Role of advertising in brand extension evaluations: A construal level perspective

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by

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Abstract

Firms often capitalise on their established brands through brand extensions, a strategy in which firms use established brand names to introduce new products in different categories. Brands purposefully extend into unrelated product categories (e.g. Dyson from vacuum cleaner to hairdryers, Victoria Bitter from beer to men's grooming products) because such low-fit brand extensions can offer strategic benefits, such as capturing emerging consumer trends (Mathur et al., 2023) and broadening revenue streams (Parker et al., 2018). Despite these strategic benefits, low-fit brand extensions are often risky and marketers lack guidance on how to effectively promote low-fit extensions (Miniard et al., 2018). Furthermore, few studies have examined the ways that advertising appeals can improve the evaluations of low-fit extensions.

Against this backdrop, this thesis investigates the efficacy of various advertising appeals in enhancing low-fit extension evaluations. To this end, it draws on construal level theory (CLT), which posits that consumers construe information at various levels of abstraction, ranging from low-level construal to high-level construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The high-level construal of an object is abstract and decontextualised whereas low-level construal is more concrete and contextualised. Specifically, this thesis builds on the categorisation and construal level matching-effects tenets of CLT to explain the effectiveness of various advertising appeals for low-fit extensions. The categorisation-effect tenet of CLT posits that individuals perceive greater similarity among stimuli when they are in a high-level (low-level) construal state. The matching-effect tenet of CLT proposes that individuals evaluate a stimulus more positively when it matches their construal level.

This thesis executes five studies to address the research questions. Studies 1 and 2 draw on the categorisation-effect tenet of CLT to test the impact of construal level mindsets and construal-evoking advertising appeals on low-fit extension evaluations, respectively. The findings of Study 1 show that consumers in high versus low-level construal mindsets have a more favourable attitude towards low-fit extensions. However, no such effect emerged for high-fit extensions, in which brands extend to similar or related product categories (e.g. extension of Dove from soap to facewash and body wash). Study 2 demonstrates that abstract (high-level construal evoking), rather than concrete (low-level construal evoking), advertising appeals lead to a more positive attitude towards low-fit brand extensions. However, the two advertising appeals have similar effects on attitudes towards high-fit brand extensions. In

addition, Study 2 reveals that the perceived parent–extension fit is the underlying cognitive mechanism that drives the superior effect of abstract versus concrete advertising appeals on low-fit extension evaluations.

Building on the matching-effect tenet of CLT, Studies 3 and 4 extend Study 2 by testing the influence of social power and consumers' decision journey (CDJ) stage, respectively, on the effectiveness of construal level advertising appeals for low-fit extension evaluations. Study 3 finds that abstract versus concrete advertising appeals result in more positive evaluations of low-fit extensions when consumers are in high versus low-power states. Likewise, Study 4 shows that desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals result in more favourable evaluations of low-fit extensions when consumers are at the informational versus transactional stage in their CDJ. Finally, using an experimental-causal-chain design, Study 5 confirms that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the favourable effect of construal level matches between advertising appeals (i.e. promotion v. prevention) and CDJ stages (i.e. informational v. transactional) on low-fit extension evaluations.

This thesis contributes to brand extension theory in several important ways. First, a key theoretical contribution emanates from the application of two tenets of CLT to explaining the effectiveness of advertising appeals in low-fit extension evaluations. In doing so, this thesis establishes not only a cognitive route but also an affective route through which advertising appeals can influence the evaluations of low-fit extensions. Second, it extends brand extension advertising research by demonstrating additional advertising appeals (e.g. abstract and concrete, desirability and feasibility) that can help to enhance low-fit extension evaluations. Finally, the thesis uncovers two contextual factors (i.e. social power, stage in CDJ) that can influence the effectiveness of construal level advertising appeals for low-fit extension evaluations.

The findings from this thesis can guide marketers in several ways. They offer guidelines to expand the range of advertising appeals from which marketers can choose to promote low-fit extensions. They guide marketers on advertising appeals that are suitable for consumers that have various levels of social power. Further, the findings suggest advertising appeals that marketers should use at various stages in the CDJ to effectively promote low-fit extensions.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis presents work conducted by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, are clearly acknowledged.



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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
BIF	Behavioural identification form
CDJ	Consumer decision journey
CI	Confidence interval
CLT	Construal level theory
CPG	Consumer packaged good
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DAV	Descriptive action verb
GPA	Grade point average
HIT	Human intelligence tasks
IAV	Interpretive action verb
LCM	Linguistic category model
M	Mean
MANOVA	Multivariate analysis of variance
MTurk	Mechanical Turk
PB	Parent brand
RFT	Regulatory focus theory
SD	Standard deviation
SV	State verb
TCT	Temporal construal theory
WAI	Weighted abstraction index

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Benefits and challenges of low-fit brand extensions

According to the American Marketing Association (2022), a brand is a 'name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers'. For many firms, branding is one of their most valuable and enduring intangible assets (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Swaminathan et al., 2022; Tewary & Mehta, 2021). A strong brand not only offers competitive advantages to firms in their existing markets but also helps firms to penetrate untapped markets (Srivastava & Shocker, 1991). Consequently, firms often retain and capitalise on their branding when they enter new markets (Goedertier et al., 2015; Keller, 2016; Zheng et al., 2019). Of particular interest to this thesis is when firms enter a new market by launching products in categories in which they previously had no presence. The use of an established brand name to introduce a product in a different category is called brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021).

Brand extension, the focus of this thesis, has become a common marketing strategy for introducing new products (Zhou et al., 2021). Every year, as many as 90% of new products are launched through brand extensions (Keller et al., 2011). For example, Calvin Klein extended its fashion-related portfolio from apparel to fragrances and sunglasses, Harley Davidson (motorbikes) introduced clothing and Ferrari (cars) launched theme parks. By offering advantages, such as reducing product-introduction costs (Buil et al., 2009), creating advertising efficiencies (Smith & Park, 1992), enabling faster access to distribution channels (Milberg et al., 2010) and increasing market share (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Smith & Park, 1992), brand extensions tap into new markets and are an important vehicle for growth (Chun et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2001; Springen & Miller, 1990; Su et al., 2021). For example, the German brand HiPP extended from baby-food to baby-care and is currently one of the key players in the German baby-care market, with a market share of 4.5% (McKinsey & Company, 2015).

Entering a new product category is sometime the only viable option available to big brands operating in a saturated market to achieve growth targets (McKinsey & Company, 2015). A successful brand extension helps a brand to grow not only by expanding into new

markets but also increasing the sales of its existing products. For example, the sales of Apple Mac computers increased by 16.4% in the year the iPhone was introduced (SUTHERLAND, 2009). In fact, a well-managed brand extension enhances parent brand connection and loyalty by strengthening the parent brand through experience with overall brand promise (Light, 2020). These financial and strategic benefits make a brand extension strategy more attractive option for brands when introducing new products. This is evident in consumer-packaged goods market where almost 70% of new products are brand extensions (NielsenIQ, 2019).

When brands extend beyond their original category, they can do so by introducing *high-fit extensions*. These are products in a new category that is perceived by consumers as being related to, or relatively similar to, the original category. A simple example of a high-fit extension is Colgate extending from toothpaste to mouthwash, the two of which are related to oral hygiene. However, a *low-fit extension* involves brands entering a category that is perceived as differing from the original category, such as the beer brand Victoria Bitter introducing men's grooming products. This thesis focuses on low-fit brand extensions.

Low-fit extensions often present profitable opportunities for brands (Mathur et al., 2023). By extending into low-fit product categories, brands can exploit emerging consumer trends (Mathur et al., 2023), broaden revenue streams (Parker et al., 2018), seek new growth avenues (Su et al., 2021), diversify business risks (Miniard et al., 2018) or face less competition (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2004). Given these benefits, firms are often motivated to introduce low-fit extensions (Hernandez et al., 2019; Keller, 2003; Klink & Smith, 2001; Lane, 2000). For example, when Dyson extended from household vacuum cleaners to fashion hairdryers in 2016, the company's revenue increased by 28% (Chandler, 2019). Similarly, by offering new product categories, such as music (iTunes) and mobile devices (iPod and iPhone), Apple quickly recovered financially after a lengthy period of decline in the market share and sales revenue of its computer products (Hernandez et al., 2019). Apple's entry to the automobile category, a low-fitting category, is also expected soon, which could potentially reset and reshape the car industry (WARC, 2021). Further examples of rewarding low-fit extensions include the luggage manufacturer Samsonite introducing furniture, Swiss Army (knives) launching fragrances and Yamaha diversifying from musical instruments to motorbikes and other machinery.

However, low-fit extensions are often challenging and fraught with failure (Boush & Loken, 1991; Buil et al., 2009; Liang & Fu, 2021; Pina et al., 2013). For example, in the early 1980s, Colgate's foray into microwavable food products failed because consumers could not connect its well-established oral hygiene brand identity to the food category. Similarly,

PepsiCo subsidiary Frito-Lay extended its brand Cheetos to flavoured lip balm, which eventually failed, mainly because of a poor match between lip balm and the Cheetos brand's association with snacks. The lack of fit between the well-known lighter brand Zippo and women's perfume as its brand extension also resulted in failure. Duckler (2018) lamented that although the rewards are high for brands that successfully extend into new categories, as many as 80 to 90% of brand extensions have failed. Worse, this high failure rate of low-fit brand extensions can spill over to negatively affect the parent brand's (PB's) image (Loken & John, 1993; Martínez & Pina, 2003; Milberg et al., 2023) and sales (Swaminathan et al., 2001) in the established category. Thus, academics and managers have a substantial amount of vested interest in knowing how to promote low-fit brand extensions successfully.

1.1.2 Role of advertising in brand extension promotions

Despite the importance of low-fit extensions for brand growth, a review of the literature shows that existing studies are sparse and disjointed when it comes to revealing methods to promote low-fit extensions successfully.

First, the ability of advertising to inform and occasionally to persuade consumers is beyond dispute. Since early studies (e.g. Tipper et al., 1925) until now (e.g. Atalay et al.; Baudier et al., 2022; Margariti et al., 2022; To & Patrick, 2021), research has unequivocally shown that the effective use of advertisements can influence consumer behaviour. Yet, much of the research on promoting brand extensions, let alone low-fit ones, does not involve advertising. For example, Y. Zhang et al. (2020) showed that consumers evaluate a low-fit brand extension more favourably when they are distracted after encoding information about the brand extension. Likewise, another study demonstrated that a low-fit brand extension is evaluated more favourably when it is introduced by a brand that has a social responsibility reputation, rather than an ability reputation, because consumers desire to support and help such brands (Johnson et al., 2019). In studies that did not involve advertising, information about extensions was communicated to participants via scenarios and other manipulations, without considering the ways that brands might communicate that information in real life.

Second, although some studies involved promoting brand extensions, they used priming messages rather than advertising appeals. For example, experimentally priming consumers by announcing whether an extension product would be made available soon, or in the future (i.e. temporal primes), would influence their evaluation of the extension product (e.g. Kim & Park, 2019; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). Similarly, Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011)

used spatial distance information (i.e. a brand extension introduced in the participants' country or a foreign country) to prime consumer behaviour. Such experimental priming messages differ from advertising appeals in that advertising appeal is the *approach* to communicating a message via advertising (Belch & Belch, 2004). The key objective of an advertising appeal is to attract consumers' attention and to direct their attention to the ad's message (Dix & Marchegiani, 2013). Experimental primes attract and direct attention because they are a part of the instructions that participants must follow to participate in the experiment (Damanskyy et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2014). For this reason, experimental priming instructions offer very little guidance to brands about methods to design advertising that effectively communicates the launch of a low-fit brand extension.

Third, some studies did contain advertising appeals (e.g. Bridges et al., 2000; Lane, 2000; Sattler et al., 2010), such as an emotional appeal (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010a), a comparative appeal (Baek & King, 2015) and an intergenerational appeal (Chang & Tung, 2016). However, these studies did not investigate low-fit extensions when testing the effectiveness of various advertising appeals. These prior studies tested the effectiveness of various advertising appeals at linking an existing PB to a high-fit extension (e.g. Colgate to a new toothbrush). However, low-fit extensions are just that—the association of fit between the PB and the extension category is weak and a mental schematic link between them may not exist. Hence, it is unclear whether the findings of these studies would apply to low-fit extensions. In addition, owing to the limited amount of literature on advertising for promoting brand extensions, researchers have consistently lamented the lack of knowledge on the effectiveness of various advertising appeals for brand extension evaluations (Baek, 2011; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Martin et al., 2005). Testing a wider range of advertising appeals would further generalise researchers' understanding and provide better managerial guidance on methods to effectively promote low-fit extensions (Miniard et al., 2018).

Finally and most critically, a limited number of advertising studies have investigated low-fit extensions on the premise that the association between a PB and an extension product is malleable (Bambauer-Sachse et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2005) and strengthening this association would facilitate the transfer of a positive affect from the PB to the extension, leading to the extension product being evaluated more positively (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991). These studies have typically drawn on categorisation theory (Mervis & Rosch, 1981) to argue that consumers *cognitively* evaluate an extension product by relying on their categorical representation of the PB. Thus, the advertising of a low-fit extension should aim to categorise the PB as close as possible to the extension product. However, this

emphasis on a cognitive approach has ignored emotional influences on consumer decision-making by not accounting for the effects of 'affect as information'. For example, the *mere act* of presenting information may later produce a pleasant feeling that can improve brand extension evaluations (Huang et al., 2017; Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004). Furthermore, a cognitive process largely does not apply to consumers who have low levels of motivation or need for cognition and are less likely to expend effort to resolve the schema incongruity because of the low level of fit (Chaiken, 1980; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Srivastava & Sharma, 2012). In other words, the most wide-reaching and effective promotion of low-fit extensions may be via an affective, rather than a cognitive, process. This implies that prior findings using cognitive categorisation alone may be incomplete or even misleading.

1.1.3 Two processes of evaluating low-fit extensions

Against the backdrop of the gaps and challenges discussed earlier, this thesis focuses on the ways that advertising can enhance the favourable evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. This thesis argues that two processes underpin the ways that advertising influences the evaluation of low-fit extensions. The first process is a *cognitive process* that aims to improve consumers' perceived fit between a PB and its low-fit extension. In investigating the critical drivers of brand extension success, studies have shown that a crucial factor that underpins the success of brand extensions is the perceived fit between the PB and the extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Deng & Messinger, 2022; Guo et al., 2018; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). In their seminal study of the sequential launch of brand extensions, Keller and Aaker (1992, p. 36) defined perceived fit as the 'similarity in terms of the salient attributes shared by the core brand and the extension product class'. The salient attributes may be concrete (e.g. tangible characteristics of the product) or abstract (e.g. usage situations, users; Keller and Aaker (1992)). Therefore, perceived fit is the overall similarity between the PB and the extension product, as perceived by consumers.

Given that a low-fit extension is dissimilar to the PB, consumers may fail to assign an existing mental schema to the extension thereby causing confusion, frustration or helplessness (Gierl & Huettl, 2011). Moreover, a low-fit extension is generally associated with increased perceived risks, which is another reason that low-fit extensions have less favourable evaluations (Milberg et al., 2013; Smith & Andrews, 1995; Yeo & Park, 2006). Improving the perceived fit would lead to the extension product being evaluated more positively because it facilitates the transfer of positive affect from a PB to the extension

(Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Zhong et al., 2021). Furthermore, people are more likely to favour stimuli that are aligned with their expectations and that permit predictions (Mandler, 1982). Therefore, the first process that this thesis investigates is enhancing consumers' perceived fit between the PB and its low-fit brand extensions. This process is consistent with prior brand extension studies that suggest that a consumer's perception of fit is malleable and thus can be enhanced (Ahluwalia, 2008; Puligadda et al., 2013; Su et al., 2021).

The second process is an *affective process* in which the evaluations of low-fit extensions can be enhanced through processing fluency. Processing fluency is 'a subjective feeling of ease or difficulty associated with any type of mental processing' (Graf et al., 2018, p. 394). This contention centres on research that shows that processing fluency is hedonically marked because high fluency is a positive experience (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004). Thus, consumers can evaluate a stimulus more positively simply because it is processed more fluently (King & Janiszewski, 2011; Tsai & McGill, 2011). Advertisements that are processed more fluently are evaluated more favourably and this positive affect can transfer to the advertised product (Chang & Chen, 2022; Kim & Song, 2019). Similarly, when processing fluency is hindered, less favourable evaluations follow (Carroll & Luna, 2011; Chae & Hoegg, 2013; Leonhardt et al., 2015). For example, advertisements that do not contain narrative images are processed less fluently than those that do and this decreased processing fluency causes less positive attitudes towards these advertisements (Chang, 2013). Building on these findings, this thesis posits that enhancing the fluent processing of an advertisement for a low-fit brand extension improves consumers' evaluations of the advertisement and, in turn, the extension.

1.1.4 Construal level theory and two processes of extension evaluation

The theoretical grounding of this thesis is that the aforementioned two processes of brand extension evaluation can be explained by construal level theory (CLT), which posits that people construe objects or events at different levels of abstraction, depending on their perceived psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Williams et al., 2014). Specifically, these two processes are underpinned by the two theoretical tenets of CLT, the *categorisation* effect and the *matching* effect. Individuals interpret objects on a spectrum that ranges from low-level, concrete construal to high-level, abstract construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010, 2011). Low-level construal represents concrete and contextual details of an

object whereas high-level construal focuses on its abstract and decontextualised information (Trope & Liberman, 2011). Relevant to this thesis, CLT suggests that when consumers possess a high rather than a low-level construal mindset, or when they construe objects as having a high rather than a low construal level, they tend to perceive a similarity in the objects because of a greater focus on their abstract or high-level features (Henderson, 2013; Levy et al., 2002). In other words, consumers categorise two distinct objects as closer or more similar when using a high-level rather than a low-level construal mindset. In the context of this thesis, high-level construal makes people focus on underlying similarities between the PB and its extension whereas low-level construal accentuates their differences.

In addition, CLT asserts that matching the consumer construal level with that of a stimulus (e.g. an advertisement) leads to a higher level of processing fluency (Lee et al., 2010; Ozkara & Dogan, 2020). That is, when consumers and stimuli have matching high-high or low-low construal levels, more fluent processing occurs when evaluating the stimulus than when the stimulus has mismatched high-low (or low-high) construal levels. As discussed earlier, enhanced processing fluency then leads to more favourable evaluations. Later, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on CLT and its two tenets that are relevant to the perception of similarity and processing fluency in detail.

CLT studies further suggest that advertising appeals may possess or evoke different construal levels (Carrera et al., 2018; Labroo & Patrick, 2009) and hence appropriately developed appeals can improve the evaluations of advertised brand extensions (Martínez et al., 2009). Marketers can choose from various advertising appeals (e.g. sex, humour, rational) to communicate an advertising message. Although an advertising message refers to the information that marketers want to convey, the advertising appeal is 'the general tone and nature of the commercial or message' (Clow & Baack, 2005, p. 5). Advertising appeals hook the viewer or reader to the advertising messages (Dix & Marchegiani, 2013). Despite the assertion that suitable advertising appeals can improve the evaluations of brand extensions, prior studies in the brand extension literature have examined a limited range of appeal types, such as rational versus emotional appeals (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010b), and comparative appeals (Baek & King, 2015). Developing further insights into the effects of a wider range of advertising appeals would address this research gap and guide marketers to select appeals that suit their specific extension strategy. Although prior studies have demonstrated the role of advertising in influencing brand extension evaluations (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Lane, 2000; Nan, 2006), the context of low-fit extensions remains under explored and little guidance exists about the ways that managers can successfully advertise low-fit extensions

(Miniard et al., 2018). This shortcoming is critical because advertising is often the main channel for introducing brand extensions (Chen & Liu, 2004; Martínez et al., 2009; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Given the limited published findings and practical recommendations, understanding the role of advertising in supporting the introduction of low-fit extensions deserves further research attention.

In summary, low-fit brand extensions allow brands to enter new markets and can bring important financial benefits but the strategy often fails. CLT suggests that the evaluation of low-fit extensions can occur via two distinct processes: using either perceived fit or processing fluency. Advertising may help to enhance consumer perceptions of low-fit extensions but studies that examine the efficacy of advertising appeals remains under explored. Therefore, this thesis draws on CLT to investigate the ways that advertising appeals may work through two evaluation processes, categorisation and matching, to enhance consumers' attitudes towards low-fit brand extensions. This knowledge is essential for marketers to manage the critical issue of the failures of low-fit brand extensions thereby helping firms to achieve the significant strategic and financial gains that are associated with successful low-fit extensions. To this end, the next sections identify the research gaps in the literature and propose research questions about the ways that advertising can deliver favourable outcomes for firms that introduce low-fit extensions. These next sections also introduce the theory that supports the proposed research questions.

1.2 Research gaps and questions

As was discussed earlier, it is important for marketers to favourably enhance the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions, especially through advertising. However, how should marketers advertise and which theory can explain the reasons that particular advertising appeals are effective in shaping consumers' favourable perceptions of low-fit extensions? Grounded in CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010, 2011), this thesis addresses these questions by investigating the roles of various advertising appeals in influencing the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions.

A recent bibliometric review revealed that CLT is useful for explaining advertising effectiveness (Adler & Sarstedt, 2021). The key findings from this research stream suggest that advertising appeals may be associated with different construal levels. For example, high versus low-level construal levels are associated with the following advertising appeals, respectively, benefits versus attributes (Hernandez et al., 2015; Kacy Kim et al., 2019; Yoon

et al., 2021), desirability versus feasibility (Chen & Chiu, 2016; Han et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2012; Tok et al., 2021) and future versus present focused (Carrera et al., 2018; Labroo & Patrick, 2009; Martin et al., 2009), and consequently these appeals affect consumer behaviour differently. Building on the current advertising and construal level literature, the following sections highlight gaps in the existing literature and pose several research questions to address these gaps.

1.2.1 Construal level and perceived fit in evaluation of low-fit extensions

CLT has been widely applied to examining advertising effectiveness (Chen & Chiu, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2015; Kacy Kim et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2021). For example, Roose et al. (2019) demonstrated that a panoramic picture that has a low (high) horizon evokes high-level (low-level) construal. Consequently, when an advertisement is concerned with the future (i.e. more psychologically distant and so is construed at a high level rather than the present, which is construed at a low level), the advertisement is evaluated more positively when it uses a low-horizon (high-level) picture rather than a high-horizon (low-level) one. However, none of these advertising studies have involved brand extensions. Yet, research suggests that suitably developed advertising can enhance the perception of fit between the PB and the extension thereby improving the evaluation of the extension.

A few studies have examined the role of construal level in brand extension evaluations. However, they applied CLT to investigate issues such as the impact of construal level on creative thoughts (Y. Zhang et al., 2020) or changing the relative weight that is assigned to primary versus secondary features (Kim & John, 2008; Meyvis et al., 2012). These studies primarily used temporal distance (e.g. extension available next week versus next year) or spatial distance (e.g. extension available in close versus far market) to manipulate the construal level. However, these studies did not check whether the construal level was successfully manipulated. Critically, none of these studies examined the ways that CLT can guide the development of advertising appeals, especially for low-fit extensions. This research gap is critical because a low-fit extension is substantially dissimilar to the PB and thus developing advertising appeals for low-fit extensions is particularly challenging.

Although Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) and Kim and Park (2019) drew on CLT to study brand extensions, these two studies used contrasting theorisations of the effects of construal level on perceptions of similarity. Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) reported that

high-level construal leads to a greater level of perception of similarity between a PB and its extension because of a more inclusive categorisation. However, Kim and Park (2019) found that low-level construal enhances the perception of fit between the PB and the extension. They argued that low-level construal leads consumers to focus on contextual cues, which, in turn, enhances their perception of fit because of relational processing. Kim and Park (2019) argued that relational, holistic processing was more common for consumers from collectivist cultures, such as the Korean students who participated in their experiments, whereas most prior brand extension studies that applied CLT had investigated individualist consumers from Western countries, such as the US. These contradictory findings suggest that to determine the applicability of CLT to explaining consumer responses to brand extensions, it is important to first verify the association between construal level and perceived fit for the consumers in the country in which the brand extension will be launched and subsequently how this association may affect brand extension evaluations. Hence, it remains unclear whether CLT can explain and guide the development of suitable advertising appeals for low-fit extensions in the same way across countries.

Therefore, to explain the conflicting findings in the existing brand extension literature, and to better understand the role of CLT in low-fit extension advertising, this thesis poses its first research question (Research Question 1) about the influence of consumers' construal level mindset on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions in a country that is relatively new to brand extension and CLT research, Pakistan (an Eastern culture). To test Research Question 1, this thesis uses a well-established construal level manipulation task (the 'why/how' writing task; Freitas et al. (2004)) and manipulation check (the behavioural identification form [BIF]; Vallacher and Wegner (1989)). Research Question 1 is specifically linked to the categorisation tenet of CLT, which posits that a high-level construal mindset leads people to focus more on the underlying similarities among objects whereas a low-level construal mindset makes people attend more to surface differences (Förster, 2009b; Förster et al., 2008). According to this tenet, high-level construal mindset may lead to a better perceived fit between a PB and its low-fit extension. However, according to Kim and Park (2019), this is true only for Western cultures. In Eastern cultures, and therefore perhaps in Pakistan, the opposite is found: a low-level construal mindset leads to a better perceived fit between a PB and its low-fit extension.

> ***Research Question 1:*** *How does a consumer's construal level mindset influence the evaluation of a low-fit brand extension?*

1.2.2 Advertising appeals that have different construal levels and their influence on evaluation of low-fit extensions

The answer to Research Question 1 guides the experiments that were carried out in the rest of this thesis. If, similar to consumers in Western countries, consumers in Pakistan perceive a closer fit between a PB and a low-fit extension when they are thinking in a high-construal mode, then advertising appeals that encourage a high construal–level thinking mode should improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions in Pakistan as well as in Western countries. When consumers are thinking in a high-construal mode, then, according to CLT, they think of the object in more abstract, rather than concrete, terms.

Advertising research outside the brand extension domain has applied CLT to examining the effectiveness of advertising appeals (Dogan & Erdogan, 2020; He et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2015; Kim & Song, 2019; Scarpi, 2021b; Tok et al., 2021). Some of these studies suggest that certain advertising appeals can also evoke construal level mindset. For example, White et al. (2011) showed that a desirability advertising appeal (e.g. why to recycle) evokes high-level construal and a feasibility advertising appeal (e.g. how to recycle) evokes low-level construal. Given the impact of construal level on the perception of similarity, in the direction that is identified by the answer to Research Question 1, these findings suggest that different advertising appeals might influence the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions by altering their perception of fit with the PB.

Despite this theoretical justification, prior brand extension studies have not applied CLT to examining the effectiveness of advertising appeals in brand extension evaluations. Prior brand extension studies have tested the effectiveness of only a limited number of advertising appeals (e.g. comparative v. non-comparative, relational v. elaborational) for improving brand extension evaluations; however, they did not draw on CLT as the underpinning rationale. A few studies have applied CLT in brand extension research by manipulating characteristics, such as temporal distance (e.g. brand extension available next week v. next year), to induce construal levels (e.g. Kim & Park, 2019; Y. Zhang et al., 2020); however, none used advertising appeals (as explained earlier, an advertising appeal is different from the message in an ad; see Shan et al. (2017) for exception). Indeed, researchers have lamented the lack of research on the effectiveness of various advertising appeals on brand extension evaluations (Baek, 2011; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Martin et al., 2005). Particularly, scholars have suggested that ‘it may be useful to examine the role that construal level plays in designing successful marketing communications for brand extensions’ (Kim &

John, 2008, p. 125). Though a few studies (e.g. Shan et al., 2017) have examined the effect of construal levels that are evoked by various advertising appeals (e.g. metaphor appeals) on brand extension evaluations, many other construal level advertising appeals remain unexplored in the context of brand extensions. Therefore, building on CLT, this thesis investigates the effectiveness of so-far untested high versus low construal–level advertising appeals on the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. By doing so, this study will provide a better understanding of the availability of various advertising appeals to help marketers to identify and use the most effective option when launching low-fit brand extensions.

Extending the theoretical justification that was presented in Research Question 1, if, in Pakistan, there is a positive association between high-level construal and a closer perceived fit for low-fit extensions, it can be expected that advertising appeals that evoke high versus low-level construal have a stronger positive impact on the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. Thus, the following research question is presented:

> ***Research Question 2:*** *Does an advertising appeal that evokes high-level construal lead to more favourable evaluations of low-fit brand extensions than an advertising appeal that evokes low-level construal?*

Following on from Research Question 2, ensuing questions would thus be these: Which advertising appeals evoke low versus high-level construal? Is the reason for the improved evaluation given a high-level construal advertising appeal driven by a better perceived fit between a PB and its low-fit extension?

To address these questions, this thesis used abstract and concrete advertising appeals because they evoke high-level and low-level construal, respectively. An abstract advertising appeal displays information in a way that is highly interpretive whereas a concrete advertising message delivers information in an objective manner (Wang & Lehto, 2020). CLT suggests that the level of language abstraction is an indicator of the construal level (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006; Joshi & Wakslak, 2014; Trope et al., 2021) such that abstract language corresponds to high-level construal and concrete language is an indication of low-level construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wakslak & Trope, 2009). Importantly, drawing on these construal level findings, advertising research suggests that abstract and concrete advertising appeals can be associated with high-level and low-level construal, respectively (Hur et al., 2020; Kim, Yoo, et al., 2018; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Massara et al., 2020; Schuetz et al., 2020).

Prior studies have not investigated the effectiveness of abstract and concrete appeals in brand extension evaluations. This oversight is critical because these appeals may be more relevant when launching brand extensions given that marketers have used abstract and concrete appeals to introduce new products (Allard & Griffin, 2017). Moreover, drawing on CLT, it can be predicted that abstract advertising appeals (i.e. high-level construal appeals) are more effective for improving evaluations of low-fit brand extensions than concrete advertising appeals (i.e. low-level construal appeals). However, advertising research outside the brand extension literature generally supports the superiority of concrete appeals over abstract appeals (Robinson & Eilert, 2018; Schuetz et al., 2020; Small & Loewenstein, 2003). For example, Schuetz et al. (2020) showed that a concrete fear appeal is more effective in engendering fear as it suggests that the threat is imminent (near temporal distance). van Horen et al. (2023) demonstrated that a concrete (v. abstract) ad appeal is more effective under high uncertainty when consumers are less intended to explore new things. Thus, it would be intriguing to see whether the effectiveness of abstract appeals versus concrete appeals for improving low-fit brand extension evaluations is consistent with the theorisation of CLT. Thus, specific to Research Question 2, the following specific research sub-question is offered:

> ***Research Question 2a:*** *Do abstract advertising appeals, versus concrete advertising appeals, lead to more favourable evaluation of low-fit brand extensions?*

The arguments that were built into Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 have as their basis the CLT tenet that high-level construal leads to a perception of a greater level of similarity between stimuli than low-level construal (Liberman et al., 2002; Wakslak et al., 2006). Several psychological and marketing studies (Henderson, 2013; Kelting et al., 2019; Levy et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2013) have confirmed that the increased perception of fit is the underlying mechanism the drives the effects of high-level construal. Similarly, to validate the arguments that are offered for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, this thesis investigates whether perception of fit is the underlying mechanism that causes better evaluations of low-fit brand extensions that are advertised using high-level construal appeals. Thus, this thesis presents the following research sub-question:

> ***Research Question 2b:*** *Is the perception of fit between a parent brand and its extension product the underlying mechanism that drives the positive effect of high-level construal advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations?*

1.2.3 Matching construal levels and its influence on evaluation of low-fit brand extensions

Earlier, Section 1.2.2 laid out the research questions about whether high-level construal advertising appeals are more useful than low-level construal advertising appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit extensions. That section also sought to determine whether the improvement in evaluation is because of a closer perceived fit between the parent and the low-fit extension. Confirmation of that postulation would imply that marketers should not use low-level construal appeals to advertise low-fit brand extensions. However, another tenet of CLT posits that when there is a match between the construal level of consumers and a stimulus (i.e. high with high or low with low), it can also improve the evaluation of the stimulus (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Malkoc et al., 2005; Sagristano et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000).

Using this second theoretical tenet of CLT, advertising studies have similarly shown that matching the construal level of an advertising appeal with that of the consumer, or other construal level factors, can increase the effectiveness of these advertising appeals (Dogan & Erdogan, 2020; He et al., 2020; Kim & Song, 2019; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Massara et al., 2019). For example, Tok et al. (2021) showed that high versus low-level construal advertising appeals (e.g. desirability v. feasibility appeals) lead to more favourable product evaluations when matched with greater or lesser horizontal distance between the model and the product in advertisements. Similarly, high versus low-level construal advertising appeals (e.g. rational v. emotional advertising appeals) are more persuasive when matched with consumer high versus low-level construal that is evoked by anthropomorphised brand roles (e.g. servant v. partner; He et al. (2020)). Despite the well-established positive effect of construal level matching in advertising research (Chang & Chen, 2022; Ding & Keh, 2017; Kim & Song, 2019; Kim et al., 2009; Pfeiffer et al., 2014; Sarial-Abi et al., 2021), it remains unclear whether such an effect would also result in the favourable evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Investigating whether this matching effect applies to brand extension advertising would be an important contribution to the literature because it would offer a novel way to improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions and to widen the choice of suitable advertising appeals or, alternatively, it would identify a boundary condition for the application of CLT in brand extension. Thus, building on the matching-effect tenet of CLT, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 3: *How does matching the consumer's construal level with the construal level of an advertising appeal influence the evaluation of low-fit extensions?*

Research Question 3 draws on CLT and proposes that matching high and low construal–level advertising appeals with the relevant construal level that is being used by the consumer will improve low-fit extension evaluations. Thus, this thesis extends the construal level matching effect that is seen in advertising research to the brand extension literature by investigating its impact on the evaluation of low-fit extensions. This thesis tests Research Question 3 in two ways. First, it attempts to match a consumer-related social factor with advertising appeals, specifically, the state of social power. Social power or simply power is defined as the 'asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations' (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 361). A person's social power can be determined based on socioeconomic factors, such as income, managerial roles, and job autonomy (Dubois et al., 2011; Marmot, 2004). Also, the area code where a person resides can reflect his/her social power because some areas can be associated with socioeconomic status. For example, the zip code 90274 (Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA) is among one of the wealthiest areas in the US whereas the zip code 93640 (Mendota, CA) represents one of the poorest areas in the country (Liu & Mattila, 2017). Considering social power in this thesis is important because it is fundamental to social life (Cartwright, 1959; Rucker et al., 2011) and is anchored in most social interactions (Kim & Wingate, 2017).

Earlier, this thesis contended that abstract versus concrete advertising appeals possess high versus low construal levels. Prior studies into power and construal level have also suggested that high versus low levels of power lead to high versus low-level construal, respectively (Magee et al., 2010; Magee & Smith, 2013; Smith & Trope, 2006). Thus, this thesis tests how matching the construal level that is evoked by high versus low levels of social power with the construal level that is evoked by abstract versus concrete advertising appeals may influence the evaluation of low-fit extensions. Existing studies on abstract and concrete advertising appeals, outside the brand extension domain, have focused mainly on factors such as perceived price expensiveness (Allard & Griffin, 2017) and self-brand connection (S. Y. Lee et al., 2021); however, trait and situation-specific consumer-related factors are relatively under explored. Thus, an important gap that is addressed by this thesis is whether perceived social power can influence the effectiveness of abstract and concrete

appeals, which is yet to be investigated in advertising or brand extension research. Therefore, to test Research Question 3, the following specific research sub-question is posed:

> ***Research Question 3a:*** *How does matching the construal level of high versus low levels of social power with abstract versus concrete advertising appeals influence the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions?*

Rather than matching with a consumer-related factor, such as social power, the second test of Research Question 3 involves matching the construal level that is evoked by different stages of the consumer decision journey (CDJ) with the construal level of various advertising appeals when advertising low-fit extensions. The concept of the stages that consumers go through over time on their decision journey (Demmers et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) has received substantial attention from researchers and managers (Santos & Gonçalves, 2021). However, the role of the CDJ stage has remained unexplored so far in the brand extension literature. Given that consumers' informational needs are likely to change along their decision journey (Batra & Keller, 2016), the CDJ may be important for understanding the effectiveness of various brand extension advertising appeals. Furthermore, recent studies have suggested that different stages in the CDJ evoke different construal level mindsets (Humphreys et al., 2021). Specifically, it has been demonstrated that an informational stage (i.e. far from purchase) activates a high-level construal mindset whereas a transactional stage (i.e. close to purchase) evokes a low-level construal mindset. Consistently with the construal level matching effect, these findings suggest that the construal level of low-fit extension advertising appeals are more effective when matched with a consumer's stage in their decision journey (i.e. informational/high versus transactional/low).

Therefore, this thesis further tests the construal level matching effect on the evaluation of low-fit extensions by examining the joint effect of stages in the CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional) and the various advertising appeals that are associated with construal level. To enhance the generalisability and practicality of the construal level matching effect, Research Question 3b considers a different set of construal level advertising appeals, namely, desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals. Desirability appeals stress the desired outcomes (e.g. from purchasing the product) whereas feasibility appeals highlight the ease or difficulty in achieving those outcomes (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Tok et al., 2021). Construal level studies show that desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals represent high versus low-level construal (Han et al., 2019; Kazakova et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, this thesis proposes the following research sub-question:

Research Question 3b: *How does matching the construal level that is evoked by the stages of the consumer decision journey (i.e. informational v. transactional) with the construal level of an advertising appeal (e.g. desirability v. feasibility) influence the evaluation of a low-fit extension?*

1.2.4 Underpinning mechanism of effects of matching construal levels

Although addressing Research Question 3, in addition to Research Questions 3a and 3b, would help to explain how matching construal levels may help to promote low-fit brand extensions, it does not reveal the mechanism that underpins the influence of this matching effect. Not fully understanding how the matching effect in brand extension advertising works limits the theoretical contributions and generalisability of the findings. Further, marketers would be more confident in identifying suitable advertising appeals for their low-fit brand extensions if they understood the reasons that construal level matching effects lead to more favourable evaluations of low-fit extensions.

