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Organic Line Extensions for mainstream brands. Is it a good strategy?

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Acknowledgment

Abstract

One of the consequences of the increased demand for organic goods is the launch of organic products from mainstream brands. This thesis aims to understand the role of brand associations in assessing an organic line extension of a mainstream brand. For this purpose, the first step has been to analyze the consumers of organic products and the motivations and barriers they encounter when purchasing such goods. Subsequently, the thesis explores how brand associations establish the organic schema in the minds of consumers.

The literature on line/brand extensions suggests that the congruence or fit between the parent brand and the extension is the main driver of an extension's success. This thesis reconceptualizes the fit construct by showing its multidimensionality and highlighting different relationships within its dimensions. Our results show that the evaluation process for the organic line extension follows different paths depending on consumers' level of environmental awareness.

This dissertation contributes to the line extension literature by identifying new dimensions of fit that consumers evaluate when considering an organic line extension and establishing the different types of relationships among these dimensions. Additionally, managerial implications are provided for brands looking to launch an organic line extension.

Keywords: *Organic Food, Line Extension, Brand Schema, Perceived Fit, Grounded Theory, QCA.*

Resumen

Una de las consecuencias del crecimiento de los productos orgánicos es el lanzamiento de extensiones de línea orgánica por parte de marcas convencionales. Esta tesis pretende estudiar cómo las distintas asociaciones de marca influyen en el proceso de evaluación de una extensión de marca orgánica. Para ello, lo primero ha sido analizar cómo es el consumidor de productos orgánicos y qué motivaciones y barreras encuentra a la hora de comprar este tipo de productos. Posteriormente se ha estudiado cómo las asociaciones de marca establecen su *schema* (mapa mental) en la mente de los consumidores.

La literatura de extensión de línea/extensión de marca sugiere que la congruencia o *fit* entre la marca madre y la extensión es el principal factor de éxito de una extensión. Esta tesis reconceptualiza el constructo de *fit,* demostrando su multidimensionalidad y poniendo de manifiesto que existen diferentes relaciones entre las dimensiones que lo forman. Además, esta investigación evidencia que el proceso de evaluación de la extensión de línea orgánica muestra diferentes rutas dependiendo del nivel de conciencia ambiental de los consumidores

Este trabajo contribuye a la literatura de extensión de línea identificando nuevas dimensiones de congruencia que el consumidor evalúa ante una extensión de marca orgánica y explicando diferente tipo de relaciones entre las dimensiones. Como implicaciones para la gestión, se realizan recomendaciones a las marcas que quieren lanzar una extensión de marca orgánica.

Palabras clave: *Productos orgánicos, Extensión de Línea, Schema de marca, Percepción de congruencia, Grounded Theory, QCA.*

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In this dissertation we include a study that has been published in the British Food Journal. To maintain the formatting style of the journal complicated the overall design of this thesis. In these cases, the University of Comillas statutes allows the researcher to modify font-type, headings style, pages layout, pages number and table/figures design to make it consistent with the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 is based on the published paper. The content is unchanged, but we have renumbered the tables to follow the order in the dissertation. The reference of the published paper is:

Hernandez-Olalla, M.-L., Valor, C. and Abril, C. (2023), "Organic line extensions: do they make sense for brands?", *British Food Journal*, Vol. 125 No. 8, pp. 2785-2802. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-06-2022-0519

In this thesis, artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) has been used for proof reading.

INTRODUCTION

1. Research topic

The United Nations explicitly addresses sustainable consumption and production as one of the important foundations of their Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The development of organic food contributes to this SDG (Nielsen et al., 2022) and is growing in importance among retailers, manufacturers, and consumers.

In 2021, the retailer's organic food in Europe was valued at 54.5 billion euros (Shahbandeh, 2023) making Spain the top 3rd country of organic agricultural land - 2.4 million hectares- (Willer, Trávníček, Meier, & Schlatter, 2021). Production of organic food means producing the food without using artificial chemical fertilizers and pesticides or nurturing animals without drugs or antibiotics (Seyfang, 2006), so consumers value organic food as is associated with healthiness, tastiness, food safety, animal welfare, and environmentally friendly products (Jose & Kuriakose, 2021). Nevertheless, the term "organic" has many different meanings and interpretations and is often associated and sometimes confused with terms such as "green", "ecological", "environmental", "natural" and "sustainable" (Aarset et al., 2004). This consumer misconception underscores the significance of creating organic labels that explain the product's benefits and, in turn, influence consumers' behavior patterns (Thøgersen, 2021) to increase organic sales. Moreover, the interaction of this label and other packaging messages impact consumer's attitude towards the brand (Medina-Molina, Rey-Moreno, & Periáñez-Cristóbal, 2021; Medina-Molina & Perez-Gonzalez, 2021) that need to be considered when developing the organic label.

Mainstream brands are reacting to this trend by launching their organic products, either under new brand names or using a line extension strategy -the use of the same brand name to introduce the organic product (Keller & Aaker, 1992). To illustrate, top leading brands in Spain that commercialize their organic line extension are, SOS (rice), Gallo (pasta), or Granini (orange juice). However, there are inconclusive results on how mainstream brands shape consumer's decisions when selecting an organic product.

The literature on organic food shows that depending on the product type (e.g., fresh *vs.* processed food), the organic benefit is easier to be perceived by the consumer. Similarly, studies about the brand in organic products focus on the differences between a manufacturer or private label (Ngobo, 2011); or between local and global brands (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013). Other researchers studied the influence of brand equity (Larceneux, Benoit-Moreau, & Renaudin, 2012) or brand reputation (Ryan & Casidy, 2018) in selecting an organic brand. Still, there is a lack of knowledge on organic line extensions and specifically on how brand associations may influence the acceptance of organic line extensions.

Therefore, it is expected that the brand associations will play a key role in the assessment process of an organic line extension. The literature on line extensions agrees that the main driver for a line extension success is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension (Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Past work considered that all the fit dimensions contribute to the overall fit in a linear and additive way (Carter & Curry, 2013). However, in this dissertation, we reconceptualized the fit construct for organic products by showing that different relationships may exist, for instance, noncompensatory (when the misfit at one dimension overrides the fit at the others). Moreover, due to the complexity of the organic associations, we expect a more complex assessment process that involves manifold fit dimensions related to the benefits expected of organic food.

2. Research questions

This thesis aims to study how consumers assess the perceived fit of organic line extensions from a mainstream brand. The first research question examines consumers' organic associations by analyzing the benefits expected with the consumption of organic food and the motives for such consumption. It is expected that these associations, that vary depending on consumers previous experience with organic food and on the salience of the characteristics of the products (Klink & Smith, 2001), will determine the organic schema.

RQ1: What are the most common associations of organic food that formed the organic schema?

The main driver of a line extension's success is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension (Völckner & Sattler, 2006), so our second research question seeks to comprehend the specific dimensions involved when assessing an organic line extension. Due to the complexity of the organic schema, more fit dimensions are expected to be considered by consumers.

RQ2: Which fit dimensions are considered in the organic line extension assessment process? Are there differences between consumers depending on their level of environmental consciousness?

The third research question examines the influence of the flexibility of the brand schema on the perception of fit dimensions of an organic line extension. Based on the learnings from private label, where consumers have a flexible brand schema that facilitate the acceptance of new private label products, it is expected that this flexibility will compensate the brand associations that are not congruent with the organic benefits during the assessment process of the organic line extension.

RQ3: Does the flexibility of the brand schema have compensatory relationship with product attributes that are not congruent with the organic schema in the assessment process of perceived fit?

Lastly, the fourth research question intends to understand how the different fit dimensions combine with each other to shape the overall fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension. There is evidence on the literature that for sustainable brand extensions, moral fit (the believe of the trustworthiness of the company that launched the extension) is a noncompensatory dimension, so the absence of it may make the consumer reject the extension. This evidence then suggests that there could be some fit dimensions that are necessary for the perception of overall fit and that other dimensions are difficult to compensate if the consumer does not perceive it.

RQ4: Which fit dimensions are necessary to produce an Overall Perceived Fit? Which fit dimensions override the others to produce Overall Perceived Fit?

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3. Overview of the dissertation

For this purpose, a mixed-method sequential design is used, as integrating both methods (qualitative and quantitative) helps the researcher in social research to study a complex phenomenon (Taherdoost, 2022). See the structure of this dissertation in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Dissertation overview

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┌─────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│     Chapter 1:      │  │       Chapter 2:         │
│    Organic food     │  │ Importance of brand      │
│                     │  │ schema in line           │
│                     │  │ extension strategy       │
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         ┌─────────────────────────────┐
         │        Chapter 3:           │
         │  A Grounded Theory approach │
         │  to identified fit          │
         │  dimensions                 │
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         │        Chapter 4:           │
         │ A fuzzy set testing of      │
         │ attributes and fit          │
         │ dimensions                  │
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         │ Chapter 5: Contribution &   │
         │ practical implications      │
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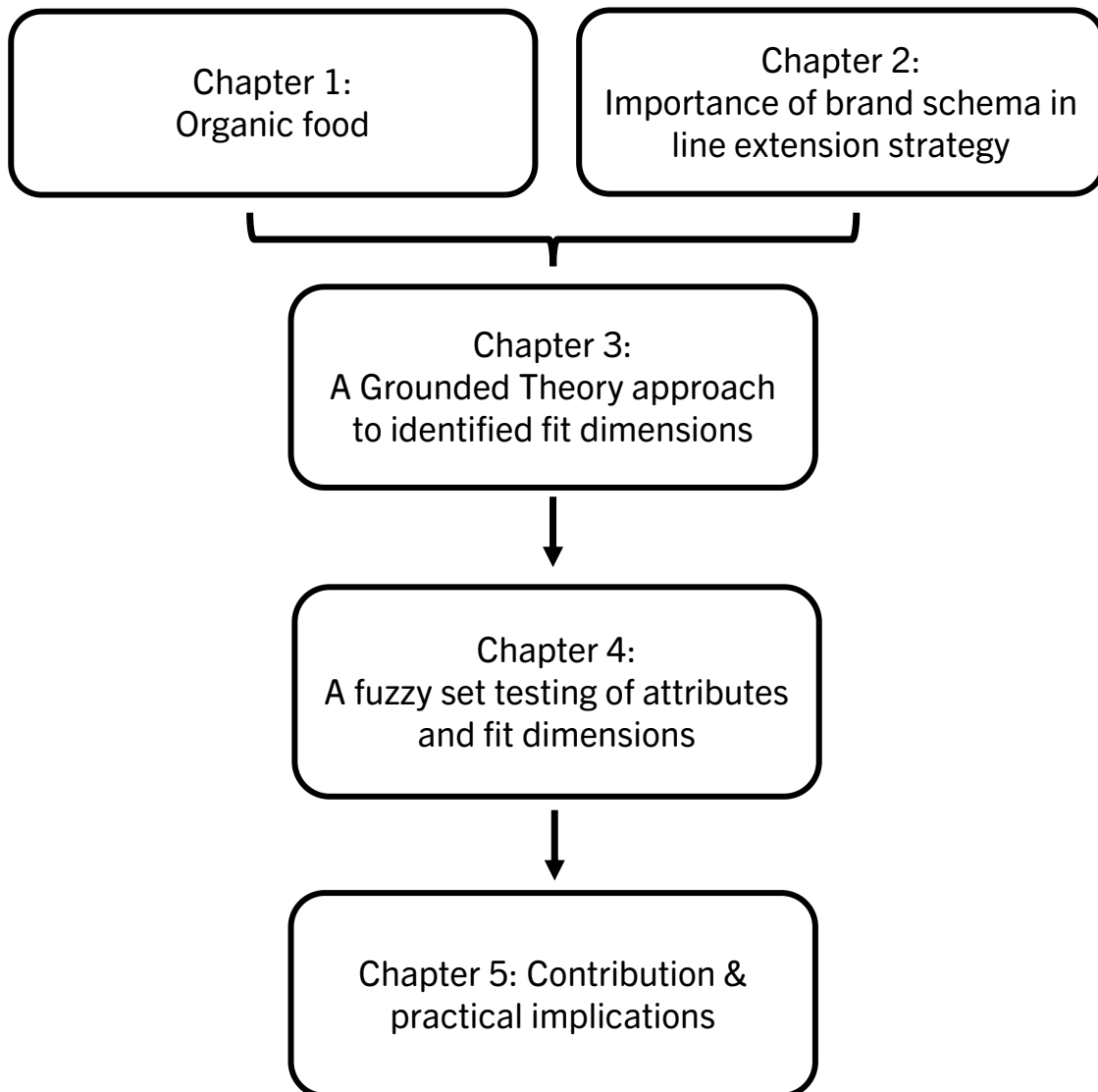
First, to draw the framework of this dissertation, we studied the main factors that influence the purchase of organic food, to have a better understanding of (1) the motives of the consumer when purchasing organic food and (2) the associations conforming for the organic schema, such as health, taste, food safety, animal welfare or environmentally friendly (Aarset et al., 2004). Second, we did a scoping review of the literature on brands to understand the brand associations typically considered by consumers. These brand associations form the brand schema (Halkias, 2015). Then, we draw from scholarship on line extensions the mechanism of consumers' acceptance of an extension. It was identified that the fit (or congruence) between the parent brand and the extension associations is the main driver for a line extension success (Völckner & Sattler, 2006). This chapter presents a proposed theorization of the fit construct as multidimensional, with different relationships among the dimensions, but there is scarce information about the dimensions used in the assessment process of an organic line extension. Therefore, the first study of this dissertation is needed. Using Grounded Theory, we identified the fit dimensions involved in the evaluation of an organic line extension and evidence that they have different relationships, as explained in Chapter 3.

Our second study uses Qualitative Comparative Analysis methodology with two purposes. First, to study the combination of the brand associations that produce each fit dimension; second, to understand the combination of fit dimensions that produce an Overall Perceived Fit. This study is explained in Chapter 4.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents this dissertation's contribution and the practical implications for brands wishing to launch an organic line extension.

CHAPTER 1. ORGANIC FOOD

1.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the findings of a scoping review of the factors that influence the purchase of the organic products. In particular, the chapter identifies three areas of interest: the profile of the consumer of organic products; the motivations and barriers to the purchase of organic food; and the contextual factors that influence the decision at the point of sale, such as category type, category structure, the role of the organic label, and the role of the brand (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Influencing factors of organic food purchases
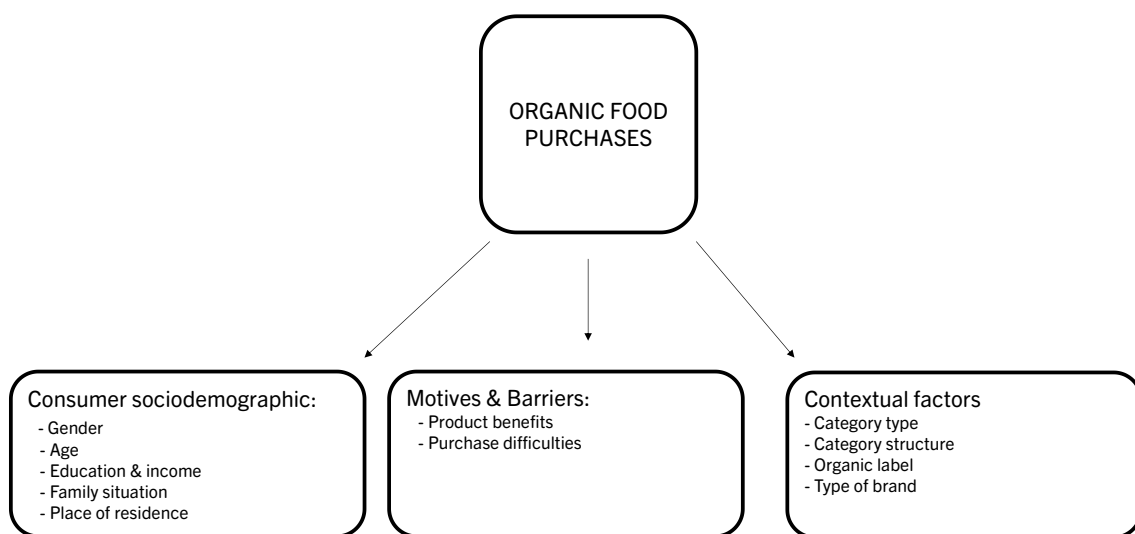
For this purpose, as the literature on organic products is vast, it was decided to prioritize seminal papers, other literature reviews, and meta-analysis studies for the scoping review. Also, we prioritized the last ten years as the organic market has been changing fast, as well as the consumption patterns, buyer profile, and consumers' understanding of organic food.

1.2. The organic consumer

Typically, when doing consumer segmentation, sociodemographic aspects are used. For organic food, gender, age, income, and education have been the most common factors under study (Katt & Meixner, 2020), followed by family situation and living in urban or rural areas. It should be noted that for some variables, the studies are not conclusive (Potter et al., 2021) due to different methodologies and products used in the studies.

Regarding gender, there is an agreement on females being more open to purchasing organic products than males. This is explained by women being, in most cases, responsible for the shopping purchases of the households (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018; Illukpitiya & Khanal, 2016; Schäufele & Hamm, 2018; White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Also, social desirability influences organic purchases as males avoid appearing "eco-friendly" because is associated with feminine traits (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016). Moreover, females tend to have higher traits such as agreeableness, interdependence, and openness to experience (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019) that have been associated with pro environmental behavior.

Studies concerning the age of the organic consumers are extremely diverse (Schröck, 2012). Some studies discover that young people are more open to consume organic products (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018) due to their openness to innovation and environmentally consciousness, whereas other studies revel that young people are the least likely to buy organic food due to budget constrains (Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012).

Education and income are highly correlated. Usually, consumers with higher education, have jobs that bring more income. This consumer highly educated does not see the price as an important barrier for the purchase of organic products (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018) and it is demonstrated that families with a higher income are willing to pay more for organic products, as there is a correlation between income status and the quality sought (Smith, Huang, & Lin, 2009). Also, the influence of education level may reflect that more educated people understand the importance of promoting a more sustainable consumption (Hansmann, Baur, & Binder, 2020) and thus try to purchase organic food.

When looking at the family situation, families with children between eleven and seventeen-year-old do more organic purchases than families with children under eleven or older married couples. This is linked to the incomes available in these families (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018; Ngobo, 2011). Another explanation of the influence of children on the purchase of organic food is that mothers look for healthier food option for their children (Makatouni, 2002) so there is an increase on the consumption of organic food once there is a newborn in a family.

Regarding the place of residence, there is not a clear conclusion on the effect of this variable in the consumption of organic products. One explanation could be the higher prices of organic food. As rural households are highly price-sensitive, they are unlikely to consume organic products (Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017). Another reason to account for these differences is associated with the availability of organic products. Studies demonstrating a higher frequency of organic product consumption in urban households attribute this trend to the accessibility of such products in urban areas (Smith, Huang, & Lin, 2009). There is a third explanation based on the effect of the country of origin for organic food. As consumers in rural areas perceived that local food is of higher quality, they are not willing to pay a premium price for organic food, as being organic does not contribute to improve the product *versus* the local product. This reason is especially relevant for fresh food (Thøgersen, Pedersen, Paternoga, Schwendel, & Aschemann-Witzel, 2017).

