

Organic line extensions: do they make sense for brands?

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Abstract-

Purpose

Past work on the role of brands in the acceptance of organic products is partial and inconclusive. Research has failed to examine the consumer sense-making process underpinning fit assessment, despite the centrality of this assessment in the acceptance of line extensions. This study reconceptualizes the fit construct, showing the relationship of the fit dimensions (noncompensatory) and contributes to the literature with a deeper understanding of the role of a brand's association in the assessment process, which has been poorly examined in the past.

Design/methodology/approach

Grounded theory was used to unearth the process followed by consumers to assess the fit of organic line extensions. The study was based on 14 in-depth interviews.

Findings

The findings show that the dimensions of fit that consumers consider in assessing organic line extensions depend on the schema used in the assessment process. Moreover, it demonstrates that these dimensions have disparate structural relationships with one another, depending on consumers' previous commitment to organic products. Finally, the paper identifies three possible behavioral reactions by consumers toward organic line extensions.

Research limitations/implications

The main limitation of this research concerns the settings in which it was developed. Therefore, and as stated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) the model applies to the situation analyzed and not to others. Future research could study if there are cultural differences in the assessment process of an organic line extension. Moreover, the contribution presented in this paper needs further empirical testing; specifically, the configuration of dimensions needed to accept

an organic line extension and the relationship among dimensions.

Originality/value

This paper contributes to the literature by studying the impact of brand association on assessing an organic line extension and reconceptualizing the fit construct by showing the dimensions and the relationship between them that are not additive to the overall fit, as shown in past literature. Additionally, it provides a guide to brands wishing to launch an organic product using a line extension strategy and the potential implications for the parent brand that should be considered.

Index Terms- Line extension; Organic products; Grounded theory; Perceived fit; Brand schema; Organic schema;

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