Advertising research outside the brand extension literature has proposed different underlying mechanisms, such as mental imagery (Gavilan et al., 2014; S. Y. Lee et al., 2019) or active attention (Simmonds et al., 2020), that underpin advertising effectiveness. More relevant to this thesis, the advertising literature suggests processing fluency as another potential underlying mechanism. Processing fluency is the subjective experience of the ease or difficulty with which a person can evaluate an object (Schwarz, 2004). Some advertising researchers posit that a construal level match between advertising appeals and consumer cognition leads to processing fluency, which, in turn, favourably influences consumer responses (Chen, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2021; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2009; Schwarz et al., 2021). However, none of the prior studies have examined the role of processing fluency in advertising research related to brand extensions. Thus, this thesis presents the following question to explore whether processing fluency underpins the improving effect of construal level matching on the evaluation of brand extensions:

Research Question 4: *Does processing fluency underpin the construal level matching effect that is proposed in Research Question 3 such that matching construal levels lead to more fluent processing than unmatched construal levels?*

The aforementioned research question aims to check whether processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of construal level match on low-fit extension evaluations. To test this, the current thesis considers the stages in the CDJ and an additional

set of high versus low construal–level advertising appeals: promotion and prevention advertising appeals. A promotion appeal highlights the desirable outcomes that consumers will gain by using the advertised product (Sar & Anghelcev, 2015; Wu & Dodoo, 2020). Meanwhile, a prevention appeal emphasises the undesirable outcomes that consumers can avoid by using the advertised product. Importantly, several studies have linked these advertising appeals to various construal levels (Ahn et al., 2022; Chou & Lien, 2012; Ng & Batra, 2017; Sar & Anghelcev, 2015). Specifically, it has been demonstrated that promotion advertising appeals are associated with high-level construal whereas prevention advertising appeals are related to low-level construal. Therefore, the following specific research sub-question is posed to explore Research Question 4:

> ***Research Question 4a:*** *Does processing fluency mediate the construal level matching effect, which improves the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions, when construal levels that are evoked by various stages in a consumer's decision journey (i.e. informational v. transactional) are matched to high versus low-level construal advertising appeals (i.e. promotion v. prevention)?*

Research Question 4a is explored using the experimental-causal-chain approach to testing for mediation. The experimental-causal-chain approach is the best way and often the simplest way to experimentally test for a mediation effect (Spencer et al., 2005). The experimental-causal-chain design offers a more rigorous approach to causally testing the mediation effect and is recommended when the mediator is easy to measure and manipulate (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017; Spencer et al., 2005). Specifically, this design requires the conducting of two manipulated experiments: one to establish the causal effect of the independent variable (X) on the mediator (M) and the second to confirm the causal effect of the mediator (M) on the outcome variable (Y) (Wu & Zumbo, 2008). Given the concerns about the inferences that are drawn from correlational mediation tests (Fiedler et al., 2018), it is very important to test mediation using a causal design. A detailed review of experimental-causal-chain design is provided in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

1.3 Significance of research

The overarching theme and significance of this thesis is the enhancement of academic and managerial knowledge on the ways that brands, through advertising, can improve consumer evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. The ***main theoretical significance*** lies in applying CLT to propose two distinct processes (categorisation and matching) through which

different advertising appeals can influence low-fit extension evaluations. The application of CLT, particularly via its two theoretical tenets (categorisation and matching), is novel because the existing brand extension literature has not applied this theory to examine the effectiveness of a wide range of advertising appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

By proposing two distinct processes and by addressing the research questions postulated earlier, this thesis contributes to the existing brand extension literature in the following ways. First, drawing on the categorisation tenet of CLT, this thesis extends the brand extension literature by examining the impact of various advertising appeals (e.g. abstract v. concrete), evoking various construal levels, on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Given the association of construal levels with advertising appeals (Choi et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2015; J. Kim et al., 2016; Scarpi, 2021b) and perceptions of similarity (Lamberton & Diehl, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010), CLT can help to explain the effects of various advertising appeals in enhancing the favourable evaluation of low-fit extensions. In doing so, this thesis also addresses the calls for more research into the effectiveness of various advertising appeals in brand extension evaluations (Baek, 2011; Martin et al., 2005).

The second contribution of this thesis lies in the empirically testing of additional boundary conditions (i.e. social power and the CDJ) that can alter the effect of various advertising appeals on low-fit extension evaluations. Given that the brand extension literature that is grounded in CLT has not extensively considered advertising appeals, it has potentially missed identifying many relevant boundary conditions. This thesis builds on the construal level matching effect to examine the moderating effect of social power on high and low construal–level advertising appeals (e.g. abstract v. concrete appeals) as well as the moderating effect of the stages in a CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional) on high and low-level construal advertising appeals (e.g. desirability v. feasibility and promotion v. prevention appeals). Despite conceptual speculation that social power may alter consumers' preferences for abstract and concrete claims (Rucker et al., 2012), none of the prior advertising studies have considered social power as a moderator of the effects of abstract and concrete appeals. Likewise, no studies have investigated whether the effects of other advertising appeals (e.g. desirability v. feasibility and promotion v. prevention appeals) on low-fit extension evaluations depend on the stage in the CDJ.

The third contribution of this thesis originates from causally determining whether processing fluency underpins the effects of construal level matching on low-fit extension evaluations. Processing fluency is an important concept in advertising research (Humphreys

et al., 2021; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2009). However, prior studies have not investigated its role in enhancing low-fit brand extension evaluations through advertising (see Huang et al. (2017) for exception). This is critical because processing fluency can affect the favourable evaluations of low-fit extensions (Huang et al., 2017). Furthermore, most of the prior advertising studies that applied CLT have not demonstrated the effects of processing fluency causally (e.g. Ma et al., 2023; Roose et al., 2019; Tok et al., 2021). Thus, providing causal evidence to support the notion that processing fluency underpins the matching effects of construal levels on low-fit extension evaluations is an important contribution. This thesis builds on CLT to experimentally manipulate and test processing fluency as the underlying mechanism that drives the effect, on low-fit brand extension evaluations, of matching the construal levels of advertising appeals (e.g. promotion v. prevention appeals) and various levels of a proposed moderator (i.e. stages in the CDJ).

Finally, a contribution of this thesis is in the carrying out of experiments in a developing collectivistic country (Pakistan) and a developed individualistic country (the US). Studies have shown that the efficacy of construal levels on consumer behaviour may differ across cultures (Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Han & Schmitt, 1997). Furthermore, brand extension studies have been primarily concerned with developed markets (Mao & Krishnan, 2006; Meyvis et al., 2012; Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2019; Su et al., 2021). Yet, customers from developed and developing countries may evaluate products differently (Jin et al., 2015) and new products may diffuse at a different pace in developed and developing countries (Talukdar et al., 2002). Moreover, the findings would interest firms that are expanding into developing countries, given the growth potential that these markets hold (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Xie & Boggs, 2006).

This thesis is also significant from a methodological perspective. The key ***methodological significance*** lies in employing the experimental-causal-chain design. Specifically, it uses an experimental-causal-chain design in Study 5 to causally test the mediating role of processing fluency. This design is the simplest yet best approach to experimentally establish a mediation effect (Spencer et al., 2005). An experimental-causal-chain design first observes the mediator as an independent variable for the manipulated independent variable. Then, the mediator is manipulated to serve as an independent variable for the outcome variable. This research is also methodological significant because it manipulates construal-level using a variety of tasks (e.g. goal priming, ad's language abstraction) and confirms construal-level manipulations through valid and direct manipulations checks (e.g. Behavioural Identification Form, Linguistic Categorisation Task).

This thesis has valuable ***practical significance***. Successful low-fit brand extensions are financially rewarding but marketers often face difficult challenges when introducing them (Zhong et al., 2021). Launching a new product is risky and as many as 80 to 90% of brand extensions have failed at launch (Duckler, 2018). Furthermore, advertising is expensive and often takes a large component of a firm's overall marketing budget. Thus, this thesis has important applied contributions to help brand managers to achieve success when launching low-fit extensions. By adding to the advertising literature and broadening knowledge on the effects of various types of appeals in the context of low-fit brand extensions, this thesis informs marketers about which advertising appeals are the most suitable for promoting low-fit extensions and thereby facilitate the success of these extensions. By demonstrating the two processes (categorisation and matching), as well as causally determining the underpinning mechanism, through which various advertising appeals work, this thesis also enhances marketers' confidence when pursuing low-fit brand extension strategies.

1.4 Structure of thesis

Beyond this introduction chapter, the remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a general overview of the brand extension literature and a comprehensive understanding of CLT and its relevant tenets. Chapter 3 presents Study 1, which addresses Research Question 1 on the influence of construal level on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. This chapter starts with a review of prior studies that have examined the role of construal level in brand extension evaluations. Afterwards, it formulates hypotheses using construal level research in psychology and consumer behaviour. Then, the research design is described followed by the analysis and results section. Finally, the findings of Study 1 are discussed along with its limitations.

In Chapter 4, Study 2 extends Study 1 and addresses Research Question 2a by examining the effectiveness of high and low construal–level advertising appeals (i.e. abstract v. concrete advertising appeals) in improving low-fit extension evaluations. Further, Study 2 addresses Research Question 2b by showing that perceived fit is the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of high-level and low-level construal on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Chapter 4 first provides a comprehensive review of studies on the effectiveness of advertising in brand extension evaluations. Further, it reviews the literature on abstract and concrete appeals. Then, this chapter develops hypotheses and describes Study 2's research design. Finally, the analysis and results are presented, followed by a discussion of the results.

Chapters 5 and 6 answer Research Question 3, which concerns the CLT tenet of matching construal levels. Specifically, Chapter 5 presents Study 3, which examines the ways that evaluations of a low-fit extension may be improved by matching the construal level of a consumer-related factor (i.e. social power) with that of an advertising appeal (e.g. abstract v. concrete appeals). Thus, Study 3 addresses Research Question 3a. Chapter 5 begins with a review of the existing literature on social power and its role in advertising research. Afterwards, it develops hypotheses and describes Study 3's research design. Finally, the analysis and results of Study 3 are presented, followed by a discussion section.

Study 4 in Chapter 6 similarly applies the CLT tenet of matching construal levels. The study aims to answer Research Question 3b by testing whether the improving effect of desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals, on low-fit brand extension evaluations, may vary depending on whether consumers are at the informational or transactional stage of their decision journey. This chapter first reviews studies on (1) desirability and feasibility advertising appeals, (2) the relationship of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals with construal level, (3) the CDJ and (4) the association between the stages in the CDJ and construal level. Then, it develops hypotheses and describes the research design. Finally, the analysis and results of the study are presented, followed by a discussion section.

Chapter 7 contains Study 5, which experimentally demonstrates that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the interactive effects of advertising appeals and boundary conditions (e.g. journey stage) on the evaluation of low-fit extensions. Thus, Study 5 addresses Research Question 4 or, specifically, Research Question 4a. This chapter first reviews the literature on processing fluency within psychology and advertising research and then develops hypotheses. After that, it describes the research design, followed by the analysis and results section. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion section.

Chapter 8 provides an overall discussion by synthesising the findings across all the studies. This chapter compares these findings with the existing literature. In addition, it highlights how the findings answer the research questions that this thesis aims to address. Importantly, it highlights the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings. Moreover, it identifies the limitations of this study and offers several avenues for future research.

The structure of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.1.

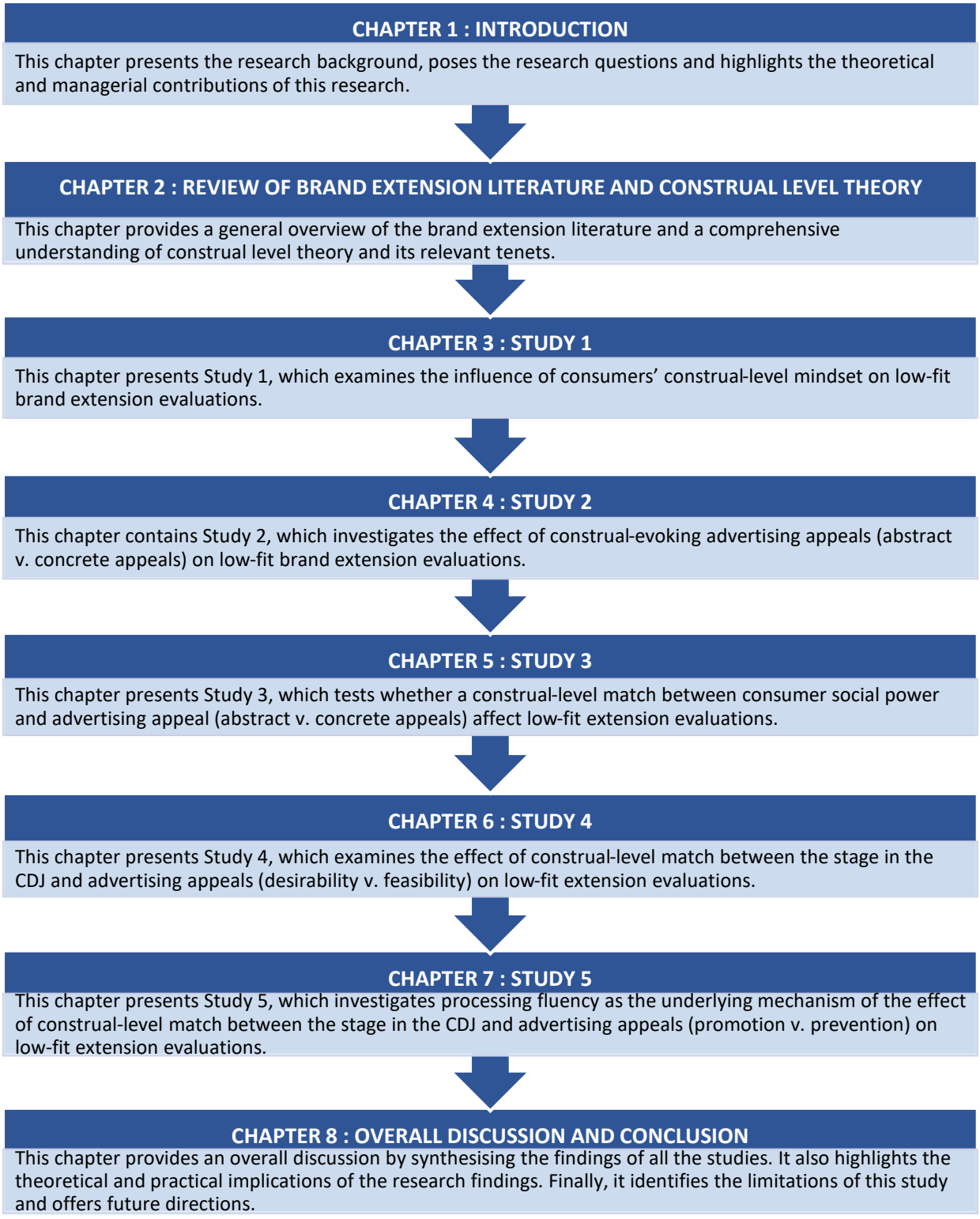

Figure 1.1: Thesis structure

Chapter 2: Review of Brand Extension Literature and Construal Level Theory

The previous chapter highlighted that marketers face critical challenges when introducing low-fit brand extensions. However, CLT suggests that advertising can be specifically tailored to improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Accordingly, Chapter 1 highlighted key gaps in the existing brand extension literature and posed research questions to address the ways that advertising can help brands to promote low-fit brand extensions successfully. To set the foundation for these research questions, this chapter aims to first provide a broad and general review of the relevant existing knowledge on CLT and brand extensions. Subsequently, Chapters 3 to 7 deliver in-depth reviews of specific aspects of the literature that are relevant to the research questions in those chapters. This chapter starts with a review of the existing brand extension literature. Then, it reviews CLT and its application in consumer research, including the evaluation of brand extensions.

2.1 Nature of brand extensions

Firms often introduce new products into existing and new markets to increase profits and to achieve competitive advantages. Firms may use new or existing brand names to introduce new products. Given the high cost of introducing new products and brand-building activities (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Boush & Loken, 1991; Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021), brand extension has become a popular branding strategy to launch new products (Hayran & Gürhan-Canli, 2016; Keller et al., 2011; Zheng et al., 2019). Brand extension refers to the use of an established brand name to launch a new product or service in a different category (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Miniard et al., 2018; Swaminathan et al., 2001). The established brand that gives birth to an extension product is called the parent brand (PB). For example, as a PB, Gillette has successfully extended from shaving razors and blades to deodorant, face wash and body wash (see Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Gillette brand extensions

Brand extensions are ubiquitous in today's marketplace (e.g. the Apple smartwatch, Dyson hairdryer, Yamaha motorbike and Clorox toilet bowl cleaner). Similarly, rather than developing a new brand, many large consumer goods companies use brand extensions for expansion into different product categories (Parker et al., 2018). In addition to the Gillette examples mentioned earlier, other examples include Arm & Hammer extending from baking soda to toothpaste, Reese's moving beyond confectionery to cereal and Ferrari's foray from sports cars to perfume.

Brand extension differs from line extension: the latter involves the use of the same brand name to launch a new product within the PB's existing product category (Keller & Aaker, 1992). For example, Gillette has introduced several line extensions within its shaving razor category, such as the Gillette Mach 3+, Gillette Fusion 5 and Gillette Proglide 5 (see Figure 2.2). Given that a line extension differs from the PB in relatively minor ways (e.g. sizes, flavours), it retains and benefits from the positive characteristics that are associated with the PB (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995; Reddy et al., 1994). However, for brand extensions, the favourable associations of the PB transfer less easily to the extension product because the extension product is in a different category from the PB. Thus, consumers often perceive higher performance risk in a brand extension than in a line extension (Shen, 2014). Therefore, consumers tend to evaluate a brand extension less favourably than a line extension (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010a), suggesting that the acceptance of a brand extension is more challenging than a line extension.



Figure 2.2: Gillette line extensions

However, a successful brand extension is particularly rewarding in several ways. First, it can help to tap into new markets, face less competition and build a multicategory brand (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2004; Miniard et al., 2018). Second, by capitalising on the PB rather than launching a new brand, brand extensions reduce the risk of new product failure by transferring the PB's equity to a new product (Aaker, 1990; Buil et al., 2009; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Martínez & Pina, 2003; Miniard et al., 2018; Su et al., 2021). This, in turn, helps to build a positive identity for the new product quickly (Chun et al., 2015; Park et al., 1991) and reduces consumers' perceived risk when buying it (Chen & Liu, 2004; DelVecchio, 2000; Sood & Keller, 2012).

Third, brand extensions reduce the cost of introducing new products (Buil et al., 2009; Swaminathan et al., 2001). Specifically, it reduces the advertising expenses for new products (Smith & Park, 1992; Tauber, 1981) because of the synergies that are created by other products that are associated with the brand via consumer experience and marketing communications (Erdem et al., 2006). In addition, a brand extension strategy reduces the costs of marketing research (Chen & Liu, 2004) and distribution (Morrin, 1999).

Fourth, the positive effects of a brand extension can spill over and positively influence the PB by adding fresh associations to the PB, improving its evaluations and enhancing consumers' acceptance of its future extensions (Chun et al., 2015). For example, Dwivedi et al. (2010) exposed 387 US university students to a fictitious brand extension (i.e. sunglasses) that was introduced by a real PB in the sportswear category (i.e. Woodland). Then, participants were asked to indicate whether their attitude towards the PB was more positive, negative or the same after knowing that it had extended its product range from sportswear to sunglasses. The findings reveal that launching a brand extension improves the evaluation of the PB. Studies also show that the trial of successful brand extensions positively affects PB choice, especially among non-users and non-loyal buyers of the PB (Swaminathan et al.,

2001). Similarly, the advertising of a brand extension increases sales of the PB (Balachander & Ghose, 2003). These positive reciprocal spillover effects of brand extensions further translate into increased market share thereby making brand extension an important driver of brand growth (Ahluwalia, 2008; Deng & Messinger, 2022; Parker et al., 2018).

Although successful brand extensions can bring critical benefits, the challenges that brands face in penetrating a new category have often led to failures. Indeed, there exists many examples of failed brand extensions, such as Cosmopolitan yoghurt, Virgin bridal dresses and Harley Davidson cologne. According to one estimate, the failure rate of brand extensions is as high as 80 to 90% (Duckler, 2018). The failure of brand extensions not only wastes firms' investments in new products but also may negatively affect the PB (Buil et al., 2009; Martínez & Pina, 2003). An unsuccessful brand extension can negatively affect the PB's favourable associations (Loken & John, 1993) and choice (Swaminathan et al., 2001). An unsuccessful brand extension can also reduce the sales of other products that are offered under the same PB name (Desai & Hoyer, 1993).

Given the rewards that can come from introducing successful brand extensions, researchers have focused primarily on investigating factors that can improve brand extension evaluations (Albrecht et al., 2013; Boush & Loken, 1991; Miniard et al., 2018; Sheinin & Schmitt, 1994; Xie, 2008; Zheng et al., 2019). Prior brand extension studies have identified factors, such as PB breadth (Dacin & Smith, 1994), mating mindset (Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012), distraction (Y. Zhang et al., 2020) and retail display format (Zheng et al., 2019), that may contribute to brand extension success. However, prior studies have examined the effectiveness of only a few advertising appeals (e.g. emotional, rational and comparative appeals) for improving brand extension evaluations. Furthermore, the topic of advertising appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions remains under explored (for exceptions see Baek and King (2015); Dens and De Pelsmacker (2010a); Puligadda et al. (2013)). Extending this research stream by investigating additional advertising appeals, as well as revealing their theoretical foundation, is important not only to advance academic research in the domain of brand extensions but also to provide marketers with a wider repertoire of effective advertising appeals for promoting low-fit extensions. Therefore, drawing on CLT, this thesis proposes and tests two distinct processes (categorisation and matching) through which various advertising appeals can influence the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. The following section reviews CLT and its two theoretical tenets that support the postulation of these two distinct processes for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

2.2 Construal level theory

In the past two decades, CLT has become one of the most influential social-cognitive theories (Calderon et al., 2020). CLT posits that people view objects or events at various construal levels (Trope & Liberman, 2010), which refer to mental representations at varying levels of abstraction (Williams et al., 2014). Although construal levels may exist on a continuum, researchers often dichotomise CLT as simply high versus low-level construal. A high-level construal is 'schematic, decontextualized representations that extract the gist from the available information' (Trope et al., 2007, p. 83). However, low-level construal is 'relatively unstructured, contextualized representations that include subordinate and incidental features' (Trope et al., 2007, p. 83). In short, high-level construal concerns the abstract or general features of an object whereas low-level construal focuses on its concrete or observable features (Bar-Anan et al., 2006; Schuetz et al., 2020; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Furthermore, a high-level construal object is often perceived as simpler, more prototypical and less ambiguous because its perceivers ignore or omit concrete details (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007).

An important question about construal levels is, which factors determine the construal level of an object? In their seminal paper, Liberman and Trope (1998) argued that the temporal distance of an object or event can determine its construal level. Specifically, they reasoned that because distant future events can be only vaguely imagined, these events are represented at an abstract, high level of construal whereas near-future events, which can be imagined in detail, are represented at a concrete, low level of construal. Liberman and Trope (1998) confirmed this by demonstrating that people describe distant future activities using superordinate terms (high-level construal) whereas subordinate terms (low-level construal) are used to describe near-future activities. For example, participants described the activity of 'cleaning the house' as 'showing one's cleanliness' in the distant future condition but as 'vacuuming the floor' in the near-future condition. The prediction that people construe distant versus near-future events at high versus low-level construal is the key postulation of temporal construal theory (TCT).

Although early studies on TCT considered temporal distance as the only determinant of construal level (e.g. Förster et al., 2004; Liberman et al., 2002; Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2000), later research has revealed additional dimensions of psychological distance, which is the perceived proximity or distance from the self, situated here and now (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Construal level studies posit four dimensions of psychological

distance: temporal distance, spatial distance, social distance and hypothetical distance (Elinor Amit et al., 2009; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007). Hence, an object or event is more psychologically distant if it is far from now in time (temporal distance), remote from here in place (spatial distance), experienced by others rather than by the self (social distance) and is less likely to happen than what is actually happening (hypothetical distance; Elinor Amit et al. (2009)). However, an object or event is psychologically proximal if it is near in time, close in place, experienced by the perceiver and is more certain. The introduction of these other dimensions of psychological distance makes TCT a particular case of CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

CLT proposes that psychological distance affects construal level. Specifically, CLT predicts that far psychological distance leads to high-level construal whereas a near psychological distance results in low-level construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Several psychology studies have confirmed this relationship between psychological distance and construal level. Consistently with CLT's postulation, several studies have reported that higher (lower) temporal distance (Förster et al., 2004), spatial distance (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006; Henderson et al., 2006), social distance (Smith & Trope, 2006) and hypothetical distance (Wakslak et al., 2006) causes high-level (low-level) construal. However, a recent study warned against considering hypothetical distance as a predictor of construal level (Calderon et al., 2020) because it failed to replicate two of the seven studies in the seminal work (i.e. Wakslak et al., 2006), which highlighted the influence of hypotheticality on construal level.

How does psychological distance determine the construal level of an event? CLT posits that the relationship between an event's psychological distance and knowledge of its high and low-level construal information underlies this effect (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope et al., 2007). The concrete and secondary information of a psychologically distant event is often lacking or unreliable, leading people to consider the abstract, central features of such an event (Rees et al., 2018). However, people usually have greater levels of information about a psychologically near event, leading them to form its concrete and low-level representation. Importantly, CLT assumes that this association between psychological distance and construal level is overgeneralised to the extent that it leads people to form high versus low-level construal of distant versus near events regardless of the amount of information that they have about those events (Liviatan et al., 2008). In other words, psychological distance automatically provides a generalised heuristic, causing people to use a high level (low level) of construal for distant (near) objects or events.

It is noteworthy that the various psychological distances are positively correlated (Fiedler et al., 2015; Maglio et al., 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2003). That is, an object or event that is distant (near) on one dimension of psychological distance (e.g. temporal) is also perceived as distant (near) on other distance dimensions (i.e. spatial, social, hypothetical). This occurs because the distance dimensions have the same origin (i.e. here, now, self) and similarly affect the construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010). To support this proposition, it has been shown that one distance dimension (e.g. temporal) influences other distance dimensions (e.g. spatial, social). For example, a study by Wakslak and Trope (2008) revealed that participants expected improbable versus probable events (hypothetical distance) to happen further away in time, place and social distance.

This generalising effect is not isolated to the temporal dimension of psychological distance. Social distance (e.g. the need to use polite language) also positively affects temporal and spatial distances (Stephan et al., 2010). In that study, participants stated that the target of the communication would perform the actions in question in the far versus the near future when the message used normative (more polite) language versus colloquial (less polite) language. Furthermore, this study revealed that participants perceived a greater level of spatial distance between the speaker and the addressee when they used normative language versus colloquial language with each other. Thus, various dimensions of psychological distance are intercorrelated, suggesting the possibility that psychological distance dimensions are interchangeable in construal level research.

CLT provides a sound theoretical basis to explain the effects of various advertising appeals on enhancing the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Specifically, categorisation and matching effects are the two relevant theoretical tenets of CLT that support the two distinct processes through which advertising appeals can influence low-fit brand extension evaluations. The categorisation effect of CLT suggests that consumers' construal level mindset or advertising appeals could improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions by enhancing the perception of similarity between the PB and its extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Buil et al., 2009; Chun et al., 2015; Völckner & Sattler, 2007). Similarly, the matching effect of CLT suggests that the favourability of low-fit brand extension evaluations can be improved by enhancing the processing fluency that emanates from a construal level match between the consumer's mindset and an advertising appeal. Section 2.3 first discusses the categorisation-effect tenet of CLT, followed by a review of the literature on the perceived parent–extension fit. Then Section 2.4 discusses the matching-effect tenet of CLT.

2.3 Categorisation effect of construal level theory

Construal level influences the way that people categorise an object, as either an abstract, decontextualised representation at a high construal–level or a concrete, contextualised representation at a low construal level. People try to identify context-invariant features of objects when construing them at a high level (Burgoon et al., 2013), which leads them to focus on a few central features that connect these objects instead of noticing multiple contextual features that distinguish them (Henderson, 2013). Thus, high-level construal of an object is more inclusive than low-level construal. For example, instead of focusing on their distinguishing incidental features, the high-level construal of a camel and a car may represent them both as means of transportation, leading them to be classified together.

Consistently with the categorisation tenet of CLT, Liberman et al. (2002) demonstrated the impact of temporal distance on construal level by examining its influence on category breadth (Study 1). Specifically, the authors used a set of 38 relevant objects (e.g. for camping: brush, camera, soap, tent, rope) for each of the four scenarios (i.e. camping, moving out, garage sale, visit to New York) and asked participants to classify those objects into as many nonoverlapping groups as they thought appropriate. It was found that the participants, influenced by the construal level of an event, formed fewer (more) groups in the distant future (near-future) condition because they applied broader (narrower) categorisation.

In their Study 2, Wakslak et al. (2006) showed that participants applied broader and more inclusive categorisation when they were unlikely versus likely to receive products (i.e. high-level v. low-level construal). Specifically, 52 university students were shown four products from each of three product categories (furniture, vegetables and clothing products), such that two products were atypical and two were typical for each of the product categories. Participants saw each product followed by a question asking them to rate the product's typicality on a 10-point scale to indicate whether the product shown belonged or did not belong to a particular category. The results indicated that participants who were unlikely to receive the products (i.e. high-level construal) used more inclusive categorisation for atypical products than those who were likely to receive the products. However, probability (i.e. likely v. unlikely to receive the product) did not affect the categorisation of typical products (i.e. centrally located in the category).

Beyond categorising objects, studies in psychology have similarly applied this categorisation effect of construal level to understand individual judgement and behaviour (Henderson, 2013; Levy et al., 2002). For example, chronic abstract or high-level construal

blurs social details, causing people to perceive greater similarities between social groups (Levy et al., 2002). Specifically, this study used the BIF (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987) to measure participants' chronic construal level and the universal orientation scale (Phillips & Ziller, 1997) to measure their perception of similarity between members of various social groups and between themselves and distinct others. It was shown that the tendency to construe information abstractly, rather than concretely, led participants to see more similarities between members of social groups and themselves and others. In addition, because of this increased perception of similarity, high versus low-level construal participants showed more empathy towards dissimilar others, were more willing to help them and donated more money to help needy dissimilar others.

Similarly to construal level research in psychology, some consumer studies have demonstrated the categorisation effect of CLT (Ding et al., 2021; Van Kerckhove et al., 2015). For example, by arguing that looking up (down) leads to high-level (low-level) construal, Van Kerckhove et al. (2015) showed that consumers who look up (down) apply broader (narrower) and more (less) inclusive categorisation. Researchers have also successfully drawn on the categorisation effect of CLT to predict consumer behaviours (Hong & Lee, 2010; Kelting et al., 2019; McGowan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2013). For example, in the retail context, Kelting et al. (2019) found that high versus low-level construal increased ease of choice and attitude favourability towards the selected brand when copycat private labels were present. Specifically, the authors presented three national brands and three copycat private labels together and demonstrated that chronic and primed high versus low-level construal increased perceptions of similarity, substitutability and simplicity among the six products, resulting in greater levels of measured ease of choice and improved attitude towards the selected product.

Similarly, Hong and Lee (2010) revealed that consumers who had low-level construal evaluated a mixed-emotion advertisement (i.e. an advertisement that showed positive and negative emotions) less favourably than a positive-emotion advertisement whereas there was no difference between the evaluations of mixed and positive-emotion advertisements for consumers who had high-level construal. Furthermore, high-level construal consumers evaluated a mixed-emotion advertisement more favourably than low-level construal consumers. These effects emerged because high-level construal consumers felt less discomfort seeing a mixed-emotion advertisement than low-level construal consumers did because of their ability to assimilate the two opposite emotions in a mixed-emotion

advertisement. Chapter 3 provides a further review of consumer studies that have applied the categorisation tenet of CLT.

Relevant to this thesis, although a few brand extension studies have applied the categorisation tenet of CLT, they did not focus specifically on low-fit extension evaluations (see Chowdhry et al. (2015) as an exception). For example, Hansen et al. (2013) reported that a money reminder improved brand extension evaluations by evoking a high construal level because money is an implicit signal that one can meet the demands of one's environment. The brand extensions that they considered in their experiment appeared to have a moderately good fit with their PBs (e.g. Kia introducing camping vans) so the categorisation effect of high-level construal thinking did not have to work very hard to close the perceived-fit gap between the parent and the extension. Little is known about whether the categorisation-effect tenet of CLT is powerful enough to close the perceived-fit gap between a PB and a low-fit extension. A closer perceived fit with the PB would improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions and their chances of in-market success (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Buil et al., 2009; Chun et al., 2015; Völckner & Sattler, 2007).

Thus, this thesis draws on the categorisation tenet of CLT to investigate the effects of construal level in two ways. First, Study 1 attempts to show, by directly and experimentally manipulating the consumer mindset, that consumers who have a high (low) construal mindset perceive greater (lower) levels of fit between the PB and its low-fit extension. Second, Study 2 shows that a consumer's mindset can be influenced by the construal level characteristics of advertisements that feature low-fit extensions (i.e. via various advertising appeals) thereby leading to an improved perceived fit. These two studies are consistent with the notion that the perception of fit is malleable (Monga & John, 2007; Su et al., 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2021). In other words, it may be plausible that it is possible to improve consumers' perceptions of fit when a PB extends to a low-fit category. This notion of fit malleability is particularly critical for low-fit extensions, which can bring important growth benefits to brands (as was discussed in Chapter 1). Low-fit brand extensions allow brands to enter new market segments and offer multiple products (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2004; Miniard et al., 2018) thereby helping brands to broaden their revenue streams and to diversify sales risks (Miniard et al., 2018).

Given that the concept of perceived fit is central to the categorisation tenet of CLT, the following section provides a review of the perceived fit literature, particularly in brand extension research.

2.3.1 Perceived fit and its theoretical root

Boush (1987) introduced the concept of 'perceived similarity' to the brand extension literature. Perceived similarity is defined as 'the perceived relationship between the parent brand and the extension product' (Goedertier et al., 2015, p. 158). Later scholars have used other terms, such as perceived 'fit', 'congruence', 'match' or 'typicality', to refer to the same concept. Given that researchers have mostly used the term 'perceived fit' in brand extension studies (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Buil et al., 2009; Dimitriu et al., 2017; Su et al., 2021), this thesis similarly uses that term rather than perceived similarity.

The concept of perceived fit, although extensively used in marketing research (Ahn et al., 2020; Lee & Thorson, 2008; Ma et al., 2012; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012; Misra & Beatty, 1990; Walsh et al., 2010; Zhang & Hanks, 2018), is rooted in cognitive psychology (Gick & Holyoak, 1987; Medin et al., 1993; Rosch, 1978; Tversky, 1977). According to these studies, people possess tendencies to transfer attributes from one object to an associated object. Early studies by Wells (1907) and Thorndike (1920) had already documented the tendency of people to use a global evaluation of an object to spread its characteristics to other objects. Similarly, Nisbett and Wilson (1977, p. 255) argued that people have 'a fundamental inability to resist the affective influence of global evaluation on evaluation of specific attributes'. In marketing, a classic example of this transfer is the well-established concept of country of origin in which consumers use their perceptions of a country to imbue their perceptions of the products that are made in that country (Chowdhury & Ahmed, 2009; Hoang et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2013).

Studies further suggest that the transfer of attributes between objects is particularly salient when the level of perceived fit between the objects is high (Fazio, 1989; Gick & Holyoak, 1987). In fact, individuals first classify a new stimulus as a member of an existing mental category before the transfer of already-formed category associations (e.g. affect) to that new stimulus (Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986; Tversky, 1977). The perceived fit between a new stimulus and an existing mental category is essential for transferring affect from that category to the new stimulus (Mervis & Rosch, 1981). For example, Harwood et al. (2011) divided 128 US undergraduate students into three groups and asked each group to imagine either a positive, negative or neutral interaction with an unfamiliar illegal immigrant. The participants were then asked to rate their attitudes towards several groups, including illegal immigrants. The findings revealed that the positive (negative) affect that resulted from the interaction with an unfamiliar illegal immigrant transferred to the illegal immigrant groups

such that a positive (negative) affect had a more (less) positive impact on attitudes towards illegal immigrant groups. Moreover, this effect on the target group (i.e. illegal immigrants) further transferred to other groups according to their similarity with the target group.

Similarly, Aaker and Keller (1990) revealed that the transfer of positive PB attributes to an extension occurred when the level of fit between the parent and its extension brand was high rather than low. Such a transfer is not automatic but is facilitated by a closer perceived fit between the brand images of the PB and its extension (Kirmani et al., 1999; Loken & John, 1993).

2.3.2 Perceived fit in brand extension

Of specific interest to this thesis is the ways that consumers may perceive fit according to product category (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Hernandez et al., 2019; Herr et al., 1996). In this context, perceived fit refers to the perceived similarity or relatedness between the product categories of the PB and its extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Herr et al., 1996; Wu et al., 2015; Zhong et al., 2021). That is, product–category fit is high (low) if the product categories of the PB and the extension are similar (dissimilar; Su et al. (2021); Yuen et al. (2021)). A brand–concept fit refers to the consistency between the concept of the PB and the extension product's category (Batra et al., 2010; Park et al., 1991). Brand–concept fit is broader than product–category fit because a brand concept or image (e.g. prestige) may be associated with multiple product categories (e.g. jewellery, perfumes, watches) thereby allowing brands to be more extendable.

A brand extension may have a high or low level of fit with the PB's category. A high-fit category extension shares most of its features with the PB whereas a low-fit category extension shares only a few features with the PB (Dimitriu et al., 2017; Keller et al., 2011; Wang & Liu, 2020). For example, an ice-cream brand (e.g. Cornetto) may be expected to have products that share more features (and benefits) with chocolate products than with bottled-water products. Assuming that this is the case, an extension of an ice-cream brand would be perceived to fit better with the PB if it was a chocolate product rather than a bottled-water product. In short, the degree to which product-related features match between the PB and the extension determine the extension's perceived product–category fit. Figure 2.3 shows some real high and low-fit extensions according to product–category fit.



Figure 2.3: Examples of high and low-fit brand extensions

The basic rationale for using a brand extension strategy instead of developing a new brand is to use the image of an established brand and to transfer this image to the extension product (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Buil et al., 2009; Chun et al., 2015; Völckner & Sattler, 2007). This transfer of PB image to the extension product is facilitated by the perceived fit between the PB and its extension (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Ahn et al., 2018; Hultman et al., 2021; Milberg et al., 2013; Milewicz & Herbig, 1994; Pina et al., 2013; Völckner et al., 2010).

Ample empirical evidence indicates that a perception of a high level of category fit facilitates the transfer of associations from the PB to the extension, which can enhance the evaluation of the extension (e.g. Gierl & Huettl, 2011; Park et al., 1991; Sunde & Brodie, 1993). To illustrate, Boush and Loken (1991) conducted a study using two fictitious brands and their hypothetical extensions within the electronics (e.g. camera, calculator) and groceries (e.g. steak sauce, toothpaste) product categories. This study indicated that consumers' processing of high and low-fit extensions was categorical. To be more specific, the authors showed that although participants categorised the high-fit extension into the PB's category

because of a greater level of product fit, the low-fit extension was not placed into the PB's category because of its obvious dissimilarity. Consequently, the high-fit extension was evaluated more favourably because the positive PB associations were transferred to the extension whereas a low-fit extension was evaluated less favourably because of the absence of any such positive affect transfer.

Many studies have shown that the emotional associations of a PB influence brand extension evaluations. For example, Echambadi et al. (2006) revealed that PB-elicited affect influenced brand extension evaluations regardless of whether the type of extension had a moderate or low level of fit. The authors reasoned that consumers used the PB-elicited affect as a basis on which to form their impressions of the PB, which, in turn, drove their evaluations of the brand extensions. Johnson et al. (2019) examined the effect of two types of brand reputation (i.e. social responsibility v. ability) on brand extension evaluations. The authors found that the ability associations of a PB did not transfer easily because they had more effect on the evaluations of high-fit rather than low-fit brand extensions.

The favourable effects on brand extension evaluations of high levels of perceived fit hold across contexts. For example, Klink and Smith (2001) examined the effect of perceived fit on brand extension evaluations by considering two fictitious extensions for each of the three real PBs that were used (Michelin, Timex and Maytag). The results showed that closer perceived fit had a positive effect on the evaluation of the extension. Martínez and Pina (2010) used several real fashion brands (e.g. Nike, Puma) and fictitious extensions that were either high fit (e.g. skis) or low fit (e.g. DVD players). They also confirmed that the level of perceived fit had a positive effect on consumers' attitude towards the extension.

A recent meta-analysis revealed that a high-fit extension is evaluated more favourably than a low-fit extension across various brand types (e.g. luxury v. non-luxury brands), countries (e.g. Italy, Spain, UK) and extension types (e.g. a product extending to a product v. a service, a service extending to a service v. a product; Pina et al. (2013)). This effect of perceived fit on favourable evaluations of brand extensions is also reflected in consumer choices, which are a more realistic measure of consumer behaviour (Morales et al., 2017). Specifically, consumers choose high-fit extensions more frequently than low-fit extensions (Milberg et al., 2013). Furthermore, the effect of positive electronic word-of-mouth on brand extension evaluations is enhanced when the level of perceived fit is high (Liu et al., 2017). Perceived fit is also critical when charging a premium price for extensions. Specifically, unlike for low-fit extensions, consumers are more willing to pay price premiums for high-fit extensions (DelVecchio & Smith, 2005; Sattler et al., 2010).