After reviewing the sociodemographic profile of the organic consumer, we need to take into consideration that the predictive ability of sociodemographic factors may be fading with the increase of the penetration of organics in the market (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018).

1.3. Motives and barriers to the organic consumption

Motives and barriers have a significant influence on the purchase-decision making process (Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2016), therefore the importance of studying them in the context of organic food.

There are several studies whose findings are consistent, showing that the main motives for the shopper when choosing organic foods are: health (Aarset et al., 2004; Eberhart & Naderer, 2017; Jose & Kuriakose, 2021; Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015; Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005), taste (Aarset et al., 2004; Bryła, 2016; Hemmerling, Hamm, & Spiller, 2015; Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005), environmental impact (Aarset et al., 2004; Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015; Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005), animal welfare (Aarset et al., 2004) or risk avoided with its consumption (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018; Rana & Paul, 2017).

On the contrary, the main barriers to the purchase of organic food are the high price (Jose & Kuriakose, 2021; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015), the lack of availability (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013; Padel & Foster, 2005), the distrust in the food system, particularly for occasional buyers (Truong, Lang, & Conroy, 2021), and the skepticism about the superior quality over the conventional products (Vindigni, Janssen, & Jager, 2002).

Drawing from the reasons and barriers to purchase organic food, we can infer some of the meanings or associations related to organic products. These meanings are different among consumers as they have inconsistent interpretations of what is organic (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005) and different consumption values (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991).

The association of healthiness with organic products is based on the production system. As organic production does not use pesticides and there is a belief in use of a more traditional way of production (Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014), the product is perceived to be healthier and have better quality (Larceneux, Benoit-Moreau, & Renaudin, 2012).

There are different perceptions of the better taste of an organic product. Individuals with pro-environmental behavior or attitudes perceive a greater taste preference for organic products over conventional ones, whereas consumers with low environmental concerns expect that organic products taste worse than non-organic products (Prada, Garrido, & Rodrigues, 2017).

Consumers perceive that organic products are more environmentally friendly and protective of animal welfare, but this belief does not necessarily drive an increase in organic purchases. The behavior toward organic food depends on the altruistic or egoistic consumer values (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). Those with more altruistic values are willing to pay more for organic food, even though poor availability exists, as they contribute to the well-being of society (with a positive impact on the environment, animal welfare, and society). In contrast, those with more egoistic values choose these products for self-centered reasons, such as health.

Past purchase experience has a higher positive influence on the purchase of organic products (Yamoah & Acquaye, 2019) and drives a spillover effect within categories that have perceived similarities, such as fruits and vegetables (Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017). Findings reveal that consumers who have started buying some organic foods are more likely to buy other organic products.

In sum, although there are different reasons to purchase organic food, health and sensory aspects have been identified as the most influential ones (Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, & Gupta, 2019).

1.4. Contextual factors

1.4.1. Category type

The extant literature has examined the impacts of category-type distinctions through the utilization of three classification schemes: (a) vice *versus* virtue products, (b) fresh *versus* non-fresh products, and (c) processed *versus* non-processed food.

Consumers make a clear distinction between vice and virtue categories. Vice categories (e.g., chocolate, wine, beer) provide an immediate pleasurable experience but contribute to negative long-term outcomes, while the virtue categories (e.g., yogurt, vegetables, fruit) are less gratifying and appealing in the short term but have fewer negative long-term consequences (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015).

There are opposite rationales for the effect of vice or virtue categories influencing consumers' preferences for purchasing organic products. On the one hand, buying organic in a vice category might reduce the enjoyment or pleasure of consuming that product because is expected that the organic version has a worse taste than the non-organic product (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011), but on the other hand, the organic label can provide a guilt-reducing complement to vice food as is perceived healthier (Lee, W. J., Shimizu, Kniffin, & Wansink, 2013). Nonetheless, evidence supports that the health benefits of organic products are more congruent with virtue than vice categories (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013). Therefore, using an organic claim in virtue categories will increase the product's attractiveness or

appeal, resulting in greater sales, as there is higher congruency between virtue products and health benefits associated with organic food.

A second category distinction is whether it is fresh *vs.* non-fresh products. There is evidence of the preference for organic fresh food over organic non-fresh products because in fresh products, the organic benefit is easier to be perceived by the consumer. Organic is associated with fresh, natural, unprocessed, and farm-grown products (Parker, J. R., Paul, Hamilton, Rodriguez-Vila, & Bharadwaj, 2021). This preference is reflected in the market where fresh fruit and vegetables constitute the most popular organic product group in Europe (Willer & Schaack, 2015), although it is demonstrated that dairy and meat are the product categories that most likely function as an entry point for organic purchasing and that in time there is a spill over to other product categories (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013; Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017). To explain this spillover, the perceived similarity between product categories seems to play a fundamental role in adopting organic food products. Moreover, food safety is an important reason for the purchase of organic food and this perception of food safety is more common in fresh food, as it is easier for the consumer to visualize possible health hazards in this type of food (Lusk, 2011); for example, the danger of the use of pesticides during the production of bread (Edenbrandt, Gamborg, & Thorsen, 2018).

The third approach to the category-type studies in the literature is processed[1] food products (*versus* fresh or non-processed food). The more processing a product needs, the less natural is perceived (Evans, de Challemaison, & Cox, 2010) and therefore the less congruent with organic benefits. Nevertheless, including an organic label on processed products (e.g., frozen pizza) increases the perceptions of healthfulness and tastiness over the conventional counterpart (Prada, Garrido, & Rodrigues, 2017) even in non-healthy process product such as chocolate cookies (Amos, Hansen, & King, 2019). Another strategy to increase the benefits of an organic process product is to include the organic label at the ingredient level (e.g., frozen pizza produced with organic ingredients). As consumers associate ingredients with

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[1] Through this dissertation, there is a distinction between fresh (e.g., vegetables or fruits) and non-fresh food (e.g., cereals), the latter comprising various levels of processed food. Consumers may appraise the level of "processness" differently, depending on their experience with the product.

raw food, and raw food is coherent with the organic benefit, having a processed product with organic ingredients makes sense for the consumer and increases the acceptance of the organic processed product (Parker, J. R., Paul, Hamilton, Rodriguez-Vila, & Bharadwaj, 2021).

1.4.2. Category structure

The structure of the category influences the purchase of organic products. Category concentration diminishes organic product sales because consumers are loyal to big players' brands (Ngobo, 2011), and the leader's power shadows small new players that bring the organic offer. Even if the leader moves to organic, consumers in this category will not consider purchasing the organic brand because they are skeptical about mainstream supermarket chains being able to meet their needs in terms of sustainable products (Ngobo, 2011). Nevertheless, Bezawada & Pauwels (2013) encourage leader brands to launch an organic product as they risk losing sales with increased penetration of organic products.

In addition to the brands selling organic products, the retailer strategy also influences the consumer's consumption. If the retailer's strategy focuses on sustainability, organic products will have a wider assortment, with an appropriate price offer, and be better positioned in the store. Retailers should increase organic assortment and lower regular prices, especially for non-core organic consumers (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013). There is empirical evidence of the suitability of this strategy, as the increase in purchases of organic products is due to the changes in the market (better availability, wider assortment, and greater quantities) and not only to attitudinal changes among consumers (Lund, Andersen, & O'Doherty Jensen, 2013).

However, major supermarket chains have encountered an unfavorable perception regarding their involvement in the sales of organic products, primarily due to consumer skepticism. This perception is rooted in the belief that retailers prioritize financial gains over supporting local agriculture (Padel & Foster, 2005). Still, it is noteworthy that this paradigm is shifting, as many supermarkets are adopting initiatives that support local farming. In this evolving landscape, the retailer's

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corporate social responsibility activities foster trust among consumers in the organic food sold in their stores (Pivato, Misani, & Tencati, 2008).

It is recommended that retailers design the stores to provide organic products in prominent positions for convenient shopping experiences, enhancing them with attractive displays (Syaekhoni, Alfian, & Kwon, 2017).

Trust in the retailers influences consumers' organic purchase intentions (Xing, Li, & Liao, 2022). A typical cue that consumers use to trust the retailers of organic food is the quality of the product. The quality is a signal of the honesty of the retailers in the organic food chain (Ladwein & Romero, 2021).

The review of these studies suggests that the demand for organic goods follows a push strategy: if retailers place greater importance on these goods, increase the assortment, reduce the premium price, and give more visibility in the store, the demand will follow suit. Consumers will increase their organic purchases if the product is easily available in their regular store due to the convenience of purchasing all they need in the same store.

The width of the organic assortment also influences sales (Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018). The wider the assortment of organics, the greater the likelihood of the availability of specific flavors and/or package sizes, which creates more opportunities for customers to buy them (Aertsens, Mondelaers, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009). Also, there is better visibility on shelves that has been demonstrated to influence the purchase of new consumers.

Regarding the influence of marketing tactics at the point of sale, three aspects have been studied: price, promotional activity, and space on the shelf. First, price. There is mixed evidence on price elasticity. Ngobo (2011) demonstrated that, in France, the price shows an inverted U-shaped relationship with purchase quantity; this implies considering organic as superior goods so that higher prices lead to higher sales. In contrast, Bezawada & Pauwels (2013) found negative elasticities in the US, so organic sales increase strongly when prices lower, even for consumers with a high intrinsic value for organics. However, expensive categories show lower consumer sensitivity to premiums and price specials for organic products.

Second, the promotional activity. Past studies have examined (1) how the promotional activities of non-organic goods affect the purchasing of sustainable goods and (2) how the promotional activities of organic goods affect their purchasing. Regarding the former, although the effect of promotion varies depending on the category (Ngobo, 2011), in categories with very high promotional activity, the perceived premium of organic goods increases, and the sales of organic products drop (Ngobo, 2011; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). This may be due to the contrast effect: in a high promotional category, the perceived premium of organic goods increases. However, promotions of organic goods could increase their demand, as these promotions would reduce the perception of premium. In "high purchase frequency categories of a virtuous nature that came directly from the farm" (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013: p.40), as the congruity between the product and the organic benefit is higher, the discount could be lower; while in storable and impulse categories, there is needed a deeper discount to increase sales. Thus, successfully promoting organic products should reduce demand for conventional products in the same category (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013).

Third, in-store visibility may also influence purchasing. For all products, the greater the shelf space and the closer the location to the eyes, the greater the sales, since the more noticeable the products are, the more consumers will purchase them (van Herpen, van Nierop, & Sloot, 2012). Regarding the location on the shelf, there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between vertical shelf and position and market share. In organic products, the share of space is higher than the market share, so giving extra space does not necessarily mean extra market share in the same amount (van Herpen, van Nierop, & Sloot, 2012).

Another important consideration for the aisle design is the implementation of different flavors or sizes of the same brand. It is a long-held debate whether organic goods should be positioned on the shelf with the category or placed on a different shelf. If implemented with the category, a brand block could be created in the aisle, with more impact on the consumer and increasing sales (van Herpen, van Nierop, & Sloot, 2012).

1.4.3. The role of the organic label

An additional characteristic that may affect sales of organic brands is the communication of the organic label. Labels are "any words, particulars, trademarks, brand images, pictorial matter, or symbols on any packaging" (Carrero & Valor, 2012a: p.631).

Because organic products are considered credence goods, which means that are difficult and sometimes impossible to evaluate even after the consumption experience (Ngobo, 2011), the organic label is a key communication tool for consumers to have this credence. These labels are used as heuristic cues to search for the benefits of being organic (Carrero & Valor, 2012b). It is demonstrated that if consumers trust the labels, their attitude towards purchasing organic food improves (Sultan, Tarafder, Pearson, & Henryks, 2020). Nevertheless, consumers spend little effort when buying a common repeat purchase product (such as food) because they are not very involved in the purchase action (Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012). This low involvement represents a barrier of entry for organic products. Therefore, the organic communication needs to catch consumers' attention to create this involvement and to guide consumers to increase purchases (Eberhart & Naderer, 2017).

Organic labelling leads to increased perceptions of food safety of a food brand (Majer, Henscher, Reuber, Fischer-Kreer, & Fischer, 2022) with different impacts depending on the type of consumer. Occasional consumers trust the organic label, regardless of its origin; nevertheless, consumers with highly knowledge and experience on organics, have lower trust in global certifications (Nagy, Lakner, & Temesi, 2022). For consumers, if the organic label is certified by a known organization, such us USDA (United State Department of Agriculture), there is a higher trust on the certified label than a generic one (Van Loo, Caputo, Nayga Jr, Meullenet, & Ricke, 2011).

Nonetheless, there is evidence that consumers struggle to understand the meaning of the organic label, if the benefit expected with organic is not easy to be perceived, as is the case for highly processed food products (Ellison, Duff, Wang, & White, 2016), or when there are other messages such as the interpretative nutritional

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label NutriScore (Medina-Molina, Rey-Moreno, & Periáñez-Cristóbal, 2021; Medina-Molina & Perez-Gonzalez, 2021). This lack of clarity can contribute to the skepticism and mistrust toward the organic label (Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014). If there is not trust on the organic label, the consumer is not willing to pay more for the organic product (Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005).

In sum, these findings underlie the importance of developing organic labels that are comprehensible and trusted by consumers to increase organic food consumption.

1.4.4. The role of the brand: private label vs. manufacturer label

The last factor considered to influence the purchase of organic products is the brand itself. Few studies have assessed the impact of the brand name in the organic product acceptance, and those that have done so, have adopted an aggregate approach by categories or type of brands.

Concerning the type of manufacturer, an organic product can be offered by a national brand or by a retailer (private label). There is not a clear conclusion on the type of brand preferred for consumers due to methodological differences across the studies.

There is a set of studies that analyses the differences of private label over conventional brands in a general way. These studies have found that consumers prefer private organic labels over conventional brands (Jonas & Roosen, 2005; Konuk, 2018; Ngobo, 2011). For consumers, private label brands mean good value for money, can be found in each retailer and in most of the categories available in the store (Jonas & Roosen, 2005). The value-price equation is considered as the main reason to purchase organic private labels (Konuk, 2018), because organic private labels are perceived as good quality products with lower prices than manufacturer brands.

The second reason for the success of a private label organic extension is related to the market reality. More private labels are launching organic assortment compared to conventional brands (Jonas & Roosen, 2005), so consumers looking for

organic food must trade between organic private label or non-organic national brands (Van Loo, Minnens, & Verbeke, 2021).

Nevertheless, other research offers non-conclusive evidence on the influence of national brand or private label being organic. Reinders & Bartels (2017) compared the impact on brand equity and brand identification of both type of brands as a predictor for a future organic purchase. Their results show that brand equity has a positive influence on organic brand consumption for both private label and manufacturer labels. Familiarity with organic products, is one driver in the purchase of manufacturer organic label; whereas in the case of private label the organic product familiarity does not have any effect and is more related to the familiarity of the retailer and its brand than specific organic products in general.

Likewise, when the perceived benefits of healthiness, hedonism, environmental friendliness, and food safety are compared across three types of brands (global, local, and private label brands), no differences among the three types are found. For conventional brands (that is, non-organic brands), the private label is perceived as less healthy, less hedonic, less environmentally friendly, and less safe compared to manufacturers brands (being local or global brands). Nevertheless, when the brands communicate a sustainable claim (e.g., organic), the local brand is evaluated more positively, although the differences are not significant (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013).

Probably these differences are due to the trust on the brand. It is demonstrated that well-known brands are trusted for organic consumption (Nagy, Lakner, & Temesi, 2022). Manufacturers' brand reputation can serve as a reason to form positive attitudes to purchasing branded organic products (Ryan & Casidy, 2018). Still, the private label is increasing in sales, knowledge, and awareness, so it is considered by its consumers as a well-known brand.

Other literature studied the differences between brand types considering the perceived size of the brand. For instance, there is evidence that native organic brands are preferred over mainstream brands for the consumption of organic products, based on the size of the company (assumed smaller for native brands). Consumers perceive that small-size companies specializing in organics,

independently of the real size, follow artisanal manufacturer procedures (Wood, Robinson, & Poor, 2018), which is more congruent with organic benefits.

Other studies on the type of brand suggest interactional effects between the perceived brand characteristics and personal characteristics for the preference for organic products. On the one hand, environmentally concerned consumers prefer small brands of organic products (Ngobo, 2011). In contrast, studies in sustainable fashion line extensions (Hill & Lee, 2015; Kim, H. & Ma, 2014) proposed that environmentally conscious consumers will respond positively to products and brands that support their values. These consumers are happy to perceive that the brands they like launch sustainable products.

1.5. Conclusions

The study of the factors that influence the purchases of organic products enables the associations that consumers identify with organic goods. These associations are closely linked to the expected benefits of its consumption (e.g., healthiness), with environmental impact, production processes (e.g., traditional) or characteristics of the brand/company selling the organic product (e.g., virtue category or small company size). However, the studies are sparse and there is a need to a more holistic and in-depth study on the brand's associations considered in the assessment of a line extension, as will be done in Chapter 2.

Also, there is evidence that consumer characteristics will influence the purchases of organic foods, depending on their previous experience with organic or their level of environmentally concerned. This will be considered in the studies in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BRAND SCHEMA IN A LINE EXTENSION STRATEGY

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to delineate a series of axioms that will structure the conceptual framework of this dissertation. As explained in the introduction section, the aim of this thesis is to study the factors that influence the acceptance of an organic line extension launched by a mainstream brand. Therefore, we will study the existing scholarship discourse concerning brand associations and their importance to consumers. Later, we will review the literature on line extensions to ascertain that the consumer's main evaluation mechanism is the fit between the parent brand associations and the organic associations. Additionally, we will examine related scholarly works that have explored the concept of fit to enhance our comprehension of this construct.

2.2. Brands as schemata

In this section, we conceptualize the meaning of the associations of the brands for consumers. These associations are reflected in the brand schema. The brand schema is a mental representation of the brand's associations in consumers' minds (Halkias, 2015).

2.2.1. Definition of brand and brand equity

A brand can be defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods and services of one's seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler, Saliba, & Wrenn, 1991: p.442). Brands are becoming one of the most valuable assets in a company. Therefore, they have been widely studied in the academic literature. The power of a brand is often expressed by brand equity (Kim, Woo-Sung, Boush, Marquardt, & Kahle, 2006), which is defined "in terms of the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand" (Keller, 1993: p.1), or using other words, the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993).

Brand equity has two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005) and can be broken down into brand recall and brand recognition. Brand recall is the consumer's ability to retrieve the brand when given

the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type of probe as a cue. Brand recognition is the consumer's ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue (Keller, 1993).

The brand image consists of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory forming a schema. Typically, these associations are related to brand attributes -descriptive features that characterize a product or service-, brand benefits -personal value consumers attach to the product-, and brand attitudes - consumers' overall evaluation of the brand- (Keller, 1993). Brand associations can also be differentiated along their favorability -how important the attribute is-, strength -depends on how the information enters consumer memory and how it is maintained as part of the brand image-, and uniqueness -the value proposition of this brand cannot be found in another brand- (Keller, 1993). Figure 3 shows the brand equity dimensions typically studied in the literature. The brand associations comprising the brand schema derived from the brand image dimensions.

