Unravelling the Secret of Successful Brand Extensions: a case study to explore consumer response

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In this paper we try to disentangle the design of successful brand extensions and test this with two case studies. Earlier research revealed that typicality and novelty are related to the aesthetic preference of products. Despite the fact these two predictors are also each other’s suppressors, the equilibrium of both will determine aesthetically preferred products. When dealing with brand extensions we assume this effect is even bigger. We discern two approaches to explain this process. On the one hand the new product category with respect to the known brand can be seen as the novel experience of the design. On the other hand, the consumer can be familiar with the archetypical forms of a product category (typicality) and consider the branded product design as the novel experience. The outcomes show that typicality and novelty are jointly effective in explaining the aesthetic preferences of consumers for some product categories and that the appreciation of novelty for less typical designs is reinforced by the context they are presented in.

Keywords: brand extensions, typicality, novelty, branding, design

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Introduction

The Maya principle as stated by Loewy (1951) has a major impact on the appreciation and acceptation of the design of new products. When a product sparks novelty, people are more attracted to it. On the other hand consumers also need to be familiar with the product category to accept the new product as a credible one. So the product design has to have a certain amount of novelty and typicality to become interesting for the consumer.

Hekkert et al (2003) proved that both features together have a positive effect on aesthetic preferences. For brand extensions this process is even more relevant. The recognizability of the core product is really important, but there also have to be a familiarity with the design characteristics of the brand (Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2013a). So the brand ensures the typicality and the new product for the brand takes care of the novel aspect. On the other hand this process can also take place the other way around. The consumer can be less familiar with the brand, and more with the core product category. The novelty in this case is than the novel experience of the brand. The reciprocity between these two mechanisms takes place in a split second and also plays an important role in the acceptation of an extension. Based on the above considerations we hypothesized that a successful brand extension incorporates both mechanisms. Therefore the hypothesis of the joint influence of typicality and novelty related to aesthetic preference as discussed by Hekkert will be tested for brand extensions. In a first case study this hypothesis was partially confirmed. In a second case study the effect of the environment is taken into account to test the two different mechanisms of perceiving the brand extensions.

This paper is part of our research into the design of brand extensions, which is aimed at supporting designers in the process of designing successful products.

Brand recognition

Designing for brand recognition is almost fully embedded in our society as a strategic asset. When the functional characteristics of products are the same as well as the price, the aesthetic expression of the product is used to differentiate from its competitors (Cooper & Press, 2003; Kotler, 2000). Consumer choice of products is based on products with added value which satisfy both emotional and functional needs (Creusen & schoormans, 2005).

Branding is one of the most commonly used methods to increase the aesthetic expression and to create recognisability among consumers.
(Kapferer, 2008). According to Zajonc and Bornstein the positive affect also increases with repeated unreinforced exposure and thus familiarity of a stimulus (Bornstein, 1989; Zajonc, 1968). When consumers are more familiar with a certain brand and its visual expression, it is more likely that those consumers remain faithful to the brand. Therefore it is really important to distinguish yourself as a brand from your competitors with a consistent and recognizable portfolio. Through this design consistency, a brand can develop a solid base to create new recognizable products (Karjalainen, 2007; Karjalainen, Heinio, & Rahe, 2010)

Even more important is the incorporation of the core values of a brand (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010). In order to be recognized by the consumer brands use brand names or logos and specific product design characteristics. When these explicit design characteristics are frequently used in the product portfolio they can therefore be easily recognised. On the other hand the design of a product also acts as a carrier of various symbolic meanings. These meanings are a result of experiencing all the explicit design characteristics together in the complete product. The separate design characteristics will build up to a total image, which will evoke certain associations. These associations are often referring to the brand values of a company and the proper translation of these values into explicit designs is crucial for a company to develop a strong brand (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010).