Most prior brand extension studies have used hypothetical extensions of real or fictitious PBs. This could cast doubt on the external validity of the findings on the effect of perceived fit on brand extension success (Klink & Smith, 2001). To address this concern, some studies have used real brands and real extensions. In this regard, one of the first large-scale studies in this stream of research considered three real extensions for each of 22 real consumer packaged goods (CPGs) brands to identify the drivers of brand extension success. Of the several drivers considered (e.g. PB quality, marketing support, retailer acceptance), perceived fit appeared to be the most influential driver of extension success (Völckner & Sattler, 2006).

Likewise, Völckner and Sattler (2007) conducted two large-scale studies to confirm the generalisability of prior brand extension findings for five effects: strength of brand name (e.g. PB quality), perceived fit, uncertainty, involvement and market power. Study 1 was performed in a lab setting using 48 real PBs and 96 fictitious extensions (i.e. two for each PB) whereas Study 2 was a field survey that collected data on 66 real extensions of 22 PBs (i.e. three extensions for each brand). Collectively, the studies collected 11,098 valid responses. In the two studies, perceived fit emerged as the most critical brand extension success driver, followed by PB quality, across multiple conditions, including nature of extension (i.e. fictitious v. real extensions), product categories (e.g. beverages, personal care), types of PB (e.g. prestige v. utilitarian), types of respondents (i.e. students v. consumers) and outcome variables (e.g. attitude, market share).

2.4 Construal level matching effect of construal level theory

Prior studies of social cognition have suggested that an individual's mental construal level of social events affected their responses to those events (Pennington & Hastie, 1988; Semin & Smith, 1999; Smith, 1998; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Accordingly, CLT postulates that an individual's mental construal level of an object influences its evaluation by altering the relative weights that are assigned to the high or low-level attributes of the target object. Specifically, the value that is associated with a high-level (low-level) construal of an object increases when individuals possess a matching high (low) construal, which enhances the attractiveness of the high-level (low-level) aspects of the object. This means that a match between the construal levels of an individual and an object positively enhances the object's evaluation. Given that prior studies have suggested that temporal distance is a determinant of construal level, several studies have shown that temporal distance can affect an object's

evaluation by increasing the value that people attach to the matching relevant construal level features of that object (Eyal et al., 2004; Malkoc et al., 2005; Trope & Liberman, 2000).

For example, in their seminal paper, Liberman and Trope (1998) demonstrated that the temporal distance from an event determines its construal level, subsequently affecting its judgement and choice. Specifically, they demonstrated that people described distant future activities using superordinate terms (i.e. high-level construal) whereas people used subordinate terms (i.e. low-level construal) to describe near-future activities. Furthermore, they showed that the desirability of outcomes (i.e. high-level construal) became more influential in distant future decisions whereas the feasibility of outcomes (i.e. low-level construal) was valued more for near-future decisions.

This construal level matching effect also occurs for the primary and secondary attributes of objects because they represent high and low-level construal, respectively (Liviatan et al., 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2010). For example, Trope and Liberman (2000) primed construal level by asking participants to assume that they would buy a radio either tomorrow or next year. Participants were then exposed to one of two descriptions of the radio. In one version, they read that the radio had good sound quality but a poor built-in clock (i.e. was better on the radio's primary feature) whereas the other version stated that the radio had poor sound quality but a good built-in clock (i.e. was better on the secondary feature). It was found that participants who were buying a radio next year (high-level construal) preferred the radio that had good sound (but a poor clock) over the radio that had poor sound (but a good clock). However, when buying a radio tomorrow (low-level construal), they preferred a radio that had poor sound but a good clock. Thus, when evaluating objects or events, people who have high-level construal assign more value to (high construal level) primary features; however, those who have low-level construal give more weight to (low construal level) secondary features. Furthermore, the construal level matching effect applies to the pros and cons of an object or event because they constitute high-level and low-level construal, respectively (Eyal et al., 2004). Consistently with the construal level matching effect, people place relatively more weight on pros when considering distant future events whereas cons become more important for near-future events.

In summary, prior studies have demonstrated that individuals put more weight on the high-level versus low-level construal aspects of an object when they are in a matching high-level versus low-level mindset, which, in turn, affects their evaluation of that object.

2.4.1 Processing fluency and matching effect

This thesis argues that processing fluency may be a possible explanation of what is driving the impact of construal level match on judgement and choice. Processing fluency is 'a subjective feeling of ease or difficulty associated with any type of mental processing' (Graf et al., 2018, p. 394). In other words, various cognitive activities, including perceiving, retrieving and processing, can result in an experience of fluency (Unkelbach & Greifeneder, 2013b). Several factors, such as figure–ground contrast (Reber & Schwarz, 1999), font type (Novemsky et al., 2007) and repeated exposure (Reber et al., 1998), can affect processing fluency.

Importantly, a construal level match can also result in a feeling of fluency (Kim et al., 2009). Construal-compatible information fits more easily with an individual's current cognition structure (Yang et al., 2011), which, in turn, improves the subjective feeling of processing fluency (Allard & Griffin, 2017; O'Brien, 2021). A growing body of literature has provided empirical evidence in this regard (Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Ozkara & Dogan, 2020; Wright et al., 2012). For example, given that temporal distance is a determinant of construal level (Liberman et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2003), Kim et al. (2009) demonstrated that voters process an abstract message more fluently when the voting decision is temporally distant. However, a concrete message is processed more fluently when the voting decision is temporally proximal. Similarly, Ozkara and Dogan (2020) conducted an electroencephalogram study to investigate the effect of construal level fit on processing fluency. The P-300 event-related potential response was used as a measure of processing fluency because of its relationship with mental workload (Shaw et al., 2018). It was concluded that high construal–level participants had lower P-300 amplitudes (i.e. less mental workload) for abstract words than concrete words. However, P-300 amplitudes were lower for concrete words than abstract words for low-level construal participants.

Prior studies have suggested that the fluent processing of a target leads to favourable judgement (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Chae & Hoegg, 2013; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Leonhardt et al., 2015). In fact, people rely on various types of processes and information to make judgements (Winkielman et al., 2003). They might consider the features of a stimulus, or the processing of these features, when evaluating the stimulus (Chang, 2013). The experience of fluency results in positive affect (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004; Reber et al., 1998; Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001). This attribution of fluency to positive affect is automatic and effortless (Bornstein et al., 1987; Seamon et al., 1984) and is interpreted as the

perceivers' response to the target, resulting in a more favourable attitude (Labroo et al., 2008; Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004). For these reasons, individuals attribute the ease or difficulty in processing a stimulus to its evaluation and so misattribute processing fluency to liking the stimulus (Bornstein & D'Agostino, 1992; Janiszewski & Meyvis, 2001).

2.4.2 Construal level matching effect of construal level theory and consumer behaviour

The CLT effect of matching construal levels has been widely applied in consumer research (Chang & Chen, 2022; Chen et al., 2017; Han et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2009; Yang & Zhang, 2018). Many studies have revealed that a construal level match affects consumer responses through processing fluency. For example, White et al. (2011) demonstrated a greater level of intention to engage in recycling activities when a consumer's construal level mindset (high level v. low level) was matched with the construal level of the message framing (gain v. loss). This matching effect persisted even when a high-level versus low-level construal mindset was evoked by different recycling messages (why to recycle v. how to recycle). The authors further reported that the construal level match resulted in a higher level of processing fluency, which led to an increased recycling intention by improving self-efficacy.

Similarly, Yao and Chen (2014) reported that consumers who received cash gifts tended to construe information at a high level because they were at the first subgoal of the shopping procedure or decisional stage whereas the recipients of gift cards (i.e. for a specific store or product) tended to construe information at a low level because they had already proceeded to the next subgoal or decisional stage. Subsequently, they found that gift card receivers, unlike cash gift receivers, felt more engaged and fluent when processing product information that was described in terms of low-level construal (i.e. feasibility, rather than desirability), resulting in a more positive product attitude. The opposite was found for cash gift receivers: more engagement and fluency when there was a match between their high-level construal and high-level product information (desirability, rather than feasibility). In a charity donation context, Gu and Chen (2021) found that a match between the construal level of the cause and the donation (i.e. 'why to donate' matched with specific amount = high level v. 'how to donate' matched with specific amount with specific usage = low level) resulted in higher processing fluency that, in turn, affected the donation intention and amount donated.

The advertising literature provides several examples of the positive effects of a construal level match (Lee et al., 2023; Pichierri & Peluso, 2023). For example, a construal

level matching effect was found between a brand's anthropomorphised roles and the construal level of an advertising message (He et al., 2020). Specifically, a construal level match between the brand roles of partners (e.g. 'It's a pleasure to work with you!') versus servants (e.g. 'It's a pleasure to work for you!') and messages that convey low construal–level information (i.e. how to use) versus high construal–level information (i.e. why to use) enhanced processing fluency, improving attitudes towards the brand. In the context of brand relationships, a secret affair versus a committed brand relationship evoked high-level versus low-level construal (Connors et al., 2021). Therefore, matching a secret affair versus a committed brand relationship with low-level construal (i.e. how) versus high-level construal (i.e. why) messages favourably affected brand evaluations by enhancing processing fluency. Similarly, Tok et al. (2021) revealed that the horizontal distance between the product and the model influenced the effectiveness of desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals. Specifically, their study found that a desirability (feasibility) advertising appeal led to more favourable product evaluations when the product and the model were far (close) from each other in the advertisement. The authors confirmed that these results occurred because of the mediating role of processing fluency. A construal level match between the product–model distance and the advertising appeal enhanced processing fluency, which, in turn, was associated with more positive product evaluations.

Despite the well-established role of this construal level matching effect in consumer research, prior studies have not tested its effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Therefore, this thesis builds on construal level matching effects to examine the influence of high-level and low-level construal advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Furthermore, this thesis tests whether situational influences on construal level moderate this matching effect of advertising appeals. In this thesis, the situations that evoke various construal levels are levels of social power (i.e. high v. low power) or stages in the CDJ (informational [high] v. transactional [low]). A match between a situationally evoked construal level and the construal level of an advertisement should result in a pleasant feeling of perceptual fluency that is misattributed to a low-fit brand extension, improving its evaluation. This thesis considers various construal level advertising appeals, including abstract (high) versus concrete (low) appeals (Studies 2 and 3), desirability (high) versus feasibility (low) appeals (Study 4) and promotion (high) versus prevention (low) appeals (Study 5). More evidence for the reasons that these situations evoke these levels of construal and the relationships of advertising appeals with construal levels are presented in the chapters that report the results of these studies.

2.5 A brief overview of five studies of this thesis

This section provides a brief overview of five studies conducted in this thesis. Specifically, this section describes each study's purpose, theoretical underpinning, and research methods. It also describes the progression of these five studies (i.e. Chapters 3 to 7).

2.5.1 Study 1

Purpose: This study investigates the influence of construal level on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.
Theoretical underpinning: The categorisation effect of CLT (see Section 2.3 for detail)
Methods:
Experimental design: 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (construal level: high, low) between-subjects
Participants: Undergraduate business students from a major Pakistani public university
Sample size: 124 in the main experiment and Minimum 44 in each pre-test
Parent brand & extensions: Parent brand: Pepsi, High-fit: Energy drink, Low-fit: Sunglasses
Construal-level manipulation: Goal-priming task (Freitas et al., 2004)
Manipulation check: Behavioural identification form (BIF; Vallacher & Wegner, 1989)
Analysis techniques: ANOVA and t-test

2.5.2 Study 2

Purpose: This study extends Study 1 by examining the effectiveness of high and low construal–level advertising appeals (e.g. abstract v. concrete appeals) in improving low-fit extension evaluations. It also confirms the underlying mechanism of the effectiveness of advertising appeals.
Theoretical underpinning: The categorisation effect of CLT
Methods:
Experimental design: 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) between-subjects
Participants: US adults recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)
Sample size: 193 in the main experiment and Minimum 51 in each pre-test
Parent brand and extensions: Parent brand: Kellogg's, High-fit: Instant coffee, Low-fit: Body spray
Ad appeals: Abstract and concrete ad appeals

Construal-level manipulation check: The linguistic category model (LCM; Semin & Fiedler, 1988)
Analysis techniques: ANOVA, t-test, and Hayes (2017) PROCESS Model 8

2.5.3 Study 3

Purpose: This study investigates how the influence of advertising appeals (e.g. abstract v. concrete appeals) on low-fit extension evaluations is influenced by social power. In other words, this study extends Study 2 by investigating social power as a moderator for the effectiveness of construal–level advertising appeals.
Theoretical underpinning: The matching effect of CLT (see Section 2.4 for detail)
Methods:
Experimental design: 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) × 2 (power: high, low) between-subjects
Participants: US adults recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)
Sample size: 204 in the main experiment and Minimum 43 in each pre-test
Parent brand and extensions: Parent brand: Gillette, Low-fit extension: Running shoes
Ad appeals: Abstract and concrete ad appeals
Manipulation of social power: Recall and writing task (Galinsky et al., 2003)
Analysis techniques: MANOVA, ANOVA, and t-test

2.5.4 Study 4

Purpose: This study examines the effectiveness of different construal-level ad appeals (i.e. desirability v. feasibility ad appeals**)** for low-fit brand extension evaluations across different stages (informational v. transactional) of consumer decision journey. Thus, it extends Study 3 by considering different construal-level advertising appeals and a different moderator.
Theoretical underpinning: The matching effect of CLT
Methods:
Experimental design: 2 (stage in CDJ: informational, transactional) × 2 (advertising appeal: desirability, feasibility) between-subjects
Participants: US adults recruited via Prolific
Sample size: 159 in the main experiment and Minimum 48 in each pre-test
Parent brand and extensions: Parent brand: Honda, Low-fit extension: Laptop
Ad appeals: Desirability and feasibility ad appeals

Manipulation of CDJ's stage: Procedure suggested by Humphreys et al. (2021)
Analysis techniques: MANOVA, ANOVA, and t-test

2.5.5 Study 5

Purpose: This final study tests the underlying mechanism of the construal level matching effect found in studies 3 and 4. Specifically, it examines processing fluency as the underlying mechanism for the impact of construal-level ad appeals (i.e. promotion v. prevention advertising appeals**)** on low-fit brand extension evaluations across different stages (informational v. transactional stage) of consumer decision journey.
Theoretical underpinning: The matching effect of CLT
Methods:
Experimental design: Study 5 used an experimental-causal-chain design (Spencer et al., 2005), which requires two manipulated experiments: one to establish the causal effect of the independent variable (X) on the mediator (M) and the second to confirm the causal effect of the mediator (M) on the outcome variable [Y; Wu and Zumbo (2008)].
Participants: US adults recruited via Prolific
Parent brand and extensions: Parent brand: Philips, Low-fit extension: sneakers

Study 5a
Experimental design: 2 (stage in CDJ: informational, transactional) × 2 (advertising appeal: promotion, prevention) between-subjects with processing fluency as an outcome variable
Sample size: 149 participants
Ad appeals: Promotion and prevention ad appeals
Manipulation of CDJ's stage: Same as in Study 4
Analysis techniques: ANOVA and t-test

Study 5b
Experimental design: Single-factor, two-levels (processing fluency: high, low) between-subjects experiment with attitude towards extension and extension ad as outcome variables
Sample size: 83 participants
Ad appeals: Promotion and prevention ad appeals
Manipulation of processing fluency: Processing fluency was manipulated using ad font style.
Analysis techniques: one-way ANOVA

Chapter 3: Study 1

Encouraging consumers to buy new products that have a low level of fit with an existing brand is an important topic in marketing, as was highlighted in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 reviewed the brand extension literature and then elaborated on CLT, having a particular focus on its categorisation and matching-effect tenets. Section 2.3 suggested that unlike a low construal–level mindset, a high construal–level mindset is likely to perceive greater levels of similarities between objects because of a focus on the broad, overarching meanings of the stimuli. The categorisation tenet of CLT has important implications for low-fit brand extension evaluations because high-level construal may improve the perception of similarity between the PB and its low-fit extension. Therefore, to test this research proposition, this chapter reports the first study (Study 1) that is undertaken by this thesis, which was a preliminary study that drew on the categorisation tenet of CLT.

A few studies (Chowdhry et al., 2015; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011) have successfully applied this tenet to predict brand extension evaluations using US participants. In those US studies, high-level construal improved the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions, in line with the categorisation tenet of CLT. However, Kim and Park (2019) revealed an opposite effect of construal level for Korean participants. In their study, low-level construal improved the evaluation of low-fit extensions. The explanation offered for this opposite effect was that Korea has a collectivist culture whereas the US has an individualist culture. Therefore, the study that is reported in this chapter, Study 1, replicates prior studies in a country that has a differing culture, Pakistan, which is potentially collectivist like Korea or individualist like the US [Pakistan scores low (14) on Hofstede's individualism index, unlike the US (91; Hofstede Insights)]. Confirming whether Pakistani consumers respond to construal level manipulations in the same way as US consumers is an essential foundation for the subsequent studies in this thesis, which might also potentially use Pakistani and US samples. Study 1 not only uses a new country for CLT studies but also extends prior studies by using a different manipulation of the construal level mindset. Study 1 draws on the categorisation tenet of CLT and investigates the ways that construal level influences the effect, on brand extension evaluations, of the perceived fit between the PB and its extension. This study examines whether consumers evaluate high and low-fit extensions differently when they are primed with a high versus a low-level construal mindset.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it identifies the key gaps in prior studies about the role of construal level in evaluations of brand extensions and then outlines the objectives and contributions of Study 1. Then, it develops hypotheses using CLT. Following that, the chapter describes the research design and reports the results. Finally, these results are discussed and conclusions drawn, including their theoretical and practical implications, as well as their limitations, with directions for future research.

3.1 Theoretical background

To summarise the extensive review in the previous chapter, brand extension studies have identified that an important factor that influences the ways that consumers evaluate brand extensions is their perceived fit with the PB (also see Section 2.3.2; Klink & Smith, 2001; Pina et al., 2013; Völckner & Sattler, 2006).

Only a few studies have drawn directly on CLT to predict consumers' evaluations of brand extensions. These studies have mainly reported that construal levels can influence brand extension evaluations by altering the perception of fit (Chowdhry et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2013; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011). That is, these studies were built on the categorisation tenet of CLT. A detailed discussion of perceived fit, and the categorisation tenet of CLT, can be found in Section 2.3. Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) revealed that, unlike low-level construal, high-level construal enhanced perceived fit, leading to favourable evaluations of brand extensions. Similarly, Y. Zhang et al. (2020) reported that a high versus low-level construal accentuated the favourable effect of distraction on low-fit brand extension evaluations by improving perceived brand extension fit. Other studies have applied CLT to see the ways that construal level alters the importance of fit (Kim & John, 2008; Shan et al., 2017). One study found that consumers who have a high level of construal, who construe stimuli in terms of abstract and generalised features, place more importance on perceived fit when evaluating brand extensions (Kim & John, 2008). They do this because perceived fit is a global and abstract assessment of the connection that exists between an extension and its PB and this abstract assessment matches their high, abstract level of construal. However, consumers who have a low construal level, who construe stimuli in terms of concrete and contextual features, place less importance on perceived fit and more importance on the distinguishing concrete features of the brand extension when evaluating extensions.

Despite the work of these prior studies in establishing the efficacy of construal levels in influencing brand extension evaluations, some key gaps remain. The first criticism

concerns the manipulation and measurement of construal level. To determine the potential effects of construal level on brand extension evaluations, researchers have attempted to manipulate and measure construal levels in various ways. For example, Y. Zhang et al. (2020) used temporal distance (i.e. extension that is available in the market in one year v. one month) and Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) used temporal distance (i.e. near future v. distant future) and spatial distance (i.e. US v. a foreign country) to prime consumers' construal levels. However, these studies did not use manipulation checks to confirm whether psychological distance successfully evoked different construal level mindsets. Thus, it remains unclear whether the increased perception of fit and improved evaluation of brand extensions was because of fluent processing of matching stimuli or a change in the construal level mindset.

Kim and John's (2008) study suffers from the same weakness. They used two methods to test the effects of high versus low-level construal across three experiments. In two of these studies, they measured construal level as an individual difference variable using Vallacher and Wegner's (1989) BIF. In another study, they manipulated construal level by varying temporal distance and compared brand extensions that took place in the near future (low-level construal) versus the distant future (high-level construal). Although Kim and John (2008) demonstrated the relevance of construal level mindset in brand extension evaluations, they did not perform manipulation checks to verify whether an individual's trait construal level, or the temporal distance manipulation, put participants into a high versus a low-level construal mindset during these experiments.

Another weakness of the existing literature on the application of CLT to enhance fit perception centres on the failure to distinguish between high and low-fit extensions as the target evaluation object. For example, Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) found that consumers evaluated brand extensions more favourably when the availability of brand extensions was temporally or spatially distant (i.e. high-level construal). Further, they reported that the perception of fit mediated the effect of construal level on brand extension evaluations. However, they did not provide complete information about the nature of the brand extensions that were considered (i.e. high fit or low fit). Similarly, Hansen et al. (2013) showed that because money is an implicit signal that customers can meet the demand of their environment, a money reminder primes high versus low-level construal. Furthermore, building on the categorisation-effect tenet of CLT, they demonstrated that a money reminder (money bills) versus a cost reminder (price tags) enhanced brand extension evaluations. Similarly to Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011), they did not categorise brand extensions as high

or low-fit extensions. Furthermore, they considered the transfer of affect from the PB to the extension as a proxy for perceived fit rather than measuring fit.

When Kim and John (2008) demonstrated the importance of considering perceived fit in their study, they acknowledged that they had 'selected brand extensions that evoked the same fit perceptions among high and low-construal consumers to provide a cleaner test of our predictions' (p. 125). However, using 'consumers with a tendency towards low- versus high-level construals suggests that these groups could have different perceptions of brand extension fit as well, based on the type of information (abstract, concrete) they use for thinking about extension fit' (p. 125). Accordingly, it was recommended that future studies should test the possibility that construal levels affect perception of fit and, ultimately, brand extension evaluations.

In this chapter, Study 1 set out to replicate and extend prior studies (i.e. Chowdhry et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2013; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011), having some important differences. First, Study 1 used a different manipulation of construal level. Instead of using temporal distance to manipulate construal level (low = extension will be launched 'very soon' v. high = 'in six to eight months'), this study used a 'how/why' writing task. Outside the brand extension literature, this task is one of the most widely used construal level manipulations (McGowan et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2013). For example, Hassan et al. (2020) manipulated construal level using the goal-priming task to investigate the ways that construal level affects consumer responses to comparable (v. non-comparable) choice sets. When people think about 'how' they will accomplish a task, they think at a low level of construal about concrete aspects of the task. However, when they think about 'why' they will accomplish a task, they think at a high level of construal about their abstract reasons for doing the task. Importantly, the success of this manipulation was assessed by a manipulation check (whether participants chose concrete or abstract descriptions of actions). Therefore, the results of Study 1 test whether the results from prior studies replicate when a different, and validated, manipulation of construal level is used.

Most of the prior CLT studies have either not accounted for perceived fit (e.g. Hansen et al., 2013), focused mainly on high-fit extension evaluations (e.g. Kim & John, 2008) or compared high and low-fit extensions (Meyvis et al., 2012). None of these have applied CLT to explain the evaluation of low-fit extensions. Thus, a second contribution of Study 1 is illuminating the effect of construal level on low-fit extension evaluations. Understanding the ways to improve consumers' evaluations of low-fit extensions is important because successful low-fit brand extensions can help brands to tap into new target markets (Meyvis &

Janiszewski, 2004; Miniard et al., 2018), broaden their revenue streams (Miniard et al., 2018) and capitalise on emerging consumer trends (Mathur et al., 2023).

Most of the construal level studies within the brand extension literature have used samples of students from the US (e.g. Kim & John, 2008; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011), except for Kim and Park (2019), who included US and Korean students. Yet, studies have shown that cultural background predisposes consumers to possess different construal level mindsets (Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Han & Schmitt, 1997). For example, Aggarwal and Law's (2005) study found that individuals or cultures that have a communal-relationship norm have a chronic high-level construal mindset whereas an exchange-relationship norm is associated with a low-level construal mindset. Ahluwalia (2008) associated an interdependent self-construal with high-level construal thinking, specifically, the ability to see similarities between a PB and a moderate-fit extension. Communal-relationship norms and interdependent self-construal are more reflective of collectivist cultures, such as those from East Asia, whereas exchange-relationship norms and independent self-construal are typical for individualist cultures, such as the US and Canada (Hofstede, 1984). Pakistan scores low (14) on Hofstede's individualism index, unlike the US [91; (Hofstede Insights)]. Hence, it is an open question whether it is possible to manipulate the construal level of consumers in a collectivist, communal norms setting, who may be predisposed to interdependent high-level construal thinking. Hence, a third difference between Study 1 and prior studies is that this study used a sample of students from a different culture, Pakistan.

Given that prior brand extension studies have been conducted primarily in developed markets (Mao & Krishnan, 2006; Meyvis et al., 2012; Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2019; Su et al., 2021), considering Pakistan as a context is critical because customers from developed and developing countries may evaluate products differently (Jin et al., 2015). Moreover, new products diffuse at a different pace in developed and developing countries (Talukdar et al., 2002). Existing brand extension research also recognises that brand extension evaluations can vary across countries (Henseler et al., 2010; Kim & Park, 2019; Monga & John, 2007). Thus, brand extension research findings that have been obtained from developed markets might not be equally applicable to developing markets. Yet, firms continue to expand into developing countries, given the growth potential that these markets hold (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Xie & Boggs, 2006). Therefore, brand extension research in developing countries can potentially advance theoretical and contextual knowledge, as well as provide practical guidance to businesses that operate or plan to operate in these markets. Validating, in developing countries, the research insights that have been obtained in developed countries on

the ways that consumers evaluate brand extensions is of value for marketers who are attempting to expand their business into developing countries in a growing globalised market.

3.2 Hypotheses development

This thesis builds on the categorisation tenet of CLT to argue for an effect of construal level on brand extension evaluations. CLT posits that individuals mentally represent or construe objects or events at various levels (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). High-level construal is broad and general and considers the primary invariant features of objects whereas low-level construal contains specific, detailed and contextual information about objects (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007). See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of CLT and its categorisation tenet.

Prior studies have suggested that construal level systematically affects cognitive processing (Kirshner, 2021). High-level construal helps with the processing of gestalt whereas low-level construal enables the processing of details (Eleanor Amit et al., 2009). In other words, high-level construal focuses on the whole but low-level construal notices specific parts (Rim et al., 2015). These characteristics of construal level processing have important implications for brand extension evaluations because cognitive processing affects brand extension evaluations (e.g. Monga & John, 2007, 2010; Puligadda et al., 2013). Prior studies have shown that a processing style that is global (Puligadda et al., 2013) or holistic (Monga & John, 2007) increases perceived fit between a PB and a low-fit extension. A similar possibility has been suggested by construal level studies, which show that high-level construal leads to assimilation (Förster, 2009b; Förster et al., 2008) and a big-picture perspective (Kelting et al., 2019). Consequently, high-level construal leads consumers to relate a PB to its low-fit extension despite their remote associations.

Consumer studies have empirically shown that a high-level (low-level) construal results in perceived similarities (differences) among stimuli (Hong & Lee, 2010; Huang et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2013). More relevant to the current study, prior studies have demonstrated that consumers who have a communal-relationship (exchange-relationship) norm process information at a higher (lower) level of abstraction that leads them to perceive a low-fit extension as more similar (dissimilar) to a PB's product category, which consequently enhances the evaluation of low-fit extensions (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

Using these findings in relation to CLT, it can be predicted that a high versus low-level construal might blur the perceptual boundary between a PB and its low-fit extension

(Huang et al., 2017). As a result, consumers that are primed to have a high level of construal are more likely to find similarities between a PB and its low-fit extension thereby enhancing a favourable evaluation of the low-fit extension. Thus, for a low-fit extension, high-level construal consumers have a more favourable attitude than low-level construal consumers. However, for a high-fit extension, the high and low-level construal consumers do not evaluate the extension differently because the two types of consumers are equally likely to see a close fit between the two. For a high-fit extension, there are no significant differences in the attitudes between high-level and low-level construal consumers. The combination of these two effects suggested the following interaction hypothesis:

> ***H1:*** *There is a two-way interaction between extension fit (low v. high) and construal level (low v. high) such that (a) high-level rather than low-level construal participants show a more favourable attitude towards the low-fit extension but (b) this effect is not significant for a high-fit extension.*

The conceptual model of Study 1 is shown in Figure 3.1:

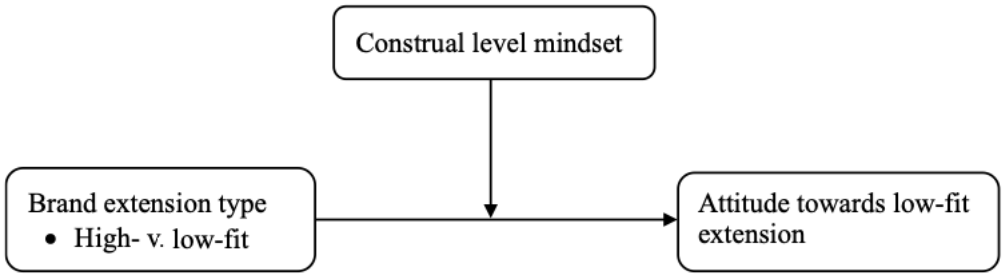

Figure 3.1: Study 1 conceptual model

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Research context

The developing market of Pakistan offers a suitable context for this study. Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world (Pakistan Finance Division, 2021) and has a population of more than 200 million, which is growing at a rate of 2.4% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2021). Despite the coronavirus disease pandemic, Pakistan's economy experienced a growth of 3.9% in fiscal year 2021, which was substantially higher than the targeted growth rate of 2.1% (Pakistan Finance Division, 2021). Per capita income increased by 13.4% in the same fiscal year (Rana, 2021). Moreover, almost 30% of the population belongs to the middle

class and has an estimated collective income of USD600 billion in purchasing power parity (Business Recorder, 2017). The expanding middle class in Pakistan has resulted in more demand for consumer goods, leading to tremendous growth of the CPG industry (Asghar, 2019). Pakistan's retail market growth forecast was 8.2% annually from 2016 to 2021, making it the fastest growing retail market in the world (Mangi, 2017). A report (*Food and Grocery Retail in Pakistan*, 2021) revealed that the compound annual growth rate of food and grocery retail in Pakistan was 8.3% between 2016 and 2020. Figure 3.2 shows several countries' retail market growth comparisons. This great potential has led many multinational consumer goods brands to make their brand extensions available in this market. For example, Pakistani retailers carry a variety of brand extensions of many consumer brands, such as L'Oréal, Dove and Colgate. Thus, Pakistan appears to be a suitable context for this study.

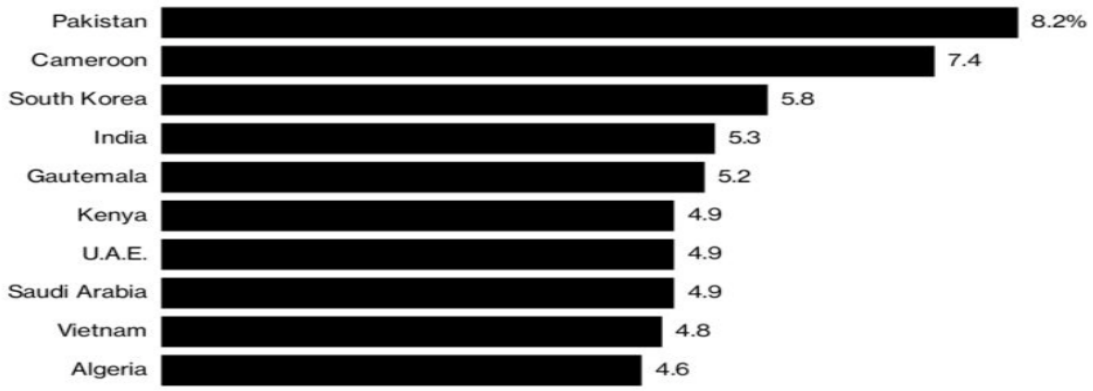

Figure 3.2: Projected average annual growth of world's fastest growing retail markets (Source: Euromonitor International, 2017)

3.3.2 Experimental design

To test the proposed hypotheses, a full-factorial 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (construal level: high, low) between-subjects experiment was conducted. Participants for all the pre-tests and the main experiment came from the same cohort of undergraduate business students at a major Pakistani public university. Different samples were used for each study; no students participated in more than one. Students as research participants are appropriate for tests of theory such as this one because they are more homogeneous in terms of age, occupation and education level, which helps to minimise extraneous sources of variance (Crompton, 1979) and enhance internal validity (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989). Importantly, Völckner and Sattler (2007) showed that the relationships between various success factors (e.g. PB affect, perceived similarity) and brand extension evaluations did not differ

substantially between student and consumer samples. Furthermore, it is a common practice in brand extension research to consider student samples (e.g. Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009; Kim & Park, 2019; Martin et al., 2005; Su et al., 2021). Before the main experiment, three pre-tests were conducted to select a PB and its high and low-fit extensions, experimental materials and construal level manipulation.

3.3.3 Pre-test 1: Selection of parent brand and extensions

Consistently with prior studies (Bambauer-Sachse et al., 2011; Gierl & Huettl, 2011; Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012; Parker et al., 2018), extension fit was manipulated by considering products in similar or dissimilar categories. Thus, the purpose of the first pre-test was to identify a real PB and its high and low-fit extensions. The existing brand extension literature suggests considering a PB that is well known and positively evaluated (Aaker, 1990; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). This is because the evaluation of a brand extension depends on the transfer of affect from the PB to its extension and thus high PB awareness and positive affect are prerequisites. Therefore, six real brands that were relevant to the student population were included in this pre-test to assess their level of awareness. These brands were Bata (shoes), Pepsi (soft drink), Lux (soap and shampoo), Cadbury (chocolate), Lipton (tea) and Colgate (toothpaste). Furthermore, eight potential extension products were identified for each PB such that four products were expected to have a high level of fit with the respective PB whereas the remaining four were expected to be low-fit products. The list of extension product categories is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Parent brands and proposed brand extensions

Brand	Proposed high-fit extensions	Proposed low-fit extensions
Pepsi	popcorn, lemon malt, milk soda, canned iced coffee	sunglasses, custard, biscuit, coffee maker
Cadbury	ice-cream, flavoured butter, jam, chocolate juice	soft drink, mineral water, tissue, tea
Lux	sunscreen, beauty cream, facial powder, facial wipes/tissue	sunglasses, chocolate, wallet, green tea
Colgate	freshening gum, lip gel, face wash gel, hand sanitiser	laundry detergent, chocolate, personal repellent, hair colour
Bata	sports bag, leather jackets, foot cream, leather suitcase	watch, surface cleaner, lawn mower, laundry detergent
Cornetto	milk pack, chocolate, custard, energy	hair oil, beauty cream, sauce, noodles

drink, juice

In an online survey, the participants were exposed to the six brands, one brand at a time. The appearance order of the brands was randomised. After each brand, the participants were asked to respond to two items measuring brand familiarity on a seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. known to me/not known to me, familiar/not familiar) that was adapted from Hirschman (1986). Next, the participants were informed that these brands were planning to extend into various product categories. The participants were then shown each PB and its eight extension products and were asked to rate the similarity of each extension to its relevant PB on a one-item seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. 1 = 'not at all similar' to 7 = 'extremely similar') that was adapted from Monga and John (2010). The order of appearance of these extension products was also randomised to prevent question order effects (McFarland, 1981) and to minimise potential common method bias in responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Table 3.2 shows each brand's mean familiarity score. It also shows the extension products that had the highest and lowest mean scores for brand extension similarity.

Table 3.2: Means of brand familiarity and perceived similarity of high and low-fit extensions

Parent brand	Brand familiarity	High-fit extension	Low-fit extension
Colgate	5.76	Freshening gum (4.42)	Dishwashing soap (3.26)
Pepsi	5.70	Energy drink (5.26)	Sunglasses (2.95)
Lux	5.47	Beauty cream (4.73)	Chocolate (2.83)
Bata	5.14	Leather suitcase (4.23)	Washing powder (2.89)
Cornetto	4.92	Chocolate (5.00)	Beauty soap (3.21)
Cadbury	4.11	Ice-cream (4.77)	Mouthwash (3.23)

Table 3.2 indicates that Colgate had the highest level of brand familiarity (M = 5.76), followed by Pepsi (M = 5.70). Clearly, the difference between the mean familiarity scores of Colgate and Pepsi was negligible. However, compared with Colgate's proposed extensions, Pepsi had higher and lower scores for its high and low-fit extensions, respectively. Thus, Pepsi was selected as a PB and energy drink and sunglasses as its high and low-fit extensions, respectively.

3.3.4 Pre-test 2: Experimental stimuli

The objective of this pre-test was to select two advertisements as the experimental stimuli for the main experiment: one for the high-fit extension and the other for the low-fit extension. Initially, two advertisements were designed for each high and low-fit extension (see Appendix I). Each advertisement contained an image of the brand extension (i.e. energy drink or sunglasses) and the PB name and logo (i.e. Pepsi). The advertising copy announced that the PB was introducing a brand extension. To select a suitable advertisement for each brand extension type, the four advertisements were pre-tested in terms of professionalism, appropriateness and realism. A single-item measure using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree') was used to assess each variable: professionalism ('This advertisement is professional'; R. Lee et al. (2021); Yang and Oliver (2004)), appropriateness ('This advertisement is appropriate'; Bottomley and Doyle (2006)) and realism ('This advertisement is real'; Cornelis and Peter (2017); R. Lee et al. (2021)).

A sample of 44 students was selected from the same population. Of these 44 participants, 22 were randomly exposed to two advertisements for the high-fit extension and the remaining 22 were exposed to two advertisements for the low-fit extension. Thus, this pre-test used a 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (advertisement type: ad#1, ad#2) mixed design, using extension fit as a between-subjects factor and advertisement type as a within-subjects factor. After initial instructions, the participants in each condition were exposed to two advertisements each, followed by items measuring advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism. The extension advertisements and the items measuring the advertisement characteristics appeared in a random order. At the end of the survey, all the participants were asked to rate their attitude towards Pepsi on three semantic differential items (1 = 'extremely unfavourable/negative/bad' to 7 = 'extremely favourable/positive/good') that were adapted from Samu et al. (1999) and Lee and Aaker (2004). The mean score indicated that attitude towards Pepsi was positive (M = 5.25, SD = 1.20).

A mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed using extension fit as the between-subjects factor and extension advertisement as the within-subjects factor to see whether the two advertisements in each condition (i.e. high and low-fit extension) differed in terms of professionalism, appropriateness and realism. Table 3.3 shows the mean and standard deviation of professionalism, appropriateness and realism for the high and low-fit extension advertisements.

Table 3.3: Mean and standard deviation of advertisement characteristics across high and low-fit extensions

Extension type	Ad#	Professionalism	Appropriateness	Realism
High fit	1	4.91 (1.63)	4.95 (1.81)	4.41 (1.62)
	2	4.77 (1.85)	4.60 (1.62)	4.82 (1.44)
Low fit	1	4.68 (1.52)	4.86 (1.58)	4.59 (1.41)
	2	4.32 (1.62)	4.45 (1.63)	4.45 (1.71)

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which controlled for multiple tests across the three dependent variables, revealed an insignificant effect of fit (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 0.01$, $F[2, 41] = 0.19$, $p = 0.83$), which indicated that the high and low-fit extension advertisements did not vary significantly in terms of advertisement professionalism, appropriateness or realism. Thus, the two advertisements for each high and low-fit extension were perceived as equally professional, appropriate and realistic. However, low-fit extension ad#1 was rated slightly higher than ad#2 for all the characteristics. Likewise, ad#1 for the high-fit extension was rated slightly higher than ad#2 for professionalism and appropriateness but not for realism. Furthermore, the average across professionalism, appropriateness and realism was slightly higher for high-fit extension ad#1 (4.76) than for high-fit extension ad#2 (4.73). Therefore, the advertisements numbered 1 were selected as the experimental stimuli for the high and low-fit extensions.

