perceived fit definitions. However, these definitions are rather vague and do not provide insights into the actual characteristics of the construct. Future research should create a universal perceived fit definition to establish a common understanding of the construct
<p>What dimensions does perceived fit consist of, and how can these dimensions be defined?</p>	Previous research has hardly addressed the dimensions of perceived fit in detail, although the dimensions provide clarity on the meaning and scope of the construct. Future research should validate and, if necessary, complement the dimensions derived herein and focus in particular on the dimension of conceptual fit, which appears highly relevant but remains unexplored
<p><i>Perceived fit operationalization</i> How can perceived fit be measured quantitatively?</p>	Research to date has produced mixed results when operationalizing perceived fit. Future research should create a uniform operationalization to ensure validity and facilitate comparison and replication of research results around perceived fit
<p><i>Perceived fit context</i> Are different perceived fit dimensions relevant depending on the context? Are all dimensions equally important?</p>	The perceived fit dimensions have hardly been tailored to different contexts in previous research. Future research should investigate which dimensions are most important in different settings to sharpen research around perceived fit and to anticipate consumer behavior and perceptions in the best possible way

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Research questions	Directions
<i>Perceived fit research results</i>	
Do previous research findings on perceived fit hold up when operationalized uniformly?	Research has proved many effects around perceived fit, but different operationalizations make comparisons difficult. Thus, future research should replicate previous results using a uniform operationalization to develop a more accurate picture of perceived fit and its influence on the success of brand extensions
What is the impact of perceived fit on feedback effects from the extension to the parent brand?	Although brand extensions involve both opportunities and risks for the parent brand, parent brand outcomes are understudied in perceived fit research. Research needs to examine the role of perceived fit in feedback effects from the extension on the parent brand, to enhance positive and avoid negative effects
What is the impact of perceived fit on retailers?	The effects of perceived fit on retailers have received little attention so far, despite their key role in the success of indirectly distributed extensions. Thus, research should investigate how perceived fit can influence the listing chances of an extension
How can perceived fit be maximized and minimized?	Research has hardly explored what factors influence perceived fit. However, for perceived fit to be used effectively as a success factor for brand extensions, determining how perceived fit itself can be maximized or minimized is necessary. In this way, risks associated with the perceived fit can be reduced and positive effects reinforced

Source(s): Authors' own work

The article provides managers with a clear understanding of the key drivers of perceived fit and thereby highlights the stages within the product development process where managing fit is particularly important. It identifies situations in which fit becomes particularly critical, helping managers allocate resources more effectively. By providing a structured synthesis of empirical findings, the article facilitates the successful integration of the construct into the specific product environment, supports more informed strategic decisions and helps reduce the risk of extension failure or brand dilution.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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