Figure 3: Brand equity dimensions and associations
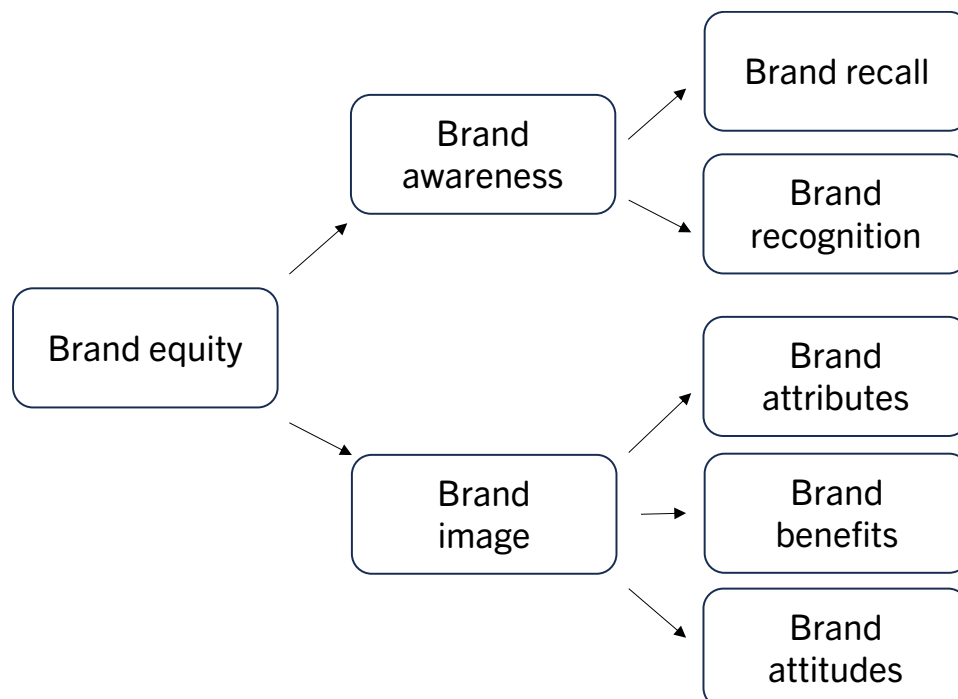
The brand equity represents the preference of a brand for the consumer. These preferences are based on the brand associations that each consumer has. Therefore, to study the acceptance of a line extension of a mainstream brand, we are going to consider the brand schema.

2.2.2. Brand from a schema theory

The schema theory came from the psychological literature. It defines schemata as memory-stored cognitive structures of prior knowledge about a concept that specify its defining and relevant attributes (Halkias, 2015). The schematic knowledge that individuals develop through their experience help them make inferences about missing attributes (Puligadda, Ross Jr, & Grewal, 2012). In short, brand schema could be defined as consumers' mental representation of brands (Halkias, 2015), organized around brand associations. These associations characterize a product or service (Keller, 1993) and can be classified into (a) product-related associations (e.g., ingredients necessary for performing the product), and (b) non-product-related associations or external aspects of the product (e.g., brand image, price, packaging, user imagery, and usage imagery).

Organic products enjoy as a category an organic schema, related to the organic benefits and organic product attributes that the consumer perceives. Typically, as explained in Chapter 1, these benefits or associations are related to healthiness (Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017), freshness (Rana & Paul, 2017), natural ingredients (Lusk, 2011), tastiness (Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012), food safety (Rana & Paul, 2017), environment protection, animal welfare (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005), overall quality improvements (Hemmerling, Hamm, & Spiller, 2015), and local and artisanal productions (Wood, Robinson, & Poor, 2018). Due to the intricate nature of the organic associations among consumers (Hidalgo-Baz, Martos-Partal, & González-Benito, 2017) and the varying perspectives regarding organic products (Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014), we expect that diverse organic schemata coexist.

2.3. Literature review on brand and line extensions

The literature on line extensions builds upon previous research on brand extensions, given that a line extension represents a specific type of brand extension

(to launch a product in the same product category). The extant literature provides little guidance on line extensions as it is fragmented within a large body of research on brand extensions (Schmitz, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2023: p. 829). Therefore, we will include insights from the brand extension literature to outline the conceptual framework of this dissertation.

Brand extension is the "use of established brand names to enter new product categories or classes" (Keller & Aaker, 1992: p.35). Firms commonly use this strategy to enter new categories with a strong brand that would allow them to reduce the investment in advertisement and take advantage of the brand name and recognition. The idea behind this strategy is that the core brand name signals the consumer some characteristics or qualities of the new product that would facilitate consumers' acceptance and purchase the new product (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

There are two forms of introducing a brand extension, a horizontal extension, or a vertical extension. Following Kim, C.K., Lavack, & Smith's (2001) definition, a horizontal brand extension involves the application of an existing brand name to a new product introduction, either in a similar product class or in a product category entirely new for the firm (e.g., Kellogg's -cereal manufacturer- launching Kellogg's breakfast cookies). A vertical brand extension (or line extension) involves introducing a similar brand in the same product category with a different quality or price point (e.g., Chocolate Lindt launching Chocolate Lindt with reduced sugar).

Line extensions can be upscales of the parent product -the addition of an attribute to improve the quality and price of the product - or a downscales- the addition of a cheaper version of the parent product- (Heath, DelVecchio, & McCarthy, 2011; Kim, C. K., Lavack, & Smith, 2001). There is a third possibility, whereby brands launch an extension at a similar price to that of the parent brand to respond to competitors' offerings or new market demands in the product category -e.g., being organic- (Lee, M., Lee, & Kamakura, 1996; Munthree, Bick, & Abratt, 2006; Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994).

The objective of these strategies is to reach new consumers to achieve incremental sales that compensate for potential cannibalization of the parent brand sales (Caldieraro, Kao, & Cunha Jr, 2015) -up to 53% of line extension sales are

detracted from the parent brand sales (Lomax & McWilliam, 2001)- or to revitalize the brand by improving the parent brand equity (Sinapuelas & Sisodiya, 2010), as the innovation increases the brand's attractiveness and enhance the value proposition for the consumer (Aaker, 2007).

Most of the line extension literature studied the attitude toward the extension, the extension purchase intention, and the impact of the extension on the parent brand (Figure 4). We will focus on the attitude towards the line extension, as is the main purpose of this dissertation.

Figure 4: Line extensions most frequent studies objectives
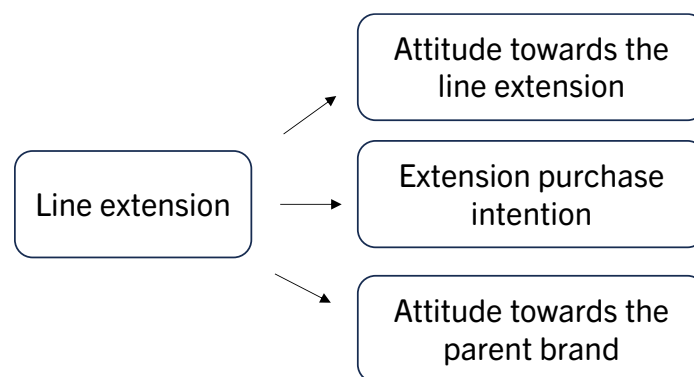
In addition, past scholarship also has paid attention to the possible negative consequences of a line extension strategy on the parent brand. Two possible consequences have been identified in past work: the cannibalization effect (Nijssen, 1999) and a negative impact on the brand image (Martinez & Pina, 2003). The cannibalization effect occurs when current consumers of the parent brand perceive the extension as an improved product and switch to it. Nevertheless, this situation might not be so negative when the line extension drives incremental sales (especially when the line extension has a premium price) that compensate for the loss in sales of the parent product (Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994) or when the extension is perceived as a higher quality that improves brand attitudes (Heath, DelVecchio, & McCarthy, 2011).

The second risk studied of a line extension strategy is the dilution or erosion of the parent brand image (Martinez & De Chernatony, 2004). This may occur if consumers find dissonances between the quality of the parent brand and the

extension (Kim, C. K., Lavack, & Smith, 2001). Usually, line extensions have different prices or quality levels, so consumers may perceive inconsistencies between both products that make them re-evaluate their initial assessment of the parent brand (Kim, C. K., Lavack, & Smith, 2001). This may be especially true for environmentally friendly line extensions of products that may be perceived as less effective and more inconvenient to use compared to the conventional counterparts (Chatterjee & Kay, 2010), and for prestige brands when a downscale extension is launched (Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2013), because it is associated with lower quality.

Some literature proposes strategies to avoid these adverse effects on the parent brand. For example, the use of a "distancing technique" between the two products (ways to position the extension closer or further from the parent brand), such as graphical and linguistic differences (Kim, C. et al., 2001) or the use of a sub-brand (Aaker, 1997) for the new product. Nevertheless, launching an innovative line extension could build on the brand's good image and associations that enhance the brand equity of the brand family (Sinapuelas & Sisodiya, 2010), which seems to be an interesting strategy.

2.3.1. Acceptance of line extensions

Most of the literature has studied the success of a line extension as the attitude towards the extension (Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2013; Kim, C. K., Lavack, & Smith, 2001), the extension purchase intention (Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2015; Lei, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2008) or willingness to pay (Sattler, Völckner, Riediger, & Ringle, 2010). Few studies have used market data as dependent variables to measure the success, e.g., market share, stock market value, or extension sales; (Nijssen, 1999; Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994), despite the use of these measures could increase relevance to practitioners.

Moreover, it is worth bearing in mind that most of the literature on brand extension has studied the success of an extension measured as the consumer's acceptance of the new product. This acceptance has been evaluated from different perspectives: (a) as a cognitive construct, such as the credibility of the company launching the extension or brand trust (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Reast, 2005), (b) as an affective variable, measuring the disposition and its valence towards the extension

(Hem, De Chernatony, & Iversen, 2003), (c) as a behavioral construct measured with variables such as willingness to pay, intention to buy or likelihood of trying the extension (Klink & Smith, 2001; Reast, 2005; Sattler, Völckner, Riediger, & Ringle, 2010).

Awareness of the differences between acceptance and purchase is essential because accepting an extension may not lead to higher sales (Carter & Curry, 2013) due to the attitude-behavior gap, which is especially relevant in ethical consumption (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2014). Consumers could accept an organic line extension based on the sense-making of the product, but they may not purchase it due to other reasons, such as higher prices (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015) or lower added value perceptions (Skard, Jørgensen, & Pedersen, 2020).

In this dissertation, we will focus on acceptance of the organic line extension. This acceptance is measured as an overall perceived fit between the parent product and the extension without considering if this acceptance results in greater purchases.

2.3.2. Methodological approaches

The study of line extensions has used different methodological approaches, mostly using genuine parent brands but with hypothetical line extensions. Although using hypothetical brands allows the researcher to control the variables that influence the assessment process of a brand extension, this choice may limit ecological validity as, in real situations, consumers have more *stimuli* that also influence this process (Schmitz, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2023).

Also, past literature has used different methods to study line extensions being the most common correlational or experiments. Table 1 summarizes the methodology and the type of brand used when studying line extension success.

Table 1: Summary of studies on line extension success

References	Method	Sample type	Type of brand	Type of extension
Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo (2013)	Correlational	Consumers	Real (2 cars brands and 2 fashion brands)	2 hypothetical extension
Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo (2015)	Experiment	Consumers	Real brands (cars, shoes)	Hypothetical extension
Kim C.K., Lavack, & Smith (2001)	Experiment	Students	Real brands (cars, watches)	Hypothetical
Lee, Lee, & Kamakura (1996)	Experiment (Conjoint)	Students	2 real brands (detergent and drinks)	1 real (detergent) 1 hypothetical (drinks)
Lei, de Ruyter, & Wetzels (2008)	Experiment	Consumers	Real (hotel)	2 hypothetical extension
Nijssen (1999)	Correlational	Product and marketing managers	Real brands (from the respondent's company)	Real extension (that were in the market for more than 3 years)
Sattler, Völckner, Riediger, & Ringle (2010)	Correlational	Consumers	10 real brands	10 real extension

2.3.3. Perceived fit as the primary determinant of an extension's acceptance

Researchers agree that the primary mechanism for line/brand extension acceptance is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension (Peng, Bijmolt, Völckner, & Zhao, 2023; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). The perceived fit is the perception of similarity or congruity between two products based on shared attributes or associations salient for consumers. Although there is agreement on fit as the main mechanism of assessment, there are diverse perspectives on what line/brand-extension fit is and how to measure it (Deng & Messinger, 2021). For example, the fit has been studied as a unidimensional or a multidimensional construct.

Fit is conceptualized as unidimensional when assessed as a single, overall judgment of similarity between the parent brand and the extension (Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000; Kim, C. K., Lavack, & Smith, 2001; Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994) without analyzing any separate dimensions.

In contrast, the fit is conceptualized as multidimensional by other authors defending that the assessment is more complex since the consumer evaluates the fit at different levels or dimensions, such as *inter alia*, the product attributes level - e.g., ingredients- and the brand image associations -e.g., symbolic benefits, feelings towards the brand, perceived price/value- (Carter & Curry, 2013; Czellar, 2003; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Riley, Charlton, & Wason, 2015; Völckner & Sattler, 2007). For instance, in the assessment of a new Special K cereal bar, the consumer may consider the capacity of Kellogg, as an expert in the cereal category, to produce cereal bars, and the sense-making of having cereal bars under a cereal brand name (Special K). Combining both dimensions drive the extension's overall perceived fit and acceptance.

Other dimensions identified in the literature that are relevant for brand and line extension are category fit or the perceived similarity between the differential attribute of the extension and the category of the parent brand (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991); image fit or the match between the specific image of the brand and the extension product category (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Carter & Curry, 2013; Deng & Messinger, 2021; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991); usage fit when both products are used in the same situation (Deng & Messinger, 2021) and targe-market-based fit, when both products have the same consumer's target (Deng & Messinger, 2021).

Depending on the product type one of the fit dimensions may be more relevant than other for the consumer evaluation of the line extension. For instance, the literature paid attention to the differences between function-oriented and prestige-oriented products. For function-oriented products, the fit of the product associations is the most relevant dimension, whereas for prestige-oriented products, the most important fit dimension is the brand image (Carter & Curry, 2013; Czellar, 2003; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Völckner & Sattler, 2007). These

differences are based on the consumer's brand associations and their attached importance which are different for each type of brand. These disparities determine the importance of the range of fit dimension in the evaluation process. For organic products, the congruity between the organic benefit and the product category's main attribute leads to more favorable evaluations of the extension -e.g., perceptions of the naturalness of organic products fit with the attribute of nutrition in the cereals category- (Chatterjee & Kay, 2010).

Another important fit dimension studied in the literature is the company's expertise or competence to produce the extension. This variable has been studied from different perspectives, distinguishing between the consumers' perception of the companies' capacity (operational competence) and the companies' sensemaking (conceptual competence) in the assessment process. Operational competence refers to the techniques used to develop the product. In contrast, conceptual competence is more abstract, reflecting the brand's ability to connect different products, not specific product characteristics (Wang, H. & Liu, 2020). Based on the statement that consumers evaluate the line/brand extensions with the information held about the parent company, the researchers found out that for a near-brand extension (an extension that shares some attributes of the parent brand), the operational competence of the parent company (ability to manufacture the other category's product) was a significant predictor of the acceptance of the brand extension. For example, when a high-performance detergent product launches a fabric softener product with the same brand, the consumer evaluates the extension based on the brand's ability to manufacture a high-performance softener. This finding suggests that the company's capacity and expertise will positively impact the evaluation for an organic line extension, as both products belong to the same product category.

In the case of far-distance extension (when consumers have difficulties understanding the similarities between the two products), the consumer evaluates the extension based on the perceived conceptual competencies of the company (Wang, H. & Liu, 2020). For example, Harley-Davidson's extending from motorcycles to footwear, consumers evaluated the extension based on the brand concept of freedom, ruggedness, and outdoors (Cooney, 2004). If the consumer abstractly

evaluates the organic line extension, then they will always analyze the extension in terms of fit with similar associations in the parent brand schema, such as healthy or natural.

Company resources and capabilities have been studied using company size as a cue (Han & Schmitt, 1997). Consumers seem to find big companies more trustworthy, as they have the resources to produce new products (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Nevertheless, as organic products are associated with small companies (Janssen & Hamm, 2012), company size is expected to be ambivalent in the assessment process, depending on the consumer's characteristics evaluating the extension. Therefore, opposite meanings are possible to drive fit perceptions. If the company is perceived big and an expert manufacturing the category, then the consumer perceives fit at the company dimension. Also, if the company is perceived small and producing with traditional methods, the consumer perceived fit at this size dimension.

Table 2 summarized the most important fit dimensions studied in the literature on brand extensions that are applicable to the specific case of line extension.

Table 2: Fit dimensions in the literature

Fit Dimensions	Definition	Findings	References
Product category fit/product attributes fit	The perceived similarity between the extension category and the existing product category of the parent brand	Inconclusive findings: Product-category fit positively influences the extension's acceptance (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991); product category similarity was irrelevant in extension evaluation (Bhat & Reddy, 2001).	Bhat & Reddy (2001) Park et al. (1991)
Brand level fit/Image fit	The match between the specific image of the brand and the extension product category	Image fit (fit of the specific brand's associations that differentiate one brand from another of the same product category) is more important for a symbolic brand than for a functional brand, as symbolic brand associations are related to the image, status, style… in contrast to functional brands, associations that are product-related attributes are more important.	Bhat & Reddy (2001) Carter & Curry (2013) Deng & Messinger (2021) Park et al. (1991)
Target-market-based	The target market (consumer's profile) of the parent brand's leading product and the extension product target market	Positive impact	Deng & Messinger (2021)
Transferability/resource-based/parent company competence	The resources required (e.g., people, facilities, skills, strategy, knowledge, expertise) to develop and manufacture the parent brand's leading product and the extension product	Transferability has a direct and positive effect on the evaluation.	Aaker & Keller (1990) Deng & Messinger (2021) Han & Schmitt (1997) Wang & Liu (2020)

The study of fit in other pieces of literature beyond brand or line extensions suggests that there could be more dimensions of the perceived fit that have not been studied yet. For example, the sponsorship literature has studied different fit dimensions that predict positive attitudes toward sponsorship. The most typical dimensions are the possibility to use the product during the event (e.g., consuming drinks during the game), the similarity audience (e.g., the object's audience is the brand target segment), the geographical similarity (e.g., a national bank and a national team) and the attitude similarity (e.g., equal liking both the brand and the object) (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011).

In cause-related marketing, Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley (2010) identified ten dimensions that contribute to the assessment of overall fit between social causes and consumer brands, from the message of the campaign to the colors of the slogan or the involvement of the consumer in the cause; Huertas-García, Lengler, & Consolación-Segura (2017) empirically demonstrated that two of Zdravkovic et al. (2010) proposed dimensions are sufficient to spur a positive affective response in consumers, such as the slogan fit and the geographic fit.

In sum, past work has shown that the fit is assessed by comparing or contrasting the associations and attributes of the parent brand and the extension (Klink & Smith, 2001). These associations entail the parent brand and the extension schemata (Halkias, 2015; Low & Lamb, 2000). Schemata are, thus, phenomenological since each consumer will hold his or her brand schema based on the associations' differences in importance, complexity, and salience (Halkias, 2015). The more brand associations the consumer has, the more complex the brand schema is (Low & Lamb, 2000), and the more dimensions will be implicated in the assessment of overall fit.