**Brand extensions**

For brand extensions this process is even more complex. The design language of a brand cannot literally be translated for a brand extension, because the products that are to extend the brand are mostly from a complete different category, with specific, commonly used design features. So the extension has to be a good representation of the brand and at the same time has to retain recognition to the product category. For example a bike from Ferrari has to be accepted as a product that is close to the core concept of a bicycle, but also has to share a certain amount of its design language with the Ferrari cars. The focus of our research is to support designers in this complex process to design successful brand extensions.
Framework

To assist the designer in taking the right decisions when translating a corporate identity into a form language, a Brand Translation Framework was developed (Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2011; Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2013a, 2013b). This framework (figure 1) helps the designer to focus on the most important values of the brand, and the way they can be translated into the design and styling of new products in such a way that consumers will recognize the brand and its associated values more easily.

![Brand translation Framework](image)

Figure 1. Brand translation Framework

The framework starts with analysing in which way the specific design characteristics of the brand refer to which core values of the brand. The translation of the more tangible features towards the more abstract values can then be done by referring to first and second order associations (Krippendorf, 2005). When analysing the brand by ordering associations, designers will become more aware of the most important values of the brand.

We introduced the framework in an elective master course ‘Graphic language of Products’ of our curriculum Industrial Design Engineering. This course is a 10 week project of 5 ECTS, aimed at defining brand identity and translating those identity into new products, where the students work in couples. The goal of using the framework was to see if young designers can work with the model and to see if the students succeeded in designing more recognizable products. In figure 2 an overview of the framework is shown, filled in by a student couple, analysing the brand Lamborghini. The students made an analysis of the brand according to the three levels of the framework, starting with defining the physical features of the brand on top (level 1). Subsequent the students derived first and second order associations (level 2) from the visuals of the brand and at last they combined
the wordings of the second order associations into groups that together form a certain keyword which refers to the core values of the brand (level 3). It should be noticed that the students are challenged to make their own observation from the product portfolio of the brand and define the three core values that suits the brand the best in their vision. In fact this could be different compared to the values of the brand.

For two years now, the students are using this version of the framework. From the results it seems that for brand extensions it is quite important that consumers are able to recognize the core product of the extension, besides using characteristic features of the brand. For example, in figure 3 two bicycle designs for the brand Ferrari are shown. It is obvious that the concepts both make use of characteristic features of the brand. However, the designs are completely different. The design of the group at the right (figure 3b) has focused more on using the specific characteristics of the shape of the Ferrari F458 into the design of the bike. They copied the lines of the car quite literal. The design of the group at the left side (figure 3a)
focuses more on the associations with the brand (power, Italian tradition, and a purbred racing pedigree). To retain the Ferrari-feeling they translated the remarkable air intake into the bike concept, as well as the rims of the car. So the students who designed the left bike are using all levels of the brand translation framework instead of the right design which only uses the physical characteristics of the brand. Earlier research showed that a successful brand extension is using all levels of the Brand Translation Framework (Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2012; Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2013a).

The pitfall of the design of the group at the right side is that they got lost in copying the features of the car into the bike. They forgot to take a step back and get an overview of the complete product and therefore failed to integrate the core values of Ferrari. The other important aspect of their design is that the bike is not very recognizable as a stereotypical bike.

**Typicality and Novelty**

Consumers prefer an optimum between innovation and categorization (N. Crilly, J. Moultrie, & P. J. Clarkson, 2004) as explained in the MAYA
principle which was coined by Raymond Loewy (1951). As argued before, especially for brand extensions it is important to pay attention to the recognition process of the consumer.

As stated by Hekkert et al (2003) the aesthetic preference will be determined by the joint influence of typicality and novelty.

“Typicality and novelty are not to be conceived as opposite poles of one and the same continuum, although a high (negative) correlation will often be found” (Hekkert et al., 2003, p. 112)

When the design of a product seems to be more novel, consumers are more unsecure about the performances, therefore designers have to create a certain amount of recognition in the product to counteract this effect. But when the design has a strong resemblance with the same category of the core product, the reaction of the consumer can be more disappointed. At the same time the visual similarity of products determines the categorization of the concept. If the design differs a lot from the stereotype-product, the consumer will not recognise the function of the product anymore and can’t categorize it.