3.3.5 Pre-test 3: Construal level manipulation and manipulation checks

The final pre-test served to determine the method of construal level manipulation for this study. Several construal level manipulations are available in the literature, such as goal priming, the exemplars versus category task and the map task. A review of commonly used construal level manipulations and manipulation checks is provided in Appendix II. This review shows that Freitas et al.'s (2004) goal-priming task is one of the most well-established and widely used construal level manipulations (Burgoon et al., 2013). In this manipulation, the experimenter presents participants with a target goal that is unrelated to the study and asks them to describe 'why achieve the target goal' and 'how to achieve the target goal' to prime a high versus low-level construal mindset. More specifically, participants see a set of five vertically organised boxes and the first box contains the target goal. To prime a high-

level construal mindset, participants use the second box from the bottom to describe why they might like to achieve the target goal. Then, participants explain in the next box why they might want to achieve what they mentioned in the second box. In the next box, they answer why they might want to achieve what they mentioned in the third box. This process continues until the last box is filled. This construal level manipulation has also been used predominantly in consumer research (e.g. Chen, 2020; Hassan et al., 2020; Vilches-Montero & Spence, 2015; Williams et al., 2014). For example, Ding and Keh (2017) and Hassan et al. (2020) manipulated construal level using the original version of the goal-priming task to investigate the ways that construal level affects consumer responses to tangible (v. non-tangible) service attributes and comparable (v. non-comparable) choice sets, respectively. To further simplify the goal-priming task, consumer researchers have used modified versions of this task (e.g. Chen, 2020; Tsai & McGill, 2011; Vilches-Montero & Spence, 2015; Williams et al., 2014).

Unlike the original goal-priming task, some modified versions of this manipulation do not require participants to write responses in a hierarchy. For example, Williams et al. (2014) asked participants to indicate why and how they would donate to the Red Cross to manipulate high and low-level construal. A more recent study manipulated construal level by asking participants to describe in detail why or how they would take a holiday (Chen, 2020). These and many other studies suggest that the goal-priming task is not only a well-established construal level manipulation in psychology but also in consumer research. Therefore, consistently with prior studies in psychology (Alter et al., 2010; Carrera et al., 2020; Henderson, 2013) and consumer research (Tsai & McGill, 2011; Williams et al., 2014), this study used a modified version of the goal-priming task to induce high and low construal–level mindsets.

Furthermore, a review of construal level manipulations (see Appendix II) suggests that the BIF (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) is the predominant and established measure of construal level (Vilches-Montero & Spence, 2015; Williams et al., 2014). Most of the consumer studies have used the BIF to measure chronic construal or to check construal level manipulations (Cai & Leung, 2020; Ding et al., 2021; Sarial-Abi et al., 2021; Scarpi, 2021a; Wan & Rucker, 2013; Yang & Hu, 2023). Given that the BIF describes each action (e.g. eating) at a high level as ‘why’ (e.g. getting nutrition) and at a low level as ‘how’ (e.g. chewing and swallowing), it seems to be a natural manipulation check when construal level is primed through a why/how goal-priming task. Thus, the BIF was used as a manipulation check in this study. Specifically, a short version of the BIF scale comprising nine items was

used instead of the 25 items in the original BIF (see Appendix III). This is consistent with prior consumer studies that have applied short versions of the BIF that consisted of seven (Carrera et al., 2020), eight (Vilches-Montero & Spence, 2015), 10 (Tsai & McGill, 2011) and 13 (Alter et al., 2010) items. In addition to the BIF, this study used participants' textual responses to confirm the manipulations. Recent consumer research has also used this construal level manipulation check (Ding & Keh, 2017; McGowan et al., 2020).

3.3.5.1 Procedure and results

This pre-test considered three goals that were important and relevant to the target respondents. These goals were (1) achieving a good grade point average (GPA), (2) helping needy people and (3) maintaining and improving health. To pre-test this manipulation, a sample of 46 undergraduate students was taken from the same population. After responding to a few demographic questions, the participants were randomly assigned to either a high or low-level construal condition. Then, the participants read a paragraph that highlighted the importance of thinking about why or how to achieve a goal. The high-level construal participants read a paragraph that highlighted the importance of 'why achieve a goal' whereas the low-level construal participants read a paragraph that highlighted the importance of 'how to achieve a goal'. All the other content in the two paragraphs was the same. The two paragraphs are shown as follows:

> **High-level construal condition:** Focusing on 'why achieve a goal' is important. Research shows that understanding 'why achieve a goal' or 'the reason for achieving a goal' increases one's performance. Research also shows that people who focus on 'why achieve a goal' have more life satisfaction. This is because a greater focus on and knowledge of 'why achieve a goal' helps to achieve one's aims and goals. Thus, a great formula for a successful and happy life is to focus on and understand 'why achieve a goal'.
>
> **Low-level construal condition:** Focusing on 'how to achieve a goal' is important. Research shows that understanding 'how to achieve a goal' or 'the way of achieving a goal' increases one's performance. Research also shows that people who focus on 'how to achieve a goal' have more life satisfaction. This is because a greater focus on and knowledge of 'how to achieve a goal' helps to achieve one's aims and goals. Thus, a great formula for a successful and happy life is to focus on and understand 'how to achieve a goal'.

Having read this paragraph, the high-level construal participants were asked to write three reasons for achieving each of the three goals (i.e. achieving a good GPA, helping needy people and maintaining and improving health). However, the low-level construal participants were asked to write three ways to achieve each of the three goals. The participants wrote in three separate text boxes that were provided under each goal. After completing this writing task, the participants responded to a shortened nine-item measure of the BIF (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989).

A total of 48 participants completed the pre-test but two were removed from the sample because they did not complete the manipulation task. Of these 46 participants, 23 were in the low-level construal condition (i.e. the 'how' writing task) and the remaining 23 were in the high-level construal condition (the 'why' writing task). Each participant's response to each of the nine items of the BIF scale was assigned a value of 0 if it was low level or 1 if it was high level. Thus, the average of each participant's responses on the BIF scale ranged from 0 to 1 in which a higher score indicated more high-level construal. An independent samples *t*-test was run on the participants' average BIF scores to see whether the BIF score differed between the high and low-level construal participants. The results indicated that the participants who wrote about 'why achieve goals' (i.e. high-level construal) had a higher BIF score ($M = 0.86$, $SD = 0.14$) than those who wrote about 'how to achieve goals' ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 0.24$, $t[44] = 2.58$, $p = 0.01$). These results suggested that the construal level manipulation was successful.

The construal level manipulation was further checked through a procedure that was suggested by Freitas et al. (2004). First, two independent coders who were blind to the experimental conditions coded the participants' responses according to whether they represented 'means' or 'ends' in terms of the manipulation task (i.e. obtaining a good GPA, helping needy people, maintaining and improving health). They coded a response as −1 if it represented a 'means' to achieve the selected goals. However, if a response represented an 'end' or 'outcome' that resulted from the selected goals, a value of +1 was assigned to it by the coders. Further, a response was coded as 0 if it represented neither 'means' nor 'end'. Then, two construal level indices (one for each coder) were created by summing each participant's nine responses. Thus, each participant's construal level score ranged from −9 to +9 in which higher scores represented a higher construal level. The two construal level indices were highly correlated ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a very high consensus between the two coders. The two indices were then averaged to form a single construal level index. This was analysed to confirm the construal level manipulation. The results indicated

that the participants who were primed by 'why' questions generated more 'ends' (M = 8.78, SD = 0.65) whereas those who were primed by 'how' questions generated more 'means' (M = −8.20, SD = 1.44, t[44] = 51.60, p < 0.001). These results reinforced that the construal level manipulation was successful.

3.4 Main experiment

3.4.1 Design, participants and procedure

As was described earlier, this study used a 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (construal level: high, low) between-subjects design. Consistently with prior brand extension studies (Goedertier et al., 2015; Kim & Park, 2019; Monga & John, 2010; Su et al., 2021), a convenience sampling procedure was adopted to source study participants. A total of 124 undergraduate students from the same university, but who had not participated in the pre-tests, voluntarily participated in this experiment without credit. This experiment was run during the class. A class teacher was approached about the collection of the data. Having the approval and support of the teacher, a Qualtrics survey link was shared with students at the end of their class and they were invited to voluntarily participate in the survey before leaving the room. Using a provided script, the teacher explained to the class that the survey was about understanding the ways that people view product advertisements and did not give any further details. The survey randomly assigned each participant to one of the four experimental conditions.

After reading the cover story and answering the demographic questions, each participant was assigned to either a high or low-level construal mindset-priming task. As was described in Pre-test 3, the participants in the high-level construal mindset condition were asked to write three reasons for each of the three goals (i.e. obtaining a good GPA, helping needy people and maintaining and improving good health) whereas the participants in the low-level construal mindset condition were asked to write three ways to achieve each of the three goals. After being primed with either a high or low-level construal mindset, the participants were randomly exposed to an advertisement for either a high or low-fit extension. Finally, the participants responded to measures of the dependent variables and manipulation checks.

3.4.2 Measures

This study adapted established measures of variables of interest from existing studies. Three items, adapted from Simonin and Ruth (1998) and Lee and Aaker (2004), were used to assess participants' attitude towards the extension on a seven-point Likert scale. Perceived fit between the PB and the extension was measured using a two-item seven-point Likert scale, which was adapted from Su et al. (2021). Finally, similar to Pre-test 3, nine BIF items, each with two options, which were adopted from Vallacher and Wegner (1989), were used to measure construal level. The items of all the measures and their reliabilities are shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Scale items and their reliabilities (i.e. Cronbach's alpha score)

Construct	Measure items
Attitude towards the extension (α = 0.86)	I have a positive attitude towards Pepsi < extension > . My evaluation of Pepsi < extension > is good. My opinion about Pepsi < extension > is favourable. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
Extension perceived fit (α = 0.88)	<extension product > fits with Pepsi. <extension product > is consistent with < parent brand>. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
BIF (α = 0.81)	See nine items of BIF scale in Appendix III

3.5 Analysis and results

3.5.1 Manipulation checks

Before reporting the results, it is important to note that this thesis used one-tailed *t*-tests for all the directional hypotheses.

Extension fit: The manipulation of extension fit was successful because the participants perceived the energy drink as more fitting with Pepsi than sunglasses ($M_{energy\ drink}$ = 5.13, *SD* = 1.69 v. $M_{sunglasses}$ = 3.05, *SD* = 1.89, $t[122] = 6.48$, $p < 0.001$).

Construal level: The mean scores of the nine items of the BIF showed that the participants in the high-level construal mindset condition selected more high-level or abstract descriptions of the given actions whereas the participants in the low-level construal mindset condition selected more low-level or concrete descriptions of the given actions

($M_{high\ construal}$ = 0.80, *SD* = 0.23 v. $M_{low\ construal}$ = 0.70, *SD* = 0.30, *t*[122] = 2.02, *p* = 0.045). Thus, the manipulation of construal level mindset was successful.

Similar to Pre-test 3, the construal level manipulation was further checked by coding participants' textual responses (Freitas et al., 2004). 'Ends' (higher goals) in terms of the prime (e.g. maintaining and improving health) were coded +1 and 'means' (ways) of achieving the prime were coded −1. The sums of these codes from two independent judges across the three priming tasks were highly correlated (*r* = 0.86, *p* < 0.001), indicating a very high consensus between the two coders. The two coders' indices were then averaged to form a single construal level index, which was analysed to check the construal level manipulation. The results of an independent samples *t*-test indicated that the participants who were primed by 'why' questions generated more 'ends' (*M* = 7.22, *SD* = 2.18) whereas those who were primed by 'how' questions generated more 'means' (*M* = −5.06, *SD* = 3.69, *t*[122] = 22.62, *p* < 0.001). Thus, the BIF and the analysis of textual responses indicated that the construal level manipulation was successful.

3.5.2 Hypotheses testing

An ANOVA was run to test the main and interactive effects of extension fit and construal level on attitude towards the extension. The ANOVA results indicated that extension fit had a significant main effect on attitude towards the extension (*F*[1, 120] = 4.86, *p* = 0.03, η_p^2 = 0.04). However, the main effect of construal level on attitude towards the extension was not significant (*F*[1, 120] = 2.72, *p* = 0.10, η_p^2 = 0.02). Further, the hypothesised interaction between extension fit and construal level was not significant (*F*[1, 120) = 0.72, *p* = 0.40, η_p^2 = 0.01). Interaction effects are notoriously difficult to detect (Hayes, 2015) and this study was very likely underpowered to detect a significant interaction between construal level and fit. A sample of 124 has a less than 70% chance of detecting a significant (*p* < 0.05), medium-sized interaction effect (η_p^2 = 0.06), according to G*Power (Faul et al., 2007).

Some researchers have argued that interaction hypotheses can still be tested by simple effects tests even though they are not significant in an ANOVA test (e.g. Winer et al., 1991). Therefore, to test H1, follow-up simple effects analyses were conducted on the interaction between extension fit and construal level. Specifically, one-tailed *t*-tests were conducted to perform means comparisons across the experimental conditions. The results of the independent sample *t*-tests revealed that unlike the low-level construal mindset participants,

the participants who had a high-level construal mindset had a more favourable attitude towards the low-fit extension ($M_{\text{high construal}} = 4.53$, $SD = 1.35$ v. $M_{\text{low construal}} = 3.82$, $SD = 1.84$, $t[58] = 1.72$, $p = 0.047$, $d = 0.44$). However, as was predicted by H1b, the participants in the high and low-level construal mindset conditions did not differ in their attitudes towards a high-fit extension ($M_{\text{high construal}} = 4.92$, $SD = 1.52$ v. $M_{\text{low construal}} = 4.69$, $SD = 1.59$, $t[62] = 0.59$, $p = 0.28$). These results supported H1a and H1b. Figure 3.3 shows these results.

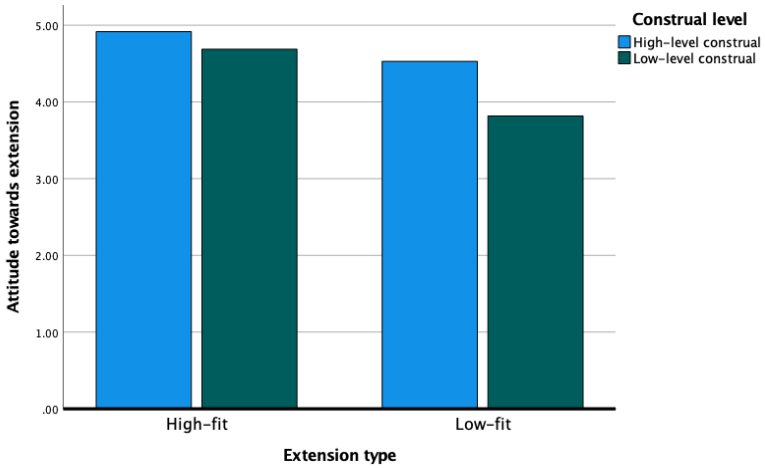

Figure 3.3: ANOVA results for attitude towards extension

This study considered attitudes towards brand extensions as an outcome variable and a proxy for actual purchase behaviour. Although most early social psychological studies accepted attitude as a key determinant of actual behaviour (e.g. Stagner, 1942; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918; Thurstone & Chave, 1929; Watson, 1925), several researchers have reported that attitude can have little or no correlation with actual behaviour (e.g. Corey, 1937; DeFleur & Westie, 1958; LaPiere, 1934; Wicker, 1969). Instead of attitude, intention has been posited as the most important determinant of actual behaviour (e.g. Ajzen, 1991, 2011; Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015; Richetin et al., 2011; Sheppard et al., 1988). Therefore, a post-hoc analysis was performed to determine whether attitude towards extension is correlated with purchase intention. A single-item scale (i.e. 'I am likely to buy Pepsi < extension>', 1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree') was adapted from MacKenzie et al. (1986) to measure extension purchase intention. The results of the correlational analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between attitude towards the brand extension and extension purchase intention ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$).

3.6 Discussion

3.6.1 General findings and implications

Brand extension has become a popular strategy to introduce new products (Hayran & Gürhan-Canli, 2016). Study 1 demonstrated the moderating role of construal level on attitudes towards brand extensions at various levels of perceived parent–extension fit. The results of this study revealed that high versus low-level construal consumers showed more favourable attitudes towards a low-fit brand extension. However, low and high-level construal consumers held similar attitudes towards high-fit brand extensions. Furthermore, additional analysis demonstrated that high versus low-level construal led to a greater level of perception of fit between the PB and a low-fit extension. These findings are consistent with what has been hypothesised using CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010): a high versus low-level construal would result in a higher level of perceived fit between the PB and its low-fit extension, which, in turn, would result in more positive evaluations of the low-fit extension. These findings are also consistent with prior studies that indicate that global (i.e. abstract) versus local (i.e. concrete) processing leads to more favourable evaluations of low-fit brand extensions (Puligadda et al., 2013).

This study has important theoretical implications. First, it contributes to the brand extension literature that demonstrates the effect of various situational factors on brand extension evaluations (Meyvis et al., 2012; Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). Specifically, it applied the categorisation tenet of CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010) to assess the impact of a high-level construal mindset on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions in the context of Pakistan. The findings suggest that the effect of construal level on low-fit extension evaluations in Pakistan is similar to that found in the US. Thus, it contributes to an emerging stream of consumer research, revealing that high-level construal leads to more favourable evaluations of low-fit brand extensions, in line with CLT's categorisation tenet, in which high-level construal leads to perceptions of greater levels of similarity (e.g. Lamberton & Diehl, 2013; McGowan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2013).

The findings of this study offer several important implications to marketers about low-fit extensions. The prevailing view suggests that brands should not extend to distant product categories because they are more difficult to be accepted. However, many strong brands find distant product categories highly attractive (Su et al., 2021) because they offer substantial growth potential (Chun et al., 2015). Thus, it is important to understand ways to

improve the evaluation of low-fit extensions. In this regard, the findings of the current study reveal that evoking a high level of construal can improve the evaluation of low-fit extensions. Therefore, marketers should employ tactics that evoke high-level construal to enhance the evaluation of low-fit extensions. Given that various construal levels can be induced by factors that can be measured or controlled by marketers, such as advertising elements (Tok et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2021), the consumer's buying stage (Ma et al., 2023) and price judgements (Saint Clair et al., 2019), these factors may help marketers to enhance low-fit extension evaluations. For example, the evaluation of low-fit extensions can be improved by distant future pre-announcements because these evoke high-level construal (Y. Zhang et al., 2020).

3.6.2 Limitations

Although this study offers useful theoretical and practical contributions to brand extension research, it has several limitations. First, Study 1 was conducted in Pakistan using student samples. Past studies indicate that consumer evaluations of brand extensions differ across countries (Kim & Park, 2019; Monga & John, 2007). Specifically, Kim and Park (2019) study suggests the importance of comparing consumers from different cultures because their differing processing styles may influence their evaluations of brand extensions. Furthermore, scholars have recommended using heterogenous adult populations in subsequent studies after testing the initial theory using student samples (Ashraf & Merunka, 2017). Thus, it is important to test whether the results in this study are replicable in a culturally different context.

Second, the current study evoked a higher-level construal mindset through a well-established priming task. However, it is not feasible for marketers to use this priming task to influence brand extension evaluations. Thus, a construal level manipulation that is relevant to marketing practices would be more useful. The construal level literature suggests that abstract versus concrete language can affect temporal distance (Semin & Smith, 1999), which is one of the main determinants of construal level. Other studies have shown that abstract versus concrete language affects high versus low-level construal (Fujita, Trope, et al., 2006, Study 5; Stapel & Semin, 2007). Consistently, advertising studies have suggested that advertising appeals, such as abstract versus concrete appeals, can evoke different construal levels (Qin et al., 2022). Finally, although this study provided initial evidence for the effect of construal level on the perception of similarity, it did not test the process that underlies the effect of construal levels on brand extension evaluations. Therefore, it is important to examine the

ways that construal levels that are evoked by advertising appeals (abstract and concrete advertisements) influence the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

The main limitation of this study was that it was underpowered to test its interaction hypothesis. Future studies should perform a power analysis before conducting the study to determine a priori what sample size is needed to detect the hypothesised effects using sufficient power.

To address the aforementioned limitations, this thesis conducted a subsequent study, Study 2, using US consumers as the research participants. Study 2 extends the current study by manipulating construal levels through abstract and concrete advertising appeals thereby enhancing its practical implications. It examines whether perceived fit is the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Finally, a power analysis that was carried out before the experiment ensured that the sample size that was collected had more than 80% power to detect the hypothesised effects.

Chapter 4: Study 2

So far, this thesis has discussed the importance of increasing the success rate for brand extensions that have a low level of perceived fit with the PB (Chapter 1). As Study 1 showed, one way to do this is to manipulate consumers' thinking styles to be either high or low in construal level. That study drew on the categorisation tenet of CLT, which says that a high construal level allows more similarities to be seen between a low-fit extension and its PB. The findings of Study 1 showed that, most likely because of this greater level of perceived similarity, high-level construal was associated with more favourable evaluations of a low-fit extension. However, these findings had little practical benefit because brand managers cannot directly manipulate consumers' construal mindset using manipulation tasks such as the one that was used in Study 1.

To overcome this weakness, Study 2, which is reported in this chapter, explores the effects of more subtle manipulations of construal level thinking, such as using a certain messaging approach in advertisements. In other words, Studies 1 and 2 differ in the following ways on how construal level can influence perceived fit: Study 1 used a priming task to manipulate participants' mindsets to be high or low construal and then measured participants' evaluations of a low-fit brand extension (the Pepsi brand sunglasses). However, Study 2 uses exposure to certain stimuli (advertisements) as the task to prime participants' construal level mindset, which subsequently influences their evaluation of a low-fit brand extension.
Study 2's approach is plausible because the CLT literature reveals that construal level can be evoked through message characteristics, such as language abstraction (Fujita, Trope, et al., 2006), and the formation of construal level is bidirectional. For example, Liberman, Trope, McCrea, et al. (2007) showed that construal level can influence perceptions of psychological distance just as perceived psychological distance can influence construal level

Specifically, Study 2 examines whether abstract versus concrete advertising appeals, because of their differential construal level characteristics, can influence the effects of perceived fit on attitude towards a low-fit brand extension. Further, Study 2 enhances the generalisability of Study 1 by conducting the study in a developed country that has a different culture (the US).

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. It first reviews the relevant literature on the role of advertising in brand extension promotions before developing research hypotheses. Then, it describes the research design and the results, followed by a discussion

section. Finally, it presents managerial and theoretical implications and highlights some limitations and directions for future research.

4.1 Role of advertising in brand extension evaluations

The brand extension literature has acknowledged the important role of advertising in enhancing brand extension evaluations (Athanasopoulou et al., 2015; Boush, 1993; Bridges et al., 2000; Kim, 2003; Lane, 2000; Sattler et al., 2010). Given that the perceived fit between an extension and the PB is a key driver of brand extension evaluation (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Ahluwalia, 2008; Völckner & Sattler, 2007), scholars have investigated mainly the ways that advertising can increase perceived fit and thereby improve the evaluation of the brand's extension (e.g. Baek & King, 2015; Martin et al., 2005; Puligadda et al., 2013). For example, perceived fit is enhanced by goal-congruent advertising (i.e. advertising that highlights a goal that is associated with the PB and the extension), resulting in a more favourable evaluation of a low-fit extension (Martin et al., 2005). A goal-congruent advertisement helps consumers to see connections between the PB and its extension thereby enhancing perceived fit.

Similarly, Lane (2000) indicated that advertisement repetition enhances brand extension evaluations. Specifically, by considering four brands (e.g. Michelin), each with a high-fit extension (e.g. for Michelin, a bicycle tyre) and a low-fit extension (e.g. sports sandals), the author demonstrated that evaluations of low-fit extensions were more favourable after repeated advertisement exposure (i.e. five exposures) than a single exposure. The author explained that the repeated advertisement exposure might have facilitated the creation of ad hoc product categories that were associated with the PB, resulting in increased perceived fit between the parent and extension.

Prior studies have shown that advertising appeals may influence perceived fit and, ultimately, brand extension evaluation. The selection of an appropriate advertising appeal is a critical first step when designing any advertising campaign (Sharma & Singh, 2021). The term 'advertising appeal' refers to the content and form of the advertising message (S. Wang et al., 2018). Thus, advertisers can create different advertising appeals by altering the elements of the advertising messages (Tok et al., 2021).

Puligadda et al. (2013) showed that a comparison appeal, which compares the extension with the PB, leads to a more favourable evaluation of a high-fit extension than a low-fit extension. The authors argued that this effect emerged because a comparative advertising appeal highlights the contrasts between the parent and the extension thereby

decreasing perceived fit and the favourability of low-fit extension evaluations. Similarly, Dens and De Pelsmacker (2010a) examined the effects of emotional versus rational appeals on extension evaluations. They found that an emotional appeal is more effective for high-fit extensions. Similarly to in their study on relation and elaboration appeals (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2016), they asserted that an emotional advertising appeal induces category-based processing by providing a strong PB cue thereby facilitating positive affect transfer from the parent to a high-fit extension. They argued that such facilitation cannot occur for a low-fit extension because of the category-based processing that is induced by the emotional appeal. However, an informational advertising appeal highlights the unique attributes of the low-fit extension, encouraging consumers to evaluate low-fit extensions using these attributes instead of perceived fit and positive affect transfer.

In essence, the earlier review shows that advertising using appropriate appeals can enhance the evaluation of brand extensions. Despite a considerable number of studies on this topic, researchers still highlight a lack of studies that compare the effectiveness of a wide range of advertising appeals for improving brand extension evaluations (Baek, 2011; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Martin et al., 2005). This lack of research means that marketers need more empirical guidance about the ways that advertising appeals can help to introduce brand extensions successfully (Martin et al., 2005). Marketers would benefit from empirical evidence on the effectiveness of other commonly used advertising appeals in addition to the comparison and emotional versus rational appeals that have been investigated. In addressing this gap, Study 2 specifically argues that abstract versus concrete advertising appeals, which are commonly used in advertising (d'Astous & Mathieu, 2008; Yang et al., 2015), may be relevant for promoting brand extensions.

4.1.1 Abstract and concrete advertising appeals

The level of abstraction that is used in advertising copy determines whether an appeal is abstract or concrete (Wang & Lehto, 2020). An abstract advertising message displays information in a way that is highly interpretive (e.g. ‘Destination A is an exciting water sports destination’) whereas a concrete advertising message delivers information in an objective manner (e.g. ‘Destination A provides various water sports activities’; Wang and Lehto (2020)). In other words, an abstract appeal uses general and vague wording and contains a more ambiguous or subjective description of a product’s features (Hur et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2015). However, a concrete appeal contains details of observable information and uses a

more specific or objective description of a product's features (MacKenzie, 1986; Yang et al., 2015). In short, an abstract appeal contains a more generic message whereas a concrete appeal carries a more specific message (Schuetz et al., 2020). Indeed, there are many similarities between concrete appeals and the more widely researched rational appeals, as well as similarities between abstract appeals and emotional/metaphorical appeals (Hornik et al., 2017). Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide examples of advertisements that have concrete and abstract appeals.

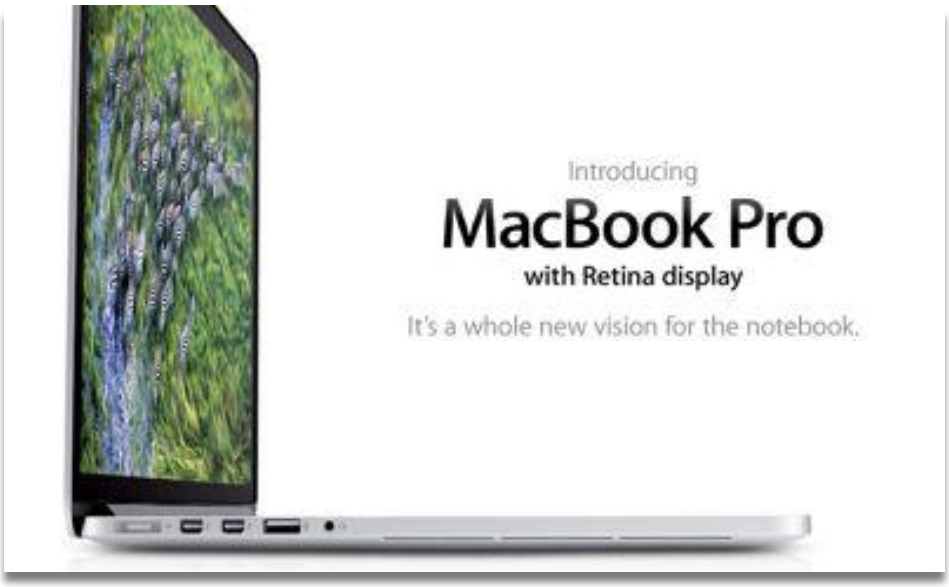

Figure 4.1: Abstract advertising appeal



Figure 4.2: Concrete advertising appeal

Concrete and abstract advertising appeals have different effects on consumer behaviour. For example, a concrete appeal in a corporate social responsibility communication generated a more favourable attitude towards the brand than an abstract appeal (Robinson & Eilert, 2018). In charity advertising, a concrete message had a greater level of influence on donation behaviour than an abstract message (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). A concrete fear appeal is also more effective in generating fear appeal-related responses (e.g. threat severity, threat vulnerability, protection motivation) than an abstract fear appeal (Schuetz et al., 2020).

Despite the differential effects of advertising appeals that use abstract and concrete language in various advertising contexts, no studies have examined the effectiveness of these appeals for improving brand extension evaluations. Furthermore, the efficacy of these two appeals may depend on the context. Although the aforementioned examples support the superiority of concrete appeals, others have found abstract appeals to be more effective in different contexts. For example, an abstract appeal had more impact than a concrete appeal on purchase intentions for green products when green products were associated with psychologically distant benefits for other consumers (Yang et al., 2015). This raises the question of which appeal is more effective in the context of brand extensions, particularly for low-fit brand extensions. Given the potential practical and theoretical significance of using advertising appeals to successfully launch low-fit brand extensions, the current study addresses this gap by examining the effectiveness of abstract and concrete appeals in improving brand extension evaluations.

Intuitively, abstract and concrete appeals seem important for promoting brand extensions. Abstract and concrete appeals may have different effects on brand extension evaluations because they are associated with different construal levels (Huang et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2020; Wang & Lehto, 2020). Specifically, the advertising literature indicates that abstract appeals are associated with high-level construal and concrete appeals are associated with low-level construal (Schuetz et al., 2020). Furthermore, high and low-level construal leads to assimilation and contrast effects, respectively, on stimuli processing (Liberman et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, it is expected that abstract and concrete appeals affect consumers' perceptions of fit between a PB and its extension, potentially influencing the evaluation of a low-fit extension. As the next section discusses, this argument is consistent with CLT, which links abstract versus concrete appeals to high versus low-level construal (Hur et al., 2020; Kim, Yoo, et al., 2018; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021).

4.1.2 Construal level theory perspectives of abstract and concrete advertising appeals

Construal level studies have suggested that language can vary in its level of abstraction (Trope et al., 2021). The level of abstraction that is used in language corresponds to the way that people mentally represent reality (Magee et al., 2010). Specifically, an abstract message is represented at a high level of construal because it provides more generic information whereas a concrete message is represented at a low level of construal because it is more specific (Schuetz et al., 2020). Given that psychological distance predicts construal level (see Section 2.2), scholars have shown that psychological distance influences language abstraction, which means that language usage can be a manipulation check measure for CLT experiments. For example, Fujita, Henderson, et al. (2006) reported that spatial distance influences response abstraction. Specifically, they asked participants to watch a video of two students talking in an empty classroom. High-level construal was primed by informing the participants that this video was filmed at the spatially distant New York University campus in France whereas low-level construal was primed by informing the participants that the video was filmed at the spatially proximal New York campus (at which the student participants were located). Next, the participants were asked to write what they saw in the video. The findings showed that the participants generated more abstract descriptions of the video in the spatially distant (i.e. high-level construal) condition and more concrete descriptions in the spatially proximal (i.e. low-level construal) condition.

Moreover, people used more abstract language to describe the actions of another person (i.e. high level of social distance) versus oneself (i.e. low level of social distance; Fiedler et al. (1995); Semin and Fiedler (1989)). Likewise, speakers tended to use abstract versus concrete language when the number of audience members was larger versus smaller (i.e. high v. low level of psychological distance; Joshi and Wakslak (2014)). Furthermore, given that the relationship between psychological distance and construal level is bidirectional (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wakslak & Trope, 2009), language abstraction can affect psychological distance. For example, individuals recalled events that occurred in the more distant past (i.e. greater level of temporal distance) when they received abstract event retrieval cues (i.e. adjectives) instead of concrete event retrieval cues (i.e. verbs; Semin and Smith (1999)). Likewise, Qin et al. (2022) demonstrated that participants perceived negative consequences of opioid misuse to be temporally distant (v. closer) when they saw abstract (v. concrete) health messages about the negative consequences of opioid misuse. Temporal distance is one of the main predictors of construal level (Eyal et al., 2004; Liberman et al.,

2002; Trope & Liberman, 2000) and has been used as a construal level manipulation check. For example, Durkin et al. (2020) used psychological distance (i.e. temporal and spatial) to confirm the impact of abstract versus representational art (i.e. art without v. with objects or scenes) on a construal level mindset. Thus, an abstract versus concrete message can activate a high versus low-level construal mindset because it affects temporal distance.

Several studies have empirically confirmed the impact of message abstraction on an individual's construal level mindset. For example, Fujita, Trope, et al. (2006; Study 5) successfully manipulated individuals' high-level (v. low-level) construal of self-control conflicts by describing self-control conflict situations using abstract (v. concrete) language. Similarly, Stapel and Semin (2007) demonstrated that priming using an abstract message (e.g. describing the personality of chess pieces) led individuals to focus more on the global features of stimuli. However, a concrete message (e.g. describing the behaviour of chess pieces) caused greater levels of attention on the local features of stimuli. In addition, they examined the impact of language abstraction on categorisation by priming abstract versus concrete language using adjectives versus action verbs. They found that the abstract language resulted in broader categorisation than concrete language.

To summarise, a large body of advertising research has investigated the effectiveness of abstract and concrete appeals in various contexts by successfully applying the construal level findings that abstract versus concrete appeals correspond to high versus low-level construal (Massara et al., 2020; Schuetz et al., 2020). Building on this literature and CLT, the current study examines the effectiveness of abstract and concrete appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

4.2 Hypotheses development

The literature review on abstract and concrete appeals presented earlier established that an abstract versus a concrete appeal evokes high versus low-level construal. This finding has important implications for postulating the effect of abstract and concrete appeals on brand extension evaluations. The review of the categorisation tenet of CLT that was presented in Section 2.3 (Chapter 2) suggests that a high, rather than a low, construal level leads to people categorising objects into fewer broader categories (Liberman et al., 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wakslak et al., 2006). This broader categorisation effect occurs because high-level construal causes assimilation rather than contrast (McGowan et al., 2020).

Individuals who have a high level of construal focus on a few central, invariant and decontextualised features of objects. These shared features, in turn, create connections among these objects (McGowan et al., 2020; Rosch, 1975). In other words, high-level construal individuals are more likely to find commonalities between objects (Förster et al., 2008) because they look for overarching themes (Malkoc et al., 2005). Consequently, high-level construal leads to perceived similarity and more inclusive categorisation whereas low-level construal increases perceived dissimilarity and exclusive categorisation (Clair et al., 2019). Notably, construal level and perceived similarity are so strongly connected that researchers have manipulated construal level by asking participants to focus on similarities or dissimilarities (Burgoon et al., 2013).

Using the earlier discussion, an abstract appeal should encourage high-level construal and assimilation processing. This should result in greater levels of perceived similarity between the PB and the low-fit extension so that a low-fit extension is categorised alongside its PB. Categorisation using the PB should encourage positive affect transfer from the parent to the extension, leading to a more favourable evaluation of the low-fit extension (e.g. Park et al., 1991; Sunde & Brodie, 1993). This prediction is consistent with construal level and language abstraction studies that indicate that abstract language (e.g. an abstract advertising appeal) describes situations or stimuli in a highly generalised manner and encourages a focus on broader meaning (Stapel & Semin, 2007; Wakslak & Joshi, 2020; Wakslak et al., 2014; X. Wang et al., 2022). However, concrete language focuses on the contextualised and local details of stimuli (Stapel & Semin, 2007; Ter Doest et al., 2002) so it is likely to evoke contrast processing and therefore a focus on the dissimilarities between the PB and the low-fit extension. Thus, a concrete appeal may lower the level of perceived fit between the PB and the low-fit extension, blocking positive affect transfer from the parent to the extension and resulting in a less favourable evaluation of the low-fit extension. In summary, a low-fit extension is evaluated more favourably when an abstract advertising appeal is used, rather than a concrete advertising appeal. For a low-fit brand extension, an abstract advertising appeal creates a more favourable attitude towards the extension than a concrete advertising appeal. However, this difference between abstract and concrete appeals does not emerge for a high-fit extension because the perceived similarity between the parent and the extension is already very high. For a high-fit brand extension, attitude towards the extension does not differ between an abstract and concrete advertising appeal. Thus, it was hypothesised that:

H2: *There is a statistically significant two-way interaction between extension fit (low v. high) and advertising appeal (abstract v. concrete) such that (a) attitude towards a low-fit extension is more favourable using an abstract rather than a concrete appeal but (b) this effect of advertising appeal is not significant for a high-fit extension.*

The aforementioned hypotheses use the argument that an abstract (v. concrete) appeal leads to a higher level of perception of fit between the PB and its low-fit extension thereby improving the favourability of attitude towards the low-fit extension. As was discussed earlier, this argument is consistent with the categorisation tenet of CLT (Wakslak & Joshi, 2020; Wakslak et al., 2014) and the literature on language abstraction (Stapel & Semin, 2007). To empirically confirm this postulation, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: *Perceived fit mediates the interactive effect of advertising appeal and extension fit on attitude towards the brand extension.*

The conceptual model of Study 2 is shown in Figure 4.3.

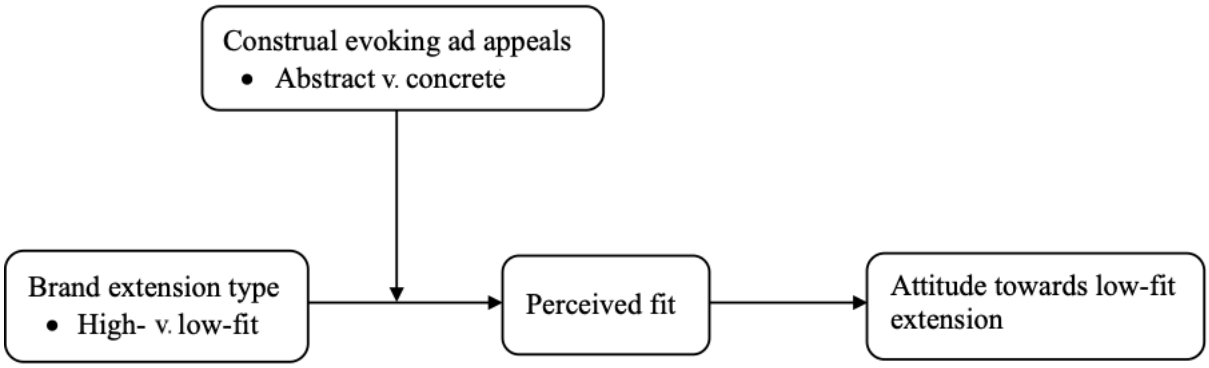

Figure 4.3: Study 2 conceptual model

4.3 Research design

4.3.1 Data source

The experiment was programmed using Qualtrics software. US adult consumers, recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), served as the research participants for the pre-tests and the main experiment. MTurk, a crowdsourcing platform that allows researchers

to recruit research participants, has become a popular and essential data collection tool that enables marketing researchers to quickly obtain inexpensive data from a diverse pool of participants (Feitosa et al., 2015; Matherly, 2019; Paolacci et al., 2010). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the quality of the data that are obtained from MTurk participants is comparable to that of data collected from members of online marketing research panels (Buhrmester et al., 2018) and students (Behrend et al., 2011). Some advertising researchers have shown that MTurk data has outperformed data that were obtained from online panels and students across several quality measures (e.g. attention checks, reliability; Kees et al. (2017)). According to these findings, they concluded that MTurk is a viable platform for obtaining participants for advertising experiments. Thus, MTurk appears to be an appropriate platform to recruit participants for this study.