In organic line extensions we expect the fit assessment to be multidimensional, considering both the brand and the organic schemata. The organic schema is related to the benefits expected from organic products and the associations of the company launching the organic line extension. Therefore, the fit dimensions expected in the assessment process of an organic line extension are related to the product category, the brand associations, and the company launching the extension. A Grounded Theory approach study will be carried out and explained in

Chapter 3 to discover more fit dimensions involved in the evaluation of an organic line extension.

2.3.4. Rethinking the relation between dimensions and perceived fit

The multidimensionality of the assessment begs the question of how consumers combine or integrate these separate dimensions of fit to eventually make an overall fit assessment (Deng & Messinger, 2021). Past work has studied the fit dimensions assuming that the relationship between them is linear and additive, so each separate fit assessment contributes to the overall fit, albeit with a different weight (Carter & Curry, 2013; Czellar, 2003; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Riley, Charlton, & Wason, 2015; Völckner & Sattler, 2007). These studies assume that the fit assessment at each sub-dimension has compensatory relationships with the overall fit assessment. Depending on the extension type, some dimensions are more critical than others (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Peng, Bijmolt, Völckner, & Zhao, 2023). For instance, in functional products, the fit at the category level is more critical than in prestige products, where the image fit is more salient for the consumer (Völckner & Sattler, 2007).

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the different fit dimensions may have non-compensatory relationships in the assessment process. For example, research on green line extensions in the fashion industry has shown that moral fit perceptions override the overall fit assessment so that if consumers do not perceive that the green clothing line fits with the company's environmental values, there is no perceived overall fit between the green line extension and the parent brand schema (Kim, Hye-Shin & Hall, 2015). As a result, the green extension is rejected without even considering the fit at the other dimensions (Kim, Hye-Shin & Hall, 2015). Further evidence for the non-compensatory relationships among dimensions of fit is found in studies on consumers' reactions to organic products in the vice and virtue categories. Consumers are unwilling to pay the premium price of an organic product in the vice category because they perceive that being organic will reduce the enjoyment of its consumption (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). Reinterpreting this finding from the notion of fit, we defend that lack of fit with the category associations of vice products and the organic schema leads consumers to reject organic vice products without considering the fit at other dimensions. Alternatively, if consumers continue

to evaluate the new product, it becomes necessary for multiple fit dimensions to be present to offset the lack of fit with vice products.

Also, one dimension could strengthen and amplify the importance of other dimensions in the assessment process (Grzybowska-Brzezińska, Kuberska, Ankiel, & Brelik, 2020). For example, the quality of the parent brand amplifies the fit perceptions so that the more the perceived quality of the parent product, the more accessible for the consumer is to transfer this quality to the extension and therefore its acceptance (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Also, consumer characteristics, such as their level of innovativeness, influences the fit perception as highly innovative consumers are more willing to try new brands (Czellar, 2003).

Given these arguments, we defend that the acceptance of organic line extensions will be based on assessing the fit between the brand and the organic schemata held by consumers. This fit assessment is decomposed or multidimensional, as the fit is assessed for each of the pair of the brand and the organic schema. Moreover, we contend that there could be different relationships among the fit dimensions. We expect non-compensatory relationships when a lack of fit at one dimension leads to overriding (and not considering) fit at other dimensions. This would lead consumers to reject the extension. In contrast, we expect conjunctural causation when the perceived fit at one dimension encourages consumers to accept the extension, even with low fit perception in other attributes. To study the relationship between the fit dimensions, a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) is done and explain in Chapter 4.

2.3.5. Consumer traits as a key moderator of fit perceptions

The literature agrees that the main moderator of the fit perception is the consumers' characteristics (Czellar, 2003). Also, as explained in Chapter 1, the consumer characteristics also influence the consumption of organic products; therefore, we need to consider them in this dissertation.

The consumer characteristics most studied in the line/brand extension scholarship are the level of innovativeness and thinking style. Highly innovative consumers (early adopters) are less sensitive to risk, so the fit plays a less important role in their extension evaluations than late adopters' consumers (Czellar, 2003;

Hem, De Chernatony, & Iversen, 2003; Jung & Tey, 2010). Furthermore, the level of expertise with the parent product influences the fit assessment process due to the differences in product knowledge (Muthukrishnan & Weitz, 1991), that is expected to be especially pertinent in the case of an organic line extension. As explained in Chapter 1, previous experience with organics has a spillover effect to increase the consumption of organic products in more categories (Juhl, Fenger, & Thøgersen, 2017). The higher the involvement with organic products, the more organic products consumers are willing to consume. This involvement with organic products influences what fit dimensions will be considered in the assessment of the line extension (Ferguson, Dadzie, & Johnston, 2008), as the consumer will make a more comprehensive assessment of it.

Another significant consumer characteristic that moderates the importance placed on the different dimensions of the perceived fit is thinking style - the analytic *vs.* holistic- (Hao, Liu, Hu, & Guo, 2020; Monga & John, 2007). Consumers with analytical thinking focus on the attributes of the product to establish categories, whereas consumers with holistic thinking analyze the product in general, also considering the context of the evaluation and the relationship between the context and the product (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Those that analyze in a more abstract and generalized way, place more importance on the overall perceived fit, as it is a global assessment "of the connections that exist between the parent brand and the extension" (Kim, Hakkyun & John, 2008: p.117), than those that analyze the extension in a more concrete way, that give importance to the specific features of the brand extension (Kim, Hakkyun & John, 2008). Consumers that are highly environmentally concerned look for ethically cues more carefully (Wagner & Petty, 2011), so it is expected that will need more fit dimensions in the assessment process.

To sum up, different assessment paths are expected as consumers understand organic products differently (Hidalgo-Baz, Martos-Partal, & Gonzalez-Benito, 2017; Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014), leading to distinct evaluations of the line extension based on different cues. The main difference is expected to be between high *vs.* low-environmentally concerned consumers. High-environmentally concerned consumers are likely to engage in a

more deliberative assessment process, so will need a greater number of ethically cues to perceive an overall fit between the mainstream brand and the organic line extension. These consumers are expected to consider a wider range of fit dimensions in their assessment process.

2.4. Conclusion

Drawing from the literature on line extensions and what has been said about the brand in organics, it is proposed that the mechanism of acceptance of an organic line extension will rely on the fit as a multidimensional construct. As previously discussed, the consumer considers various dimensions of fit that correspond to the associations of the brand and organic schemata in their mind. The first purpose of this dissertation is to unveil the dimensions used in this assessment. For this, the first study used Grounded Theory to identify the fit dimensions and the evaluation path that the consumer follows depending on their level of environmentally concerned.

Finally, it is expected that the dimensions of fit do not linearly add to shape the overall fit assessment. Rather, we expect to find compensatory and noncompensatory relationships among the dimensions of fit. The second study, using QCA methodology, allows to understand the different combinations of the fit dimensions that produce the overall perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension.

CHAPTER 3. A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND THE DIMENSIONS OF FIT IN ORGANIC PRODUCTS

3.1. Introduction[2]

As explained in Chapter 2, the main driver for line extension success is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension. We expect the fit construct to be multidimensional, and these dimensions are related to the brand and the organic schemata. This research aims to unveil the fit dimensions that the consumer considers when assessing an organic line extension.

The proliferation of organic line extensions rests on the idea that including an organic version adds value to existing products since it provides additional benefits (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013). However, a closer look at the literature on line extensions and organic products reveals limitations in understanding the role of brands in supporting organic claims.

Specifically, two significant limitations have been identified in past research. First, the process underpinning the acceptance of an organic line extension has yet to be studied comprehensively. The literature on brand and line extensions agrees that the most critical driver of brand extension success is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Consumers evaluate an extension based on the congruity of the new attribute of the product (e.g., non-added sugar) and the parent product (Lee, M., Lee, & Kamakura, 1996). Whereas this fit assessment may be relatively straightforward when the line extension is based on a simple benefit or attribute (such as the non-added sugar example), for organic line extensions, the assessment of fit is more involved due to the complexity of the meaning of organic (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005), which covers various aspects from healthy attributes to hedonic aspects (taste) or environmental protection (Hemmerling, Hamm, & Spiller, 2015). As work on the perceived fit of cause-related marketing has shown, the assessment of the fit between multivocal constructs is based on the evaluation of different dimensions (Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley, 2010); therefore, to understand how consumers assess the fit of organic line extensions, it is fundamental to identify the dimensions

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[2] This study was published in British Food Journal under the title *"Organic Line extensions: do they make sense for brands?"*. We have adapted the introduction to increase the fit with the rest of the dissertation. Method, findings, and conclusion are identical to the paper published.

used by consumers that cannot be inferred or have not been provided by past research.

Second, the role of brands in accepting organic products has been overlooked in past research. Brands are a set of associations of the attributes and benefits of a product (Keller, 1993) that belongs to the brand schema (Halkias, 2015). However, as explained in Chapter 2, research on organic goods and brands has not studied brands as associations but rather brands as signals or cues of a category (Ngobo, 2011). For instance, past research has examined how consumers react to organic products sold by retailers' or manufacturers' brands or between global or local brands (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013; Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013; Ngobo, 2011). Few studies have adopted the brand-as-schema perspective; at most, they have examined one of the associations comprising the brand schema, such as the influence of brand credibility on purchase intentions of organic food (Sekhar, Krishna, Kayal, & Rana, 2021) or the brand familiarity impact on the willingness to pay for organic food (Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005). There is a lack of research that fully acknowledges the complexities of the brand schema involved in organic line extensions; capturing this complexity demands comparing or contrasting the schema held about a brand and the schema held about organic goods.

Other work has focused on brand equity, "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993: p.8), but the results are inconclusive. For example, Larceneux, Benoit-Moreau, & Renaudin (2012) demonstrate that low equity brands benefit more from the association of an organic label than high equity brands; since it is easier to change attitudes toward low-equity brands, and the organic label may help boost the perceived quality of the product. Nevertheless, Reinders and Bartels (2017) show that brand equity positively influences organic brand consumption for private and manufacturer labels, regardless of brand equity.

In sum, past work on the role of brands in the acceptance of organic products is partial and inconclusive. Research has failed to examine the consumers' sense-making processes underpinning the fit assessment, despite the centrality of this assessment in the acceptance of line extensions. This research addresses the

described limitations, controversies, and omissions by providing new insights into consumer assessment processes related to accepting branded organic line extensions.

Given the limited research on the topic, a theory-building approach is appropriate (Morse et al., 2016). Specifically, a grounded theory approach was adopted, as this method is recommended for the study of processes, specifically for those that are based on consumers' sense-making (Charmaz, 2014), as is the case here. Drawing from schema theory of brands (Halkias, 2015) and line extension research (Aaker & Keller, 1990), this paper contends that a consumers' disposition to accept or reject organic line extensions depends on an a priori assessment of the fit between the schema held of organic goods and the schema of the specific brand launching the organic product. Because these schemata are comprised of various associations (Halkias, 2015), the assessment of fit is expected to be decomposed in the evaluation of fit of particular dimensions or subassociations (Deng & Messinger, 2021). Identifying these dimensions is, then, a primary objective of this research.

However, as explained in Chapter 2, whereas past work has assumed that these decomposed assessments linearly or additively combine to produce an overall fit assessment, assuming compensatory relationships among the dimensions (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991), our study rejects this assumption and contend that noncompensatory relationships may occur among these dimensions so that lack of fit in one dimension may be sufficient to produce an overall perception of nonfit and, thus, to reject the organic line extension. Thus, a second objective is to identify the structural relationships among dimensions *vis-à-vis* the overall fit assessment.

This paper proposes a conceptual model grounded on data to explicate consumers' acceptance (or rejection) of organic line extensions. In particular, the model shows that the fit assessment between the brand and the organic product is based on manifold dimensions comprising the brand and organic schema. Moreover, the model shows that the primacy of the dimensions depends on which schema takes precedence in the assessment, which, in turn, depends on the consumers' environmental concern/previous commitment to organic purchasing. The model also unveils the noncompensatory relationships among the dimensions

of these schemata so that extensions that lack fit at the category dimension are not accepted by low environmentally concerned consumers; similarly, extensions that lack fit at the company dimension are not accepted by high environmentally concerned consumers, regardless of the fit in other dimensions. Finally, the model shows three possible consumer behavioral dispositions [reverse cannibalization, cannibalization, and rejection] toward organic line extensions. Whereas past literature has assumed that perceived fit is linked to acceptance of the extension, our findings show that even when consumers assess a positive fit, they may not purchase the organic extension, instead turning to the parent brand (reverse cannibalization).

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, a method particularly suitable for theory development (Charmaz, 2014), was chosen as the appropriate technique for this study since the aim of this research is to create a conceptual model grounded on data that unveils the psychological processes leading to the acceptance of an organic line extension and, more precisely, the dimensions of the fit mechanism used and the structural relationships involved (Glaser, 1978). This approach seems appropriate for theory construction, not description, of processes that otherwise remain invisible (Charmaz, 2014) and is particularly suitable to study sense-making processes, as is the case here (Charmaz, 2014). Another advantage of this method is that it allows the researcher to simultaneously unearth many variables or categories (the fit dimensions in this study) and to identify their interrelationships. Following the Straussian version of Grounded Theory, the model will be based on an iterative analysis of previous literature and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.2.2. Interviews

Fourteen semistructured interviews with a reflexive focus, tailored to each interviewee (Arsel, 2017), were conducted with the person responsible for household grocery shopping.

Following the tenets of purposive sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), variability was sought based on gender (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019), family life cycle stage

(Chintakayala, Young, Barkemeyer, & Morris, 2018; Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012), previous consumption of organic food (Schäufele & Hamm, 2018; Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012) and level of environmental concern (Prada, Garrido, & Rodrigues, 2017; Wang, J., Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2021). A description of the informants is provided in Table 3. Informants were contacted using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Parker, C., Scott, & Geddes, 2019). Interviewees lasted between 45 and 120 minutes and were held online or face-to-face at the informants' request. Saturation was achieved in interview 11. The Ethical Committee of the University approved the method design.

Table 3: Informants' profile

Informants	Gender	Age	Family life cycle	Purchase Organics	Environmentally concerned
1	Male	41	Married, 5 children < 9	No	No
2	Male	31	Single	No	Yes
3	Female	41	Single	No	No
4	Female	56	Widow	No	Yes
5	Female	23	Single	Yes	Yes
6	Female	32	Dinky*	Few	Yes
7	Male	41	Married, 3 children < 12	Few	Yes
8	Female	43	Single	Yes	Yes
9	Female	30	Married, a child < 2	No	No
10	Male	30	Married, a child < 2	No	No
11	Female	35	Single	Yes	Yes
12	Female	35	Dinky	Yes	Yes
13	Female	37	Married, 3 children < 10	No	Yes
14	Female	44	Married, 2 children < 7	No	No

*Dinky: Double Income No Kids Yet

3.2.3. Interview guide

Before the interview, informants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the food product categories and brands they regularly bought. Their answers were used to customize the interview guide that followed a three-part structure so that each respondent talked about their preferred brand for different food categories. First, informants were asked about their general knowledge of sustainable products and, more precisely, organic food products and their understanding of various organic labels available in the market (showing them different pictures or organic logos, including the official European Organic Logo). Additionally, they were asked about their recycling habits and grocery shopping routine, e.g., whether they brought their shopping bags, as this has been found to correlate with organic product purchases (Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015). This first part of the interview also served to assess their environmental concerns. Second, they were shown a set of images of different product categories, selected to match their responses based on

the preinterview questionnaire; these scenarios described the organic line extensions launched by their favorite brands. These organic extensions could be real ones (e.g., Nestlé Chocapic Bio) or fictional (e.g., Orlando tomato sauce), depending on whether they existed in the market. In this latter case, the first author created a product prototype using the European Organic logo and included an organic claim in the packaging picture. Finally, to obtain higher quality and more profound information on the processes underpinning the assessment of the organic line extension (Wei & Yeik, 2022), beyond their knowledge and attachment to a specific brand (Grønhøj & Bech-Larsen, 2010), two types of vignettes were used. Vignettes were used to illustrate situations in which a person is about to purchase a food product and finds a new organic line extension on the shelf (see the vignettes in Appendix 1).

3.3. Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed in three sequential phases (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, transcripts were read several times, and preliminary codes of the cues used for the assessment of the fit between the parent product and the line extension were identified, such as vice or virtue category, healthier product, naturalness, better taste, nonprocessed product, environmentally friendly, company's degree of specialization, firm size, and proximity (see Figure 5). Second, these preliminary codes were aggregated into second-order categories. This procedure identified fundamental categories that explained the dimensions that consumers used for the fit assessment. In this step of the analysis, we discovered that some dimensions were noncompensatory (e.g., large company size unfit with organic production methods, so that organic products launched by large companies are rejected). Third, the constant comparison among respondents (Gambetti, Graffigna, & Biraghi, 2012; Leite, Pinto, Kon, & Meirelles, 2021) allowed us to identify that the noncompensatory dimensions differed according to the prevalence of the schema used for the fit assessment; in turn, this prevalence is closely associated with the consumers' environmental concern. Thus, environmental concern seems to act as a moderator of the processes of fit assessment. As a result, two paths for the fit assessment are identified, as shown in the proposed model in Section 4.

Figure 5: Data coding
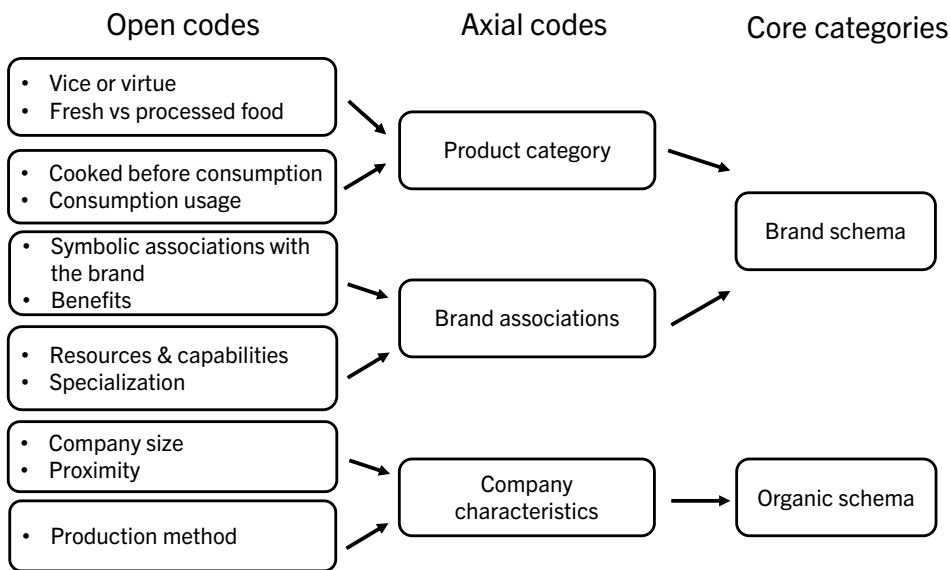
Finally, the interviews were analyzed to identify the declared consumers' intentions concerning the potential line extension. This analysis identified three possible outcomes: increased loyalty or consideration of the parent brand (reverse cannibalization); a switch from the parent product to the extension (cannibalization); and a negative impact on the parent brand and extension (rejection). Whereas the cannibalization effect (Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994) and the negative impact on the parent brand image (Martinez & De Chernatony, 2004) have already been identified in past studies, reverse cannibalization has emerged as a new possible outcome that has not been identified in previous studies.