It seems at first hand that those two principles are linear related to each other. If a product is more typical, it is less novel and vice versa. This seems to be a logical explanation, but on the contrary there are also products that exist of a combination of those two mechanisms.

For example, the lamp in Figure 4 is a new interpretation of a classic baroque lamp. So the form of the lamp refers to associations with the baroque style characteristics which are familiar to consumers and the use of transparent shiny polycarbonate evokes the novel experience of the lamp even as the construction of the foot, which exists of three plains creating a three dimensional form.
We assume that for brand extensions these mechanisms are also really important. In fact there can be two approaches to look at this process. On the one hand the new product category with respect to the brand can be seen as the novel experience of the product. The extension is not common for the usual product portfolio of the brand and therefore refers to the term ‘novelty’. The counteracting effect is the implementation of well-known brand characteristics in the extension, which will take care of the ‘typicality’ effect. The brand familiarity emphasizes the recognition of the brand and its reliability and therefore compensate the effect of the novel experience.

On the other hand the consumer can be more familiar with the archetypical forms of a product category compared to the brand. In other words the product is categorized and recognized like a certain archetypical form (typicality). Meanwhile the consumer considers the extension of the brand as novel experience with respect to the product category.

Take for example the brand extension of a Lamborghini bike. When placing the Lamborghini bike in an bike shop, the novel aspect will be the fact that there is also a bike with a Lamborghini design in the assortment. When we place the same bicycle in an Lamborghini showroom, the novel aspect will be that Lamborghini also designs for another product category.

We used the theory of Hekkert et al (2003) to disentangle the design of successful brand extensions. Based on the above considerations our hypothesis implies that the joint influence of typicality and novelty is also positively related to aesthetic preference for designing brand extensions. To test this hypothesis a case study with two different sets of brand extension
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designs was executed. In the first instance we’d like to prove that the theory of Hekkert et al. is also applicable on brand extensions. Subsequently we would like to refine the results and take a closer look at the two approaches as described above.

Case Study 1

In study 1 we tested the joint influence of typicality and novelty for brand extensions. The relation between novelty an typicality on the one hand and aesthetic preference on the other hand was investigated in a test with bicycle and helmet designs (concepts of the students of the master course). Conform the joint influence of typicality and novelty we expect that the more aesthetically preferred designs are above the typical negative correlation line (distributed along the red line in Figure 5) and the less aesthetically preferred products are on the line or beneath the line (blue area). Especially the optimum of both mechanism, more to the centre of the graph where the distance between the blue and the red line will be larger, will lead to more aesthetically preferred products.

Figure 5  Schematic overview of the hypothesis
Figure 6. Stimuli of study 1 (a) 3 bicycles for Ferrari (A,B,C) and 3 bicycles for Lamborghini (D,E,F) (b) 3 helmets for Lamborghini (A,B,C) and 3 helmets for Mini (D,E,F)

Method
The two different product categories were rated by 21 respondents. They all had to evaluate 6 bicycle designs and 6 helmets designs (figure 6). The respondents were asked to arrange the designs on typicality, novelty and aesthetic preference by placing them on a line with on the one hand the term “not typical” or “does not look like a archetypical bike” and on the other hand, “typical” or “looks like a archetypical bike”. The selected designs cover a wide range of typicality and novelty. On a big screen, life-size pictures of the six designs were shown (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Set up of test situation

Results
As was to be expected the ratings for typicality and novelty showed a high negative correlation for both the bicycles and the helmets. The Pearson correlations were respectively -.96 (p<.01) and -.90 (p<0.05).
Both the correlation between the mean typicality and mean preference score (.30) and the mean novelty and mean preference score (-.023) does not reach statistical significance (p>0.5) which is comparable to the study of Hekkert.