Researchers recommend applying several quality-control tactics when procuring samples via MTurk to further ensure high-quality data. Specifically, researchers have suggested using attention check questions (Barger & Sinar, 2011; Paolacci et al., 2010; S. M. Smith et al., 2016) and a timer (Sheehan, 2018) in the survey to overcome the issues of participants' inattentiveness and speedy responses. The attention-quality filter helps to screen out participants who fail to correctly answer attention check questions because of inattentiveness whereas the timer stops participants' progress for a specific time to give them full exposure to the stimuli (e.g. the full duration of a video stimulus). Therefore, the current study used an attention check question ('If you are attentive, then please select strongly disagree') in the middle of the survey and set a timer for the survey screens that showed the experimental stimuli (i.e. the brand extension advertisements) such that participants were not able to click the next button for eight seconds.

MTurk provides options to set qualification filters for participation, including location, total HITs (human intelligence tasks) completed and approval rate (i.e. percentage of tasks that requesters approved). Researchers have suggested using quality filters to maximise data quality (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). Given that US adult consumers were the population of this study, the location qualification was set as the US. Moreover, the minimum number of HITs completed was set to 5,000. Consistently with previous studies (Barger & Sinar, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012; Matherly, 2019), a minimum 97% approval rate was set. Indeed, a high approval rate (i.e. above 95%) positively contributes to data quality (Peer et al., 2014). Finally, following the advice of Buchheit et al. (2018), a custom qualification was created and applied to prevent MTurk workers from participating in more than one pre-test or main experiment.

Before performing the main study, three pre-tests were conducted to (1) select a suitable PB and its high and low-fit extensions, (2) check whether the advertising manipulations were perceived as intended and (3) assess the professionalism, appropriateness and realism of the advertisements.

4.3.2 Pre-test 1: Selection of parent brand and brand extensions

The purpose of this pre-test was to identify a real PB and its potential high and low-fit extensions. Given that the evaluation of a brand extension depends on the transfer of affect from the PB to the extension, prior studies have suggested considering a PB that is well known and positively evaluated (Aaker, 1990; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). In other words, participants' familiarity with and positive evaluations of the PB are the prerequisite for PBs in brand extension research. Furthermore, following prior studies (Bambauer-Sachse et al., 2011; Gierl & Huettl, 2011; Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012; Parker et al., 2018), the perceived extension fit was manipulated by considering product categories that were similar or dissimilar to the PB's product category (or categories).

This pre-test considered four PBs and, for each PB, two potential brand extensions, one having a high level of fit and the other a low level. Unlike pre-test 1 of Study 1, this pre-test considered only one potential high-fit and one potential low-fit extension to avoid redundancy resulting from little variations in the perceived brand-extension similarity of extensions within each category (i.e. high- v. low-fit). Table 4.1 shows these PBs and their potential high and low-fit extensions.

Table 4.1: Parent brands and their high and low-fit extensions

Parent brand	High-fit extension	Low-fit extension
Nikon	Instant printer	Mountain bicycle
Philips	Camera	Furniture
Kellogg's	Instant coffee	Body spray
Nivea	Mouthwash	Chocolate

Sixty-nine US adult consumers (66.67% males; average age = 37.93 years), recruited via MTurk, participated in this pre-test. After the initial instructions, the participants saw each PB followed by either its high or low-fit extension. In other words, a mixed experimental design was used in which PB was a within-subjects factor whereas brand extension type served as a between-subjects factor. The appearance order of the PBs and extensions was

randomised to prevent question order effects (McFarland, 1981) and to minimise potential common method bias in the responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The participants first rated their familiarity with and attitude towards each PB. A single-item scale (i.e. 'how familiar are you with < parent brand >?'), which was adapted from Su et al. (2021), was used to measure brand familiarity on a seven-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = 'extremely unfamiliar' to 7 = 'extremely familiar'). Likewise, a one-item scale (i.e. 'my attitude towards < parent brand name > is:') was adapted from Su et al. (2021) to measure attitude towards the PB on a seven-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = 'extremely unfavourable', 7 = 'extremely favourable'). Then, the participants were informed that the brand was planning to introduce either a high or low-fit extension, followed by a question (i.e. 'Please rate the extent to which < brand extension > fits with the brand < parent brand>'), which measured their perception of the fit between the PB and its extension on a seven-point bipolar scale (1 = 'does not fit with < parent brand >', 7 = 'fits with < parent brand >') that was adapted from Su et al. (2021). Table 4.2 shows the average familiarity and attitude scores for the four PBs. Moreover, it contains the average perceived-fit scores for the brand extensions.

Table 4.2: Mean (standard deviation) of brand familiarity, brand attitude and perceived parent–extension fit

Parent brand	Brand familiarity	Brand attitude	Perceived extension fit	
			HF extension	LF extension
Kellogg's	5.88 (1.07)	5.55 (0.93)	Instant coffee 5.38 (0.92)	Body spray 3.34 (2.10)
Philips	5.52 (1.24)	5.45 (0.97)	Camera 5.48 (1.60)	Furniture 4.33 (1.77)
Nikon	5.41 (1.44)	5.55 (0.97)	Instant printer 5.85 (1.15)	Mountain bicycle 4.26 (1.86)
Nivea	5.23 (1.68)	5.19 (1.34)	Mouthwash 4.72 (1.73)	Chocolate 4.24 (2.06)

Note. HF = high-fit, LF = low-fit.

Table 4.2 clearly indicates that Kellogg's had the highest familiarity (M = 5.88) and most favourable attitude (M = 5.55). Thus, Kellogg's was selected as the PB and instant coffee and body spray were its high and low-fit extensions, respectively.

4.3.3 Pre-test 2: Experimental stimuli

Using Kellogg's as the stimulus brand, two print advertisements for each high and low-fit extension were designed as the experimental stimuli for the main experiment. The advertisement stimuli were developed by adapting real product advertisements to increase external validity (Kyuha Kim et al., 2019). The pair of advertisements for each high and low-fit extension were identical, except for the advertisement copy and an image of the extension product. The advertisement copy was altered to manipulate advertising appeal. Specifically, following prior advertising studies (Humphreys et al., 2021; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Wang & Lehto, 2020), the advertisement copy that was used in the abstract appeal was more general and subjective whereas the advertisement copy for the concrete appeal presented information in a more specific and objective manner (see the advertisement stimuli in Appendix I).

To ensure that the advertisement stimuli were perceived as intended, a pre-test was conducted with 80 US adult consumers (43.75% males; age range: 18–54). This pre-test used a between-subjects design in which each participant was randomly exposed to one of the four advertisements: one abstract and one concrete advertisement for each high and low-fit brand extension. Each participant evaluated whether the advertisement was abstract or concrete on a one-item, seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. 1 = 'concrete', 7 = 'abstract') that was adapted from prior studies (Doest & Semin, 2005; Johnson-Grey et al., 2019; J. Kim et al., 2016). The participants also rated their attitude towards the advertisement using a two-item, seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. 1 = 'bad/negative', 7 = 'good/positive'; Kim and Youn (2019)). These questions appeared in a random order to prevent question order effects (McFarland, 1981) and to minimise common method bias in the responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

An independent samples *t*-test indicated a significant mean difference between the abstract and concrete advertisements for the high-fit extension ($t[38] = 3.07$, $p = 0.004$). Specifically, the abstract advertisement ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.52$) was perceived as more abstract than the concrete advertisement ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.95$). Similarly, for the low-fit extension, an independent samples *t*-test showed that the abstract advertisement ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 0.93$) was perceived as more abstract than the concrete advertisement ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.64$, $t[38] = 2.49$, $p = 0.017$). Hence, all the advertisements were perceived as intended. Finally, a 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) between-subjects ANOVA demonstrated that the participants' attitude towards the abstract and concrete advertisements for the high and low-fit extensions did not differ ($F[1, 76] = 0.01$, $p = 0.90$). In other words, all the advertisements were evaluated equally.

4.3.4 Pre-test 3: Advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism

This pre-test assessed the suitability of the advertisement stimuli by measuring advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism. Differences in these variables would have represented confounding alternative explanations for the results (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017; Perdue & Summers, 1986). Pre-test 3 used a 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) mixed experimental design such that brand extension fit served as a between-subjects factor and advertising appeal was a within-subjects factor. Fifty-one adult US consumers (47% males; age range: 18–54) participated in this pre-test. Each participant saw abstract and concrete advertisements for either a high or low-fit brand extension. After seeing each advertisement, the participants were asked to respond to items measuring advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism. A single-item scale was used to measure each variable: advertisement professionalism ('this advertisement is professional'; R. Lee et al. (2021); Yang and Oliver (2004)), advertisement appropriateness ('this advertisement is appropriate'; Bottomley and Doyle (2006)) and advertisement realism ('this advertisement is real'; Cornelis and Peter (2017); R. Lee et al. (2021)). All the measures used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree'). As in Pre-test 2, the participants rated their attitude towards the advertisement using a two-item, seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. 1 = 'bad/negative', 7 = 'good/positive'; Kim and Youn (2019)).

A one-sample *t*-test was performed on the respondents' responses to the professionalism, appropriateness and realism items, comparing their means to the midpoint of their seven-point scales. The mean scores for professionalism, appropriateness and realism for the four advertisements were higher than the midpoint. Thus, the participants perceived the four advertisements as professional, appropriate and real. These mean scores are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Mean (standard deviation) of advertisements' professionalism, appropriateness and realism

Extension fit	Advertising appeal	Profes.	Appro.	Realism	Aad
High	Abstract	5.88 (1.11)	5.92 (1.61)	5.81 (1.60)	5.60 (1.27)
	Concrete	5.77 (1.66)	5.74 (1.28)	5.50 (1.53)	5.52 (1.42)
Low	Abstract	5.68 (1.44)	5.36 (1.35)	5.40 (1.68)	5.30 (1.51)
	Concrete	5.64 (1.29)	5.44 (1.53)	5.36 (1.66)	5.36 (1.45)

Note. Profes. = professionalism, Appro. = appropriateness, Aad = attitude towards advertisement.

In addition, three two-way mixed ANOVAs were performed to see whether the abstract and concrete advertisements for the high and low-fit extensions differed in terms of professionalism, appropriateness and realism. The results indicated that neither the main effects of advertising appeal (F[1, 49] = 0.21, p = 0.65) or perceived fit (F[1, 49] = 0.23, p = 0.64) nor their interaction (F[1, 49] = 0.05, p = 0.82) was significant for advertisement professionalism. Similarly, the main effects of advertising appeal (F[1, 49] = 0.14, p = 0.71) and perceived fit (F[1, 49] = 1.55, p = 0.22) as well as their interactive effect (F[1, 49] = 0.83, p = 0.37) were insignificant for advertisement appropriateness. Finally, advertising appeal (F[1, 49] = 2.48, p = 0.12) and perceived fit (F[1, 49] = 0.39, p = 0.54) did not have significant main effects nor a significant interaction effect (F[1, 49] = 1.47, p = 0.23) on advertisement realism. These results indicated that the four advertisement stimuli did not differ in professionalism, appropriateness and realism.

A two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to see whether the participants' attitude towards the advertisement differed for abstract and concrete advertisements of high and low-fit brand extensions. The results indicated that advertising appeal (F[1, 49] = 0.01, p = 0.932) and perceived fit (F[1, 49] = 0.35, p = 0.56) had neither a significant main effect nor a significant interaction (F[1, 49] = 0.48, p = 0.49) on attitude towards the advertisement. Thus, the four advertisements were equally evaluated.

4.3.5 Main experiment

4.3.5.1 *Design, participants and procedure*

This study employed a 2 (extension fit: high, low) × 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) between-subjects online experiment. To determine an appropriate sample size, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power software version 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007). The power of a statistical test is the probability of successfully rejecting a false null hypothesis (Perugini et al., 2018). Power depends on three factors: sample size, level of significance (i.e. the probability of rejecting a true null hypothesis) and effect size (i.e. strength or magnitude of the expected result). In other words, power analysis involves four parameters: power, sample size, effect size and level of significance. Given that these four parameters are related, one can determine a particular parameter when the other three parameters are available (Kraemer & Blasey, 2015). Therefore, this study used power analysis to determine a suitable sample size.

Specifically, a priori power analysis, which aims to attain a specific desirable power, was conducted. Consistently with prior advertising studies (Chen, 2020), the desired power of 80% was set in this study. G*Power recommended a minimum of 128 participants for an ANOVA to detect a significant ($p < 0.05$) interaction effect (numerator degrees of freedom = 1, number of groups = 4) that has a medium effect size (i.e. f = 0.25; (Faul et al., 2008). In the end, a larger sample of 193 US consumers (57% males; age range: 18 to 54 years) was used for Study 2.

The link to an online survey, programmed in Qualtrics, was shared to the MTurk participants. The survey initially showed a cover story, followed by some demographic and PB-related questions. Then, each participant was randomly exposed to one of the four advertisements. These advertisements promoted a high or low-fit brand extension that had either an abstract or a concrete advertising appeal. Finally, the participants responded to measures of the dependent variables, followed by potential confound and manipulation checks.

4.3.5.2 Measures

This study adapted established measures of relevant variables from existing studies. A single-item scale (i.e. ‘how familiar are you with Kellogg’s?’), which was adapted from Su et al. (2021), measured PB familiarity on a seven-point semantic differential scale (i.e. 1 = ‘not

familiar at all', 7 = 'extremely familiar'). Likewise, one item (i.e. 'please rate your attitude towards the brand Kellogg's') measured attitude towards the PB on a seven-point semantic differential scale (i.e. 1 = 'extremely unfavourable', 7 = 'extremely favourable'; Su et al. (2021)). Three items (i.e. 'I have a positive attitude towards Kellogg's < extension product>', 'my evaluation of Kellogg's < extension product > is good', 'my opinion about Kellogg's < extension product > is favourable'), which were adapted from prior studies (Lee & Aaker, 2004; Samu et al., 1999; Simonin & Ruth, 1998), assessed attitude towards the brand extension on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree').

In addition, two potential confounds were measured: attitude towards the brand extension advertisement using a two-item semantic differential scale (i.e. 1 = 'bad/negative', 7 = 'good/positive'; Kim and Youn (2019) and liking of the brand extension advertisement using a single item ('I like the advertisement'; Cornelis and Peter (2017); Shehu et al. (2016)) on a seven-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree'). Perceived fit between the PB and the extension was measured using a two-item, seven-point Likert scale (i.e. '< extension product > fits with < parent brand >', '< extension product > is consistent with < parent brand >'), which was adapted from Su et al. (2021). The manipulation of advertising appeal was checked using the same concrete/abstract scale that was used in Pre-test 2. Finally, the participants were asked to list their thoughts that came to mind after seeing the advertisement for the brand extension.

4.4 Analysis and results

4.4.1 Manipulation checks

Two independent samples *t*-tests were performed to check whether the advertisements and brand extensions were perceived as intended. The results of the first independent samples *t*-test showed that the abstract advertisements ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.88$) were perceived as more abstract than the concrete advertisements ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.62$, $t[191] = 7.13$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the participants perceived coffee ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.84$) as more fitting with the Kellogg's brand than body spray ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.83$, $t[191] = 8.61$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the experimental manipulations were successful.

Furthermore, this study was premised on the postulation that an abstract (v. a concrete) advertising appeal would activate high-level (v. low-level) construal. Although prior studies have shown that language abstraction can influence construal level mindset (Qin et al., 2022; Semin & Smith, 1999; Stapel & Semin, 2007), this study also conducted an

analysis to confirm whether an abstract (v. a concrete) advertising appeal actually evoked high-level (v. low-level) construal. This study used the level of abstractness of the participants' thoughts that were collected at the end of the survey to test their construal level mindset. Prior construal level studies have also used the level of abstraction in thoughts to check individuals' mental construal level (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006; Gong & Medin, 2012; Huang et al., 2016; Reyt et al., 2016).

Two academic colleagues, who were blind to the experimental conditions, were asked to code the level of abstraction in the participants' thoughts, which were entered into the open text box at the end of the survey. The participants' thoughts were categorised as abstract or concrete according to the linguistic category model (LCM; Semin & Fiedler, 1988). The LCM provides a systematic way to distinguish between abstract and concrete descriptions in language (Wang & Lehto, 2020). It focuses on the linguistic features (i.e. verbs and adjectives) of a description to identify its level of abstraction. The LCM identifies four classes of words according to their level of abstraction. These classes of words are descriptive action verbs (DAV.), interpretive action verbs (IAV.), state verbs (SV.) and adjectives. DAV. are the most concrete words because they describe a specific event or behaviour in a non-interpretive manner (e.g. drink, call). IAV. represent the next level of abstraction because they contain more general descriptions of specific behaviours and thus offer more room for interpretation (e.g. help, cheat). At the third level, SV. describe enduring, unobservable states (i.e. admire, envy). Finally, the most abstract words are adjectives (i.e. cooperative, generous).

Using the LCM (Semin & Fiedler, 1988) and related studies (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006; Joshi et al., 2016; Menegatti & Rubini, 2013; Semin et al., 2005), the coders were instructed to identify the number of DAV., IAV., SV. and adjectives that were used in the written thoughts of the participants. The coders were given sufficient understanding of DAV., IAV., SV. and adjectives before they started coding. Then, the number of DAV., IAV., SV. and adjectives that were identified by the coders were multiplied by 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively, to reflect their relative level of abstractness. Finally, the sum of these weighted scores was divided by the total number of linguistic categories in a participant's thoughts to calculate a single weighted abstraction index score (WAI), which controlled for the number of a participant's thoughts. Specifically, a weighted average score was calculated for each participant's written thoughts by using the following formula:

$$\text{WAI} = \frac{(\#\text{DAV.} \times 1 + \#\text{IAV.} \times 2 + \#\text{SV.} \times 3 + \#\text{Adjectives} \times 4)}{(\#\text{DAV.} + \#\text{IAV.} + \#\text{SV.} + \#\text{Adjectives})} \quad (1)$$

The index scores of the two coders were highly correlated ($r = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$) and therefore were summed to form a single index. The results of an independent samples *t*-test indicated that the participants' thoughts were more abstract when they saw an abstract (v. a concrete) advertising appeal ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 2.65$, $SD = 0.81$ v. $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 2.32$, $SD = 0.85$, $t[191] = 2.75$, $p = 0.01$, $d = 0.40$). These results confirmed that an abstract versus a concrete advertising appeal evoked participants' high versus low-level construal.

Lastly, common method variance (CMV) bias can be a threat in experimental research examining a mediating effect (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, this study tested whether a CMV bias was present using the correlation matrix procedure (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Pavlou et al., 2007; Tehseen et al., 2017). The results detected not CMV bias because the correlation between mediator (processing fluency) and outcome variable (attitude towards extension) was not extremely high ($r > .90$).

4.4.2 Hypotheses testing

First, some preliminary analyses were conducted on PB familiarity, PB attitude, demographic variables and potential confounds. Similar to in Pre-test 1, it was found that the participants were highly familiar with Kellogg's ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 0.97$) and evaluated it positively ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 1.16$). Further, the results of two ANOVAs indicated that the participants in the four experimental conditions did not vary in terms of their PB familiarity ($F[1, 189] = 0.03$, $p = 0.87$) or their attitude towards the PB ($F[1, 189] = 1.37$, $p = 0.24$). Similarly, the participants' ages ($F[1, 189] = 0.160$, $p = 0.69$) and genders ($F[1, 189] = 0.07$, $p = 0.80$) were evenly distributed across the four experimental groups. Furthermore, the participants across the four groups had the same attitude towards the brand extension advertisement ($F[1, 189] = 0.06$, $p = 0.80$) and liking for this advertisement ($F[1, 189] = 0.02$, $p = 0.90$). These results eliminated the possibility that PB familiarity, attitude towards PB, attitude towards extension advertisement, extension advertisement liking and demographic variables could be potential alternative explanations for the results of Study 2. Therefore, these variables were not used as covariates in the main analyses.

To test the proposed hypotheses, a univariate ANOVA was conducted to examine the interactive effects of extension fit (i.e. high v. low) and advertising appeal (i.e. abstract v.

concrete) on attitude towards the brand extension. The ANOVA results revealed significant main effects of extension fit (F[1, 189] = 59.26, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$) and advertising appeal (F[1, 189] = 4.01, $p = 0.047$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). Specifically, the results demonstrated that a high versus low-fit brand extension ($M_{\text{high fit}} = 5.06$, $SD = 1.47$ v. $M_{\text{low fit}} = 3.30$, $SD = 1.75$) and an abstract versus a concrete advertising appeal ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 4.42$, $SD = 1.85$ v. $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 4.02$, $SD = 1.80$) were associated with a more positive attitude towards the brand extension. However, the interaction between extension fit and advertising appeal did not have a significant effect on attitude towards the extension (F[1, 189] = 1.57, $p = 0.21$). Simple effect analyses to test H2 via planned independent samples one-tailed t-tests revealed that when extension fit was low, an abstract appeal had a more favourable attitude towards the extension than a concrete appeal ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 3.66$, $SD = 1.94$ v. $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 2.91$, $SD = 1.45$, t[90] = 2.09, $p = 0.02$ [1-tailed], $d = 0.44$). However, for the high-fit extension, the abstract and concrete appeals had a similar effect on attitude towards the brand extension ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 5.15$, $SD = 1.45$ v. $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 4.97$, $SD = 1.51$, t[99] = 0.59, $p = 0.56$). Thus, H2a and H2b were supported. Figure 4.4 shows these results diagrammatically.

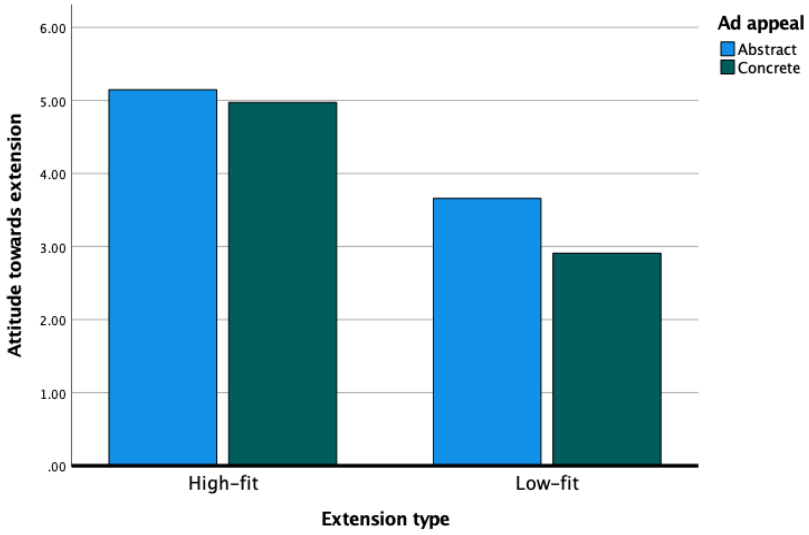

Figure 4.4: ANOVA results for attitude towards the brand extension

4.4.2.1 Perceived brand extension fit as a mediator of interaction between brand extension fit and advertising appeal

H2 predicted that perceived fit would mediate the interaction between extension type and advertising appeal on attitude towards the extension. To test this prediction, a moderated

mediation analysis for attitude towards the extension was run (PROCESS Model 8 using 5,000 bootstrap samples; Hayes (2017)). The results revealed that perceived fit mediated the interaction between extension type and advertising appeal on attitude towards the extension (*moderated mediation index* = −0.65, 95% CI: [−1.31, −0.01]). Specifically, the effect of advertising appeal (i.e. abstract v. concrete) on attitude towards the extension was mediated by perceived brand extension fit when the extension was low fit (*indirect effect* = −0.68, 95% CI: [−1.14, −0.23]) but not when the extension was high fit (*indirect effect* = −0.03, 95% CI: [−0.50, 0.43]). These results supported H3.

4.5 Discussion

Prior brand extension studies have examined the effectiveness of a limited number of advertising appeals (e.g. emotional v. rational advertising appeals, comparative v. non-comparative advertising appeals) for influencing brand extension evaluations (Bei et al., 2011; Puligadda et al., 2013). The current study extends this research stream by examining the effectiveness of abstract and concrete advertising appeals for improving evaluation towards a low-fit brand extension. Moreover, it examined the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of advertising appeals on consumer responses. This study revealed that consumers are more likely to hold a favourable attitude towards a low-fit extension when the advertising appeal is abstract rather than concrete. These findings are contrary to existing advertising studies outside the brand extension literature that support the superiority of concrete advertising appeals over abstract advertising appeals (e.g. Robinson & Eilert, 2018; Schuetz et al., 2020; Small & Loewenstein, 2003). However, the findings of this study show that the type of advertising appeal does not alter consumer attitudes towards a high-fit brand extension.

Furthermore, this study confirms that perceived fit is the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of advertising appeal on consumer attitude towards a low-fit brand extension. Specifically, the finding suggests that an abstract advertising appeal enhances consumers' perception of fit between the parent and the extension, which, in turn, leads to a more favourable attitude towards the low-fit extension. However, no such finding emerged for a high-fit extension. These findings are consistent with prior studies, suggesting that advertising tactics or elements can influence the perception of fit between a PB and its low-fit extension thereby affecting the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions (Bambauer-Sachse et al., 2011; Boush, 1993; Gierl & Huettl, 2011).

Another finding worth mentioning is that the effects of abstract versus concrete advertising appeals on brand extension evaluations occur because these appeals evoke high versus low-level construal mindsets, respectively. This was confirmed by conducting analysis of consumers' written thoughts using the LCM, an abstract language coding scheme (Semin & Fiedler, 1988). Consistently with this finding, recent studies in health communication show the impact of abstract versus concrete messages on an individual's high versus low-level construal mindset (Qin et al., 2022). Thus, this study adds to the body of knowledge that documents the effect of language abstraction on construal level mindset.

Study 2 extends brand extension theory by indicating the effectiveness of abstract and concrete advertising appeals for improving brand extension attitude. Furthermore, it provides guidelines for marketers about which advertising appeals are suitable for advertising low-fit brand extensions. However, Study 2 did not account for situational factors that may alter the impact of abstract and concrete appeals on brand extension evaluations. One such important situational factor is social power, which has been linked to construal level and language abstraction (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Smith & Trope, 2006). High-power (v. low-power) individuals construe information at a high (v. low) level and thus tend to prefer abstract (v. concrete) language (Magee et al., 2010). This preference may affect the matching tenet of CLT, which says that messages are more effective if the construal level of the message matches the construal level of the consumer (e.g. Liberman & Trope, 1998).

To address this limitation, the next chapter reports Study 3, which extends Study 2 by examining whether power, a social factor, moderates the effects of abstract and concrete appeals on consumers' attitudes towards a low-fit brand extension. Moreover, to further enhance the generalisability and applicability of this thesis' findings, Study 3 uses a different PB (i.e. Gillette) and low-fit extension (i.e. shoes). Another limitation of Study 2 was that it was underpowered to detect its hypothesised interaction effect, despite using power analysis to determine the sample size a priori. The main reason for this was that the medium effect size that was used in the a priori power analysis was much larger than the effect size that was estimated from the data.

Chapter 5: Study 3

This thesis investigates the important topic of the ways that marketers can increase the chances of successfully introducing a brand extension that has a low level of perceived fit to the PB (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 reviewed the brand extension literature and introduced CLT as a potential tool that managers could use to increase their brand extension success rate. Chapter 3 reported the results of Study 1, which showed that high-level construal leads to more favourable evaluations of a low-fit extension. Study 2, reported in Chapter 4, extended the results of Study 1 to a different sample of consumers, in the US rather than Pakistan, and to a more practical method that managers could use to prime a high level of construal: by using an abstract appeal in advertisements for a low-fit extension.

This chapter reports the results of Study 3. The primary purpose of Study 3 was to investigate how the influence of abstract and concrete appeals on brand extension evaluations differs between consumers who have high and low levels of social power. Thus, this study extends Study 2 by incorporating social power as a moderator. This chapter is organised as follows. Initially, it presents a review of the social power literature within the consumer behaviour, advertising and construal level domains. After that, the chapter presents the study's hypotheses. The next section then describes the research design and results of the study, followed by a discussion and conclusion section. The final section contains managerial and theoretical implications along with limitations and directions for future research.

5.1 Research background and development of hypotheses

5.1.1 Power in consumer behaviour

Power is one of the most fundamental concepts in social life (Cartwright, 1959; Rucker et al., 2011). Power is defined as the 'asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations' (Magee & Galinsky, 2008 361). Specifically, high-power individuals have relatively more control over the valued physical, economic and social outcomes of others (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). Control refers to an individual's ability to lessen or deny rewards or punishments to others (Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In summary, high-power individuals have more access to resources and control the distribution of these resources to those that have low levels of power (Keltner et al., 2003).

Power is fundamentally a social construct (Emerson, 1962) and is determined by the structural characteristics of social relationships (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). For example, social structural factors, such as socioeconomic status and job designations, can determine power. Notably, not only these social structural factors but also mindset priming can induce perceptions of power. In this regard, prior studies have shown that power can be primed through episodic recall (Galinsky et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2011), semantic tasks (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), role imagination (Briñol et al., 2007; Choi et al., 2018; Rucker et al., 2014) and advertising messages (Dubois et al., 2012; Mourali et al., 2018).

Prior studies have established that power can influence various human behaviours, including action orientation (Galinsky et al., 2003), risk-taking (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), expression of opinions (Galinsky et al., 2008), creativity (Galinsky et al., 2008) and confidence (Rucker et al., 2012), among others. Consumer studies have also shown that power can shape consumer behaviour (Jiang et al., 2014; Rucker et al., 2011; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). For example, high-power consumers choose less distinctive products when they feel socially excluded (Liang & Chang, 2016). High-power consumers are also more likely to buy healthy food whereas low-power consumers are more inclined to buy indulgent food (C. X. Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, unlike high-power consumers, low-power consumers prefer larger-sized products from an assortment (Dubois et al., 2012).

Most of the consumer research on power concerns luxury consumption. These studies primarily argue that because low power is an aversive state, it leads low-power consumers to value luxury products and brands to compensate for their low level of power (Koo & Im, 2019; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009). For example, Rucker and Galinsky (2009) found that unlike high-power consumers, low-power consumers displayed a greater preference for conspicuous consumption. Similarly, low versus high-power consumers express more desire for status-related products and prefer such products over everyday products (Koo & Im, 2019; Mazzocco et al., 2012). Furthermore, scholars have identified some conditions that can alter the effect of power on luxury consumption. For example, high-power (low-power) consumers choose luxury brands that are associated with a narrow (broad) range of products (Kim & Wingate, 2017). This preference further accentuates when consumption is public and attenuates when consumption is private.

Moreover, power affects other important consumer behaviours, such as switching, complaining and spending. For example, high-power (low-power) consumers are more inclined towards switching behaviour because they are more (less) action oriented (Jiang et al., 2014). Likewise, when angry, high-power consumers tend to complain more than low-

power consumers (Min et al., 2019). In terms of spending, high-power consumers spend more on products for themselves whereas low-power consumers spend more on products for others (Rucker et al., 2011).

Furthermore, high-power consumers differ from their low-power counterparts in terms of price perception and evaluation of product-packaging design. High-power consumers perceive higher levels of price unfairness when they pay more than other consumers whereas low-power consumers' level of perception of price unfairness is high if they pay more than what they paid in prior transactions (Jin et al., 2014). In terms of product-packaging design, high versus low-power consumers show higher levels of purchase intention when a high versus low-power brand's logo is located high versus low on the packaging (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2014). This is an example of a matching metaphorical appeal (Hornik et al., 2017) in which a high logo position matches the higher position in society of the brand and the consumer.

In summary, the earlier review indicates that power has become an important concept in consumer research because it can predict a diverse range of consumer behaviours. Several scholars have demonstrated the role of power in advertising research. The next section reviews the studies on power in the context of advertising.

5.1.2 Role of power in advertising

A recent and growing body of advertising research has emphasised the role of power in enhancing the effectiveness of advertising (Li et al., 2021; Liu & Mattila, 2017; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009; Septianto et al., 2020; Wang & Zhang, 2020; Yang et al., 2021; Zhang & Yang, 2019). Predominantly, these studies have suggested that power moderates the influence of celebrity type and advertising appeals on consumer responses. For example, Thomas et al. (2020) found a complex interaction between consumer power, celebrity power and the power claims that were made by advertisements. They found a main mismatch effect between consumer power and celebrity power. Low-power consumers had higher levels of intentions to spread word-of-mouth about a brand when its advertisement employed a high-status endorser. However, when an endorsement message contained high-power expectations, the typical matching effect was found. High-power consumers had higher levels of intentions to spread word-of-mouth about a brand that was endorsed by a high-status celebrity. Mismatch effects have also been found in the context of health advertising: low-power consumers had

higher levels of intentions to adopt health behaviours when high-status spokespeople endorsed these behaviours (Newton et al., 2015).

Another stream within advertising research shows the effect of power on the effectiveness of various emotion-based advertising appeals (Dubois et al., 2016; Liu & Mattila, 2017; Septianto et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). Septianto et al. (2020) demonstrated a match-up effect between power and emotional appeal such that high-power consumers showed a more favourable attitude towards a pride appeal whereas low-power consumers evaluated a gratitude appeal more favourably. Yang et al. (2021) revealed that an emotional appeal, rather than a rational appeal, had more impact on high-power consumers' willingness to pay for indulgent food. However, they found no difference in low-power consumers' willingness to pay after seeing an emotional appeal versus a rational appeal. Critically, a mismatch effect was found when consumers in a high-power state showed more favourable attitude towards a product when it was advertised using a hard-sell (i.e. performance-oriented) appeal versus a soft-sell (in this case, status-oriented) appeal (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). Similarly, when the product was advertised using a soft-sell (i.e. status) appeal, low-power consumers evaluated the product more favourably. In another mismatch study, high-power consumers had a more positive attitude towards a restaurant when it used a competence-focused message versus a warmth-focused message (Dubois et al., 2016). However, low-power consumers showed a more favourable attitude towards the restaurant in response to a warmth-focused message.

Power can also alter the influence of other advertising appeals on consumer responses, such as scarcity appeals. In the context of online bookings, the demand-framed scarcity appeal (i.e. in high demand) leads to higher levels of reservation intentions among high-power consumers than a supply-framed scarcity appeal (i.e. in limited supply) because demand-framed scarcity appeals elicit low-risk perceptions among high-power consumers (Huang et al., 2020). (They probably reasoned that flights that are in short supply may not be available.) Furthermore, when an assertive appeal was used to promote 'want' products (e.g. chocolate), it had more effect on the purchase intentions of high-power consumers whereas low-power consumers had higher levels of purchase intentions when the assertive appeal promoted 'should' products (e.g. reusable bags; Wang and Zhang (2020)). These findings occurred because high-power (v. low-power) consumers perceived a greater level of fit between an assertive advertisement message and a want (v. a should) product. Moreover, power influences the effectiveness of top-dog appeals, which emphasise the superiority of the brand in terms of its market position and share, and under-dog appeals, which emphasise a

less privileged brand's struggle to improve performance to gain customer sympathy and favour. Specifically, low-power consumers find a top-dog appeal more persuasive because it facilitates power restoration whereas high-power consumers are more persuaded by an under-dog appeal because supporting under-dogs helps to express power (Jin & Huang, 2019).

Overall, the earlier review of advertising research demonstrates that power plays a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness of various advertising appeals. These studies suggest that power moderates the influence of various advertising appeals on advertising-related outcomes. Although these studies contribute to general advertising research in important ways, scholars have not examined the ways that power and abstract and concrete appeals work together to drive brand extension evaluations. Therefore, the current study examines the ways that the influence of abstract and concrete appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations differs across high and low-power consumers. In this regard, the matching-effect tenet of CLT provides theoretical support.

5.1.3 Relationship between power and construal level

An individual's power state can influence their cognitive representation of information (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Keltner et al., 2003; Yin & Smith, 2020). An important finding that has emerged from the existing literature is that high-power individuals mentally represent information at a high level of construal. Specifically, scholars have argued that because a high level of power creates a sense of social distance from others, it is associated with high-level construal (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Smith & Trope, 2006). The same argument serves as the basis of the social distance theory of power. The social distance theory of power (Magee & Smith, 2013) involves two principles. The first principle builds on the power literature and posits that high-power individuals feel more socially distant because they depend less on others to attain their goals than those that have low levels of power. The second principle draws on CLT to state that the feeling of greater social distance leads high-power individuals to engage in abstract, high-level mental representation. Thus, the social distance theory of power suggests that social distance is the underlying process through which power affects construal level.

Prior studies have revealed this influence of power on construal level. Specifically, studies have shown that power affects language abstraction, a core feature of construal level thinking (Magee et al., 2010). Smith and Trope (2006) found that high-power individuals used high-level, abstract language to describe actions whereas low-power individuals

described actions using low-level, concrete language. Similarly, unlike low-authority (i.e. low-power) individuals, high-authority (i.e. high-power) individuals described the September 11 terrorist attacks using abstract language (Magee et al., 2010). In addition, high-power individuals performed better on an abstraction task (Huang et al., 2011) and categorised objects at an abstract, superordinate level (P. K. Smith et al., 2016). Moreover, studies have demonstrated that when participants judged their clothing to be more formal than their peers' (Slepian et al., 2015) and lowered their voice pitch (Stel et al., 2012), they perceived themselves as more powerful, which, in turn, led them to abstract thinking (i.e. high-level construal).

Furthermore, there exists a bidirectional relationship between power and abstract language. In other words, similar to the way that power affects language abstraction, abstract language can affect perceptions of power. In this regard, Wakslak et al. (2014) found that a high level of power was signalled more by abstract language than by concrete language. For example, in one of their experiments (i.e. Experiment 4), the authors asked participants to read four descriptions of a new product (two abstract and two concrete), ostensibly written by two respondents in a prior study. The participants were then asked to form impressions about the power of these previous respondents using their product descriptions. The findings revealed that the participants rated the respondents who had abstract statements as more powerful than those who had concrete statements. Likewise, Keltner et al. (2003) showed that priming high versus low-level construal makes people feel more powerful. Across four studies, the authors confirmed that high versus low-level construal (primed through conceptual and perceptual tasks) leads to a higher score on power-related traits (Experiment 1), greater preference for a high-power role (Experiments 2 and 3) and a greater sense of control (Experiment 4). Thus, sufficient empirical evidence indicates that high versus low levels of power lead to high versus low-level construal.

Using the aforementioned findings, consumer researchers have investigated the impact of power on consumer responses. For example, Choi et al. (2018) demonstrated that when gift-givers have more (less) power than receivers, they are more likely to focus on the gift from their own (the receiver's) perspective. They, in turn, feel less (more) psychological distance from the gift, leading high-power gift-givers to prefer gifts that have low-level construal features (i.e. feasibility) over gifts that have high-level construal features (i.e. desirability). Moreover, Wang et al. (2021) drew on CLT and demonstrated that high versus low-power consumers are more likely to donate money to a matching abstract versus a

specific target. Taken together, prior construal level and consumer studies confirm that high versus low level of power evoke high versus low-level construal.