Qualitative studies were recommended to triangulate the data for the study's validity. For this reason, the second and third researchers reviewed the analysis performed by the first researcher after each step of the process. When the interpretations differed from each other, the researchers analyzed the data together to reach an agreement (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016).

3.4. Findings

The findings show that the assessment of an organic line extension can follow two paths, depending on the schema primacy used for the assessment. The brand schema path is observed among low-environmentally concerned consumers, and

the organic schema path among high-environmentally concerned consumers. During this assessment process, various dimensions are evaluated, some of which are noncompensatory for the consumer. The emerging model for the assessment of an organic line extension and the possible outcomes are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Representation of the conceptual model
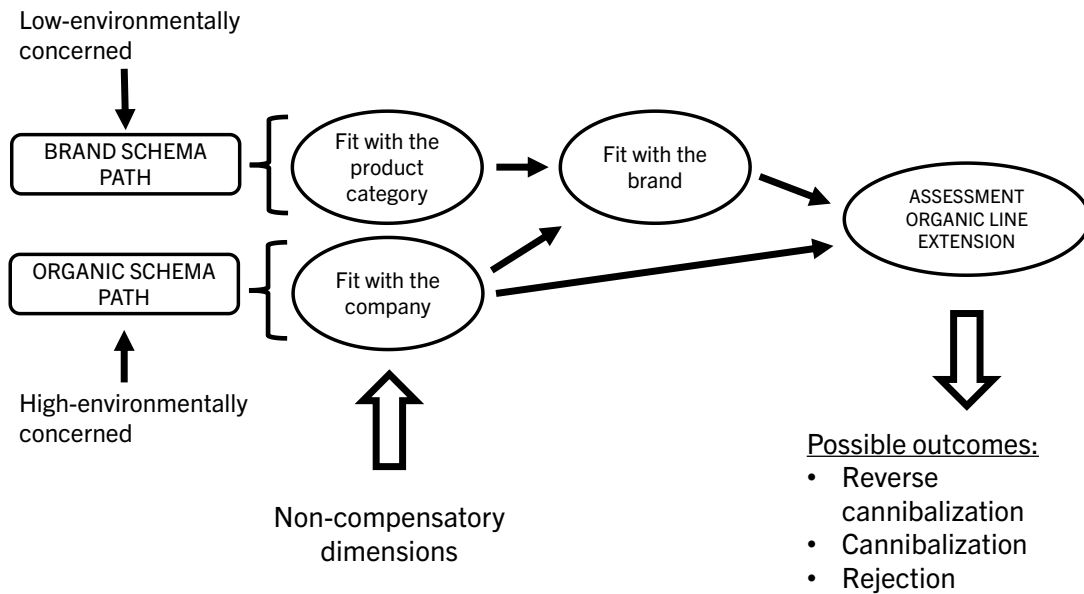
Three dimensions are key in the assessment process of an organic line extension: fit with the product category, fit with the brand, and fit with the company launching the product. Additionally, we identified different cues used to assess each dimension. These cues are related to the benefit expected with the consumption of organic products and the schema path used for the evaluation. The cues are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Exemplary cues for fit dimensions

Fit with the product category	Fit with the brand	Fit with the company
Vice or virtue	Symbolic associations of the brand	Company size and proximity
Fresh *vs.* processed food	Benefits associated with the brand	Production methods
Cooked needed before consumption	Resources and capabilities	Packaging
Consumption usage	Specialization of the brand	Specialization of the company

3.4.1. Assessment of the fit based on the "brand schema path"

Low-environmentally concerned consumers and not used to consuming organic products have two salient associations with the organic schema: healthiness and tastiness. To assess fit with the brand schema, first, they examine the fit between these associations and the product category of the extension, and second, they examine the fit with the brand associations embedded in their brand schema.

Four aspects are especially relevant for the consumer to assess the fit at the product category subdimension. The category being vice or virtue, the perception of fresh *vs.* processed food, the necessity to cook the product before consumption, and how the product is consumed.

To evaluate the fit at the category level, those who expect an improvement in the organoleptic attributes of the product (hedonic benefit) find better fit with organic extensions in virtue and less processed food products categories; thus, extensions in virtue or nonprocessed food categories are assessed as having a better fit and, thus, are more accepted. This assessment of fit is based on the associations between natural, artisanal and tastiness often held by consumers (Richetin et al., 2021), as I7 pointed out:

> I imagine the production of the coffee more handcrafted; they would roast the coffee without industrial ovens, with wood, for example. Therefore, the coffee should be a bit different and with a better taste.

In contrast, consumers reject organic line extensions in processed food categories, as they interpret processed food as contrary to naturalness, a common attribute identified with organic products (Roman, Sánchez-Siles, & Siegrist, 2017). The incongruity or limited fit between the organic benefit of naturalness and a processed food product explains why informants are not inclined to accept the organic line extension: *"The ketchup is an artificial product; it is a mixture of many ingredients with the tomato… it makes no sense to have it organic"* (I3).

Moreover, consumers make a similar unfit assessment of nonprocessed products that require food preparation before consumption (e.g., a can of fresh crushed tomato for preparing tomato sauce). To illustrate, I10, who claims to be a very "rational buyer," refuses to buy organic products or nonprocessed food when this food is cooked at home:

> *If you buy a can of crushed tomatoes that are used for cooking something else, you cannot notice any better taste, so buying an organic version is not worth it.*

According to his interpretation, the organic benefits of better taste will dissipate once the product is cooked. Similarly, consumers evaluating the extension based on better taste reject the product if it is consumed with something else (e.g., pasta with any kind of sauce), as they will not be able to notice any taste difference.

Comparably, fit assessments at the category level are found among consumers buying organic food for health benefits. These consumers assess a greater fit when organic extensions are launched in virtue categories. This fit may explain why greater sales of organic food are found in health-related brands, as reported in other studies (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013). Conversely, informants assess incongruent organic extensions in vice categories. Even when one of the ingredients is organic, this does not help to override the unhealthy perceptions of the other ingredients (*"The beer has alcohol, so it remains unhealthy anyway, why would you prefer an organic beer?"*, I8).

The model shows that fit at the category level seems necessary but not sufficient since consumers report that the extension first needs to "*make sense*" or "*be*

congruent" with the product category. Fit at this dimension is, thus, noncompensatory. Consequently, only when consumers assess fit at this dimension do they proceed to assess the fit between the meanings of taste and health embedded in the schema of organic products and the brand's associations; precisely, consumers evaluate the fit between the organic meanings and (1) the symbolic associations of the brand that make consumers perceive a real commitment of the brand with consumer's health, (2) the resources and capabilities of the brand and (3) the benefits expected of the brand.

Consumers report a greater fit with the health benefit associated with organic products with brands perceived as caring and healthy. To illustrate, I5 does her grocery shopping at a retailer reputed for its commitment to health. She recognizes that it makes sense that they launch an organic line extension with their private label brand:

> *If I see that they [referring to the retailer's brand] now have an organic pasta, I am sure it is healthier; they are very conscious of the health of the people. I liked the idea* (I5).

The second element used by consumers to assess fit at the brand level is the perceived ability to produce the organic product. The literature on line extensions has demonstrated a greater acceptance of the line extension when consumers perceive this ability (Desai & Keller, 2002). For I2, a brand that is used to launch many extensions can also produce an organic line extension because the brand has the expertise to launch new products: *"[The brand] is always launching new variants of beer; I am sure they can have an organic one"*.

Another cue about the company's ability is the leadership position of the brand in the specific category. Consumers attribute the ability to produce according to organic requirements to leading brands, usually produced, and sold by large companies. Additionally, they value the effort to develop this kind of product. They believe that well-known brands have greater environmental impact, and, for this, they have the responsibility as well as the resources to innovate and adapt to consumers' needs. Thus, organic line extensions launched by large companies are considered congruent with the parent company. This is the case for I14, who

perceives the organic claim of added value to the product and expects leading brands to invest in products that meet consumers' new needs and demands: *"It is more logical that leading companies developed this type of product. They need to work on their image with the consumers (...). They have the responsibility and the tools to do it"*.

For the positive evaluation of the fit between the brand's benefits and the organic claim, the organic version needs to fit with the brand associations. For example, I14 chose a specific pasta brand for its texture and expected that the organic version would maintain the texture of the nonorganic product: *"the texture after boiling needs to be the same"*.

In summary, for consumers looking for hedonic and healthy benefits in the organic line extension, fit at the product category level emerges as a noncompensatory dimension. This assessment is a necessary but insufficient condition for the overall fit assessment. If there is no perceived fit at the category level, the extension will be rejected by consumers even if it fits in with any of the other dimensions. Once there is perceived fit at the product category dimension, consumers evaluate the perceived fit at the brand dimension.

3.4.2. Assessment of the fit based on the "organic schema path"

For high-environmentally concerned consumers and those who regularly buy organic products, the organic schema takes precedence in evaluating the organic line extensions. In particular, the attribute of "environmentally friendly", in addition to "healthy" and "tasty", is more salient for these consumers. For them, the framework of the assessment process is the organic schema.

The first dimension of fit evaluated is the company's feasibility of launching an organic product. This feasibility is assessed by the ability of the company to launch the product and the motives behind doing it. When consumers believe that company behavior is motivated by benevolence rather than self-interest (Chernev & Blair, 2015) and that the company has demonstrated community involvement (Keller & Aaker, 1998), the perception of fit increases. Past work has referred to this dimension of fit as "moral fit" (Kim, Hye-Shin & Hall, 2015). To assess moral fit,

consumers use different cues, such as (a) company size or proximity location, (b) production methods, (c) packaging and (d) company product specialization.

Consumers believe that organic products are from small and local companies (Sanders, 2013), and both associations conflate in consumers' minds. Therefore, organic line extensions launched by large companies are negatively assessed because the associations of large companies are not congruent with environmentally friendly production. Informants shared two reasons to support this statement. First, large companies need to produce large quantities that are incompatible with organic requirements, as the company needs to add unhealthy additives (e.g., preservatives) to have an extended expiration date. I11, a habitual buyer of organic products, has the experience of purchasing organic pasta with a shorter expiration date than the regular pasta: "*I purchase organic pasta, from a company in my town, the expiration date is shorter than others you find in the supermarket; also, the flour of the pasta is not so processed, you can notice the difference".* Second, large companies are thought to produce outside the OECD countries, which seems to be less healthy because consumers assume that the regulation is more permissive (Benard Oloo & Oniang'o, 2018). I6, for whom the organic product is synonymous with healthy products, is concerned with legislation:

> *There are some pesticides that in the European Union are forbidden, as they are considered carcinogenic (…). Additionally, there is a higher impact on transportation.*

An organic product is seen as free of the whole complex model of treatment and manipulation (Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014), so it is assumed to be produced using traditional methods. Consumers believe that local companies also have a traditional production system that is more environmentally friendly, so there is a perceived fit between the organic benefit and the company launching the extension when this company is small: *"There is a young couple in my town that produces organic apple juice with traditional methods (…) I believe their juice is more sustainable, natural and healthier than an organic juice from a big, well-known company"* (I12). Additionally, the necessity of significant quantities of raw material to meet demand means that the company uses

production methods that are necessarily not (or less) environmentally friendly: *"If there is a plague, they need to treat the trees… they cannot accept losing so many olives"* (I11).

Another cue used for consumers to infer the environmental responsibility of the company is packaging. If the packaging is deemed unsustainable or not green enough, consumers infer that the company's environmental commitment is limited, which negatively impinges on fit perceptions (*"They cannot be selling an organic product in a plastic packaging"*, I9).

The specialization of the company in producing organic food is congruent with the associations of organic production, so if the consumer perceives that the company is specialized in producing organic goods, the size of the firm is not as important, and there is a greater acceptance of the extension even if the company is large. For the consumer, specialized organic firms have a real commitment to eco-friendly production: "*I don't know how big it is, but as it is specialized on an organic product, I would choose it before the others [referring to the mainstream line extension shown in the vignettes], it gives me more credibility"* (I12).

As explained, the fit dimension of the company is noncompensatory for highly environmentally concerned consumers. If consumers perceive fit at this dimension, they continue the evaluation of the fit between the extension and the brand associations similarly to the low-environmentally concerned consumers. In summary, for more environmentally concerned consumers, the organic schema is the framework for the assessment. Specifically, the dimension of "environmentally friendly" takes precedence in the assessment. To infer whether there is fit with the extension, consumers use some characteristics of the firm launching the product to make a determination, in particular, the size of the company. This dimension emerges as a noncompensatory dimension, with the rejection of the extension if launched by large companies. Once there is a perceived fit at this dimension, consumers evaluate the fit between the organic line extension and the brand's associations.

3.4.3. Impact of the organic line extension on the parent brand

The analysis unveils three possible behavioral responses toward an extension. As already identified in the literature, findings show that organic line extensions may lead to the cannibalization of the parent product (Reddy, Holak, & Bhat, 1994) and have adverse effects on the parent brand's image (rejection) (Martinez & De Chernatony, 2004).

Complementing these already-noted consumer responses, we also observe a reinforcement of parent brand image, a behavioral response not identified in past studies that we call reverse cannibalization. Consumers believe that if the brand has launched an organic variety, they are using organic production for the entire product line, as they do not think it is possible to compartmentalize production methods for different products in the portfolio. Thus, they consider it is not worth buying the organic version since it is usually sold with a premium price and has no superior benefit over the parent product, which they also believe is produced organically.

> *The milk is a healthy product, so if they sell organic milk, it is due to the feeding of the cows… so I imagine they feed all the cows in the same way, so everything they produce would be organic. Selling milk as regular and organic is just the company's strategy to reach different types of consumers. I will keep buying the same milk with the satisfaction of thinking that it is also organic* (I13).

The cannibalization effect occurs when consumers perceive the organic line extension as an improved version, with superior benefits, over the original product. Once there is perceived fit and, consequently, acceptance of the organic line extension, informants report their intentions to switch between the parent product and the organic line extension: *"I would purchase the organic coffee instead of the regular coffee and go home feeling I am bringing a great product"* (I7).

The third implication is a negative impact on the parent's product image. When consumers perceive that the reason for launching the extension is to increase sales, they will not switch to the new product, even if there is perceived fit between the product and the organic associations. For example, for I2, if the company can produce the organic version, all the products should be organic for the benefit of

society: *"What is the reason for not producing all organically when it is more environmentally friendly? It makes me think that they are not truly committed and just want to increase sales".* Thus, the attribution of intention to the firm seems relevant to explain the acceptance of the product; even if there is perceived fit, the consumer could still reject the extension.

3.5. Conclusions and future research

The findings of this study show that there are two types of consumers who follow different assessment processes of organic line extensions, subject to the use of a brand schema or organic schema for the evaluation. Low-environmentally concerned consumers accept line extensions based on category fit, whereas high-environmentally concerned consumers accept line extensions based on company fit. This knowledge highlights the need for firms to analyze consumer targets, the product category, and the company's and brand's associations to decide the best strategy for launching an organic product (e.g., which target is the focus; how "organic" is the category perceived; how large the company is viewed). Additionally, reverse cannibalization and rejection implications need to be considered by practitioners, as they may cause an undesirable, and unexpected, impact on the parent's product image. In conclusion, launching an organic line extension may not be the best strategy for all leading brands.

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. This is addressed in the next study explained in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4. ASSESSING ORGANIC LINE EXTENSIONS: A FUZZY SET TESTING OF ATTRIBUTES AND FIT DIMENSIONS

4.1. Introduction

Line extension literature agrees that the primary mechanism for a line extension's success is the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension (Völckner & Sattler, 2006). More precisely, the fit is assessed by comparing or contrasting the associations and attributes embedded in the schema that consumers have about the brand with the schema of the extension -in this case, the schema of organic- (Klink & Smith, 2001)-. Previous studies assumed that all the fit dimensions linearly and additively contribute to the Overall Fit, albeit with different weights (Deng & Messinger, 2021). Nevertheless, as seen in Chapters 2 and 3, exploratory studies suggest that the dimensions of fit may combine in non-linear or non-additive ways depending on the type of consumer and/or brand (Kim & Hall, 2015), producing different paths for evaluating the extension.

These differences exist because there is variation in the salience of the attributes for the consumer (Zeithaml, 1988), the weight attached to some of the attributes, the understanding of the organic product (Vega-Zamora, Torres-Ruiz, Murgado-Armenteros, & Parras-Rosa, 2014), and the number of aspects about the product considered by the consumers (Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012). For example, as high-environmentally concerned consumers deeply care about the origin of their food, they are likely to carefully process cues of ethicality in the extension (Wagner & Petty, 2011). In contrast, consumers that are very loyal to a food brand due to its taste may assess the extension considering only its tastiness, giving less importance to other fit dimensions (Waldman & Kerr, 2018).

These arguments suggest that the fit assessment may be better understood using a configurational rather than a variance-based approach because a configurational approach allows understanding how different combinations of the presence or absence of specific attributes create distinct pathways or routes for the fit assessment. Variance-based analytical techniques such as structural equation modelling assume that causal conditions are independent variables with effects on the outcome that are both linear and additive (as explained in the conceptual framework of this dissertation); in contrast, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis* (QCA) sees cases as configurations of conditions (Ragin & Sonnett, 2005), thinking in terms

of conjunctive statements rather than thinking in only net effects of the variables (Woodside, 2013). For this, an approach to line extensions using configurational causality, particularly QCA, as the corresponding method seems appropriate.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. The next section explains the conceptual framework of this study. Then, the methodology used, and the findings are presented followed by the conclusion. The theoretical contributions and managerial implications are explained in the last chapter of the dissertation.

4.2. Conceptual framework

The perception of fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension is based on the assessment of congruency or compatibility between the brand and the organic schemata (Czellar, 2003). As explained before, a schema is a mental representation of the brand's characteristics in consumers' minds (Halkias, 2015). This schema differs across consumers -depending on their knowledge or previous experience with the brand/ the organic products-, and across brands, making some attributes more salient than others, depending on the product type and brand perception (Klink & Smith, 2001). To capture this variability in the study, we have selected the most influential associations of the organic schema related to the category type, the flexibility of the brand schema, and the company launching the extension.

Whereas in the study in Chapter 3 it was identified two sequence paths for the assessment of an organic line extension based on consumers' level of environmental concern, this research analyzes the combination of associations that produce the Overall Perceived Fit.

We first considered category type as an influential association of the perceived fit (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991) and distinguished between vice and virtue categories. As explained in Chapter 1, vice categories (e.g., chocolate, wine, beer) provide an immediate pleasurable experience but contribute to adverse long-term outcomes. In contrast, the virtue categories (e.g., yogurt, vegetables, fruit) are less gratifying and appealing in the short term but have fewer negative long-term consequences (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). There are contradictory arguments on how consumers assess the congruence of organic food in virtue and vice categories.