As stated by Hekkert et al, looking at the high negative correlations between typicality and novelty, either of these variables may have functioned as a suppressor variable with respect to the relation between the other one and aesthetic preference. When we performed a correlation analysis where the effect of novelty was partialled out, this is true. The suppressor effect is even larger than found by Hekkert et al. The correlation of typicality with the preference of the products is 0.94 (with significance is <0.05) when we controlled for the influence of novelty. The mean originality scores correlates with the mean preference controlling for typicality with r= 0.935 and a significance of p<0.05. The same tests applied to the helmets showed another picture. There is no significance between the mean typicality and main preference when partialing out for novelty and vice versa. The partial typicality/mean preference correlation was .836 and for novelty/mean preference it was .872. Both p≥0.05.

At last a regression analysis was made to determine how much variance in the ratings of the dependent variable “aesthetic preference” can be explained by typicality and novelty. It seems that for the bicycles the influence of the predictors of typicality and novelty showed a significance compared to aesthetical preference (p<0.05). For the helmets there is no significance for this relation (p>0.05). The analysis revealed that typicality as well as novelty explained 89% of the variance in beauty ratings of the bicycle.

The graph in figure 8 shows the ratings of the bicycle designs with on the horizontal axis “typicality” and on the vertical axis “novelty”. According to this graph our hypothesis is that the bikes above the line are arranged as more aesthetically pleasing than the bikes on the line. When we compare those results with the aesthetic preference rates (figure 9), it is obviously clear that the designs B, D and A are judged as the most beautiful designs. Bike C scored the lowest, followed by bike F. The standard deviations of the ratings of bike E are very high. Some of the people judged the bike as too extreme, others really liked the novel aspect.
Figure 8. Typicality (looks like an archetypical bike) versus novelty (looks like a novel design of a bike) plot for the 6 bicycle designs.

Figure 9. Mean values for aesthetic preference of the bicycle designs.

In figure 10 the results of the helmets are plotted with on the horizontal axis “typicality” and on the vertical axis “novelty”. The graph shows that all results are plotted above the blue line. According to our hypothesis the
helmets C, B and F should rate higher according to aesthetic preference because of the combined influence of the two mechanisms typicality and novelty.

![Figure 10. Typicality (looks like an archetypical helmet) versus novelty (looks like a novel design of a helmet) plot for the 6 helmet designs.](image)

When we compare the results with the aesthetic preference rates, it shows that helmet B is rated as the far most beautiful helmet conform our hypothesis. The results show also that helmet C is not rated very high, against our expectations. A closer look at the standard deviation explained that there is lot of disagreement about this helmet. Helmet E scored also really low (with the highest standard deviation of all helmets). Helmet A is rated with the lowest ‘aesthetic score’, with a very small standard deviation.

It is also remarkable to see that the helmets are mainly positioned at the right side of the graph, while the bicycles where spread over the complete graph. There are almost no helmets which are rated as more novel. In the discussion we will discuss these outcomes.
Discussion case study 1

The results show that the hypothesis that was visualized in figure 5 is correct for the product category of the bicycles, however not for the helmets. It seems that the hypothesis can be true, but is dependent on the type of products. As we compare the results of the helmets according to the bicycles, it seems that the helmets are rated as more typical and less novel. This could be explained by the difference in the dominance of the archetypical shape of bicycles versus helmets. After the test the respondents were asked for which product category it was more easy to judge the designs. 17 of the 21 respondents indicated the bicycles as more easy to judge, because the designs varied more and it was easier to determine the extremes. Comparing with the stimuli of Hekkert et al. (Teakettles, Cars and Telephones) it shows that those three product categories are less stereotypical compared to the helmet. this assumption can be explained because a helmet is a product that has to fit around the head and therefore is automatically tended to be less novel. When we take a closer look at the results of the beauty ratings of the helmets this case seems more complex. The differences of the originality of helmet E (figure 12a) varied a lot between the respondents, it has the highest standard deviation. Some of the respondents rated the helmet as old fashioned and discussed the resemblance with retro motor cycle helmets (called ‘pothelm’ in Dutch) as shown in figure 12b. The same ‘problem’ even sometimes occurred when respondents were rating the bicycles. Bicycle C was judge as a bike that
looks like an old fashioned specimen from the nineteenth century in contrast to others who judged the bike like really innovative (figure 13).