5.2 Hypotheses development

Many studies have established that a match between consumers' mental construal and the construal level of an advertising message generates more favourable consumer responses (Cheng & Zhang, 2023; Hernandez et al., 2015; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; Septianto & Pratiwi, 2016). For example, consumers evaluate a product more positively when their high-level construal mindset is matched to a high-level benefits appeal, rather than a low-level attributes appeal (Hernandez et al., 2015; Luan et al., 2023). However, consumers who have a low-level construal mindset evaluate a product more favourably when it is advertised using an attribute-based appeal. Likewise, given that cash has more uses and is therefore more abstract than a store's gift card, receiving a cash gift, rather than a gift card, prompts high-level construal (Yao & Chen, 2014). For this reason, matching cash gifts to an abstract appeal (or a gift card to a concrete appeal) results in a more favourable evaluation of the advertised product, unlike a mismatched gift/appeal combination. In the context of hotel advertising, Dogan and Erdogan (2020) reported that matching consumers' construal mindsets to the construal level of the advertising increased their purchase intentions.

Further, this matching effect is reflected in studies that examine the role of psychological distance in advertising effectiveness. Given that psychological distance (i.e. temporal, social, spatial, hypothetical) is a key determinant of construal level (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010), studies have reported that matching psychological distance to the advertising appeal enhances its effectiveness (Kim et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2015). For example, when the election campaign was temporally distant (in the next six months), individuals showed a more favourable attitude towards a political candidate when the message contained high-level construal features (Kim et al., 2009). However, in the case of a temporally near election campaign (next week), individuals had a more favourable attitude towards a political candidate when the message highlighted low-level construal features. Similarly, consumers expressed a more favourable evaluation of a high-level desirability appeal advertisement in a matching socially distant condition (the News Feed section of a social media app) whereas a low-level feasibility appeal was evaluated more positively when shown in a matching socially near condition (the apps' Timeline; D. H. Kim et al. (2016)). Thus, matching consumer construal level

(psychological distance) and the construal level of the advertising appeal results in a more favourable consumer response.

Given that high versus low levels of power represent high-level versus low-level construal (see discussion in Section 5.1.3), it is predicted that high versus low levels of power should moderate the effect of an abstract versus a concrete appeal on consumers' evaluations of a low-fit extension. This prediction is consistent with Rucker et al. (2012), who proposed that high-power consumers prefer abstract claims over concrete claims. Thus, this study hypothesised:

H4: *Unlike low-power consumers, high-power consumers have a more favourable (a) attitude towards the advertisement for the extension and (b) attitude towards the extension when the advertisement for a low-fit extension uses an abstract appeal.*

H5: *Unlike low-power consumers, high-power consumers have a less favourable (a) attitude towards the advertisement for the extension and (b) attitude towards the extension when the advertisement for a low-fit extension uses a concrete appeal.*

The conceptual model of Study 3 is shown in Figure 5.1:

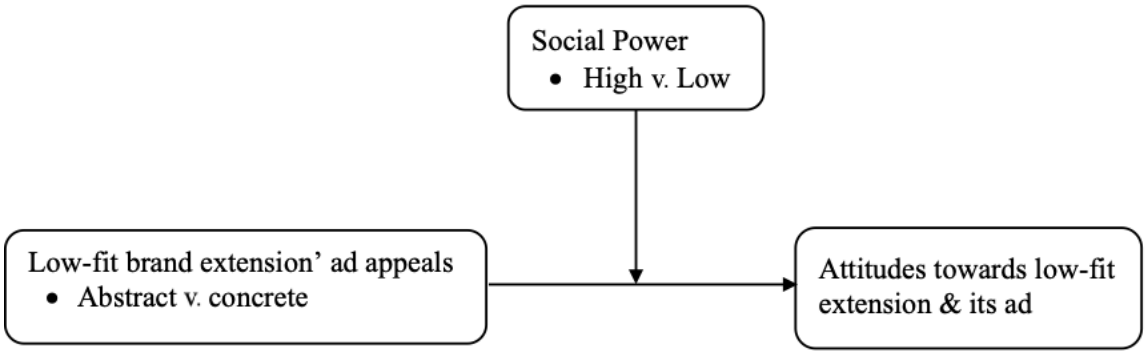

Figure 5.1: Study 3 conceptual model

5.3 Research design

Study 3 involves a 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) × 2 (power: high, low) between-subjects online experiment. Qualtrics software was used to program the experimental survey. A Qualtrics survey link was used to recruit US adult consumers via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). As was discussed in Chapter 4, the quality of data for market research that is collected through MTurk is comparable to other online panels

(Buhrmester et al., 2018). Similar to Study 2, this study used an attention check question and timers for the advertisement stimuli and applied other qualification filters (e.g. location, minimum HITs approval rate). These tactics help to maximise the quality of data that is collected through MTurk (Barger & Sinar, 2011; Goodman & Paolacci, 2017; Peer et al., 2014; Sheehan, 2018; S. M. Smith et al., 2016).

This study conducted four pre-tests before the main experiment. These pre-tests aimed to (1) confirm the suitability of a PB and its low-fit extension, (2) check whether the advertising manipulation was perceived as intended, (3) assess the professionalism, appropriateness and realism of the advertisements and (4) pre-test the manipulation of power.

5.3.1 Pre-test 1: Selection of parent brand and low-fit extension

This study, as well as the next two studies of this thesis, required the identification of a suitable PB paired with an extension product that was perceived as having a low level of fit. To achieve this, a survey that used MTurk participants (n = 46, 57% males; age range = 20–49) rated six brands (Sony, Sara Lee, Philips, Pantene, Nike, Honda, Gillette) and, for each brand, a product that was ostensibly to be introduced by the brand (respectively: toothbrush, energy drink, sneakers, shaving cream, bicycle, laptop, running shoes). For each brand, participants rated their familiarity with and attitude towards the brand and the perceived fit between the brand and its extension product. As previously, consumers needed to be familiar with and hold a favourable attitude towards the brand so that they would be able to determine the fit between the PB's category and the extension product and to transfer the favourable PB affect to the extension.

The participants were initially asked to rate their familiarity with and attitude towards each brand. A single-item scale, which was adapted from Su et al. (2021), was used to measure each brand's familiarity (i.e. 'how familiar are you with the brand < parent brand name >?', 1 = 'extremely unfamiliar', 7 = 'extremely familiar') and brand attitude (i.e. 'my attitude towards < parent brand name > is:', 1 = 'extremely unfavourable', 7 = 'extremely favourable'). The participants were then told that each brand was planning to introduce a new product under its existing name and therefore sought their opinions about the new product. Afterwards, the participants were asked to rate their perception of fit between each brand and the respective extension product on a single item ('The product < category > fits with the brand < one of the two brands>'; Su et al. (2021)), using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree').

Using the results in Table 5.1, we selected three brand extension pairs that had the lowest level of perceived fit: Honda/laptop, Gillette/running shoes, Phillips/sneakers. Across the three brands, familiarity (range 6.09–6.24, ANOVA $F = 0.374$, $p = 0.69$) and attitude (range 5.41–5.76, ANOVA $F = 1.245$, $p = 0.29$) were high and not significantly different. For the main experiment, the Gillette/running shoes brand extension was chosen from these three.

Table 5.1: Selection of parent brand and low-fit extension for Studies 3–5

Parent brand	Brand familiarity	Brand attitude	Perceived fit between parent brand and extension
Honda	6.15 (1.10)	5.76 (1.31)	Laptop: 2.63 (1.80)
Gillette	6.24 (1.00)	5.76 (1.16)	Shoes: 2.37 (1.93)
Philips	6.09 (1.06)	5.41 (1.21)	Sneaker: 2.63 (2.00)
Nike	6.52 (0.85)	5.83 (1.49)	Bicycle: 3.11 (1.80)
Sara Lee	5.43 (1.57)	5.30 (1.21)	Energy drink: 3.17 (1.94)
Pantene	4.96 (1.69)	4.76 (1.40)	Shaving cream: 4.26 (1.71)
Sony	6.41 (0.74)	6.11 (1.03)	Electric toothbrush: 4.67 (1.75)

5.3.2 Pre-test 2: Manipulation check for advertising appeal

Using existing research (Humphreys et al., 2021; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Wang & Lehto, 2020), one abstract and one concrete advertisement were created for the Honda laptop (see Appendix I). The abstract advertisement contained more general copy whereas the concrete advertisement's copy was more specific. To verify the level of abstraction of the advertisements, 60 participants (males = 50%, age range = 18–45 years) were recruited via MTurk. Each participant randomly viewed either an abstract or a concrete advertisement. The participants then rated the level of abstraction of the advertisement using a two-item, seven-point semantic differential scale (1 = 'concrete/specific', 7 = 'abstract/general') that was adapted from prior studies (e.g. Doest & Semin, 2005; Johnson-Grey et al., 2019; J. Kim et al., 2016). An independent samples *t*-test revealed that the abstract advertisement ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.59$) was perceived as more abstract than the concrete advertisement ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.07$, $t[58] = 3.75$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the results showed that attitude towards the advertisement did not differ between the abstract advertisement ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.83$) and the concrete advertisement ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.61$, $t[58] = 3.75$, $p = 0.72$).

5.3.3 Pre-test 3: Test of advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism

To check whether the two advertisements appeared professional, appropriate and real, 62 US consumers (males = 42%, age range = 20–50 years) were recruited via MTurk. The two advertisements were shown to each participant, in a random order, each followed by three questions. These questions measured advertisement professionalism ('This advertisement is professional'), advertisement appropriateness ('This advertisement is appropriate') and advertisement realism ('This advertisement is real'). These scales were sourced from prior studies (R. Lee et al., 2021; Yang & Oliver, 2004) and were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 7 = 'strongly agree').

The mean scores showed that the two advertisements were rated high on professionalism ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 5.39$, $SD = 1.52$; $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 5.23$, $SD = 1.70$), appropriateness ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 5.87$, $SD = 1.58$; $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 5.63$, $SD = 1.70$) and realism ($M_{\text{abstract ad}} = 5.53$, $SD = 1.81$; $M_{\text{concrete ad}} = 5.31$, $SD = 1.96$). Furthermore, one-sample *t*-tests confirmed that the professionalism, appropriateness and realism mean scores were significantly higher than the midpoints of the scales (i.e. 4 on a 7-point scale) for the abstract advertisements ($t[61]_{\text{professionalism}} = 7.19$, $p < 0.001$; $t[61]_{\text{appropriateness}} = 9.30$, $p < 0.001$; $t[61]_{\text{realism}} = 6.67$, $p < 0.001$) and the concrete advertisements ($t[62]_{\text{professionalism}} = 5.67$, $p < 0.001$; $t[62]_{\text{appropriateness}} = 7.54$, $p < 0.001$; $t[62]_{\text{realism}} = 5.26$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, paired-samples *t*-tests demonstrated that the abstract and concrete advertisements did not differ significantly for professionalism ($t[61] = 0.71$, $p = 0.47$), appropriateness ($t[61] = 1.31$, $p = 0.19$) and realism ($t[61] = 1.39$, $p = 0.17$). Thus, the abstract and concrete advertisements were perceived as equally professional, appropriate and real.

5.3.4 Pre-test 4: Manipulation check for power

This pre-test aimed to confirm the power manipulation. In this regard, a power manipulation task was adopted from Galinsky et al. (2003). Studies in psychology (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Lammers et al., 2012; Mueller et al., 2014) and consumer behaviour (Jin et al., 2014; Kim, 2018; Wang & Zhang, 2020; Wei et al., 2020) have used this task to manipulate power. This task requires participants to recall and describe a past incident in which they felt powerful or powerless (see complete instructions in Appendix II).

A total of 43 participants (males = 53.50%, age range = 20–50 years) were randomly assigned to either a high-power or a low-power condition. The participants in the high-power condition were asked to recall and describe an incident in which they had power over others

whereas the participants in the low-power condition recalled and described an incident in which others had power over them. Then, they responded to a single question (i.e. 'how powerful you felt after recalling the event you described'; Yang and Zhang (2018)) on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'very powerless', 7 = 'very powerful'). The results of an independent samples *t*-test showed that power was successfully manipulated because the participants in the high-power condition ($M_{high\ power}$ = 5.48, *SD* = 1.25) felt more powerful than those in the low-power condition ($M_{low\ power}$ = 3.09, *SD* = 1.88, $t[41] = 4.88$, $p < 0.001$).

5.3.5 Experimental design

5.3.5.1 Design, participants and procedure

The main experiment used a 2 (advertising appeal: abstract, concrete) × 2 (power: high, low) between-subjects design. A priori power analysis was conducted through G*Power software to determine the appropriate sample size that had a power of 80%. G*Power recommended a minimum of 128 participants for an ANOVA to detect a significant ($p < 0.05$) interaction effect (numerator degrees of freedom = 1, number of groups = 4) that had a medium effect size (i.e. f = 0.25; Faul et al. (2008)). A larger sample of 204 US adult consumers (49% males; ages 20 to 49) was recruited via MTurk.

The participants first answered some demographic (i.e. age, gender) and PB-related (i.e. PB familiarity, PB attitude) questions. Then, they were randomly assigned to either a high or low-power condition. Using the power manipulation task that was described in Pre-test 4, the participants in the high-power condition recalled and wrote about an incident in which they had power over others. The participants in the low-power condition recalled and wrote about an incident in which others had power over them. Afterwards, they randomly saw either an abstract or a concrete advertisement for the low-fit brand extension (i.e. the Honda laptop). Finally, they responded to measures of outcome variables and manipulation checks.

5.3.5.2 Measures

The same scales that were used in the pre-tests were used to measure the PB's familiarity and attitude (Su et al., 2021). The outcome variables, namely, attitude towards the advertisement (Kim & Youn, 2019) and attitude towards the extension (Lee & Aaker, 2004), were measured on scales that were used in the previous two studies. The same scales that were used in the pre-tests were used to check the advertising appeal (D. H. Kim et al., 2016)

and power (Yang & Zhang, 2018) manipulations. Likewise, the same scale that was considered in the pre-test was used to measure perceived fit (Su et al., 2021). All these measures used a seven-point Likert scale, except for the advertising appeal manipulation check, which used a seven-point semantic differential scale.

5.4 Analysis and results

5.4.1 Manipulation checks

An independent samples *t*-test revealed that the manipulation of power was successful because the participants in the high-power condition felt more powerful ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.40$) than those in the low-power condition ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.38$, $t[202] = 15.85$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the abstract advertisement was perceived as more abstract ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.99$) than the concrete advertisement ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.74$, $t[202] = 6.11$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipulations of power and advertising appeal were successful.

5.4.2 Hypotheses testing

Before testing the hypotheses, a preliminary analysis was performed to identify any confounding factors. Specifically, a separate ANOVA was run for each of three potential confounding factors: participants' age, gender and PB familiarity. The results of the three ANOVAs revealed that the participants' ages ($F[1, 200] = 0.11$, $p = 0.74$), genders ($F[1, 200] = 0.35$, $p = 0.55$) and PB familiarity ($F[1, 200] = 0.14$, $p = 0.71$) did not differ across the four experimental conditions. These results eliminated the possibility that because of a failure to properly randomise allocation, these factors might be alternative explanations for the effects of the independent variables (i.e. power and advertising appeal) on the outcome variables (i.e. attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards extension). Therefore, these potential covariates were not used in the main analysis.

To test the proposed hypotheses, a MANOVA was run to examine the interactive effects of power and advertising appeal on attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the extension. The MANOVA results demonstrated that power (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 1$, $F[2, 199] = 0.05$, $p = 0.95$) and advertising appeal (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 1$, $F[2, 199] = 0.05$, $p = 0.95$) had no main effects on the outcome variables. However, the MANOVA results indicated a significant interaction effect of power and advertising appeal on the outcome variables (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 0.95$, $F[2, 199] = 5.41$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$). The results of the univariate

ANOVAs for each dependent variable, which were generated by the single MANOVA test, were further examined to test the hypotheses.

5.4.2.1 Attitude towards the advertisement

Importantly, the interaction of power and advertising appeal significantly affected attitude towards the advertisement for the low-fit extension product (F[1, 200] = 5.30, p = 0.02, η_p^2 = 0.03). Follow-up independent samples t-tests revealed that the abstract appeal advertisement had a marginally more favourable attitude towards the advertisement for the high-power participants ($M_{\text{high power}}$ = 4.83, SD = 1.76) compared with the low-power participants ($M_{\text{low power}}$ = 4.28, SD = 1.73, t[106] = 1.62, p = 0.05 [1-tailed], d = 0.31). However, the concrete advertisement had a marginally more favourable attitude towards the advertisement for the low-power participants ($M_{\text{low power}}$ = 4.89, SD = 1.69) than for the high-power participants ($M_{\text{high power}}$ = 4.31, SD = 1.74, t[94] = 1.64, p = 0.05 [1-tailed], d = 0.33). Thus, H4a and H5a were accepted. Figure 5.2 shows these results diagrammatically.

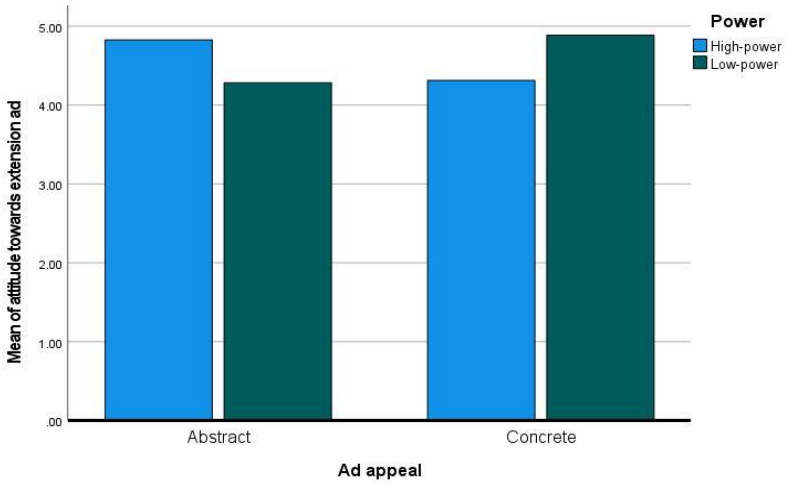

Figure 5.2: ANOVA results for attitude towards the extension advertisement

5.4.2.2 Attitude towards the extension

The univariate analysis found a significant interaction effect of power and advertising appeal on attitude towards the low-fit extension (F[1, 200] = 9.79, p = 0.002, η_p^2 = 0.05). Follow-up t-test analyses found that the high-power participants had a more favourable attitude towards the extension ($M_{\text{high power}}$ = 4.62, SD = 1.73) than the low-power participants ($M_{\text{low power}}$ = 3.93, SD = 1.60, t[106] = 2.15, p = 0.02 [1-tailed], d = 0.42) after seeing an abstract advertisement. However, after seeing a concrete advertisement, attitude towards the

extension was more favourable for the low-power participants than for the high-power participants ($M_{\text{low power}} = 4.68$, $SD = 1.62$ v. $M_{\text{high power}} = 3.89$, $SD = 1.77$, $t[94] = 2.27$, $p = 0.01$ [1-tailed], $d = 0.46$). Thus, H4b and H5b were supported. Figure 5.3 shows these results diagrammatically.

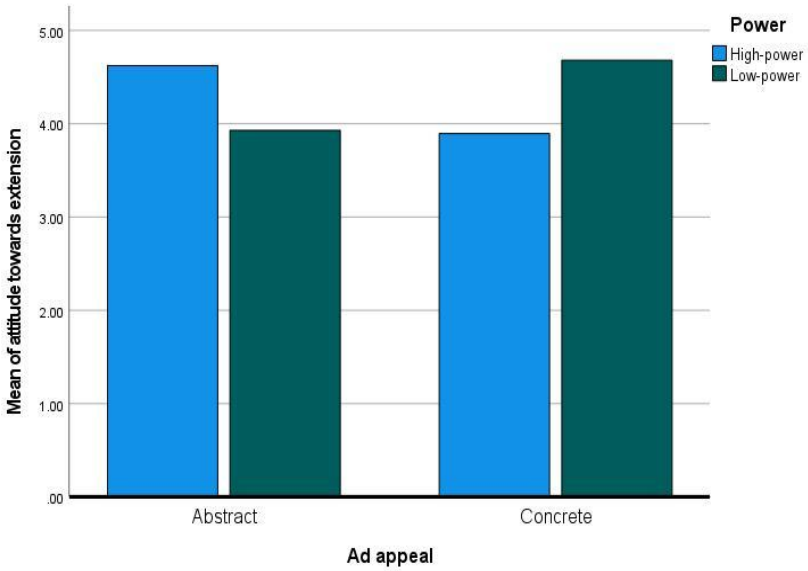

Figure 5.3: ANOVA results for attitude towards the extension

5.5 Discussion

The brand extension literature suggests that advertising appeals can influence brand extension evaluations (Baek, 2011; Jun et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2005). Earlier, Study 2 of this thesis (Chapter 4) extended this research stream by showing that an abstract advertising appeal has more favourable effects on the evaluations of a low-fit brand extension than a concrete advertising appeal. To better understand the effectiveness of abstract and concrete advertising appeals, the present study, Study 3, further determined the ways that the persuasive effects of abstract or concrete advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations may vary for high-power and low-power consumers. Specifically, drawing on CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010), the current study tested the theoretical postulation that a construal level match between advertising appeal (i.e. abstract v. concrete) and a consumers' sense of power maximises a low-fit brand extension's advertisement effectiveness.

Consistently with the matching-effect tenet of CLT, the results demonstrated that high-power (v. low-power) consumers show more favourable attitudes towards a low-fit brand extension and its advertisement when an abstract advertising appeal is used. However,

a concrete advertising appeal has a more favourable effect on attitudes toward a low-fit brand extension and its advertisement when consumers have a low level of power rather than a high level of power. These findings are consistent with those from prior advertising studies outside the brand extension literature that have reported the greater level of effectiveness of high-construal (v. low-construal) advertising appeals (e.g. benefit v. attribute appeals, emotional v. rational appeals) when matched to high-level (v. low-level) construal mindsets or far psychological distance (e.g. Kim & Song, 2019; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Roose et al., 2019).

Overall, Study 3 offers valuable theoretical and practical contributions to brand extension research. Specifically, it extends the moderating effect of social power on the matching tenet of CLT from the psychology and consumer behaviour literature to the brand extension literature by indicating the greater level of effectiveness of abstract (v. concrete) advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions when matched, in terms of construal level, to consumers' feelings of high power (v. low power). Thus, these findings provide useful insights into when marketers should use abstract or concrete advertising appeals to promote low-fit brand extensions effectively. The findings suggest that marketers should use an abstract versus a concrete advertising appeal to promote a low-fit brand extension when audiences are expected to be in a high versus a low-power state. Prior studies into luxury shopping have suggested that a high level of power is associated with a large disposable income (Koo & Im, 2019; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009).

Despite the important theoretical and practical contributions, Study 3 has some limitations. First, Study 3 considered a specific advertising appeal type, abstract and concrete, to test the effect of a construal level match between advertising appeals and social power on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Prior advertising and construal level studies have shown that other advertising appeals are also associated with various construal levels. Specifically, several studies have linked desirability and feasibility advertising appeals to high-level and low-level construal, respectively (Tok et al., 2021; Willems et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2021). Second, this study tested only one moderator of CLT's matching-effect tenet, social power, which limits the generalisability and applicability of the study's findings. Therefore, it would be useful to test how CLT's matching-effect tenet responds to a different potential moderator, such as the CDJ, which also evokes various levels of construal (Humphreys et al. (2021).

To address these limitations, Study 4 in the next chapter extends Study 3 by examining the construal level matching effect using desirability and feasibility advertising appeals and stages in the CDJ as the situational moderator. Study 4 examines whether

matching desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals to the informational versus the transactional stage of the decision journey leads to more favourable consumer responses towards a low-fit brand extension. Finally, to enhance the generalisability of this thesis' findings, Study 4 considers a different PB (i.e. Honda) and its low-fit brand extension (i.e. laptop).

Chapter 6: Study 4

To summarise the previous three studies of this thesis, Studies 1 and 2 examined the influence of construal level on consumer responses towards low-fit brand extensions. Study 1 manipulated construal level mindset and found that participants who had a high-level construal mindset had a more favourable attitude towards a low-fit brand extension than participants who had a low-level construal mindset. Study 2 used abstract and concrete advertising appeals to evoke high and low-level construal, respectively, and assessed the impact of construal level on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Like Study 1, Study 2 demonstrated that an abstract advertising appeal (v. a concrete advertising appeal) resulted in more favourable evaluations of a low-fit brand extension because an abstract appeal evoked a high-level (v. a low-level) construal mindset. Furthermore, consistently with the categorisation tenet of CLT, Study 2 revealed that a closer perceived fit was the underlying mechanism that drove the effect of an abstract advertising appeal on the evaluation of a low-fit brand extension.

Extending Study 2, Study 3 drew on the matching-effect tenet of CLT and investigated the moderating role of social power on the effectiveness of abstract and concrete advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions. It was found that an abstract (v. a concrete) advertising appeal had a more persuasive effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations for high-power (v. low-power) consumers. To further test the generalisability of the matching-effect tenet of CLT, Study 4 considered a different construal-evoking moderating factor and different advertising appeals that are associated with high versus low construal level. Specifically, Study 4 aimed to investigate the potential interaction between stages in the CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional) and desirability and feasibility advertising appeals.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it reviews the literature on the CDJ and desirability and feasibility advertising appeals. Then, it reviews the literature that links construal level to stages of the CDJ and desirability and feasibility advertising appeals, which is followed by the development of hypotheses. Afterwards, it describes the research design and results of the study. Finally, it presents the discussion and conclusion section.

6.1 Literature review

6.1.1 Consumer decision journey

Consumer decision-making process models explore the ways that consumers make purchase decisions by passing through stages (e.g. pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase) in a linear fashion (Følstad & Kvale, 2018; Towers & Towers, 2020). However, later studies have highlighted that consumer decision-making is a dynamic process (Court et al., 2009; Hamilton et al., 2019). Consumers may not always undertake decision-making stages linearly (Achrol & Kotler, 2012; Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020) and decision-making is an iterative process that includes past experiences and external factors (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). To capture its dynamic nature, researchers have used the term 'consumer journey' to refer to the decision-making process (Court et al., 2009). A consumer journey is defined as the iterative process by which a consumer starts to consider alternatives to satisfy a need or a want, evaluates and selects among them and engages in consumption (Court et al., 2009; Hamilton et al., 2019). It includes all the activities and touchpoints that a consumer experiences when moving from consideration to purchase and post-purchase (Hildebrand & Schlager, 2019). Thus, the consumer's journey is a 'conceptualization of a much more intricate and involved process by which a customer and supplier may embark that incorporates all of the experiential elements of the interactions and their flow over multiple periods' (Steward et al., 2019, p. 296).

Though the consumer's journey is one of the most prominent topics in marketing (Herhausen et al., 2019), there is a lack of common terminology. Researchers have used a multitude of terms to refer to the consumer's journey, including consumer decision-making journey (Schamp et al., 2019), path to purchase (Bell et al., 2011), consumer journey (Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019), customer journey (De Keyser et al., 2015) and consumer decision journey (Batra & Keller, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2019). This study uses the term consumer decision journey (CDJ).

Traditional consumer buying-behaviour models, such as the attention, interest, desire and action model (Lewis, 1903), the consumer decision-making process (Howard & Sheth, 1969) and the behavioural model of rational choice (Simon, 1955), have provided a theoretical foundation for customer journey models (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rudkowski et al., 2020). Similarly to these models, the CDJ has been conceptualised as comprising stages that consumers go through over time. However, there are some variations in the number of

these stages and the terms that are used for them. For example, some researchers have described the CDJ as consisting of five stages (e.g. information processing, initial consideration, evaluation of alternatives, choice, consumption experiences; Hamilton et al. (2019)), four stages (e.g. search, purchase, experience, reflect; Dellaert (2019) or three stages (e.g. pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase; Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and De Keyser et al. (2015)). Thus, a CDJ begins with a need to address or a problem to solve and ends with a resolution or re-evaluation of that need or problem (Hamilton et al., 2019). Although various terms have been used in the literature for these stages, they all describe a similar core set of activities that consumers perform when deciding to make a purchase (Santana et al., 2020). Following prior studies (Hamilton et al., 2019; Humphreys et al., 2021), this thesis considers three stages in the CDJ, from initial search to purchase: a beginning informational stage, an intermediate comparison stage and a final transactional stage (see Figure 6.1). However, this thesis uses only the informational stage and the transactional stage to examine the effectiveness of advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions.



Figure 6.1: Stages in consumer decision journey (information search to purchase)
Source: Humphreys et al. (2021)

The CDJ model has become increasingly important for understanding consumer decision-making processes (Santos & Gonçalves, 2021). There has been an increased focus on exploring CDJs (Steward et al., 2019). Prior studies on the CDJ have focused on mapping consumer journeys (Rosenbaum et al., 2017), loyalty formation (Herhausen et al., 2019) and examining the impact of various stages in the CDJ on consumer choices (Schamp et al., 2019). For example, Schamp et al. (2019) examined the impact of ethical product attributes at

various stages (consideration v. choice) in the CDJ. They found that a brand's ethical strengths exerted higher influence during the choice stage than during the consideration stage.

Furthermore, given that consumers' goals vary along their stages in the decision journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), their informational needs are also likely to vary with the stage in the journey (Batra & Keller, 2016). Despite this conjecture, only a very limited number of studies have examined the effectiveness of various advertising appeals at various stages in the CDJ (e.g. Humphreys et al., 2021). For example, Humphreys et al. (2021) showed that consumers clicked more on abstract advertisements when they were in the information stage; however, concrete advertisements were clicked more when consumers were in the transactional stage. Notably, none of the prior studies have examined the ways that various advertising appeals can influence the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions at various stages in the CDJ. This is a critical gap because different communication messages might be appropriate at different stages in the CDJ (Batra & Keller, 2016), particularly when advertising low-fit brand extensions. Therefore, this study examines how effectiveness varies for desirability and feasibility advertising appeals for a low-fit brand extension across stages in the CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional). The following section describes desirability and feasibility advertising appeals.

6.1.2 Desirability and feasibility advertising appeals

Action identification theory posits that an action can be described in terms of desirability or feasibility (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987, 1989). Desirability refers to the benefits that are associated with an action whereas feasibility concerns the ease or difficulty that is involved in the action (Castaño et al., 2008). In other words, desirability is the value of an action's outcome whereas feasibility is the ease or difficulty of achieving that outcome (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Likewise, a product can be described in terms of its desirability or feasibility features. The desirability features of a product highlight the quality of its use end state and relate to its central aspects (e.g. 'the uses of a piece of software', 'the pleasure of a movie'; Baskin et al. (2014)). However, the feasibility features involve the ease, convenience or other secondary aspects of the product (e.g. 'the ease of learning how to use software', 'the convenience of seeing a movie'; Baskin et al. (2014)).

Prior consumer studies have investigated the ways that the desirability and feasibility features of a product can influence consumer choices (Aggarwal & Zhao, 2015; Hsieh & Yalch, 2020; Liu, 2008). For example, an experiment found that consumers preferred an

option that was high on desirability (e.g. a 70 mile distant park that had waterfalls and creeks) over the one that had greater feasibility (e.g. a 40 mile distant park that had plenty of parking) when they were interrupted (e.g. a filler task during the decision; Liu (2008)).

Moreover, advertisements can use desirability or feasibility appeals to persuade consumers. Desirability advertising appeals emphasise the higher-order goal of why the product should be bought whereas feasibility advertising appeals focus on how a product works (Kazakova et al., 2016; Tok et al., 2021). Figures 6.2 and 6.3 show two real advertisements that employ desirability and feasibility advertising appeals, respectively.



Figure 6.2: Desirability advertising appeal



Figure 6.3: Feasibility advertising appeal

Many advertising studies have examined the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals (Han et al., 2019; Tok et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2021). However, none of these studies have examined the ways that desirability and feasibility advertising appeals can influence brand extension evaluations. Desirability and feasibility advertising appeals may be relevant in the context of brand extension because consumers often trade desirability for feasibility when making product choices (Liu, 2008). Importantly, desirability (e.g. functionality) and feasibility (e.g. interface) features have been shown to affect consumers' evaluations of new products (e.g. voice recognition software). However, prior brand extension studies have not examined the ways that highlighting desirability and feasibility features in advertisements for brand extensions can influence their evaluations. Therefore, this study draws on CLT to examine the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions at various stages of the CDJ.

6.1.3 Construal level, stages in the consumer decision journey and advertising appeals (desirability versus feasibility)

6.1.3.1 Stages in consumer decision journey and construal level

As was discussed in Chapter 2, psychological distance is a key determinant of construal level. CLT postulates that an object or event is represented at a high construal level

when it is psychologically distant whereas a psychologically near object or event is represented at a low construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Construal level studies have suggested four dimensions of psychological distance, including temporal, spatial, social and hypothetical. These dimensions are correlated and similarly affect construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

The existing literature has shown that different stages in the CDJ can evoke different construal levels because these stages may be perceived as psychologically distant or close to the point of purchase. For example, Dhar and Kim (2007) speculated that a consumer's mindset is at a greater psychological distance from the moment of purchase when they are at the stage of forming consideration sets (e.g. the informational stage), which may make high-level construal product attributes (e.g. quality) more important. However, consumers feel psychologically closer to purchasing when they are at the purchase stage; therefore, low-level construal features (e.g. price) might be more important at that stage. Hamilton and Chernev (2010) stated that during the browsing stage of the CDJ (e.g. the informational stage), consumers tend to gather information for possible future use (far temporal distance) whereas they are likely to collect information for use in an immediate purchase decision (near temporal distance) during the buying stage (e.g. the transactional stage). Similarly, it has been argued that in some contexts, consumers may be 'motivated by concrete goals, such as getting medications', in their decision journeys whereas in others, they may be motivated by 'more abstract goals, such as getting healthy and feeling good again' (Hamilton et al., 2019, p. 188).

More recently, Humphreys et al. (2021) argued that when consumers move along the consecutive stages of their decision journey, their purchase goal is likely to seem psychological closer because the CDJ is a spectrum that varies in terms of psychological distance from the point of purchase. They further posited that because psychological distance changes during the decision journey, consumers have high versus low-level construal when they are at an earlier versus a later stage of the decision journey (i.e. far from v. close to the purchase point). They confirmed this postulation by showing that consumers at the informational stage used abstract language for online search whereas those at the transactional stage used concrete search queries. Similar findings were found by Ma et al. (2023) in the context of luxury advertising. By applying a two-stage model of the buying process (Dhar et al., 2007), they showed that although lifestyle advertisements are more effective during the motivation-formation stage ('consumers do not yet intend to buy a luxury product and are still forming purchase interest and motivation'), functional advertisements

are more effective during the purchase decision stage ('consumers desire to buy a luxury product and their focus is on deciding which product to buy'). The authors argued that these effects occurred because consumers perceived that they were far (v. near) in psychological distance from purchase during the motivation-formation (v. purchase decision) stage, which matches the construal level of lifestyle (v. functional) advertisements thereby enhancing the effectiveness during this informational stage of lifestyle (v. functional) advertisements. In summary, prior consumer studies have established that consumers feel psychologically far, versus near, from purchasing during the informational, versus the transactional, stage of their decision journey, which, in turn, evokes high-level versus low-level construal.

6.1.3.2 Desirability and feasibility advertising appeals and construal level

Studies have suggested that desirability and feasibility advertising appeals are associated with high and low-level construal, respectively (Liberman & Trope, 1998). In fact, desirability is a superordinate 'why' aspect of an action and feasibility is a subordinate 'how' aspect of an action (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). The why aspects of an action are more general and abstract than its how aspects (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Furthermore, given that the desirability of an action's end state defines the meaning of the action, it is represented as the high-level, primary dimension of the action (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). However, although the feasibility of an action describes many of its different characteristics, it does not identify the meaning of the action and hence feasibility is construed as a low-level, subordinate dimension. Therefore, desirability versus feasibility aspects are associated with the high versus low-level construal of actions (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003).

Building on these findings, prior consumer studies have successfully predicted consumer judgement and behaviour in various contexts, such as gift giving (Baskin et al., 2014), shopping channels (Xu et al., 2021), ethical consumption (Amaral & Jiao, 2021) and shopping orientations (Scarpi, 2021a). Importantly, advertising studies have applied these findings to examine the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals (Kim, Sung, et al., 2018; Y. Lee et al., 2019; Saxton et al., 2024; F. Wang et al., 2022; Yoon et al., 2021). For example, Yoon et al. (2021) showed that because slow versus fast advertisement videos evoke high versus low-level construal, desirability (e.g. focusing on quality) versus feasibility (e.g. focusing on price) advertising appeals are liked more when an advertisement's video is slower versus faster.

In short, there exists sufficient theoretical and empirical evidence that suggests that desirability advertising appeals are associated with high-level construal whereas feasibility advertising appeals are associated with low-level construal.

6.2 Hypotheses development

The discussion in the previous section suggests that consumers have high-level construal when they are at the informational stage in their decision journey because they feel they are psychologically far from the point of purchase. However, they feel psychologically near to purchase when they are at the transactional stage and hence possess low-level construal. The preceding section highlighted that desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals are associated with high versus low-level construal. These findings are important for determining the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals for low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Construal level studies have suggested that given that the desirability versus feasibility aspects of an object or event represent high versus low-level construal, the desirability versus feasibility aspects become more important when the object or event is psychologically distant versus near (Agrawal et al., 2006; Fujita et al., 2008; Liberman & Trope, 1998; Thomas et al., 2006). For example, Liberman and Trope (1998) revealed that when deciding to attend a guest lecture, students placed more importance on the desirability aspect of the lecture (how interesting the lecture was) when it was scheduled far in the future but they cared more about its feasibility aspect (how convenient the timing was) when the lecture was scheduled for the near future. Another study demonstrated that a distant future choice was valued more when its desirability aspect was emphasised; however, a near-future choice was valued more when its feasibility rather than its desirability aspect was made salient (Agrawal et al., 2006). Likewise, consumer studies have shown that verbal contractions (e.g. they're) lead consumers to choose more products that are higher on feasibility (v. desirability) because contractions evoke low-level construal (Chan & Meng, 2023).

Building on this construal level research, many advertising studies have shown that advertising appeals are more persuasive when consumers' perceived psychological distance or construal level is matched to the construal level of the advertising appeals (Bauer, 2023; He et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2015; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Roose et al., 2019; Tok et al., 2021). In fact, a construal level match between consumers' mindsets and

advertising messages increases receptivity to advertising messages (Lee et al., 2010) and boosts a product's appeal (Spassova & Lee, 2013) thereby leading to positive consumer attitudes and behaviours (Chou & Lien, 2012; Hong et al., 2021; White et al., 2011). More relevant, it has been demonstrated that desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals are more effective when the consumer's construal level or psychological distance is high versus low.

For example, a desirability advertising appeal has a more positive impact on attitude and purchase intention towards the product when the model is far (i.e. further apart in psychological distance) from the product (Tok et al., 2021). However, a feasibility advertising appeal results in a more favourable attitude and purchase intention towards the product when the model is close to the product. Within a retail context, it has been shown that a digital sign screen in a coffee shop that shows desirability appeals generated a higher level of purchase intention when it was distant from the actual purchase decision (i.e. located at the entrance of the coffee shop) whereas a digital sign screen that showed feasibility appeals generated a higher level of purchase intention when it was located closer to the actual purchase decision (i.e. where customers placed their orders; Willems et al. (2017)). More relevant to the present study, Humphreys et al. (2021) found that consumers clicked more often on advertisements that used abstract language when they were at the informational stage in their decision journey whereas they clicked concrete advertisements more often when they were at the transactional stage. The authors argued that these effects occurred because of a construal level match between advertisements and stages in the CDJ.