On the one hand, the health benefits of organic products are more congruent with virtue categories (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013). Also, there is a more positive attitude towards organic food when the consumer values sustainability or quality (virtue products) and a lower attitude if the consumer values indulgence (Hauser, Nussbeck, & Jonas, 2013). On the other hand, some consumers perceive that the organic label can provide a guilt-reducing complement to vice food (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015) because when the organic attribute is added, vice products are perceived to be more nutritious (Ellison, Duff, Wang, & White, 2016). In any case, the type of category (vice or virtue) of the product will influence the perception of the organic line extension; we expect consumers to perceive more fit when the brand belongs to a virtue category as there is higher congruity between virtue products and the organic health-related benefits. Consistent with our configurational approach, organic food in vice categories may also be perceived as congruent, as other compensatory attributes may provide similar meanings (e.g., communal, or benevolence-related associations) that would increase the Overall Perceived Fit. We expect to unveil these compensatory attributes in this study.

A second association considered is the flexibility of the brand schema. Despite the potential importance of schema flexibility as a modulator of perceived fit, past scholarship on brand extensions has yet to examine it. The brand schema is organized around the product attributes based on the knowledge or experience that the consumer has with the brand. The less anchored or more flexible the schema is, the more accessible consumers perceive fit at any dimension under evaluation because they can make associations from multiple perspectives (Jhang, Grant, & Campbell, 2012) that can compensate for the incongruity of other associations. To illustrate, Danone can be considered a non-flexible brand schema as the brand is associated with meanings such as tradition, high quality, and family products, so launching innovative products incongruent with these associations, would be challenging to be accepted. In contrast, Carrefour has a more flexible brand schema because it is sold in most FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) categories, being innovative to adapt to new market trends. Hence, we expected that consumers would more likely accept its line extensions (e.g., Carrefour Bio range in all the FMCG categories). Indeed, studies examining organic line extensions of

manufacturers and retailers' brands show that consumers find it easier to accept a Private Label product launched in a new category because the retailers generally use a branded house approach (e.g., same brand for multiple categories) to their private labels as it favors their brand equity and loyalty (Rubio, Villaseñor, & Yagüe, 2020). Another explanation for this finding is that the brand has broader meanings and is not rigidly associated with any product category and its accompanying perceptions, enabling greater perceived fit. Given this evidence, we expect that organic extensions of brands with a flexible schema will be perceived as more congruent, because the consumers will find lesser contradictions in the associations between the two products; we also expect that this attribute may act as a compensatory or reinforcing attribute of others.

The third association is company size. Consumers use the perception of company size as a heuristic to evaluate the credibility of the company launching the organic extension. Company size is an ambivalent cue as it is used as a proxy for two brand associations. On the one hand, organic food is typically associated with local and small companies (Rana & Paul, 2017). Consumers perceive that small-size companies follow artisanal manufacturer procedures independently of the actual size (Wood, Robinson, & Poor, 2018), which is more congruent with organic benefits. So, it is expected that the attribute of being a local company positively influences the perception of fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension. Nevertheless, a large company size could be associated with manufacturing expertise (Aaker & Keller, 1990); this perception of expertise may enable congruent perceptions insofar as consumers perceive that a large company has the knowledge and the resources to make an organic extension. Therefore, company size can positively influence congruence in different forms, making it difficult to have a priori expectations of its impact on the overall evaluation of fit.

Finally, we considered whether the company is known for its CSR activities. Companies perceived as environmentally friendly are more trustworthy in their commitment to society (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Organic production is associated with communal companies (Yang & Aggarwal, 2019). Therefore, to capture the company's commitment to society, positive information on CSR is included and expected to positively influence the perceived fit between the parent brand and the organic line

extension and act as a compensatory attribute of other attributes, such as being in a vice category.

As explained in Chapter 2, we conceptualize the fit construct as multi-dimensional. Specifically, we propose that fit will be assessed against four dimensions, namely (a) Category Fit, (b) Health Fit, (c) Environmental Fit, and (d) Moral Fit. Moreover, it will be studied the combination of product attributes that produce an (e) Overall Perceived Fit.

In sum, the following propositions guide our analytical strategy:

P1: More benevolence-related cues (positive CSR or local company) are necessary for vice products than for virtue products to assess the dimensions of (a) Category Fit, (b) Health Fit, (c) Environmental Fit, (d) Moral[3] Fit, (e) Overall Perceived Fit, due to the incongruence of vice products and the organic schema.

P2: The flexibility of the brand schema has a compensatory relationship with product attributes in the assessment process of (a) Category Fit, (b) Health Fit, (c) Environmental Fit, (d) Moral Fit, (e) Overall Perceived Fit, that is not congruent with the organic schema.

Since the fit is assessed by comparing the parent brand and the organic schemata, we expect different pathways for high and low-environmentally concerned consumers because their organic schema will differ and the deliberation in the choice process will be also different (Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012). High-environmentally concerned consumers give more importance to sustainability outcomes, expecting congruency between their values and the values that organic food represents (Engels, Hansmann, & Scholz, 2010). Therefore, they are more worried about benevolence cues in the assessment process and will process them more systematically: high-environmentally concerned consumers are more involved with the decision and will make more effortful information processing of the available cues (Wagner & Petty, 2011). They will not perceive fit if just one cue of ethicality is

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[3] Being local company is considered a benevolence cue as local firms are perceived as more communal (Yang & Aggarwal, 2019).

present as this will not be enough to persuade them. In contrast, as low environmentally concerned consumers value private benefits such as health (Sarti, Darnall, & Testa, 2018), the Health Fit dimension is expected to be the most important dimension in the assessment process that can even compensate for the nonfit in another dimension.

The literature on brand extensions considers Category Fit as an essential dimension (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991) for consumers' acceptance of an extension. Category Fit is the similarity between the extension category and the parent brand category (Czellar, 2003). Consumers perceive fit if there are shared associations between both categories. In the case of an organic line extension, the associations evaluated by the consumers are between the product category and the organic benefits. It is expected then that the pathways leading to Overall Perceived Fit assessments differ between virtue or vice categories. For example, given that vice products do not have imbued meanings of health, consumers will perceive lesser fit notably in the Category Fit dimension and indirectly in the Overall Perceived Fit; nonetheless, attributes conveying benevolence or communality (e.g., local company or positive CSR activities) may have a compensatory relationship incrementing the perceived fit as they may reinforce the congruence with the category schema.

Health and environmental benefits are the most important reasons for purchasing organic food (Aarset et al., 2004). In at least one of these dimensions, perception of fit is expected to be a necessary condition for the Overall Perceived Fit. Also, any of them can have a compensatory relationship with the other as they are all drivers of preferences for organic food. Environmental Fit is expected to be more critical for high-environmentally concerned consumers than low-environmentally concerned consumers, as they value organic products to protect the environment (Engels, Hansmann, & Scholz, 2010). On the other hand, low-environmentally concerned consumers give higher importance to Health Fit, as they look for individual benefits.

Another important fit dimension is related to the company's reason for launching an organic line extension. When consumers recognize that the company

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is trying to be sustainable (Keller & Aaker, 1992) or demonstrate community involvement (Keller & Aaker, 1998) they perceive greater congruity between an organic line extension and the parent brand. This commitment to society is measured as Moral Fit. The perception of Moral Fit is expected to increase the Overall Perceived Fit in the assessment process. It is considered a dimension that may override the absence of fit in another dimension, especially for high-environmentally concerned consumers.

Considering these fit dimensions in the assessment process and the relationship among them, we will analyze the following propositions.

P3: Health Fit or Environment Fit dimensions are expected to be necessary conditions for overall fit perceptions.

P4: The absence of one of the benevolence fit dimensions (Health, Environment, or Moral Fit) will be a sufficiency condition to produce the absence of Overall Perceived Fit among the high-environmentally concerned consumers.

4.3. Method

To study the influence of the product attributes and the relationship among the fit dimensions, QCA is the most appropriate method as it assumes that the influence of attributes on a specific result depends on their combination rather than isolated individual attributes (Medina-Molina, Pérez-Macías, & Gismera-Tierno, 2022). QCA used a configural analysis to explicate a complex phenomenon (Kraus, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Schüssler, 2018) by the identification of necessary and sufficient conditions that lead to an specific outcome (Gligor & Bozkurt, 2020). It is based on three principles: (1) equifinality, (2) conjunctural causation, and (3) asymmetric causation (Schneider & Wagemann, 2010).

First, the consumer evaluates different combinations of fit dimensions to form an Overall Perceived Fit assessment of the organic line extension that differs between brands and consumers; therefore, exists equifinality - multiple paths are possible to reach the desired result (Fiss, 2007). As explained above, the different importance and relationship of the dimensions in the assessment process would explain different ways to achieve an Overall Perceived Fit. The exploratory results

presented in Chapter 3 showed that the assessment paths differ among consumers and that perceived misfit in some dimensions halts the evaluation process and leads consumers to reject the extension.

Second, conjunctural causation may be present; namely, the effect of a single condition or attribute may occur only in combination with other conditions or attributes (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p.78). As explained in section 4.2., this would occur because the perceived fit dimensions are assessed in combination with one another, multiple fit dimensions are combined to produce the Overall Perceived Fit, and changes in one subdimension may cause different fit perceptions (Deng & Messinger, 2021). Indeed, other studies suggest that fit dimensions are not separately assessed; instead, one dimension may reinforce another dimension -e.g., an environmentally friendly product in combination with small size company perception augments perceptions of fit as organic products are associated with pro-environmental, small companies (Janssen & Hamm, 2012)- or a dimension may cancel out another dimension- e.g., the absence of Moral Fit may override the perception of Health Fit leading consumers to reject the extension (Kim, Hye-Shin & Hall, 2015).

Third, there may be asymmetrical causation, as the configuration that produces the outcome (Overall Perceived Fit) is not the opposite of the one that produces the absence or negation of the outcome (Schmitt, Grawe, & Woodside, 2017). Some dimensions may be necessary for the perception of fit (e.g., Health Fit), so they would explain the Overall Perceived Fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension. Still, another dimension can compensate for its absence (e.g., Moral Fit), so the outcome is also explained. Moreover, the absence of Overall Perceived Fit could occur because there is a misfit in one dimension that override the fit of the others; to illustrate, for high environmentally concerned consumers, based on the results of the qualitative study, we expect that the absence of Moral Fit cannot be compensated by fit at other dimensions to form the Overall Perceived Fit.

QCA is a case-oriented method (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008; Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). In this study, the cases are consumers evaluating an organic line extension from a theoretical parent brand. We split the consumers according to their environmental

concern level (high *vs.* low) as we expect that the assessment process will be different. These differences were observed in the previous chapter and found in the literature. As explained in the introduction, high-environmentally concerned consumers care deeply about the origin of their food and therefore are likely to carefully process cues of ethicality (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Wagner & Petty, 2011).

We used a *stimulus*-based scenario about a fictional parent brand. This fictional brand is described based on five attributes justified in section 4.2. To include variability in the study, two levels per attribute were considered. The first attribute is category type, which levels are virtue and vice are explained before. To capture the brand schema flexibility, we included a description of the brand adaptation to customer's needs and new market trends, and brand diversification (brand present in many categories), as these characteristics allow the consumer to have a flexible schema of the brand. As the brand changes to adapt to consumers' needs or can be found in many categories, none of the brand associations are too anchored in consumers' minds, making the assessment of the extension easier. Since the two attributes used to reflect the flexibility of the brand schema overlap, we eventually included only the customer-oriented brand in the analysis.

The fourth attribute is the knowledge of CSR activities. This attribute has two possibilities, positive knowledge of CSR activities or non-information. It was decided not to include harmful CSR activities, as this level would override the rest of the information about the brand. Also, it was not considered plausible that a firm would provide damaging information about their CSR on their packaging.

The fifth attribute considered is company size. Two levels were included: local company and large company, to make it more straightforward for participants to consider this information. As explained in section 4.2, consumers associated local companies with organics independently of the actual size.

To reduce the possible combinations of attributes, an orthogonal design of the attributes and levels was done using Sawtooth software yielding 15 *stimuli* to show to participants.

4.3.1. Data collection

Consumers were randomly assigned to one of these scenarios and assessed the perception of fit at different levels between the brand described in the scenario and its organic line extension. There were between 8 and 15 participants per scenario (12 on average). An example of a *stimulus* shown to participants is as follows:

Imagine that X launches an organic line extension, this means it is the same product manufacturer with the same brand, but the new version meets organic requirements. We want you to answer the following questions knowing that:

- *X is a food brand in a category that provides immediate pleasure during its consumption, usually because products are very tasty.*
- *This brand has been evolving to adapt to consumers' needs and market trends.*
- *It only offers products in a single product category.*
- *This company is considered large.*
- *Consumers don't have information about any activities that improve the social and environmental performance of the firm and its products.*

Even when no brand names were provided in the *stimulus* to the sample, the *stimuli* were designed to reflect actual brands to increase the study validity. For instance, the corresponding real example of this *stimulus* is Chocolate Lindt. Chocolate is considered a vice category (consumed for pleasure). This brand has launched line extensions before (e.g., orange flavor chocolate). It is considered a large company and is not known for any CSR activities demonstrating society or environmental commitment.

The online questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics and shared on the researcher's social media using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Parker, C., Scott, & Geddes, 2019). This sampling procedure seems adequate given the exploratory nature of this study (Efthymiou & Antoniou, 2012). The questionnaire was shared in English and Spanish. After translating the questionnaire into Spanish, two doctoral students reviewed it to ensure the translation was accurate.

4.3.2. Sample description

The final number of answers collected was 177. Female respondents represent 63% of the sample and 53% of the sample have children. 47% belong to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979), 37% are millennials (born between 1980 and 1996), and 16% belong to Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012). 71% are Spanish, 19% are from other European countries, and 10% are from the USA. 70% of the sample are considered low-environmentally concerned consumers (mean value < 4.90 in the corresponding scale).

4.3.3. Measures

Scales from the literature were used to assess the fit dimensions (Table 5). As explained in the conceptual framework section, these dimensions are the most relevant for organic products. Participants rated their level of agreement (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) on a range of statements measuring the perceived fit between the *stimulus* and the organic line extension (e.g., "The extension of this brand into an organic product seems logical"). Also, we collected information about the environmental attitude of the consumers, based on Brown & Dacin (1997) scales.

To confirm the scales' reliability and composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and the average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated. Both dimensions have a rate >.7 (Bagozzi, Yi, & Nassen, 1998; Streiner, 2003; Werts, Linn, & Jöreskog, 1974), as can be seen in the table below, suggesting a good reliability. Only Moral Fit yielded a Cronbach's alpha lower than .7, for this only one item was used in the analysis (M=4.59; SD=1.83).

Table 5: Measures used in the questionnaire

SCALES	
Category Fit	
∝ = .858, **AVE** = .7531, **M**= 5.19, **SD**= 1.47	
Source: Adapted from Broniarczyk & Alba (1994)	
The extension of this brand into an organic product seems logical	.824
The extension into an organic product seems appropriate for this parent brand	.859
Health Fit	
∝ = .917, **AVE** = .6999, **M**= 4.93, **SD**= 1.67	
Source: Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer (2013)	
The consumption of this new product enhances my health	.874
I believe that this new product enables me to live healthily	.869
I am of the view that the consumption of this new product has a health-promoting effect	.835
This new product and a health-conscious lifestyle match well	.705
The organic extension of this brand is a better product for consumers	.627
Environmental Fit	
∝ = .861, **AVE** = .6756, **M**= 4.86, **SD**= 1.53	
Source: Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer (2013)	
The production of this new product goes easy on resources	.610
I believe that the environment is highly valued during the production of this new product	.625
This new product is environmentally friendly	.563
Moral Fit	
∝ =.294, **AVE** = .4592 **M**= 3.41, **SD**= 2.05	
Source: Adapted from Aaker & Keller (1990); Chernev & Blair (2015)	
I believe this brand launches the organic extension to increase its sales (R)	.856
I believe this brand launches the organic extension because it is more environmentally friendly	.431
Overall Perceived Fit	
∝ = .841, **AVE** = .7268, **M**= 5.05, **SD**= 1.56	
Source: Adapted from Jung & Tey (2010); Stumpf & Baum (2016)	
I think this new product is a bad/good idea	.548
I dislike/like very much this new product	.506
Environmental attitude	
∝ = .929, **AVE** = .7003, **M**= 4.85, **SD**= 1.63	
Source: Adapted from Brown & Dacin (1997)	
Purchasing organic foods is desirable because they are socially responsible products	.859
Purchasing organic foods is desirable because they are more beneficial to society's welfare than other products	.828
Purchasing organic foods is desirable because they contribute something to society	.823

4.3.4. Analysis

To analyze the data, a two-step method was used. First, we studied the relationship between the product attributes and their presence to explain each fit dimension and Overall Perceived Fit using crisp-set QCA (csQCA). Second, a fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) analysis was done to understand the combinations of conditions (fit dimensions) that explain the Overall Perceived Fit (or its absence).

A regression analysis using overall fit as dependent variable and the fit dimensions as independent variables showed that these dimensions capture 65.9% of the variance of the perceived fit construct ($r^2 = .659$).

To show the relevance of using configurational analysis, we conducted variance-based analyses. First, a t-test analysis was done between the product attributes and few significant differences were found across the fit dimensions. The only significant differences were between Environmental Fit and flexible brand schema (there is a higher perception of environmental fit if there is a flexible brand schema); between Health Fit and positive CSR and between Overall Perceived Fit and positive CSR, there is a higher health and overall perceived fit when there is positive CSR information (see Appendix 2 for full results). Conducting a QCA analysis instead of variance-based analyses allows us to unveil how dimensions are combined to produce an overall fit judgment.

Measurement and data calibration csQCA. For the analysis of the product attributes csQCA was used as the attributes are measured as dichotomous variables - present/absent- (Marx & Dusa, 2011). The complex solution is selected as in csQCA privileging complexity over parsimony is recommended (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). As explained above, these attributes are brand schema flexibility (flexible or non-flexible), company size (local or large company), and perceived CSR (positive CSR or no information about CSR activities).

These attributes were included as conditions in the analysis. As we set the level of the attribute in the *stimulus* (e.g., large-size company), it cannot be studied the absence or negation of a condition (e.g., non-large-size company) because the opposite level was shown (e.g., local company). Therefore, in the findings section,

we will only explain the presence of a condition in the result (e.g., large company or local company).

The analysis was done separately for virtue and vice categories. As explained in the conceptual framework, we expect that different pathways produce a perceived fit to each category. The fit dimensions analyzed as outcomes are Category Fit, Environmental Fit, Health Fit, Moral Fit, and Overall Perceived Fit. Each of them was introduced in turn. These variables were measured with a 7-point Likert scale that had to be transformed into a dichotomous variable using >4.9 as the inclusion threshold (Valor, Antonetti, & Merino, 2020).