Figure 12. (a) the design of helmet for the brand Mini (b) a retro cycle motor helm called ‘pothelm’ in Dutch

Figure 13. (a) the design of a bike for the brand Ferrari (b) Michaux "boneshaker" ca. 1870

In other words; some of the designs evoke an effect that does not correspondent with the designers’ intent.

There are also other factors that could influence the outcomes but are not discussed in this paper in detail for example the relatively small amount of respondents, the use of stimuli created by students and the observer characteristics such as the expertise level. Nevertheless, the statistical results of the ratings of the bicycle case study are significant.

**Conclusion case study 1**

The results show that the hypothesis of figure 5 is correct for the bicycles, however not for the helmets. The more appreciated bikes are placed above the lines. There is an optimum line as visualized in figure 5
where we can predict the outcomes of the more aesthetically preferred designs. Therefore we could say that the aesthetic preference based on the joint influence of typicality and novelty is true for this product category in case of brand extensions. For helmets the hypothesis is not significant, which seems to be due to the more archetypical product category. In order to say more about this effect we need to test more product categories.

Elaborating on the research of Hekkert et al. we can say that to create a successful brand extension, it is important to create a product that has to look like the product of its category (typicality) and on the other hand has to maximize the novelty aspect.

The results also showed that the judgment of novelty in the case of brand-extensions is not without difficulty. To unravel the mechanism behind the appreciation of novelty in brand extensions, we performed a second case study where the influence of the context was taken into account.

**Case study 2**

There are two mechanisms that can occur when watching a brand extension like a bike from Lamborghini in a specific context.

On the one hand the new product category with respect to the brand can be seen as the novel experience of the product. The familiarity with the brand characteristics of the brand (typicality) has to compensate the effect of the novel experience. On the other hand the consumer can be familiar with the archetypical forms of a product category (typicality) and considers the extension of the brand as a novel experience with respect to the product category. Take for example the brand extension of a Lamborghini bike. When placing the Lamborghini bike in an bike shop, the novel aspect will be the fact that there is also a bike with a Lamborghini design in the assortment. When we place the same bicycle in a Lamborghini showroom, the novel aspect will be the fact that Lamborghini also designs for another product category. When the outcomes of the novelty ratings of the two designs are the same, there is no difference in judging the objects even by placing them in a specific context. We assumed that the more typical bike of Lamborghini in the more typical context (bike shop) will be rated as less novel. All the other bikes will be rated as (more) novel. When the Lamborghini bike in the bike shop is rated as more novel compared to the same bike in the Lamborghini showroom, than we could say that the influence of context will reinforce the effect of the recognition of brand characteristics with a specific context perceiving novelty in a product.
To be more specific, we assume that the bike in context 4 (figure 14b) will be rated more novel than the bike in context 1 (figure 14a), because the novelty in context 1 is provided by the environment, in contrast to the really typical bike shop in context 4. The second assumption is that the bike in context 3 will be rated as more novel than the bike in context 2, because the physical brand characteristics (forms/lines, colours etc.) of the product show more contrast in the design related to the context. According to the integration of the product with the context we assume that bike 4 is more integrated with the context than bike 1 and Bike 2 is more integrated than bike 3.

Method

We asked 59 first year students of our curriculum Industrial Design Engineering to judge two different bike designs in a specific context. They were asked to rate the novelty on a likert scale from 1-7. We made 4 different surveys were the respondents were asked to rate only two different bike designs (1&3, 2&4, 1&2 or 3&4).