Building on this construal level research within advertising, a construal level matching effect can be proposed between stages in the CDJ and advertising appeals for a low-fit brand extension. Specifically, it can be presumed that advertising appeals are more effective at improving the evaluation of a low-fit extension when matched to the stages in a CDJ in terms of construal level. Therefore, it is expected that a desirability (v. feasibility) advertising appeal generates more favourable responses towards a low-fit extension when consumers are at the informational (v. transactional) stage of their decision journey. Thus, using the construal level matching effect, it was hypothesised that:

> ***H6:*** *Consumers show a more positive (a) attitude towards the advertisement and (b) attitude towards the extension when they see a desirability appeal in the informational rather than the transactional stage of their decision journey.*

H7: *Consumers show a more positive (a) attitude towards the advertisement and (b) attitude towards the extension when they see a feasibility appeal in the transactional rather than the informational stage of their decision journey.*

The conceptual model of Study 4 is shown in Figure 6.4:

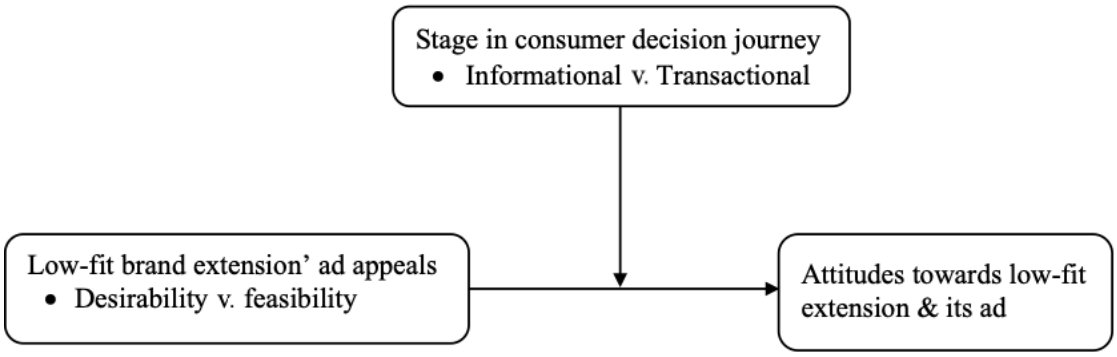

Figure 6.4: Study 4 conceptual model

6.3 Research design

This study conducted a 2 (stage in CDJ: informational, transactional) × 2 (advertising appeal: desirability, feasibility) between-subjects online experiment. It recruited US participants via Prolific, an online platform for recruiting research participants. Unlike MTurk, which is a general crowdsourcing platform, Prolific was established specifically for researchers to provide them with a subject pool (Palan & Schitter, 2018). Prolific participants produce data quality that is comparable to MTurk and superior to CrowdFlower (Peer et al., 2017). This study applied two quality filters (i.e. an attention check question and timers for the advertisement stimuli) and one qualification filter (i.e. location: the US).

This study considered Honda as the PB and a laptop as its low-fit extension, using the results of Pre-test 1 of Study 3 (see Section 5.2.1 for detail). The current study performed two pre-tests before conducting the main experiment. The purposes of these pre-tests were to (1) check the manipulation of the advertising appeals and (2) test the advertisements' professionalism, appropriateness and realism.

6.3.1 Pre-test 1: Manipulation check of advertising appeals

This study designed two print advertisements such that one had a desirability appeal and the other had a feasibility appeal. Following prior construal level studies within

advertising (Hsieh & Yalch, 2020; Tok et al., 2021), the desirability and feasibility of the advertising appeals was manipulated through the advertisement copy. Specifically, the advertisement copy for the desirability advertising appeal highlighted the desirability aspects of the laptop (e.g. best-looking, amazing display) whereas the feasibility advertising appeal emphasised the feasibility aspects of the laptop (e.g. easiest-to-use, best warranty). These extension advertisements were similar in all other aspects (see Appendix I).

A pre-test was conducted using 49 participants (males = 63%, age range = 20–50 years) to confirm the advertisement manipulation. After the initial instructions, the participants were randomly exposed to a desirability or a feasibility advertising appeal. Next, they were asked to read definitions of desirability and feasibility and to rate the focus of the Honda laptop advertisement on a seven-point semantic differential scale (1 = 'more related to feasibility', 7 = 'more related to desirability') that was adapted from prior studies (Hsieh & Yalch, 2020; Tok et al., 2021).

An independent samples *t*-test showed a significant mean difference between the desirability and feasibility advertising appeals ($M_{\text{desirability ad}}$ = 5.88, SD = 1.42 v. $M_{\text{feasibility ad}}$ = 4.08, SD = 2.22, t[47] = 3.39, p = 0.002). The higher score for the desirability advertisement indicated that it was perceived as focusing more on desirability whereas the feasibility advertisement was perceived as focusing more on feasibility. Thus, the manipulation of advertising appeal was successful.

Further, this pre-test tested whether the two advertisements differed in attitude towards the advertisement. A two-item, seven-point Likert scale (shown in Table 6.1) that was adapted from Kim and Youn (2019) was used to measure attitude towards the advertisement. The results of an independent samples *t*-test showed that there was no significant difference in attitude towards the advertisement for these two advertisements ($M_{\text{desirability ad}}$ = 4.48, SD = 1.49, $M_{\text{feasibility ad}}$ = 4.52, SD = 1.19, t[47] = 0.11, p = 0.92). Thus, the two advertisements were similarly evaluated.

6.3.2 Pre-test 2: Assessment of professionalism, appropriateness and realism of advertising appeals

The second pre-test was conducted to test whether the two advertisements were perceived as professional, appropriate and real. Forty-eight participants (males = 48%, age range = 19–49 years) were recruited. They were randomly shown a desirability advertisement or a feasibility advertisement. Afterwards, they responded to three items measuring the

professionalism, appropriateness and realism of the advertisement on seven-point bipolar scales (i.e. 1 = 'unprofessional'/'inappropriate'/'unrealistic', 7 = 'professional'/'appropriate'/'realistic'). These measures were adapted from prior studies (R. Lee et al., 2021; Yang & Oliver, 2004).

The results revealed that the two advertisements were rated high (i.e. higher than the scale midpoint according to one-sample *t*-tests) for professionalism ($M_{\text{desirability ad}}$ = 5.74, *SD* = 1.32 and $M_{\text{feasibility ad}}$ = 5.56, *SD* = 1.69), appropriateness ($M_{\text{desirability ad}}$ = 5.30, *SD* = 1.40 and $M_{\text{feasibility ad}}$ = 5.76, *SD* = 1.23) and realism ($M_{\text{desirability ad}}$ = 5.09, *SD* = 1.68 and $M_{\text{feasibility ad}}$ = 5.20, *SD* = 2.08). Furthermore, three independent samples *t*-tests demonstrated that there were no significant differences between the desirability and feasibility advertisements in terms of professionalism ($t[46] = 0.41$, $p = 0.69$), appropriateness ($t[46] = 1.20$, $p = 0.24$) and realism ($t[46] = 0.21$, $p = 0.84$). Thus, the desirability and feasibility advertisements were considered equally professional, appropriate and real.

6.3.3 Main experiment

6.3.3.1 Design, sample and procedure

This study used a 2 (stages in the CDJ: informational, transactional) × 2 (advertising appeal: desirability, feasibility) between-subjects online experiment. For this study, G*Power suggested a sample size of 128 participants against a power of 80%, medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) and 5% level of significance. This study recruited a sample of 159 US participants via Prolific. Of the participants, 44% were males and 56% were females. Their ages ranged from 19 to 50 years.

The participants first responded to demographic questions (i.e. age, gender) and two PB-related questions (i.e. attitude towards and familiarity with the PB). Next, they were asked to imagine that they were considering buying a laptop. Then, they were assigned to the informational or transactional stage of the CDJ by adopting a procedure from Humphreys et al. (2021). Specifically, they were told that consumers tend to pass through three sequential stages when making a buying decision and were shown a diagram that described each stage (see Appendix II). The diagram presented three chevrons that represented three stages of the CDJ: Stage 1 (informational), Stage 2 (intermediate comparison) and Stage 3 (transactional). Then, the participants were asked to imagine themselves at the informational or the transactional stage, depending on the condition to which they had been randomly assigned, and were shown the respective chevron/image of the stage (see Appendix II). Next, they were

randomly exposed to an advertisement that used a desirability or a feasibility advertising appeal for a low-fit brand extension (Honda laptop). Finally, they provided their responses to the measures of the dependent variables (i.e. attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the extension) and the manipulation checks.

6.3.3.2 Measures

This study adapted measures from prior studies. All the measures were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale, except for the manipulation check items, which used a seven-point semantic differential scale. Attitude towards the extension was measured using three items that were adapted from Lee and Aaker (2004). A two-item measure was adapted from Kim and Youn (2019) to measure attitude towards the advertisement. The manipulation of the CDJ stage was assessed using a single-item semantic differential scale ('please indicate whether the situation you imagined at the start was...'; 1 = 'far from point of purchase', 7 = 'close to point of purchase') that was adapted from Humphreys et al. (2021). The manipulation of advertising appeal was checked using the same single-item semantic differential scale that was used in Pre-test 2. Finally, the perceived parent–extension fit was measured using two-item scales that were adapted from Su et al. (2021). All the measures are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Measures of dependent variables and manipulation checks

Variable	Item
Attitude towards the extension ($\alpha = 0.957$)	I have a favourable attitude towards the advertised laptop. My attitude towards the advertised laptop is positive. I think the advertised laptop is good.
Attitude towards the extension advertisement ($\alpha = 0.973$)	My attitude towards the laptop advertisement is positive. I have a favourable towards the laptop advertisement.
Extension fit ($\alpha = 0.966$)	Laptop fits with the Honda brand. Laptop is consistent with the Honda brand.

6.4 Analysis and results

6.4.1 Manipulation checks

This study first checked whether the manipulations of the CDJ stage and advertising appeal were successful. The results revealed that the manipulation of the CDJ stage was successful because the participants that were assigned to the transactional stage scored higher, meaning that they perceived themselves to be closer to purchase than the participants that were assigned to the informational stage ($M_{\text{informational stage}} = 2.07$, $SD = 1.56$ v. $M_{\text{transactional stage}} = 6.29$, $SD = 1.29$, $t[157] = 18.53$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the manipulation of advertising appeal was successful because the advertisement that had desirability appeal was perceived as focusing more on desirability than feasibility ($M_{\text{desirability ad}} = 5.34$, $SD = 1.64$ v. $M_{\text{feasibility ad}} = 4.25$, $SD = 1.91$, $t[157] = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the average score for perceived parent–extension fit ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.62$) confirmed that the laptop was considered a low-fit extension for the Honda PB.

6.4.2 Main analyses

The mean of PB familiarity ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.31$) and PB attitude ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.26$) demonstrated that the participants were familiar with Honda and evaluated it positively. Initially, two ANOVAs were run to see whether the participants across four experimental groups differed in terms of PB familiarity and attitude towards the PB. The results indicated that the four experimental groups did not differ in terms of PB attitude ($F[1, 155] = 0.08$, $p = 0.78$) or PB familiarity ($F[1, 155] = 2.34$, $p = 0.13$). Therefore, these factors were not used as covariates in further analyses.

To test the hypotheses, a MANOVA was performed, using attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the extension as the two dependent variables. The main effects of the CDJ stage (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 0.99$, $F[2, 154] = 0.11$, $p = 0.89$) and advertising appeal (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 0.99$, $F[2, 154] = 0.83$, $p = 0.44$) were not significant. However, the interaction between the CDJ stage and advertising appeal was significant (*Wilk's* $\lambda = 0.96$, $F[2, 154] = 3.11$, $p = 0.047$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). To test the hypotheses, the univariate results from the MANOVA were further examined and planned mean comparisons were performed.

6.4.2.1 Attitude towards the advertisement

The interaction effect was significant on attitude towards the advertisement (F[1, 155] = 6.25, p = 0.01, η^2 = 0.04). The interaction chart is shown in Figure 6.5. Furthermore, simple means comparisons revealed that the participants exhibited more favourable attitudes towards the advertisement when it used a desirability advertising appeal and they were at the informational stage of their decision journey rather than at the transactional stage ($M_{\text{informational stage}}$ = 4.91, SD = 1.31 v. $M_{\text{transactional stage}}$ = 4.41, SD = 1.31, t[77] = 1.71, p = 0.046 [1-tailed], d = 0.38). However, the participants demonstrated a more positive attitude towards the advertisement when it used a feasibility appeal and they were in the transactional stage of their decision journey rather than in the informational stage ($M_{\text{transactional stage}}$ = 4.71, SD = 1.48 v. $M_{\text{informational stage}}$ = 4.11, SD = 1.43, t[78] = 1.83, p = 0.035 [1-tailed], d = 0.41). These results provided support for H6a and H7a.

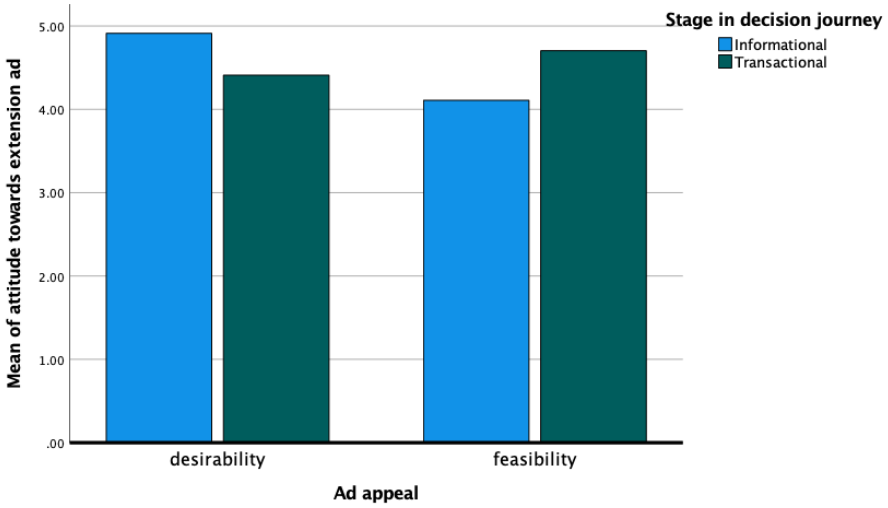

Figure 6.5: ANOVA results for attitude towards brand extension advertisement

6.4.2.2 Attitude towards brand extension

The interaction between the stage in the CDJ and advertising appeal was significant for attitude towards the extension (F[1, 155] = 5.44, p = 0.02, η^2 = 0.03; see Figure 6.6). Specifically, a desirability advertising appeal generated a more positive attitude towards the extension when consumers were at the informational rather than the transactional stage of their decision journey ($M_{\text{informational stage}}$ = 4.89, SD = 1.20 v. $M_{\text{transactional stage}}$ = 4.38, SD = 1.29, t[77] = 1.82, p = 0.036 [1-tailed], d = 0.41). However, the participants' attitude towards the extension was marginally more favourable after seeing a feasibility advertising appeal when

they were at the transactional stage rather than the informational stage ($M_{\text{transactional stage}}$ = 4.72, SD = 1.51 v. $M_{\text{informational stage}}$ = 4.20, SD = 1.50, t[78] = 1.53, p = 0.06 [1-tailed], d = 0.34). These results supported H6b and H7b.

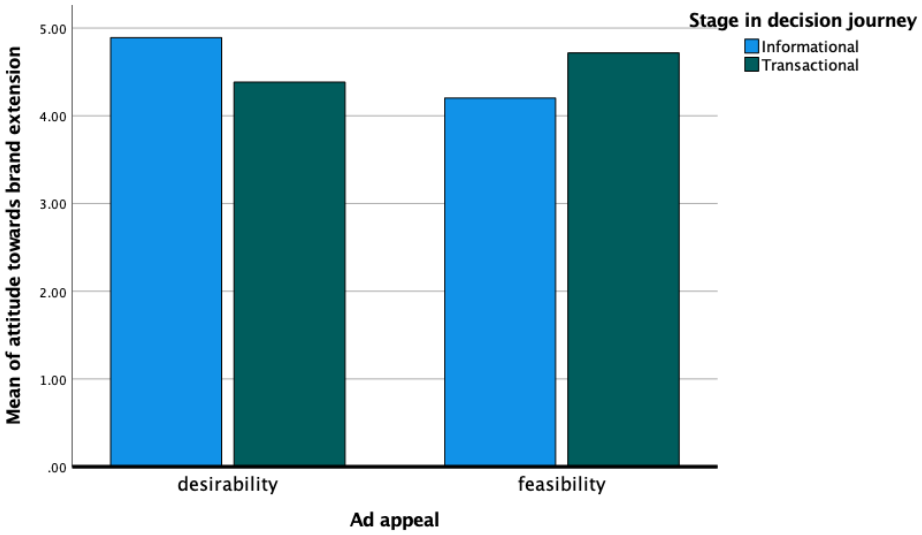

Figure 6.6: ANOVA results for attitude towards brand extension

6.5 Discussion

The current study investigated how the stages in the CDJ influence the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Specifically, it drew on the matching tenet of CLT to test whether matching the construal levels of the stages in the CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional) to those of advertising appeals (i.e. desirability v. feasibility) leads to more favourable consumer responses towards a low-fit brand extension. The findings provided support for this study's postulation. That is, consistently with the construal level matching effect, a desirability advertising appeal resulted in more favourable attitudes towards a low-fit extension and its advertisement when the participants imagined that they were at the informational stage in their decision journey. However, when the participants imagined that they were at the transactional stage of their consumer journey, a feasibility advertising appeal generated more positive attitudes towards the extension and its advertisement. Thus, Study 4 confirms the robustness of the construal level matching effect for enhancing the favourable evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. These findings are consistent with those of prior advertising studies outside the brand extension literature that have reported a greater effectiveness of advertising

appeals when they match other factors in terms of construal level (He et al., 2020; Kim & Song, 2019; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Septianto et al., 2021).

Study 4 provides useful theoretical contributions to the brand extension and advertising literatures. The main theoretical contribution of this study comes from the extension of the construal level matching effect to the brand extension literature by showing the effectiveness of desirability and feasibility advertising appeals when matched to the construal level that is associated with the stage of the CDJ for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. By doing so, it adds to prior brand extension studies that have shown the effectiveness of a limited number of other advertising appeals for improving brand extension evaluations (e.g. Baek & King, 2015; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010a; Puligadda et al., 2013). Further, Study 4 contributes to advertising research that demonstrates the greater level of effectiveness of advertising appeals when matched to other factors in terms of construal level (e.g. He et al., 2020; Kim & Song, 2019; S. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Septianto et al., 2021). Moreover, it extends the literature on the CDJ by showing how the stages in a CDJ have various levels of construal, which, in turn, affects the effectiveness of advertising appeals that have different construal levels, such as desirability and feasibility advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions. These findings offer important practical contributions. Specifically, these findings suggest that if marketers can target messages to consumers according to their stage in the decision journey, they should use desirability advertising appeals to advertise a low-fit brand extension when consumers are in the informational stage of their decision journey and feasibility advertising appeals when consumers are in the transactional stage. For example, an advertiser that uses targeted digital adverting could identify a consumer's decision stage from the queries that they enter into search engines (Rutz & Bucklin, 2011) or the types of pages that they visit on websites (Moe, 2003). In the context of a brand extension, all consumers are in the informational stage if the extension is announced before its launch and after its launch, heavy category buyers might be more likely than others to be in the transactional stage.

A limitation of Study 4 is that it did not examine the underlying mechanism that drives the construal level matching effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Thus, it remains unclear which process explains the ways that the construal level matching effect between the stages in the CDJ and advertising appeals influences low-fit brand extension evaluations. Addressing this question is critical because advertising researchers should test potential mediators to provide theoretical reasons for observed effects (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). Prior studies into the effects of construal level and advertising have

suggested that a construal level match between an advertising appeal and other situational factors (e.g. temporal distance, product–model distance in advertisement) enhances processing fluency, which, in turn, leads to favourable consumer responses (Kim et al., 2009; Tok et al., 2021). Consistent with this research, processing fluency might have underpinned the interaction between the stage in the CDJ and advertising appeal on low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Therefore, building on prior research, Study 5 attempts to determine the theoretical underpinning of the construal level matching effect by testing whether processing fluency can explain the observed effects. It manipulates processing fluency to causally test whether it mediates the construal level matching effect between the stages in the CDJ and advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. In doing so, it follows researchers' recommendations to test mediating effects by manipulating the mediating variable whenever possible instead of measuring it (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017).

Chapter 7: Study 5

This thesis draws on two tenets of CLT to predict the ways that various advertising appeals can help to enhance the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. The first two studies of this thesis, Studies 1 and 2, drew on the categorisation tenet of CLT and showed that high-level (v. low-level) construal and abstract (v. concrete) advertising appeals, respectively, can encourage better evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. Furthermore, Study 2 confirmed that this effect occurs as high-level construal that is evoked by an abstract advertising appeal increases the perception of fit between the PB and the low-fit extension. Unlike the first two studies, Studies 3 and 4 built on the matching-effect tenet of CLT and revealed that a matching (v. mismatching) construal level between an advertising appeal and the consumer's feeling of social power or their stage in the purchase decision journey results in a more favourable evaluation of a low-fit brand extension. However, unlike Studies 1 and 2, Studies 3 and 4 did not empirically confirm the underpinning mechanism that drives the construal level matching effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Many prior advertising studies outside the brand extension literature have suggested that processing fluency underpins the effect of construal level matching on consumers' advertisement-related responses (e.g. Chang & Chen, 2022; Gu & Chen, 2021; He et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Roose et al., 2019; White et al., 2011). Therefore, Study 5 investigated whether processing fluency is the underlying mechanism through which a construal level match (v. mismatch) affects consumer responses towards advertisements for low-fit brand extensions. To test this, Study 5 examined whether processing fluency mediates the effect of a construal level match between an advertising appeal and the stage of a CDJ (i.e. informational v. transactional) on the consumer's evaluation of a low-fit brand extension. To enhance the generalisability of the construal level matching effect in brand extension evaluations, this study considered a different pair of contrasting advertising appeals (i.e. promotion v. prevention), which have also been shown to possess varying construal levels (i.e. high level v. low level).

Importantly, Study 5 used an experimental-causal-chain design, which is the simplest approach to experimentally establishing a mediation effect (Spencer et al., 2005) but also the most rigorous (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017; Spencer et al., 2005). Specifically, this design requires two manipulated experiments: one to establish the causal effect of the independent variable (X) on the mediator (M) and the second to confirm the causal effect of

the mediator (M) on the outcome variable (Y; Wu and Zumbo (2008)). Thus, this approach causally establishes the mediation effect by manipulating the mediator instead of merely measuring it, which provides only correlational evidence for mediation (Armstrong, 2012). See Section 7.3 for more details on experimental-causal-chain design.

This chapter is organised as follows. First, it reviews the psychological and advertising literature that is relevant to processing fluency. Second, it reviews the literature on promotion and prevention advertising appeals and provides evidence about their association with various construal levels. Third, a hypothesis about the mediation effect of processing fluency is developed. Finally, the designs and results of two studies (Studies 5a and 5b) are presented, followed by a discussion section. Following the experimental-causal-chain design, Study 5a investigates whether a construal level match (v. mismatch) leads to more (v. less) fluent processing of a low-fit brand extension advertisement. Study 5b further tests whether more (v. less) fluent processing of the low-fit brand extension advertisement results in more (v. less) favourable consumer responses towards the low-fit brand extension.

7.1 Literature review

7.1.1 Processing fluency

Individuals consider various sources of information when making judgements. They make use of declarative information (e.g. perceived features of the target stimulus) and experiential information (e.g. their feelings) when making judgements (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Winkielman et al., 2003). The dynamics of information processing itself could serve as a source of experiential information (Winkielman et al., 2003). In this regard, cognitive fluency research shows that processing fluency, defined as the subjective experience of the ease or difficulty of processing information, can provide input in judgement and choice (Schwarz et al., 2021). Processing fluency is a metacognitive experience (Unkelbach & Greifeneder, 2013a), which refers to individuals' feelings about their own thoughts or thought processes (Briñol et al., 2006). In fact, any cognitive task (e.g. perceiving, retrieving and processing) can be categorised along a continuum that ranges from very easy to very difficult and therefore as a metacognitive experience that ranges from fluency to disfluency (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Unkelbach & Greifeneder, 2013a).

The existing literature suggests that processing fluency is hedonically marked (see Winkielman et al. (2003) for a detailed review). That is, a high level of processing fluency signals a more positive state and elicits positive feelings (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004;

Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001; Winkielman et al., 2003). This is because a high level of processing fluency is associated with 'progress toward successful recognition of the stimulus, error-free processing, or the availability of appropriate knowledge structures to interpret the stimulus' (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004, p. 366). Given that rapid cognitive progress is experienced as rewarding, high levels of fluency tend to produce positive affect whereas high levels of disfluency tend to cause negative affect (Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Indeed, individuals can read processing fluency through some internal metacognitive feedback system (Mazzoni & Nelson, 2014), which can make the fluency signal available to other processing models, including the affect system (Fernandez-Duque et al., 2000). In short, the processing fluency literature converges on the view that fluency is hedonically marked.

The existing literature has established that processing fluency affects individual judgement and behaviour. For example, it has been shown that processing fluency affects familiarity (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008), perceived truth (Newman et al., 2014), perception of risk (Dohle & Siegrist, 2014), confidence (Finn & Tauber, 2015) and engagement (Shulman et al., 2020). The literature on processing fluency provides two theoretical justifications for its effect on judgement. The first justification uses the feelings-as-information model (Schwarz & Clore, 1983), which posits that feelings serve as a source of information unless their perceived informational value for the judgement is undermined through (mis)attribution manipulations (see Schwarz and Clore (2003) for review). Processing fluency is hedonically marked, that is, high levels of fluency (disfluency) tend to be marked with a positive (negative) affect and therefore people may use their feelings that result from processing fluency as a source of information to make judgements (Schwarz, 2012; Schwarz et al., 2021). However, people may not be aware of the source of this processing fluency (Reber, Wurtz, et al., 2004) because it is felt at the periphery of conscious awareness (Herrmann et al., 2013). Indeed, people are more sensitive to their feelings than to the source of their feelings (Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Therefore, perceivers interpret the positive affect that is elicited by processing fluency as their response to the target, resulting in more positive evaluations (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004). Taken together, these findings suggest that processing fluency can indirectly influence judgement through affect (Briñol et al., 2006; Dovidio & Gluszek, 2012; Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004).

Second, processing fluency can affect judgement through the application of 'naïve theories', which provide relevant rules for making judgements (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009). For example, people have a naïve theory that the better something feels, the more they should like it and often form judgements in part by monitoring their feelings (Pham et al., 2001;

Schwarz et al., 1991). The two processes through which processing fluency affects judgement are shown in Figure 7.1 (adapted from Dragojevic and Giles (2016)).

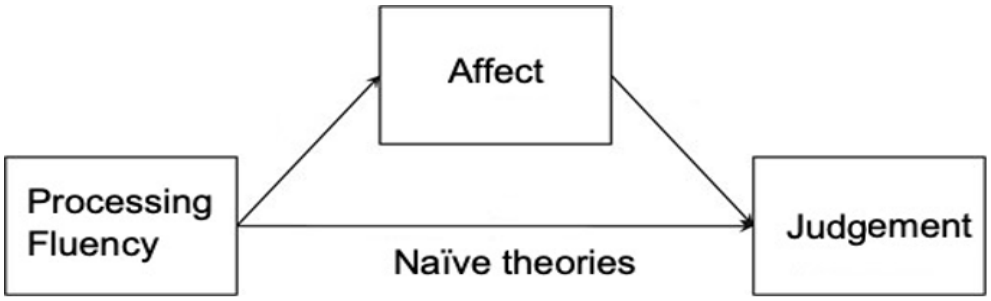

Figure 7.1: Processes through which processing fluency affects judgement

7.1.2 Role of processing fluency in advertising

The concept of processing fluency is increasingly applied to consumer research to understand consumer behaviour in domains such as luxury goods preferences (Chan & Northey, 2021), online buying (Ko et al., 2015), product innovativeness (Min, 2023) and deal perceptions for coupons (Kramer & Kim, 2007). Moreover, processing fluency has been used widely in advertising research to understand advertising effectiveness (e.g. Auschaitrakul & Mukherjee, 2017; Chang, 2013; Leonhardt et al., 2015; Roy & Phau, 2014; Septianto et al., 2022). Specifically, it has been found that in addition to the thoughts and ideas that marketing communications may engender, the experience of processing these communications can affect judgement (Kostyk et al., 2021). Similarly to the processing fluency literature in psychology (see Section 7.1.1), advertising studies argue that easily processed advertising messages lead consumers to experience high levels of processing fluency. Subsequently, a positive experience or affect emerges that influences downstream advertisement-related responses, including attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the advertised product and purchase intention (Ma et al., 2023).

Most of the advertising studies that have applied processing fluency theory have demonstrated that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of advertisements on consumer responses. For example, Auschaitrakul and Mukherjee (2017) demonstrated that online display advertising is processed more fluently when it appears on commercial websites (e.g. Walmart) rather than social websites (e.g. Facebook), which, in turn, leads to more positive attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand. Similarly, Roy

and Phau (2014) showed that a match between consumers' regulatory focus (promotion v. prevention) and advertising appeals (imagery v. analytical) resulted in a more favourable attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention. They further confirmed that processing fluency underpinned these effects.

Despite being an important mechanism through which various advertising appeals can influence consumer responses, none of the prior advertising studies within the brand extension literature have examined the mediating role of processing fluency. This lack of mediation research, perhaps, has limited the brand extension literature to examining the effectiveness of a narrow range of advertising appeals (e.g. emotional, nostalgia, comparative) for improving brand extension evaluations. This oversight is particularly critical for studies that support the possible role of processing fluency in brand extension advertising. For example, building on the grounded cognition theory, Huang et al. (2017) showed that a match between a consumer's physical distance from the brand extension (near v. far) and the distance between the PB and the extension (high-fit v. low-fit brand extension) enhances processing fluency, which, in turn, improves brand extension evaluations. Therefore, to address this gap, Study 5 examines whether processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the construal level matching effect between the stages in the consumer's decision-making journey and advertising appeals. Specifically, this study considers promotion and prevention advertising appeals to test this postulation. The following section reviews promotion and prevention advertising appeals.

7.1.3 Promotion and prevention advertising appeals

A critical issue that advertisers face when developing persuasive advertising is deciding what benefits to communicate and how to convey these benefits (X. Zhang et al., 2020). The advertising literature suggests that the benefits of consuming an advertised product can be presented using promotion or prevention advertising appeals. A promotion advertising appeal emphasises the ways that the advertised product can help to achieve desirable outcomes whereas a prevention advertising appeal emphasises the ways that using the advertised product can prevent undesirable outcomes (Chou & Lien, 2012; Sar & Anghelcev, 2015; Wu & Dodoo, 2020). In other words, a promotion advertising appeal highlights the positive outcomes that could be attained by using the advertised product. However, a prevention advertising appeal highlights the negative outcomes that could be avoided by using the advertised product. Promotion and prevention advertising appeals are

commonly used to promote several CPGs, such as toothpaste, soap, juice and shampoo. Figures 7.2 and Figure 7.3 show a real example of a promotion and prevention advertising appeal, respectively.



Figure 7.2: Promotion-framed advertising appeal



Figure 7.3: Prevention-framed advertising appeal

The idea of promotion and prevention advertising appeals comes from regulatory focus theory (RFT; Higgins (1997, 1998)). RFT proposes two distinct self-regulatory foci that individuals use when pursuing goals: a promotion focus and a prevention focus. A promotion focus concerns growth and advancement needs that motivate attaining hopes and aspirations (i.e. ideals; Brockner and Higgins (2001)). Therefore, a promotion focus is sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes and follows an eager strategy (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). However, a prevention focus pertains to security needs that motivate the fulfillment of duties and obligations (i.e. the oughts; Brockner and Higgins (2001)). A prevention focus is sensitive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes and employs a vigilant strategy (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Consistently with these foci, promotion and prevention-framed advertising appeals similarly emphasise the positive and negative outcomes that are associated with using the advertised product, respectively.

Given their theoretical and practical relevance, promotion and prevention advertising appeals have attracted substantial attention from advertising researchers. Early studies demonstrated that a match between consumer regulatory focus and promotion and prevention appeals influenced their persuasive effects (Cesario et al., 2004; Evans & Petty, 2003; Florack & Scarabis, 2006; Kim, 2006; Zhao & Pechmann, 2007). Later studies have identified several other moderating factors, such as product type (i.e. hedonic v. utilitarian; Micu and Chowdhury (2010)), message framing (i.e. loss v. gain; Lin and Shen (2012)), self-construal (i.e. independent v. interdependent; Kareklas et al. (2012); Sung and Choi (2011)), mood (Baek & Reid, 2013; Sar & Anghelcev, 2015) and social experience (i.e. social inclusion v. exclusion; Wu and Dodoo (2020)). However, prior studies have not investigated the effectiveness of promotion and prevention advertising appeals for improving low-fit brand extension evaluations. Though a few studies have examined the ways that individual differences (Chang et al., 2011; Shine et al., 2007; Yeo & Park, 2006) or cultural differences (Kim & Park, 2019) in regulatory foci affect brand extension evaluations, no prior brand extension study has investigated the effectiveness of promotion and prevention advertising appeals. This oversight is critical given that these advertising appeals are often used to promote a wide variety of products (e.g. soap, shampoo, perfume) and thus are relevant to advertising a low-fit brand extension. Therefore, this study investigates the effectiveness of promotion and prevention advertising appeals for promoting low-fit brand extensions. Specifically, this study examines whether the effectiveness of promotion and prevention advertising appeals for promoting low-fit brand extensions depends on the stage in a CDJ.

7.1.4 Construal level of promotion and prevention advertising appeals

This study argues that promotion and prevention advertising appeals represent high and low-level construal, respectively. The main support for this argument stems from the literature that links regulatory focus and construal level. Initially, Liberman et al. speculated that:

> A prevention focus encourages representation in a more concrete and detailed form because every component of the task can potentially thwart the goal of safety and security. However, a promotion focus might encourage a more abstract and general representation of a task because the goals of advancement and growth depend on finding any means of making progress (1999, p. 1143).

Consistently with this speculation, several studies have shown that individuals who have a promotion focus are likely to construe information at a high level whereas individuals who have a prevention focus tend to construe information at a low level (Förster & Higgins, 2005; Pennington & Roese, 2003; Semin et al., 2005).

For example, Pennington and Roese (2003) showed a bidirectional relationship between regulatory focus and temporal distance, which is one of the main determinants of construal level. Specifically, in their Experiment 1, they confirmed the effect of temporal distance on regulatory focus by showing that participants had a greater level of concern for promotion-focused outcomes (e.g. improving GPA, achieving a high score) in the distant future (i.e. an exam in two weeks' time) than in the near future (i.e. an exam that day). However, the extent of participants' concern for prevention-focused outcomes (e.g. avoiding a poor score or a damaging transcript) did not differ as a function of temporal distance from the exam. Furthermore, this study revealed the effect of regulatory focus on temporal distance by demonstrating that individuals took more time to initiate and complete promotion-focused goals than prevention-focused goals.

Similarly, Förster and Higgins (2005) argued that because prevention-focused individuals emphasise security and employ a vigilant strategy, they should consider their concrete surroundings to maintain security. However, given that promotion-focused individuals focus on growth and apply an eager strategy, they might consider abstract construal more relevant because of the global and explorative nature of such a construal. Consistently with this argument, they found that individuals who had a promotion (v. a prevention) focus performed better (i.e. had a faster reaction time) on a global (v. a local) task (i.e. the Navon letter task; Navon (1977)). In addition, this study confirmed a reverse

relationship from construal level to regulatory focus (Study 2). Specifically, they primed high versus low-level construal through a global versus local task (i.e. the Navon letter task) and found that the high-construal participants assigned a higher price to a mug in an eager condition ('think of what they would gain by choosing the mug or the pen') rather than a vigilant condition ('think of what they would lose by not choosing the mug or the pen'). However, the low-construal participants assigned the mug a higher price in a vigilant condition instead of an eager condition.

More evidence about the effect of regulatory focus on construal level stems from studies that have shown the influence of regulatory focus on language abstraction. Semin et al. (2005) demonstrated that participants used more abstract and global strategic formulations for being a good friend (e.g. being available, good) when they were primed into a promotion-focused condition by being asked to 'Imagine that you are the kind of person who likes to be a good friend in your close relationships. What would your strategy be to meet this goal?' However, the participants used more concrete and local strategic formulations (e.g. through frequent visits, phoning) if they were primed into a prevention-focused condition by being asked to 'Imagine that you are the kind of person who believes you should try not to be a poor friend in your close relationships. What would your strategy be to meet this goal?' In summary, a considerable number of studies has consistently established bidirectional relationships between a promotion focus and high-level construal and between a prevention focus and low-level construal.

Building on these findings, advertising researchers have argued that promotion advertising appeals are likely to be construed at a high level because these appeals claim to help consumers to attain their desired outcomes and are more related to desirability (Chou & Lien, 2012). However, prevention advertising appeals are likely to be construed at a low level because such appeals clearly describe the ways that consumers can avoid negative outcomes and are concerned with feasibility (Chou & Lien, 2012). By applying the matching-effect tenet of CLT, several advertising studies have investigated the effectiveness of promotion and prevention advertising appeals (Ahn et al., 2022; Chou & Lien, 2012; Ng & Batra, 2017; Sar & Anghelcev, 2015). For example, Sar and Anghelcev (2015) drew on CLT's matching tenet to examine the effectiveness of promotion and prevention anti-alcohol-impaired driving advertisements. They found that a promotion advertising appeal was more persuasive when participants were in a positive mood because a positive mood induced global processing (i.e. high-level construal) which matched the promotion advertising appeal. However, when participants' mood was negative, they engaged in local processing (i.e. low-level construal)

and evaluated a prevention advertising appeal more positively because of its construal level match.

Similarly, Chou and Lien (2012) found that a promotion advertising appeal generated more favourable advertisement effects (i.e. attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the brand) in the far spatial distance condition (i.e. high-level construal) than it did in the near spatial distance condition (i.e. low-level construal) whereas a prevention advertising appeal caused more favourable advertisement effects when spatial distance was near rather than far. Recently, Ahn et al. (2022) revealed that a promotion advertising appeal had a more positive effect on attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand when its advertising claims were metaphorical (i.e. abstract imagery and implicit) rather than literal (i.e. concrete and explicit). Importantly, they highlighted that these effects occurred because of a construal level match between a promotion (v. prevention) advertising appeal and metaphorical (v. literal) advertisement claims.

The empirical evidence clearly suggests that a promotion-framed advertising appeal is associated with high-level construal whereas a prevention-framed advertising appeal is associated with low-level construal. The next section develops hypotheses for the present study.

7.2 Hypotheses development

Individuals experience fluency when they process information that corresponds to their mental state (Reber, Schwarz, et al., 2004) or orientation (Lee et al., 2010). However, processing information that is inconsistent with one's mental representation is a less fluent experience (Petty & Wegener, 1998). In fact, congruent information interacts with one's long-term memory and is easier to understand and remember (Maille & Fleck, 2011). It may be processed fluently because it matches the way that people naturally think about it (Germelmann et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2010). This processing fluency can further influence judgements when people misattribute the feeling of fluency to the target stimulus, as was discussed in Section 7.1.1.

A growing body of advertising literature demonstrates that an advertisement message or appeal that is consistent with a consumer's construal level increases processing fluency and consequently improves evaluations (Chang & Chen, 2022; Gu & Chen, 2021; He et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Roose et al., 2019; White et al., 2011). For example, Kim et al. (2009) showed that a construal level fit between an election's temporal distance

(i.e. being held far v. near in the future) and the abstractness of a political candidate's message (i.e. focusing on the why v. the how of doing things) enhanced processing fluency, leading to a more favourable attitude towards the candidate. Gu and Chen (2021) revealed that matching construal level between charitable cause phrasing (i.e. abstract v. concrete) and money phrasing (i.e. specific amount v. specific amount with specific usage) resulted in greater levels of processing fluency, which ultimately led to higher levels of intention to donate and donation behaviour. In addition, Tok et al. (2021) found that a construal level match between horizonal product–model distance (i.e. far v. near) and advertising appeal (i.e. desirability v. feasibility) enhanced processing fluency, resulting in more favourable product evaluations.