The standard procedure was followed. First, the existence of necessary isolated conditions was studied. A necessary condition is always needed to produce the outcome and requires a consistency threshold of .9 (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). We found that no necessary conditions explain any of the outcomes under study. Second, the truth table for each outcome (Category Fit, Health Fit, Environmental Fit, Moral Fit, and Overall Perceived Fit) was created to analyze the sufficient conditions, using a threshold of .75 (Marx & Dusa, 2011). The truth table provides all possible configuration of the conditions that produce the outcome and their levels of consistency and coverage (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). The consistency (inclS) is the ratio of cases with the condition and the result over all the cases with the result. This parameter should be >.75 (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008). The coverage of the solution is the proportion of cases that have the conditions and the result over the cases that have the conditions. This coverage can be split into two: raw coverage, which is "the relevant importance of several combinations of causally relevant conditions" (Ragin, 2006: p.305), and unique coverage, which assesses the weight of the configuration: the proportion that uniquely covers the outcome (Cotte Poveda & Pardo Martínez, 2013). The coverage of the solution is considered adequate if its raw coverage is between .25 and .65 (Eng & Woodside, 2012) and the unique coverage >.1 (Rubinson, Gerrits, Rutten, & Greckhamer, 2019).

In this study, all the possible combinations of each solution have the same raw and unique coverage; therefore, we will show the parameter under the label "coverage." This coincidence means that different cases explain each term of the

solutions without overlapping with other possible explanations. In some cases, the threshold considered appropriate for the raw coverage was not reached. Still, as the unique coverage was high, we decided also to consider this path of the solution of the outcome, as suggested by some authors (Rubinson, Gerrits, Rutten, & Greckhamer, 2019). In the Results section, only the solutions that met the thresholds of consistency and coverage are shown.

Measurement and data calibration fsQCA. To analyze the fit dimensions that produce overall perceived fit, fsQCA (fuzzy set) was used because it allows the researcher to work with conditions that are measured with a range of values (7-point Likert scales).

As explained in the conceptual section, we examined the configurations for high and low-environmentally-concerned consumers separately, as we expect that different combinations produce their fit assessment.

The first step for the analysis is constructing the data set for the calibration process. In fsQCA, data is transformed into degrees of membership in the target set instead of working with probabilities (Ragin, 2008). Each case can be coded as fully in or out concerning the condition's membership score and outcome. The calibration thresholds correspond to full membership (1), full non-membership (0), and crossover point, that is, the point of maximum ambiguity (.5) (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). To calibrate the data, we used percentile 95 for maximum inclusion, percentile 5 for minimum inclusion, and the average for maximum ambiguity (Nikou et al., 2019; Pappa & Woodside, 2021; Sahin et al., 2019). The anchors' values used for each group of consumers (high vs. low environmental concern) are in the table below (Table 6).

After the calibration process, it was checked that no asymmetry conditions existed on the data. As seen in Table 6, none of the variables used in the model presents concerns related to skewness; none is less than 20% or greater than 80% (Oana, Schneider, & Thomann, 2021).

Table 6: Anchors and skewness

VARIABLE	95%		Mean		5%		Skewness check	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
CF (Category Fit)	7	7	5.6	5	3.8	2.1	50.96%	54.79%
H (Health Fit)	7	6.4	5.7	4.6	3.5	1.9	58.65%	50.68%
E (Environmental Fit)	7	6.3	5.8	4.4	3.9	2.4	50%	42.47%
MF (Moral Fit)	7	7	5.7	4.1	3.0	1	50%	49.32%
PF (Perceived Fit)	7	6.5	5.9	4.7	4.3	1.6	50%	61.64%

For the ambiguous cases, those with a value of .5, .01 were added after the calibration process, as recommended by Greckhamer, Furnari, Fiss, & Aguilera (2018) to be able to consider them in the analysis. There were 12 ambiguous cases in the Category Fit among the high-environmentally concerned consumers and 7 in Health Fit among the low-environmentally concerned consumers.

Once the data was ready, we studied the necessary conditions. There were no necessary conditions for Overall Perceived Fit or the absence of Overall Perceived Fit. Not having necessary conditions supports our proposition that fit subdimensions may combine in different ways to produce an Overall Perceived Fit, as none is necessarily needed (none alone produce Overall Perceived Fit for the consumer).

The truth table was created to analyze sufficient conditions using a consistency threshold of .85 and two cases per conjunction, meaning that only configurations with more than one case are empirically relevant (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). The consistency parameter needs to be >.75 (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008), the raw coverage between .2 and .65 (Eng & Woodside, 2012) and the unique coverage >.1 (Rubinson, Gerrits, Rutten, & Greckhamer, 2019). The truth table that explains the Overall Perceived Fit and the truth table that explains the absence of Overall Perceived Fit were created. Again, only solutions that met the threshold requirements are shown in the Results section.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. csQCA on product attributes

As explained above, we studied the combined product attributes or associations that explain each fit dimension for vice and virtue product categories separately. In the explanations tables a white space means that this attribute is not considered in the assessment process.

Category Fit (CF). The analysis of the product attributes that produce Category Fit showed two possible combinations or paths in each product category (virtue and vice). This solution can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Category Fit solutions

	VIRTUE		VICE	
	1	2	1	2
Brand schema Flexibility	Non-flexible	Non-flexible	Flexible	Non-flexible
Company size	Large	Local	Large	Local
CSR information	No information	Positive		No information
Consistency	.769	.786	.880	.846
Coverage	.169	.186	.328	.164
Solution consistency	.778		.868	
Solution coverage	.356		.493	

For extensions in virtue categories, consumers perceive Category Fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension when there is a non-flexible brand schema product form a large company because the non-flexibility is understood as being an expert in virtue products (that are congruent with organics), and being a large company is the cue used to assumed that the company has the resources to produce an organic brand. The other pathway of perceived fit is being a non-flexible brand, from a local company known for its positive CSR. This solution describes the typical niche organic company.

In contrast, consumers can perceive Category Fit in vice products when the brand schema is flexible and belongs to a large company, as this flexibility can compensate for the incongruence of being a vice product and being large is associated with the idea that they have the resources to launch the extension. This path was expected in Proposition 2a. Also, a non-flexible brand schema from a local company can drive Category Fit in vice products because a local company is associated with the meanings embedded in the organic schema, as expected in Proposition 1a.

Health Fit (H). Only one possible combination of product attributes explains Health Fit for virtue products and two for vice products. These solutions can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Health Fit solutions

	VIRTUE	VICE	
	1	1	2
Brand schema flexibility	Non-flexible	Flexible	Non-flexible
Company size	Local	Large	Local
CSR information	Positive	Positive	Positive
Consistency	.786	.750	.769
Coverage	.220	.173	.192
Solution consistency	.786	.760	
Solution coverage	.220	.365	

For virtue products, a brand that has a non-flexible schema, from a local company and having positive CSR enables that the consumer perceives Health Fit. This parent brand description is typically associated to organic products. It seems that consumers are strict in their assessment process and need congruence on all the cues to perceive Health Fit, which is contrary to our Proposition 1b.

For vice products, the perception of Health Fit is driven by a flexible brand schema, from a large company that is known by its positive CSR activities, or by a brand with a non-flexible schema, from a local company with positive CSR activities. These paths suggest that as vice products are not associated with health, one of the benevolence cues (positive CSR) is needed to achieve a perceived Health Fit and that the flexibility of the brand schema can compensate other attributes (being a vice product) to perceived Health Fit, as expected in Proposition 2b.

Environmental Fit (E). The explanation of Environmental Fit is only possible for vice products as there are no possible combinations of conditions that explain Environmental Fit for virtue products. None of the cases of this research meet the parameters of consistency and coverage to explain the Environmental Fit for virtue products due to the heterogenous responses of the consumer. The solution is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Environmental Fit solution

	VICE
Brand schema flexibility	Flexible
Company size	Large
CSR information	
Consistency	.800
Coverage	.357
Solution consistency	.800
Solution coverage	.357

The flexibility of the brand schema and being a large company are cues of credibility to produce organically, allowing the perception of Environmental Fit in vice products. This flexibility and the perception that large companies have the skills to product organically, explain Environmental Fit, as expected in Proposition 2c.

Moral Fit (MF). There is only one combination of products attributes that drive the perception of Moral Fit for virtue and vice products (Table 10). It should be noted that although the solution for vice products presents low coverage. it is not a relevant problem as the unique coverage is >.1 (Rubinson, Gerrits, Rutten, & Greckhamer, 2019).

Table 10: Moral Fit solutions

	VIRTUE	**VICE**
Brand schema flexibility	Non-flexible	Flexible
Company size	Local	Large
CSR information	Positive	No information
Consistency	.857	.769
Coverage	.267	.192
Solution consistency	.857	.769
Solution coverage	.267	.192

Moral Fit is perceived for virtue products when the product attributes are congruent with the associations of organics: non-flexible brand schema, from local company that have positive CSR information. Whereas for vice products, the flexibility of the schema and being from a large company, without information on CSR activities, make it credible the organic line extension, so Moral Fit is perceived, probably, because consumers are laxer in their requirements for fit in the case of vice products. This is contrary to our expectations in Proposition 1d.

Overall Perceived Fit (PF). The analysis of the Overall Perceived Fit brings a complex solution of three terms for virtue products and a complex solution of two terms for vice products, as seen in the table below (Table 11).

Table 11: Overall Perceived Fit solutions

	VIRTUE			VICE	
	1	2	3	1	2
Brand schema flexibility	Non-flexible	Flexible	Non-flexible	Non-flexible	Flexible
Company size	Local	Local	Large		Large
CSR information	Positive	No information	No information	Positive	
Consistency	.929	.750	.769	.792	.800
Coverage	.228	.158	.175	.311	.328
Solution consistency	.821			.796	
Solution coverage	.561			.639	

For Overall Perceived Fit in virtue products is important that the company is local, either with a non-flexible brand schema with positive CSR information, or with flexible brand schema without information on CSR activities. In virtue products, that are associated with organics, being a local company explain the perception of fit, as local companies are also associated with organic production. There is also Overall Perceived Fit for large companies with a non-flexible brand schema without CRS information. As explained before, large companies are credible as they have the resources to produce organically.

For vice products, the positive CSR information, or the flexibility of the brand schema from a large company, explains Overall Perceived Fit between the brand and the organic line extension, contrary to our expectations in Proposition 1e. For vice products, consumers perceive fit if one of the attributes is coherent with organic (e.g., positive CSR or large company).

To conclude, it is remarkable that the consumer is laxer in the ethicality cues needed during the assessment process in vice products, although one of the possible configurations (no. 3) is less demanding (probably because this path reflects perceptions of competence rather than benevolence underpinning the

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overall perceived fit). Therefore, Proposition 1 is not confirmed. Results also show the importance of the flexibility of the schema to compensate for the less ethical characteristics of the brand (e.g., vice product). There are some exceptions where the brand has a non-flexible schema, but the attribute of local size explains the Category and Health Fit. Also, positive CSR perceptions explain the Overall Perceived Fit for a non-flexible brand schema. Therefore, we find evidence to support Proposition 2 even though we could not entirely support 2a or 2b or 2c.

4.4.2. fsQCA for fit dimensions

High-environmentally concerned consumers. In studying the fit dimensions that produce Overall Perceived Fit, the complex solution was selected. It offers a more descriptive solution, including all possible combinations to produce the outcome (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). The solution for the Overall Perceived Fit has four components whereas the solution for the absence of Overall Perceived Fit has two (Table 12). In the table, the black circles refer to the presence of a condition, while the white circles indicate the absence of that condition. The blank spaces indicate that a condition is not relevant -it does not matter if this condition is present or absent- (Peng, Bijmolt, Völckner, & Zhao, 2023).

Table 12: Configuration of fit dimensions for Overall Perceived Fit and absence of Overall Perceived Fit among high-environmental consumers

Condition	OVERALL PERCEIVED FIT				ABSENCE OVERALL PF		
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
Category Fit (CF)	●	●	●		○	○	●
Health Fit (H)	●			●	○		○
Environ Fit (E)		●		○		○	
Moral Fit (MF)			●	●	●	○	○
Consistency	.834	.840	.847	.870	.881	.912	.903
PRI	.722	.741	.742	.632	.641	.809	.676
Raw coverage	.688	.685	.656	.386	.374	.515	.376
Unique coverage	.046	.011	.027	.050	.090	.182	.071
Solution consistency	.804				.852		
Solution coverage	.851				.680		

[● presence of the condition / ○ absence of the condition]

High-environmentally concerned consumers. For high-environmentally concerned consumer to perceive overall fit in the extensions, Category Fit condition appears frequently but they need another dimension of fit linked with organic core meanings (e.g., Health Fit, Environment Fit or Moral Fit). This would be consistent with previous studies that demonstrated that these consumers evaluated the product in a more systematic and effortful way and needed more coherent cues to be persuaded.

Health Fit is an important condition in the assessment process of an organic line extension. Also, the absence of health overrides the perception of Moral Fit or Category Fit, making the consumer not perceive fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension. Even though this dimension is essential in the assessment process, it is not a necessary condition as explained in section 4.3.4, so Proposition 3 cannot be confirmed.

The absence of Moral or Environmental Fit is more difficult to compensate with other dimensions, confirming our Proposition 4. The absence of these two dimensions overrides Category Fit, a critical fit dimension in the assessment process, making the consumer not to Perceive Overall Fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension.

Low-environmentally concerned consumers. The analysis of the Overall Perceived Fit among low-environmentally concerned consumers generates a solution with four terms for the presence of Overall Perceived Fit and three terms for the absence (Table 13).

Table 13: Configuration of dimensions for Overall Perceived Fit and absence of Overall Perceived Fit among low-environmental consumers

	OVERALL PERCEIVED FIT				ABSENCE OVERALL PF		
Condition	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
Category fit (CF)	○	●		●	○	●	
Health fit (H)	●		●			○	○
Environ fit (E)			○	●	○		●
Moral fit (MF)		○				○	●
Consistency	.801	.872	.860	.941	.820	.778	.844
PRI	.529	.751	.690	.894	.663	.390	.468
Raw coverage	.396	.475	.461	.666	.677	.395	.422
Unique coverage	.043	.047	.030	.022	.312	.079	.082
Solution consistency	.797				.760		
Solution coverage	.872				.877		

[● presence of the condition / ○ absence of the condition]

For low-environmentally concerned consumers Health Fit is the most important dimension in the assessment process. Perceived Health Fit compensates the absence of other dimensions such as Category Fit or Environmental Fit. Moreover, the absence of Health Fit overrides the fit at the environmental and moral

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dimensions, driven by unfit perceptions between the parent brand and the organic line extension.

There is another configuration in which Category Fit can compensate for the absence of Moral Fit, but this compensation does not occur if there is also an absence of Health Fit. This path also shows the importance of Health Fit in the fit assessment process.

To sum up, Category Fit is vital in producing overall Perceived Fit for high-environmentally concerned consumers in organic line extensions. Combining this sub subdimension (Category Fit) with another benevolence dimension (Health, Environmental o Moral Fit) explains the perception of fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension.

The absence of Moral Fit and Environmental Fit is difficult to compensate with another dimension, suggesting that these dimensions have a higher weight in the assessment process for high-environmentally concerned consumers, as expected in Proposition 4. Moreover, high-environmentally concerned consumers must perceive fit in more than one dimension (e.g., Health Fit, Environmental Fit, or Moral Fit) during their assessment process to perceive overall fit.

Health Fit condition is the most critical dimension for both groups of consumers, even overriding other dimensions when the consumer does not perceive it. Nevertheless, Proposition 3 cannot be confirmed as it is not a necessary condition as seen in section 4.3.4.

As a summary, Table 14 shows a synopsis of the propositions of this study and the results.

Table 14: Results of the propositions

Propositions	Results
P1: More benevolence-related cues (positive CSR or local company) are necessary for vice products than for virtue products to assess the dimensions of (a) Category Fit, (b) Health Fit, (c) Environmental Fit, (d) Moral Fit, (e) Overall Perceived Fit, due to the incongruence of vice products and the organic schema.	1a confirmed. 1b not confirmed. 1c not confirmed. 1d not confirmed. 1e not confirmed.
P2: The flexibility of the brand schema has a compensatory relationship with product attributes in the assessment process of (a) Category Fit, (b) Health Fit, (c) Environmental Fit, (d) Moral Fit, (e) Overall Perceived Fit, that is not congruent with the organic schema.	2a partially supported. 2b partially supported. 2c partially supported. 2d confirmed. 2e confirmed.
P3: Health Fit or Environment Fit dimensions are expected to be necessary conditions for overall fit perceptions.	Not confirmed.
P4: The absence of one of the benevolence fit dimensions (Health, Environment, or Moral Fit) will be a sufficiency condition to produce the absence of Overall Perceived Fit among the high-environmentally concerned consumers.	Confirmed.

4.4.3. Robustness check

Following Oana et al., (2021) recommendation, a robustness check of the results was done to increase the credibility of the conclusions. This check consists of three analyses: (a) changes in the calibration ranges, (b) fit-oriented robustness and (c) case-oriented robustness. The calibration range test shows how modifying the different calibration benchmarks (90% for maximum inclusion, 10% for minimum exclusion, and the average for maximum ambiguity) would have no impact on the

results within the ranges shown in Appendix 3 (for high-environmentally concerned consumers) and Appendix 4 (for low-environmentally concerned consumers). Nevertheless, changing the consistency level beyond .85 and the number of cases required (different than 2) would impact the result.

The fit-oriented test compares the fit parameters for the initial solution (IS), the robust core (RC) and the minimum and maximum test set. Since all parameters, expected for the coverage of the Overall Perceived Fit are above .7, we consider the results robust (Table 15).

In the case-oriented robustness, the robustness case ratio for typical cases (RF_typ) reach an ideal level (close to 1) for high and low-environmentally concerned consumers and both the overall perceived fit and its absence. The deviant cases consistency presents low levels for the absence of perceived fit for high-environmentally concerned consumers (.375) with a rank of 2, indicating that there are possible cases but not shaky cases (Table 15). A graphical representation of these results can be found in Appendix 5.

Table 15: Robustness test

Robustness parameter	High-env. Consumers (PF/ Absence PF)	Low-env. Consumers (PF/ Absence PF)
Fit-orientated	RF_cov: .471 / .972 RF_cons: .890 / 1 RF_SC_minTS: .971 / .989 RF_SC_maxTS: .993 / .721	RF_cov: .927 / .832 RF_cons: .985 / .962 RF_SC_minTS: .917 / .928 RF_SC_maxTS: .931 / .943
Case-orientated	RF_typ: 1 / .810 RF_dev: 1 / .375 Rank: 1 / 2	RF_typ: .927 / 1 RF_dev: .750 / 1 Rank: 2 / 1

4.5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it aims to understand the combination of product attributes that explain the dimensions involved in the assessment process of an organic line extension. Second, it aims to find out the combination of fit dimensions that produce an Overall Perceived Fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension and the relationship among them.

Using fsQCA helped us understand the relationship among different fit dimensions when evaluating an organic line extension. We show that some dimensions have compensatory relations, whereas others have overriding relationships. For example, Health Fit is an important dimension that even compensates for the absence of other dimensions to explain the Perceived Fit between the parent product and the organic line extension for both groups of consumers. Moreover, the absence of Health Fit can override perceived fit in other dimensions leading the consumer not to perceive fit between the parent brand and the organic line extension.