![Figure 14. Stimuli of case study 2 (a) two designs of Lamborghini in a Lamborghini showroom (b) two designs of Lamborghini in a bike shop](image)

In the survey, the respondents were told to rate a brand extension (a product for a specific brand), the exact product and the context were not explained to the respondents. We also asked a second control question were the respondents has to rate (from 1-7) to what extend they thought the bike fitted into the context.
Results

The outcomes show that the respondents do not differ a lot between the context pictures 1 & 4. The bike in context 1 is rated just slightly higher ($M_1=2.0$) compared to the bike in context 4 ($M_4=1.96$), but the standard deviation of context 4 is lower ($SD_1=1.13$; $SD_4=0.73$) (figure 15). In contrast, the bike in context 3 is scored as more novel ($M_3=5.3$; $SD_3=1.06$) compared to the bike in context 2 ($M_2=4.6$; $SD_2=1.32$). So we could say that when the product is not really integrated with the context, this has a bigger effect on novelty than placing a more novel product in a context where the product and the context are more integrated (context 2).

![Figure 15. plot of mean results for novelty](image)

The outcomes of the second question about integration of the product with the context (consensus) reveals that the bike in context 2 ($M_2=4.6$; $SD_2=1.55$) is more merged with its environment compared to bike in context 3 ($M_3=2.6$; $SD_3=1.54$). The bike in context 4 ($M_4=5.8$; $SD_4=1.33$) is more integrated with the context compared to bike 1 ($M_1=3.0$; $SD_1=1.64$).

Discussion case study 2

The outcomes of the integration of the bikes with the context showed that the bike in context 2 is more merged with its environment compared to the bike in context 3. So the effect that people experience the Lamborghini brand as provider for the novelty aspect with the bike in the bike shop as provider for the typicality aspect seems stronger than vice versa (the bike in the Lamborghini showroom as provider for novelty, with the Lamborghini
brand as provider for typicality). The outcomes for novelty reveal the same effect: the “Lamborghini-bike” in context 3 is rated relatively more novel than the “bike-Lamborghini” in context 2.

**Table 1  Outcomes of mean ratings for novelty and integration with context (consensus) arranged for the different surveys**

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>context 1</th>
<th>context 2</th>
<th>context 3</th>
<th>context 4</th>
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<td>3,7000</td>
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<td>5,7600</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However the results of context 1 and 4 did not match our hypothesis, as the bike in context 1 was not rated as more novel than the bike in context 4. The effect of the typical bike seems to overshadow the novelty aspect, we assume that this is because the bike design is too common.

There are also some other restrictions to this case study. The outcomes of the mean scores of novelty and consensus can also depend on the sequence of showing the pictures. In table 1 the different surveys are shown related with the mean scores of novelty. The outcomes show that the novelty of bike 3 ($M_3=5.6; SD_3=0.94$) is almost 1 point lower in survey 4 ($M_3=4.6; SD_3=1.03$) compared to survey 1. So the respondents in survey 1 first rated the more typical bike as less novel with context 1, and after that bike 3 was rated as even more novel, in comparison with the respondents of survey 4, who started with bike 3. This means that we also have to test for the inverse of all the combinations.

The other restriction is that this second case study is only tested among first year industrial design students, so the results do not cover a wide range
of people. Although the respondents could be designated as more experienced with respect to adequately perceiving the designs of products.

**General Conclusion**

Starting point for the research in this paper were our previous findings, that to create an optimal brand extension, designs need to use all levels of the brand translation framework (Mulder-Nijkamp & Eggink, 2013a, 2013b). In this paper we hypothesized that besides this, a successful brand extension depends on the joint influence of typicality and novelty as also stated by Hekkert et al. The first case study confirmed that to create a successful brand extension, it is important to create a product that has to look like the archetype product of its own category (typicality), and on the other hand has to maximize the novelty aspect. Although it should be mentioned that the number of individuals surveyed was small, the results of the casestudy indicate that the successfulness of brandextensions is also determined by the two mechanisms.

The second case study was partially successful in determining which of the proposed mechanisms defined the appreciation of novelty among the respondents. The “Lamborghini-bike” is rated relatively more novel than the “bike-Lamborghini”, however the reciprocity of both mechanisms was not confirmed. The outcomes did show that the appreciation of novelty for less typical designs is reinforced by the context they are presented in. It seems that the appreciation of novelty of the respondents is strengthened by an environment that does not match the product.

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