The results of the product attributes analysis demonstrated the importance of having a flexible brand schema that compensates for less ethical perceptions of the product. This flexibility reduces the possible incongruence as the brand associations are less anchored in the consumer's mind. For example, being a product of a vice category from a large company not known by CSR activities could make sense for the consumer if it is perceived as a healthy product. Some researchers have found that healthfulness is the most important reason for buying organics (Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, & Gupta, 2019).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

This last chapter of the dissertation gathers the theoretical and practical contribution of the thesis to the literature on brand and line extension. It offers valuable insights for brand managers seeking this strategy to introduce an organic line extension. Additionally, it delineates the research's limitations and outlines potential avenues for future research.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The contribution of this dissertation to the literature is sixfold. First, it shows the importance of considering the brand as a schema (mentally created by the consumer with the brand associations) in studying an organic line extension. Second, it identifies the manifold dimensions involved in the fit assessment and demonstrates that the dimensions do not contribute to the perceived fit linearly as past literature considered it. Third, it evidences the complexity of the assessment process of an organic line extension, with two frames of evaluation (brand schema and organic schema). Fourth, it reveals that consumers are lax in assessing an organic line extension of a vice-product category. Fifth, it presents three possible behavioral responses toward the parent brand and the extension [cannibalization, reverse cannibalization, and rejection]. Finally, it delves into the appropriateness of using QCA to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for the Overall Perceived Fit of an organic line extension. Each is explained in turn.

First, to study the influence of the brand in an organic line extension assessment, it is essential to consider the brand associations that contribute to the formation of the brand schema (Halkias, 2015). Previous research on the influence of the brand in organic products has been limited, as it studied the brand as a category cue -e.g., private label *vs.* national brand- (Bezawada & Pauwels, 2013; Ngobo, 2011) or considered just one brand association -e.g., brand equity- (Larceneux, Benoit-Moreau, & Renaudin, 2012; Reinders & Bartels, 2017). This dissertation evidence that the assessment process of an organic line extension is more complex than other type of line extension (e.g., a new flavor) due to the variance of significances that the meaning of organic has (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005). The first RQ is addressed by showing that the organic schema is formed by the benefits and associations of organic consumption, such as healthiness, environmentally friendly production, or perceived small-size

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companies. Therefore, studying the brand as a schema (set of associations) allows the researcher to identify the dimensions considered in the assessment process and the importance of this dimension to form the Overall Perceived Fit. These fit dimensions vary depending on the consumer's brand schema.

Second, previous literature on line extensions studied the perceived fit as an evaluation process of different dimensions that sequentially or simultaneously contribute to the Overall Perceived Fit (Deng & Messinger, 2021: p.4). This research enhances the literature by conceptualizing that Overall Perceived Fit is multidimensional and configurational. The consumer considers different dimensions to form an Overall Perceived Fit in the assessment process, and the sub-dimensions have different relationships. The specific dimensions considered in assessing an organic line extension are derived from the brand and the organic schemata. The dimensions are Category Fit, Health Fit, Environmental Fit, and Moral Fit. This finding suggests the importance of studying the fit dimensions involved in line/brand extension assessment, which may differ among products with different brand schemata. Additionally, these findings complement past work by showing the structural relationships of these dimensions with the overall fit assessment, showing that there are not linear and additive, as assumed before (Peng, Bijmolt, Völckner, & Zhao, 2023), but have another relationship (compensatory, noncompensatory, or amplify another dimension). Some dimensions, when missing, override the others (e.g., Health Fit) or are difficult to compensate (e.g., Moral Fit). Conversely, dimensions such as Category Fit amplify the overall fit perceptions in combination with Health, Environmental, or Moral Fit. These findings tackle the second and fourth research questions of this thesis.

Third, this study demonstrates the complexity of the cognitive process involved in the assessment, as the consumers' level of environmental concern modulates the frame used for the assessment process (as expected in the RQ3 of this dissertation). Low-environmentally concerned consumers evaluate the fit between the brand schema and the most salient associations of organics (taste and health). In contrast, for high-environmentally concerned consumers, the environmentally friendly association is the most salient in the organic schema, and for this, they assess the

fit with the company launching the extension. The frame used also influences the relationship among the fit dimensions.

Fourth, consumers are lax in assessing vice organics products, contrary to our expectations. A potential explanation is that, as vice products exhibit less congruence with the organic benefit of health, consumers give more importance to the company's resources to produce organically. So, being a large company or having a flexible brand schema increases the Overall Perceived Fit for extensions in vice categories. For instance, Ferrero Rocher is a large company that can have a flexible brand schema as it has products in many vice categories. It is not especially known by any CSR activities, but as it is considered an expert on confectionary products, launching an organic line extension can make sense for the consumer.

Fifth, our study illuminates the potential repercussions of launching an organic line extension for the parent brand that has not been studied before. Past work studied the cannibalization effect (Nijssen, 1999) on the parent brand and the impact on the parent brand image (Martinez & Pina, 2003), where an asymmetry effect was found depending on the quality of the extension -high-quality line extensions positively impact the parent brand evaluation, whereas low-quality has a neutral or negative effect (Heath, DelVecchio, & McCarthy, 2011). Moreover, we discovered a reinforcement on the parent brand, that we called "reverse cannibalization". This effect strengthens the parent brand increasing sales, as consumers believe that if the line extension is organic, the parent brand is also organic (as if it were not possible to differentiate the production of both products).

Finally, this research underlies the suitability of using fsQCA, which allowed the identification of necessary and sufficient conditions that would not be possible with a variance-based technique. Drawing from previous literature, the absence of Moral Fit was expected to be a necessary condition for the absence of Overall Perceived Fit (Kim, Hye-Shin & Hall, 2015). This dissertation demonstrated that the absence of Moral Fit is a sufficient condition for the absence of Overall Perceived Fit for an organic line extension.

5.2. Practical contributions

This study also provides some implications for practitioners considering launching an organic line extension. Although past studies implicitly suggest that launching an organic line extension may be a successful strategy, as it could be perceived as an improved product (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013), our work reveals more aspects that should be considered, such as the brand's target consumer profile.

This research provides insights into how to segment the new product's target based on the differences in the assessment process between high- and low-environmentally concerned consumers. Previous literature has demonstrated that knowledge about organic consumption and production positively influences the intention to buy organic food (Testa, Sarti, & Frey, 2019). Our research supports this evidence but also points out that these knowledgeable consumers are stricter in assessing organic line extensions. Thus, unless the company launching the extension is perceived as local, environmentally friendly, or specialized in organic production, highly environmentally concerned consumers will reject leading brands launching an organic product. In contrast, low-environmentally concerned consumers are more likely to accept the organic line extension if there is a perception of the extension being healthier than the parent brand.

We suggest that brands in the virtue category that belong to large companies that are not specially recognized for having positive CSR activities should emphasize the perception of healthiness of the organic line extension to increase the Overall Perceived Fit. This could be the case for Gullon. They are an expert in producing cookies, so they should emphasize the health benefits of organic cookies if they wish to launch this type of extension. Alternatively, if the brand can prove a positive CSR, it should emphasize Moral Fit (a real commitment to society with the launch of this product) to enable fit perceptions. The Kellogg Company is an example of this type of company.

In contrast, brands categorized as vice products should aim to establish a congruity between their brand associations and the values commonly associated with organics. For instance, if a brand is widely perceived as socially responsible due

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to its positive CSR initiatives, consumers are likelier to perceive fit between the brand and the organic line extension. If it is a large company, consumers can perceive its capability to produce with the organic requirements. By leveraging this aspect of congruity, vice brands can enhance consumers' perceptions of compatibility and increase acceptance of their organic line extensions. For instance, Lays, as an expert in the salty snacks category, can highlight this when launching an organic line extension.

When targeting highly environmentally concerned consumers, brand managers should emphasize benevolence cues associated with organics to appeal to consumers' values that prioritize environmental benefits when choosing a product. In contrast, brand managers should highlight the product's health benefits when targeting low environmentally concerned consumers.

Previous literature on line extension offers strategies to mitigate the negative consequences associated with this strategy. To counteract reverse cannibalization, we suggest the brands elucidate the distinctions between the organic line extension and the parent brand, as relying on the organic label may not be a sufficient explanation for the consumer.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Lines

The main limitation of this dissertation concerns the settings in which it was developed. For the first study, Grounded Theory methodology was used. Therefore, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated, the model used is appropriate for developing middle-range, contextually grounded theory. Future research could study if there are cultural differences in the assessment process of an organic line extension.

The methodology used in the second study, QCA, is valuable in contributing to existing literature and informing practitioners. However, it offers limitations, such as the impossibility of showing the combination of product attributes that explain Environmental Fit for virtue products. This impossibility is due to the heterogeneity of consumers' perspectives, suggesting deepened research as a future line with another methodology or study design.

Moreover, using QCA requires a limited number of conditions to include. In our study, this limitation determines the number of attributes of the product and the number of fit dimensions considered. Consequently, the researchers must carefully select the most influential product attributes in the design of the scenarios. It is worth noting that including other attributes may yield different results. Furthermore, this methodology does not allow for establishing the hierarchy of the fit dimensions to understand the sequence of the assessment process. Additionally, there is a limitation on the content validity of Moral Fit as only one item was used in the data analysis.

The second study was based on fictional, *albeit* realistic, brands, so we could not consider other relevant brand associations such as brand equity, attachment, familiarity, or loyalty. Consequently, we propose conducting further studies with real brands to understand if these associations influence the relationship among the fit dimensions. Also, it would be interesting to study the potential influence of the competitor's strategy on the fit perceptions, as in this dissertation it was studied a single brand. Furthermore, it is recommended that future research consider more varied degrees of environmental concern levels, as consumer behavior is often more complex and nuanced, and other consumer traits as skepticism; the more skeptic the consumer is, the more evidence is needed in the assessment process (Koslow, 2000). Lastly, as this dissertation has studied the acceptance of an organic line extension instead of purchase, it could be interesting to investigate the consequences of this acceptance (Overall Perceived Fit) on brand sales with other methodologies, including actual sales data. As explained before, accepting an extension may not lead to higher sales.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Vignettes used in study 1

1st vignette: Mary

Mary is a large family mother. She works in a bank branch, so she works only in the mornings (but Thursdays). Usually, she does the grocery shopping in the Carrefour Market next to her house. It is very convenient as it has parking and it is not a big store, so she can do the shopping when she finishes work and before going to school to pick up her children. Moreover, in Carrefour, she can find many brands that she likes, including the private label of Carrefour, at a reasonable price. There is also big packaging, which is excellent as they are five at home.

She usually does the grocery shopping on Mondays or Wednesdays (on Tuesday, she does Pilates, and on Thursday, she has to work). She organized herself to shop every three weeks, but she purchases fruit and vegetables weekly from a traditional market where she finds high-quality products at a reasonable price.

Mary is worried about giving her children a healthy and balanced diet.

Lately, she has been thinking about breakfast products for his second child, Peter. Peter does not eat very well; he is slow and gets bored eating the same things. Mary is aware of the importance of breakfast, so she wants to find something healthy and quick to have (we all know that in the morning, everything is rushed).

Mary decided to go to the breakfast aisle. She remembers being a kid and eating Chocapic from Nestlé; she loved them. When Mary gets to the aisle, she finds out that there is Chocapic, Chocapic bio, a private label from Carrefour (regular and bio), and Ecocesta (just a chocolate bio-option).

Once Mary picked up the cereals, she decided to go for milk. While walking down the aisle, she remembers something she read in the newspaper about the best milk brands on the market. Once in the aisle, she noticed that Pascual (the milk she used to buy) had launched an organic extension. Also, it captures her attention Carrefour milk, available regular and organic; and El Buen Pastor organic milk (that was on the report she read).

2ⁿᵈ vignette: John

John is a 25-year-old man, just independent. He works as a consultant on an exciting and demanding project. He is very sportive, likes to run, and has been running a marathon every year for the last three years. Doing that much sport allows him to eat whatever he wants without worrying about gaining weight. He is happy to be able to run the office's gym three times per week in the mornings before starting to work. Now that he lives alone, he is getting more interested in the products he purchases to eat, although he is not organized and goes to the grocery store just when the fridge is empty.

On weekly days he has lunch at the office and many days dinner. On weekends, one day, he used to go for lunch at his parent's house, so there was just one day that he needed to cook.

Next Sunday he is having a new marathon. He wants to cook some pasta the day before, which will help him prepare for the run. He leaves the office earlier and stops by Lidl to purchase all the ingredients needed. Lidl is a convenient option as it is next to his house and very cheap.

When John arrives at the pasta aisle, he focuses on three brands. Gallo, a well-known brand and the one his mother buys; Barilla, which seems to be more authentical; and Garofalo, which is organic and has excellent packaging. He notices that there are the standard option and an organic version for Gallo and Barilla.

Once John has chosen the pasta, he moves to find a tomato sauce. He pays attention to two brands: Orlando, the most famous, and Lidl Organic. There are also the traditional tomato sauce and the organic extension for Orlando.

Appendix 2: T- test analysis (p-value) of product attributes and fit dimensions

	Category type	Flexibility brand schema	Size	SCR
Category Fit	.165	.404	.262	.668
Health Fit	.843	.519	.832	.011
Environmental Fit	.158	.028	.345	.089
Moral Fit	.561	.676	.570	.146
Overall Perceived Fit	.440	.844	.564	.044

Appendix 3: Robustness test for high-environmentally concerned consumers

Robustness Calibration Range for PF				
		Lower bound	Threshold	Upper bound
Category Fit	Exclusion	3.6	3.6	4.6
	Crossover	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Inclusion	6	7	7
Health Fit	Exclusion	.4	3.4	3.4
	Crossover	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Inclusion	7	7	7
Environmental Fit	Exclusion	2.4	3.4	3.4
	Crossover	5.4	5.4	5.4
	Inclusion	6	7	8
Moral Fit	Exclusion	0	3	3
	Crossover	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Inclusion	7	7	10
Raw Consistency Test		.85	.85	.85
N. Cut Range		2	2	2

Appendix 4: Robustness test for low-environmentally concerned consumers

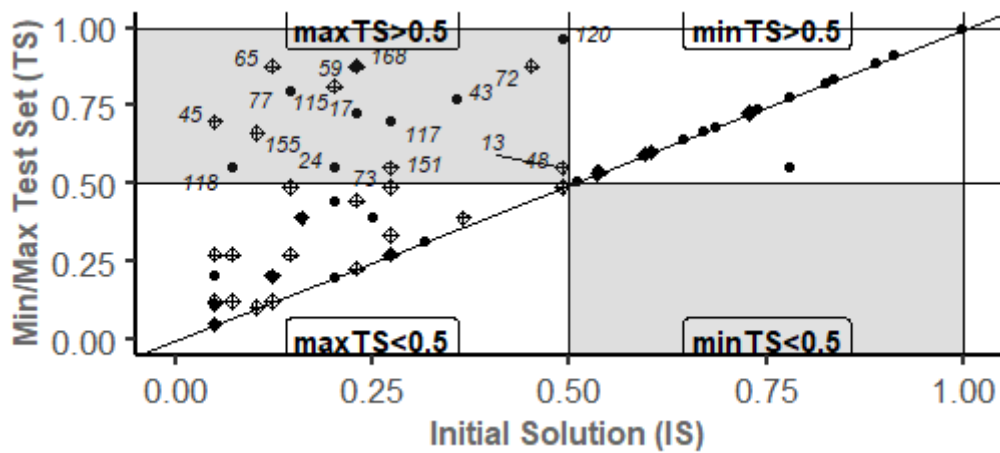| Robustness Calibration Range for PF				
		Lower bound	Threshold	Upper bound
Category Fit	Exclusion	-21	2	4
	Crossover	4.7	4.7	4.7
	Inclusion	6	7	10
Health Fit	Exclusion	-3.9	1.1	2.1
	Crossover	4	4	4
	Inclusion	5.1	6.1	10.1
Environmental Fit	Exclusion	-3.4	1.6	3.6
	Crossover	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Inclusion	5	6	NA
Moral Fit	Exclusion	-2	1	3
	Crossover	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Inclusion	4	6	9
Raw Consistency Test		.85	.85	.85
N. Cut Range		2	2	2

Appendix 5: Robustness plot

High-environmentally concerned consumers.

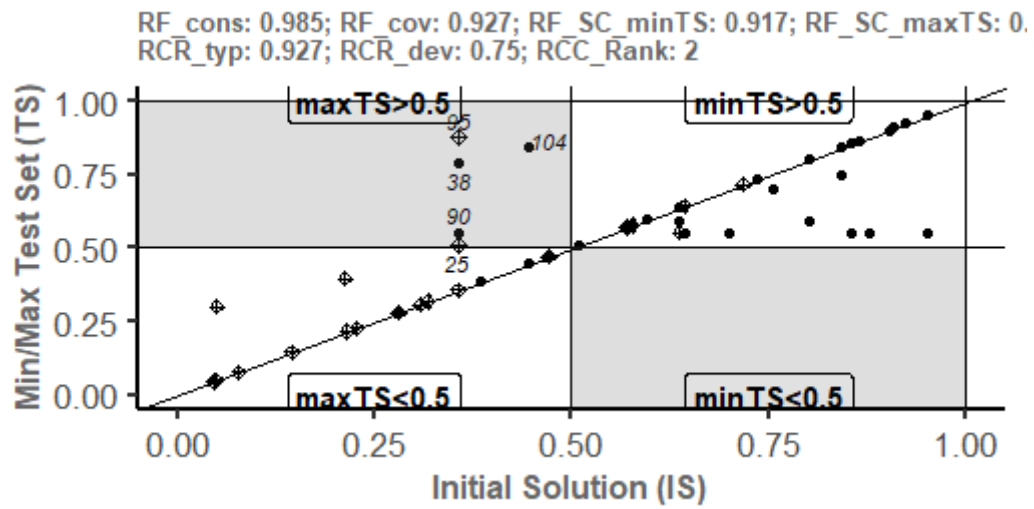Robustness plot for Overall Perceived Fit
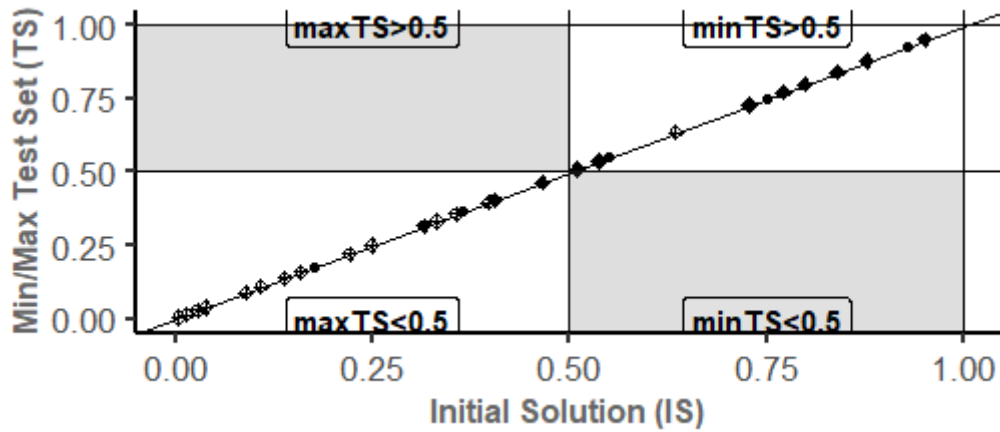
Robustness plot for the Absence of Overall Perceived Fit

Low-environmentally concerned consumers.

Robustness plot for Overall Perceived Fit

Robustness plot for the absence of Overall Perceived Fit