Extending this line of advertising research, the current study investigates whether processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the joint effects of the CDJ and advertising appeal on low-fit extension evaluations. As was discussed in Study 4, the informational and transactional stages in a CDJ can evoke different construal levels because consumers feel varying psychological distances from the purchase in these stages. Specifically, it has been indicated that the informational stage evokes high-level construal because consumers feel psychologically far from the purchase at this stage. However, the transactional stage is more likely to evoke low-level construal because consumers feel psychologically close to the purchase at this stage. Furthermore, the discussion in Section 7.1.4 indicates that promotion and prevention advertising appeals are associated with high and low-level construal, respectively. The matching tenet of CLT suggests that a promotion appeal should be processed more fluently during the consumer's informational stage because of a construal level match (both high-level construal) whereas a prevention appeal should be more fluent during the transactional stage because of matched construal (both low-level construal). Subsequently, processing fluency is predicted to cause more favourable consumer responses towards a low-fit extension, including attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the extension. Therefore, it was hypothesised that:

> ***H8:*** *Processing fluency mediates the influence of a match between the construal level of an advertising appeal and that of the consumer's stage in the decision journey on (a) attitude towards the advertisement and (b) attitude towards the extension.*

The conceptual model of Study 5 is shown in Figure 7.4:

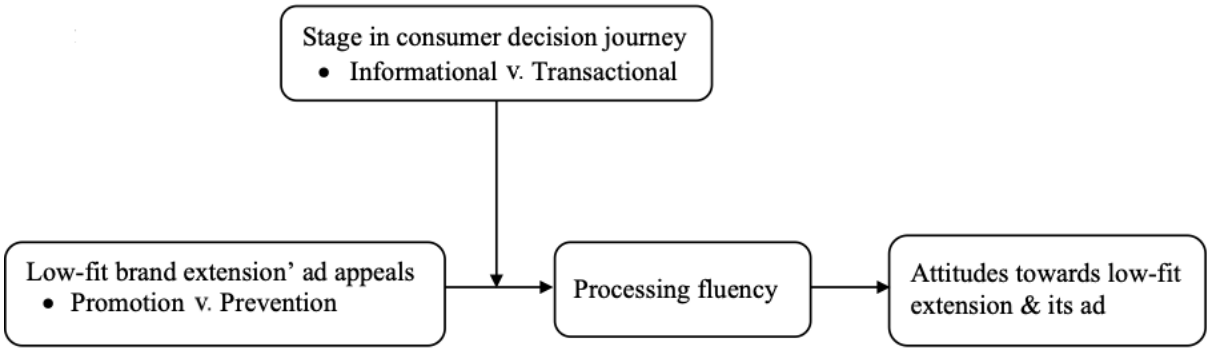

Figure 7.4: Study 5 conceptual model

7.3 Research design

To causally test whether processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the construal level matching effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations, Study 5 used an experimental-causal-chain design. The experimental-causal-chain design is regarded as the simplest yet best approach to experimentally establishing a mediation effect (Spencer et al., 2005). An experimental-causal-chain design first observes the mediator as an independent variable for the manipulated independent variable. Then, the mediator is manipulated to serve as an independent variable for the outcome variable. That is, this design requires two manipulated experiments: one to establish the causal effect of the independent variable (X) on the mediator (M) and the second to confirm the causal effect of the mediator (M) on the outcome variable (Y; Wu and Zumbo (2008)). The experimental-causal-chain design offers a more rigorous approach to causally testing the mediation effect and is recommended when the mediator is easy to measure and manipulate (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017; Spencer et al., 2005). Given that processing fluency is easy to measure and manipulate, Study 5 used the experimental-causal-chain design to test whether it mediates the construal level matching effect on consumers' responses towards an advertisement for a low-fit brand extension.

Two experiments were conducted to examine the proposed mediating effect of processing fluency, in line with the experimental-causal-chain design described earlier. The first experiment, Study 5a, investigated whether a construal level match (v. mismatch) between the consumer decision-making stage (i.e. informational v. transactional) and advertising appeal (i.e. promotion v. prevention) leads to a more (v. less) fluent processing of

a low-fit brand extension advertisement. The second experiment, Study 5b, tested whether more (v. less) fluent processing of a low-fit brand extension advertisement results in more (v. less) favourable consumer responses towards the low-fit brand extension. Figure 7.5 presents a diagrammatic view of the experimental-causal-chain design that was used in Study 5.

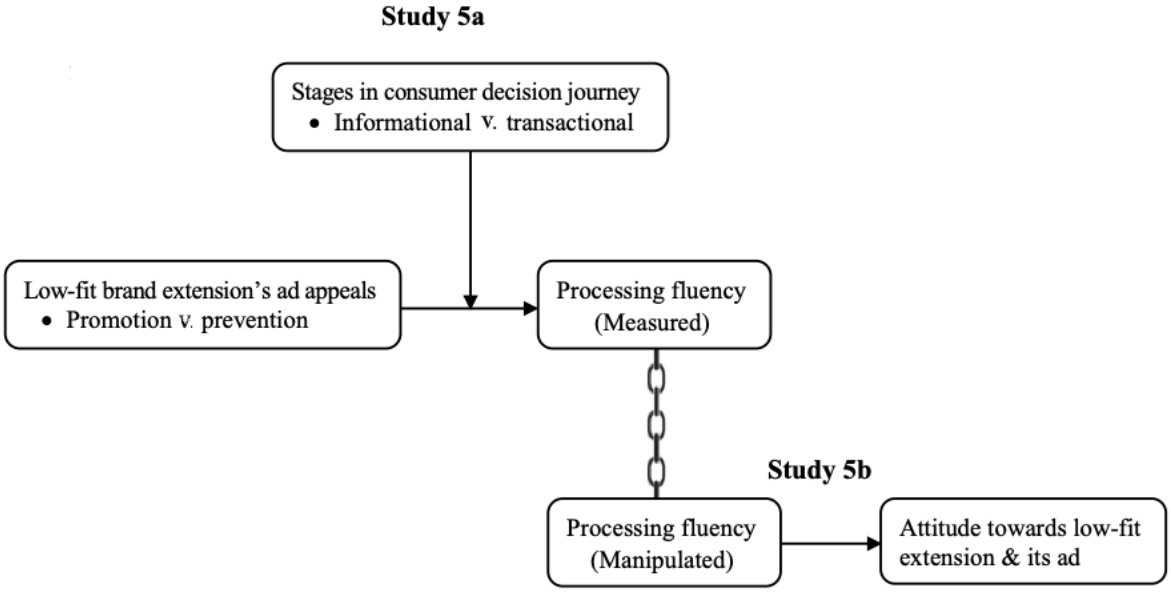

Figure 7.5: Experimental-causal-chain design used in Study 5

Using Pre-test 1 that was conducted in Study 3 (see Section 5.2.1 for details), Philips was selected as the PB for this study and sneakers as its low-fit extension. Two advertisements were designed for Philips sneakers. Before conducting the two main experiments, a pre-test was performed to check the advertising appeal manipulations and the professionalism, appropriateness and realism of the advertisements.

7.3.1 Pre-test: Advertising appeals' manipulation, professionalism, appropriateness and realism

Two print advertisements were designed such that one had promotion appeal and the other had prevention appeal. The promotion and prevention advertising appeals were manipulated through the advertisement copy. Specifically, following Jia et al. (2022), the advertisement copy for the promotion appeal highlighted the positive outcomes that Philips sneakers can provide whereas the prevention appeal emphasised the negative outcomes that can be avoided using Philips sneakers. These extension advertisements were similar in all other aspects (see the advertisements in Appendix I).

A sample of 60 participants (males = 53%, age range = 19–49 years) was selected to pre-test these advertising appeal manipulations and to test whether the advertisements were perceived as professional, appropriate and real. After the initial instructions, the participants were randomly exposed to a promotion or prevention advertising appeal. Then, they were asked to rate the focus of the advertisement on a single-item, seven-point semantic differential scale ('What was the focus of the advertisement message?' 1 = 'preventing negative outcomes', 7 = 'promoting positive outcomes'), which was adapted from prior studies (Bullard & Penner, 2017; Kareklas et al., 2012; Kim & Kim, 2022). Afterwards, the participants responded to three items measuring advertisement professionalism, appropriateness and realism on seven-point bipolar scales (i.e. 1 = 'unprofessional/inappropriate/unrealistic', 7 = 'professional/appropriate/realistic') that was adapted from prior studies (R. Lee et al., 2021; Yang & Oliver, 2004).

An independent samples *t*-test showed that the promotion appeal scored higher on the manipulation check, which means that it was perceived as focusing more on promoting positive outcomes ($M_{promotion}$ = 6.10, SD = 1.05) than the prevention appeal ($M_{prevention}$ = 3.16, SD = 2.12, t[58] = 6.76, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipulation of advertising appeal was successful. Furthermore, the two advertisements were rated as professional ($M_{promotion}$ = 4.93, SD = 1.77 and $M_{prevention}$ = 5.58, SD = 1.48), appropriate ($M_{promotion}$ = 5.97, SD = 1.05 and $M_{prevention}$ = 5.71, SD = 1.22) and realistic ($M_{promotion}$ = 5.48, SD = 1.62 and $M_{prevention}$ = 5.58, SD = 1.48; i.e. higher than the scale midpoint, according to one-sample *t*-tests). It was further demonstrated that the promotion and prevention appeals did not differ in terms of professionalism (t[58] = 1.55, p = 0.13), appropriateness (t[58] = 0.87, p = 0.39) or realism (t[58] = 0.25, p = 0.81). Thus, the two advertisements were considered equally professional, appropriate and realistic.

Finally, given that prior studies have suggested that promotion and prevention appeals may affect mood differently (Labroo & Lee, 2006), this pre-test also examined whether the promotion and prevention advertising appeals evoked different moods. A single-item, seven-point bipolar scale (i.e. 'The advertisement I saw above puts me in a …'; 1 = 'bad mood', 7 = 'good mood'), which was adapted from Labroo and Lee (2006), was used to measure the advertisement-evoked mood. The results of an independent samples *t*-test showed that there was no significant difference between the two advertising appeals in terms of their effects on mood ($M_{promotion}$ = 4.59, SD = 1.01 and $M_{prevention}$ = 4.87, SD = 1.01, t[58] = 1.01, p = 0.32). Thus, the two advertisements similarly affected participants' moods.

7.4 Study 5a: Interactive effect of decision stages and advertising appeals on processing fluency

7.4.1 Experimental design, participants and procedure

This study used a 2 (CDJ stage: informational, transactional) × 2 (extension advertising appeal: promotion, prevention) between-subjects experimental design. A sample of 149 US participants (50% males, age range: 19–49) was recruited via Prolific. To manipulate the stage in the CDJ, the participants were asked to imagine themselves at the informational or transactional stage of buying a pair of sneakers. The manipulation of the CDJ stage was adapted from Humphreys et al. (2021). See Appendix II for details. Then, they were exposed to a promotion or prevention advertisement for Philips sneakers. Then, they responded to a single-item, seven-point Likert scale measuring processing fluency ('How difficult or easy was it to process the advertisement?' 1 = 'very difficult', 7 = 'very easy') that was adapted from Chan and Northey (2021). Graf et al. (2018) suggested that this one-item scale is sufficient to measure processing fluency. Finally, the participants responded to manipulation check questions for the consumer decision stage ('Please indicate whether the situation you imagined at the start was ...', 1 = 'far from point of purchase', 7 = 'close to point of purchase'), which was adapted from Humphreys et al. (2021), and advertising appeal ('What was the focus of the advertisement message?' 1 = 'preventing negative outcomes', 7 = 'promoting positive outcomes'), which was adapted from Bullard and Penner (2017).

7.4.2 Results

7.4.2.1 Manipulation checks

The results indicated that the manipulation of the CDJ stage was successful because the participants in the transactional stage condition scored higher, meaning that they felt closer to the point of purchase ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.62$) than the participants in the informational stage condition ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.83$, $t[147] = 10.17$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the promotion-framed advertising appeal was perceived as focusing more on promoting positive outcomes ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.50$) than the prevention-framed advertising appeal ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 2.25$, $t[147] = 7.31$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the advertising appeals were perceived as intended.

7.4.2.2 Interactive effect of consumer decision stage and advertising appeal on processing fluency

Before conducting the main analysis, three ANOVAs were run to see whether gender, age and PB familiarity differed across the four experimental conditions. It was found that gender (F[1, 145] = 1.44, p = 0.23), age (F[1, 145] = 1.69, p = 0.20) and brand familiarity (F[1, 145] = 0.002, p = 0.96) did not vary across the four experimental conditions. Thus, these factors were not used as covariates in further analysis.

To test the effect of construal level match on processing fluency, a two-way ANOVA was run using the CDJ stage and extension advertising appeal as fixed factors and processing fluency as the dependent variable. The results of this ANOVA indicated insignificant main effects of the consumer buying stage (F[1, 145] = 0.06, p = 0.81) and extension advertising appeal (F[1, 145] = 0.00, p = 0.99). However, as expected, the interaction effect was significant (F[1, 145] = 7.67, p = 0.01, η^2 = 0.05). Planned means comparisons revealed that the promotion advertising appeal was perceived to be significantly more fluent by the participants in the informational stage condition than by those in the transactional stage condition ($M_{\text{informational}}$ = 6.16, SD = 1.21 v. $M_{\text{transactional}}$ = 5.51, SD = 1.41, t[72] = 2.12, p = 0.02 [1-tailed], d = 0.49). However, the prevention advertising appeal was felt to be significantly more fluent by the participants in the transactional stage than by those in the informational stage ($M_{\text{transactional}}$ = 6.11, SD = 1.14 v. $M_{\text{informational}}$ = 5.56, SD = 1.47, t[73] = 1.81, p = 0.04 [1-tailed], d = 0.41). These findings provide evidence that construal level matching (v. mismatching) between the decision journey stage and advertising appeal leads to more fluent advertisement processing. Figure 7.6 presents the results.

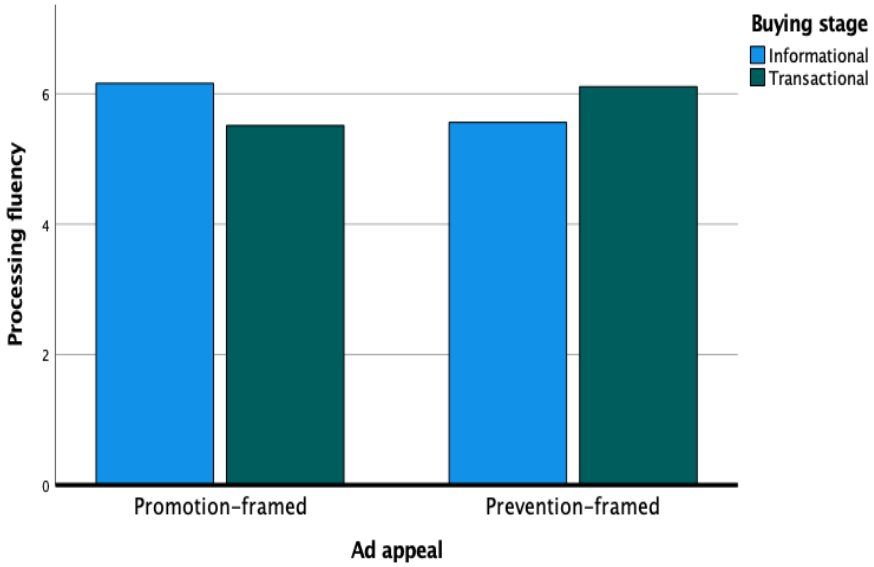

Figure 7.6: ANOVA results for processing fluency

7.5 Study 5b: Effect of processing fluency on outcome variables

7.5.1 Experimental design, participants and procedure

Study 5b aimed to examine the effect of manipulated processing fluency on outcome variables. This study conducted a single-factor, two-levels (processing fluency: high, low) between-subjects experimental design. A total of 83 US participants (73% males, age range: 19–50) were recruited via Prolific. To manipulate processing fluency, the font of the Philips sneakers advertisement was altered. Presenting information in an unclear font does not change its content but does make it more difficult to process that information (Tsai & Thomas, 2011). Accordingly, following Hernandez et al. (2015), the Edwardian Script TLC font (12-point size) was used for the advertisement copy in the low level of processing fluency condition whereas Arial font (12-point) was used in the high level of processing fluency condition (see these advertisements in Appendix I). Each participant was exposed to a fluent or disfluent extension advertisement. Afterwards, they responded to measures of attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the extension. These measures were similar to the ones that were used in the previous studies in this thesis. Then, the participants responded to a processing fluency manipulation check ('How difficult or easy was it to process the advertisement?' 1 = 'very difficult', 7 = 'very easy') that was adapted from Chan and Northey (2021).

7.5.2 Results

7.5.2.1 Manipulation check

The manipulation check results suggested that the manipulation of processing fluency was successful because the advertisement that used the easy-to-read font had a higher score ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.11$), meaning that it was perceived as easier to process than the advertisement that used the difficult-to-read font ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 2.00$, $t[81] = 7.29$, $p < 0.001$).

7.5.2.2 Effect of processing fluency on outcome variables

To test the effect of processing fluency on the two outcome variables, two one-way ANOVAs were run for attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the extension. The results of the first ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of processing fluency ($F[1, 81] = 8.61$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$). Planned *t*-tests showed that the participants had a more favourable attitude towards the advertisement that used the easy-to-read font than they had for the advertisement that used the difficult-to-read font ($M_{\text{fluent ad}} = 4.38$, $SD = 1.37$ v. $M_{\text{disfluent ad}} = 3.35$, $SD = 1.80$, $t[81] = 2.93$, $p = 0.002$ [1-tailed], $d = 0.64$). Similarly, there was a significant main effect of processing fluency on attitude towards the extension ($F[1, 81] = 3.30$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). Those who viewed the advertisement that used an easy-to-read font showed a significantly more favourable attitude towards the low-fit extension than those who viewed the advertisement that used a difficult-to-read font ($M_{\text{fluent ad}} = 4.34$, $SD = 1.41$ v. $M_{\text{disfluent ad}} = 3.72$, $SD = 1.72$, $t[81] = 1.80$, $p = 0.038$, $d = 0.39$). These results showed that processing fluency influenced attitudes towards the advertisement and attitudes towards the extension. Thus, H8 was supported. The results are shown in Figure 7.8.

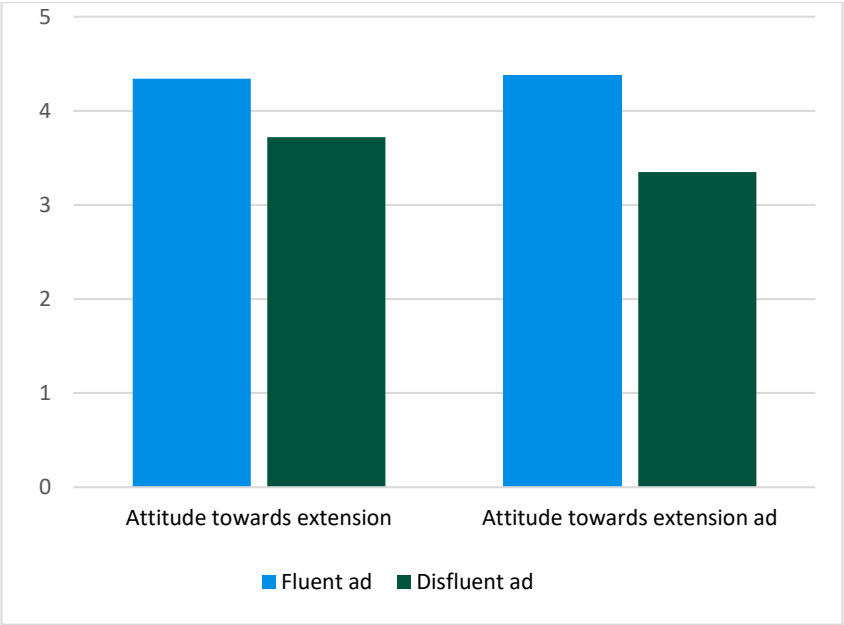

Figure 7.7: Results of one-way ANOVAs

7.6 Discussion

Prior advertising studies have demonstrated that processing fluency can influence consumers' advertisement-related responses (e.g. Leonhardt et al., 2015; Roy & Phau, 2014; Septianto et al., 2022). Most of these studies have shown that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the effectiveness of advertisements. More relevant to the present study, advertising studies have suggested that processing fluency is an explanation for the CLT's matching effect (Chang & Chen, 2022; Gu & Chen, 2021; He et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Roose et al., 2019; White et al., 2011). Therefore, the present study examined whether processing fluency mediates the effects on low-fit brand extension evaluations of a construal level match between an advertising appeal (promotion v. prevention) and the stage in the CDJ (informational v. transactional).

To test this, the current study used an experimental-causal-chain design and conducted two experiments. The results of the first experiment (Experiment 5a) showed that promotion advertising appeal is processed more fluently than prevention advertising appeal at the informational stage in a CDJ. However, at the transactional stage, the processing of prevention advertising appeal is more fluent than that of promotion advertising appeal. Thus, consistently with prior advertising studies, Experiment 5a confirms that a construal level match versus mismatch between advertising appeals and the stages in the CDJ leads to more fluent processing (Chang & Chen, 2022; Gu & Chen, 2021; He et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Roose et al., 2019; White et al., 2011). However, none of these advertising

studies were about brand extensions or the potential construal level match between regulatory focus advertising appeals and the stage in the CDJ.

Furthermore, the results of the second experiment (Experiment 5b) revealed that a fluent advertisement has a more favourable influence than disfluent advertisements on attitudes towards the advertisement and the extension. These findings suggested that a construal level match versus mismatch between the CDJ stage and advertising appeal can lead to a more favourable attitude towards a low-fit brand extension via fluent advertisement processing.

Taken together, the results of the two experiments support the notion that a construal level match between advertising appeals and the stages in the CDJ increases processing fluency, which, in turn, enhances evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. Thus, Study 5 provides empirical evidence that supports the postulation that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism through which a construal level match between advertising appeals and the stages in the CDJ affects low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Chapter 8: Overall Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis drew on CLT to investigate the ways that various advertising appeals may work through two evaluation processes, categorisation and matching, to enhance consumers' attitudes towards low-fit brand extensions. By drawing on CLT to understand the effectiveness of various advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations, this thesis addressed four main research objectives pertaining to (1) the role of construal level mindsets and (2) construal-evoking advertising appeals for improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions, (3) the effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations of matching the construal level of advertising appeals to the construal level that is evoked by a consumer's feeling of social power or their stage in the decision journey and (4) the role of processing fluency as the underlying mechanism for the match between a consumer's construal level and an advertising appeal. Five studies were conducted to address these research objectives using five real brands and their fictitious low-fit brand extensions that belonged to various product categories. Figure 8.1 shows the objectives of and links among the five studies that were conducted in this thesis. The important findings that are offered by this thesis advance current brand extension research by showing the ways that CLT can explain the effectiveness of various advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions.

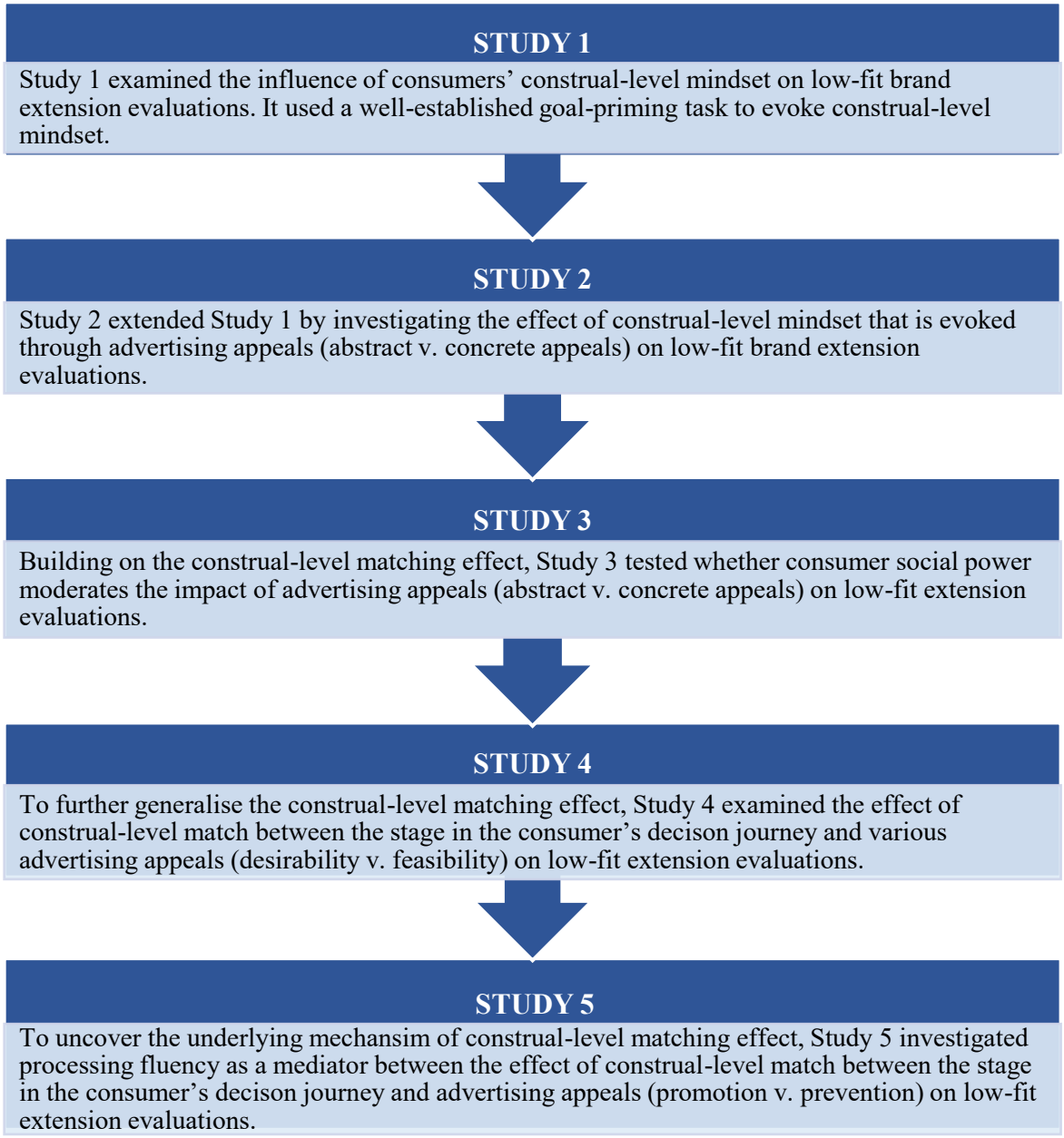

Figure 8.1: Objectives of thesis' studies

In revisiting these objectives, this concluding chapter summarises the findings of all the studies that were conducted in this thesis by relating them to their associated research questions and hypotheses. Moreover, it compares these findings with the relevant consumer research. In addition to a discussion of the findings, this chapter highlights the ways that these findings contribute to the brand extension and advertising literature. Finally, the managerial implications are presented, followed by an outline of the limitations of the studies and directions for future research.

8.1 Overall discussion

As was discussed in Chapter 1, introducing low-fit extensions brings substantial benefits to brands but it is challenging and fraught with failures (Deng & Messinger, 2022; Hernandez et al., 2019). Despite the critical challenges that marketers face when introducing low-fit brand extensions, there is a lack of guidance on how to effectively promote low-fit extensions (Miniard et al., 2018). Furthermore, though the existing brand extension literature has established the important role of advertising in brand extension success (Boush, 1993; Lane, 2000; Sattler et al., 2010), there exists few studies that examine the effectiveness of various advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the brand extension literature by examining the ways that various advertising appeals can improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

Many advertising studies outside the brand extension domain have established that CLT can explain the effectiveness of various advertising appeals (e.g.Connors et al., 2021; He et al., 2020; Tok et al., 2021). However, brand extension advertising studies have rarely used CLT to predict the impact of advertising appeals on evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. Thus, this thesis drew on CLT to test the effectiveness of various advertising appeals for low-fit brand extensions. Across five studies, this thesis established that advertising appeals that evoke high-level construal or a construal level (high or low) that matches a consumer's current construal level led to more favourable evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. Importantly, it revealed two routes—cognitive and affective—that marketers can use to promote low-fit extensions through various advertising appeals.

The following section summarises the findings of these five studies and links them to the research questions that were investigated by this thesis. The section is divided into three subsections according to the nature of the research questions. The first subsection discusses the findings of the first two studies that investigated the effect of construal level mindset and construal-evoking advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. The second subsection summarises the findings of Studies 3 and 4, which examined the effect of a construal level match between advertising appeals and consumer-side factors on low-fit brand extension evaluations. The final subsection discusses the findings of Study 5, which tested the mediating role of processing fluency between the construal level matching effect and low-fit brand extension evaluations.

8.1.1 Influence of construal level mindset and construal-evoking advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations

Research Questions 1 and 2 of this thesis focused on examining the effect of the construal level that is evoked by a mindset-priming task and advertising appeals, respectively, on the evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. Collectively, Studies 1 and 2 addressed these research questions by testing three hypotheses (H1–H3). These questions used CLT's categorisation-effect tenet, which suggests that a high-level (v. low-level) construal causes more inclusive categorisation (see Section 2.3 in Chapter 2 for more details). Consistently with this categorisation-effect tenet, these studies predicted that a high-construal (v. low-construal) mindset and a high-level (low-level) construal-evoking advertising appeal would lead to superior evaluations of low-fit brand extensions.

Study 1 used a well-established priming task (i.e. goal priming or why/how writing task; Freitas et al. (2004)) to prime a construal level mindset and to investigate its effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations (tested via H1). As was predicted, it was found that when consumers' high versus low-level construal mindset is evoked, they show a more favourable attitude towards a low-fit brand extension. However, their attitude towards a high-fit brand extension remains the same under high and low-level construal conditions. This is because high-level construal would not have further enhanced the obvious similarity between a PB and its high-fit extension.

These findings are consistent with the limited body of literature that draws on the categorisation effect of CLT to demonstrate the effect of construal level that is evoked mostly through temporal distance on brand extension evaluations (e.g. Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011)). However, even though this study was conducted in an Asian country (i.e. Pakistan), its findings are the opposite of those of Kim and Park (2019), who found that Asian versus Western (e.g. Korean v. US) consumers evaluate low-fit brand extensions more favourably if they have a low-level construal mindset because it enables them to see more similarities because of their focus on contextual aspects and their relational processing style. Thus, the findings of Study 1 suggested that construal level affects Pakistani and US consumers similarly when it comes to evaluations of low-fit brand extensions, which suggests that Pakistani consumers are more similar to US consumers than they are to some other Asian consumers (e.g. Koreans).

Furthermore, additional analyses revealed that participants who had a high-level (v. low-level) construal mindset perceived a greater level of fit between the PB and its low-fit

brand extension. However, no such effect of construal level was found in the case of a high-fit brand extension. This implies that the superior effect of high-level construal on low-fit brand extension evaluations might have been underpinned by this increased perception of fit.

Next, Study 2 extended Study 1 by using advertising appeals to evoke construal level instead of mindset priming. It addressed Research Question 2, which examined the effect of two construal-evoking advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Specifically, Study 2 investigated the effect of abstract and concrete advertising appeals to address Research Question 2a (tested via H2). Similar to Study 1, the results demonstrated that consumers have a more favourable attitude towards a low-fit brand extension when an abstract rather than a concrete advertising appeal is used. However, consumers hold the same attitude towards a high-fit brand extension regardless of the advertising appeals that is used. Furthermore, applying the linguistic categorisation model (Semin & Fiedler, 1988), Study 2 showed that consumers' thoughts are more abstract when an abstract (v. a concrete) advertising appeal is used thereby confirming that the abstract (v. concrete) advertising appeal leads consumers to construe a low-fit extension at a high level of construal. These findings are consistent with those of prior construal level studies (Fujita, Trope, et al., 2006, Study 5; Semin & Smith, 1999) and advertising studies that show that abstract language can lead to high-level construal (Qin et al., 2022).

In addition to investigating the effect of advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations, Study 2 investigated the underlying mechanism of this effect thereby answering Research Question 2b (tested via H3). Consistent with the construal level categorisation effect, Study 2 confirmed that closer perceived parent–extension fit is the underlying cognitive mechanism that drives the superior effect of an abstract versus concrete advertising appeal on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Specifically, it was found that an abstract (v. concrete) advertising appeal improves the perception of fit between the PB and its extension thereby leading to a better attitude towards the low-fit brand extension. However, no such similarity-enhancing effect of high-level construal emerged for the high-fit brand extension. These findings are consistent with those of consumer studies that have applied the categorisation-effect tenet of CLT to examine consumer behaviour in various contexts (Clair et al., 2019; Hong & Lee, 2010; McGowan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2013). For example, applying CLT's categorisation-effect tenet, Hong and Lee (2010) reported that unlike low construal–level consumers, high construal–level consumers evaluated a mixed-emotion advertisement more favourably because they felt less discomfort seeing a mixed-emotion

advertisement than low construal–level consumers because of their ability to assimilate the two opposing emotions in a mixed-emotion advertisement.

Overall, the findings of Studies 1 and 2 revealed that high-level construal that is evoked by a goal-priming task or an advertising appeal enhances the perception of fit between the PB and its low-fit extension thereby leading to improved evaluations of low-fit brand extensions. These findings are consistent with those of brand extension studies that have shown that the perception of fit between the PB and its extension is malleable (Monga & John, 2007; Su et al., 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). This stream of research has reported that the perception of fit can be altered through various factors, such as thinking style (Monga & John, 2007), mating mindset (Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012) and life-role transition (Su et al., 2021) thereby affecting the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

8.1.2 Influence of match between consumer's construal level and construal level of advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations

This thesis further tested conditions that may alter the effect of the construal level of advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Instead of applying the categorisation effect that was discussed earlier, it built on the matching-effect tenet of CLT, which posits that a match between the construal level of the consumer and a stimulus (e.g. an advertisement) leads to a better evaluation of the stimulus (Liberman and Trope (1998); Sagristano et al. (2002); see Section 2.4 of Chapter 2 for details). Consistently with CLT's matching-effect tenet, Research Question 3 focused on examining the ways that matching a consumer's construal level to the construal level of an advertising appeal influences the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. The current thesis tested this research question using two consumer-side construal-evoking factors and two pairs of high versus low construal–level advertising appeals. Specifically, it first examined the ways that matching consumer construal level that is evoked by consumers' feelings of social power to abstract and concrete advertising appeals (high v. low construal–level advertisements) affects low-fit brand extension evaluations (Research Question 3a). Second, it investigated the ways that matching the high versus low-level construal that is evoked by the informational versus transactional stages in the CDJ using desirability versus feasibility advertising appeals (high v. low construal–level advertisements) influences the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions (Research Question 3b).

Study 3 answered Research Question 3a (tested via H4 and H5). Using a well-established social power priming task (Galinsky et al., 2003), it found that when consumers are in a high-power state rather than a low-power state, an abstract advertising appeal results in more favourable attitudes towards the advertisement and the low-fit extension. However, it was demonstrated that consumers in a low-power state evaluate a low-fit brand extension and its advertisement more favourably after seeing a concrete rather than an abstract advertisement. These findings are consistent with those of consumer studies that suggest that matching a consumer's power state to other construal level factors (e.g. pride) improves the evaluation of the stimulus (e.g. Yang & Zhang, 2018).

Study 4 addressed Research Question 3b (tested via H6 and H7). It provided further compelling evidence for the construal level matching effect of low-fit brand extension advertising. Specifically, it showed that a desirability advertising appeal has a more positive effect on evaluations of a low-fit brand extension and its advertisement when consumers are at the informational versus the transactional stage in their decision journey. However, when consumers are at the transactional stage, they show more positive evaluations of a low-fit brand extension and its advertisement in response to a feasibility advertising appeal. These findings are consistent with those of recent advertising studies that have shown that advertising appeals (e.g. lifestyle-based, abstract) are more effective when matched to the construal level that is associated with the various stages of the CDJ (Humphreys et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2023).

Overall, consistent with the matching-effect tenet of CLT, the findings of Studies 3 and 4 provide strong evidence for the superior effect of advertising appeals on low-fit brand extension evaluations when advertising appeals are matched (v. mismatched) to the consumer's current construal level, whether that is evoked by feelings of social power or their stage in the decision-making process. Many advertising studies outside the brand extension literature have reported similar effects of construal level matching (e.g. Chan & Meng, 2023; Hernandez et al., 2015; Kyuha Kim et al., 2019; Septianto & Pratiwi, 2016; Xu, 2023). Specifically, advertising studies have argued that a construal level match between consumers' mindset and advertising messages increases the receptivity to messages (Lee et al., 2010) and boosts the advertised product's appeal (Spassova & Lee, 2013), which, in turn, results in more positive consumer attitudes and behaviours (Chou & Lien, 2012; de Visser-Amundson et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2021; White et al., 2011).

8.1.3 Processing fluency as underlying mechanism of construal level matching effect between consumer-side factors and advertising appeals

Addressing Research Question 3 (i.e. Research Questions 3a and 3b) established the favourable effect of a construal level match between construal-evoking factors and advertising appeals on the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions. To investigate the underlying mechanism of this effect, the current thesis posed Research Question 4. Research Question 4 focused on examining processing fluency as the underlying mechanism that drives the effect of construal level matching on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Study 5 was conducted to address this research question by testing H8. Similar to Study 4, Study 5 used the stages in the CDJ to evoke various construal levels. However, unlike Study 4, it used two advertising appeals, namely, promotion and prevention advertising appeals, to manipulate the construal level of the stimulus. Thus, Study 5 specifically answered Research Question 5a, which asked whether processing fluency mediates the effect of a construal level match between a CDJ stage and advertising appeal (i.e. promotion v. prevention advertising appeals).

Study 5 used an experimental-causal-chain design and conducted two experiments to causally test processing fluency as the underlying mechanism of the construal level matching effect. The first experiment demonstrated that a construal level match (v. mismatch) between promotion versus prevention advertising appeals and the informational versus transactional stages in the CDJ results in higher levels of processing fluency, suggesting that construal-matching advertisements are processed more fluently. These findings are consistent with those from studies in psychology (Ozkara & Dogan, 2020) and consumer behaviour (Allard & Griffin, 2017; O'Brien, 2021; Yang et al., 2011) that suggest that construal-compatible information fits more easily with an individual's cognition structure, which, in turn, improves the subjective feeling of processing fluency.

Furthermore, the second experiment reported the effect of processing fluency on low-fit brand extension evaluations by showing more favourable evaluations resulting from a fluent versus a disfluent advertisement. Thus, a greater level of processing fluency positively affects low-fit brand extension evaluations. These findings are consistent with those of processing fluency studies that have indicated that processing fluency is hedonically marked and is misattributed to the target object thereby leading to its favourable evaluation (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Chae & Hoegg, 2013; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Reber et al., 1998; Winkielman et al., 2003).

Overall, the findings of these two experiments show that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism that drives the favourable effect on low-fit extension evaluations of a construal level match between advertising appeals (i.e. promotion v. prevention) and the CDJ stage (i.e. informational v. transactional). Many construal level advertising studies outside the brand extension research literature have also shown that processing fluency is the underlying mechanism of the construal level matching effect (e.g. Gu & Chen, 2021; Lee et al., 2010; Roose et al., 2019; White et al., 2011).

8.2 Theoretical implications

Given the strategic importance of and challenges associated with introducing low-fit brand extensions, some brand extension studies have focused on understanding the drivers of low-fit brand extension success (Chun et al., 2015; Mathur et al., 2023; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). However, most of these studies have emphasised a cognitive route—the perception of fit between a PB and its extension—to understand low-fit brand extension evaluations. Moreover, these studies were not about advertising. Therefore, applying two tenets of CLT (the categorisation effect and the matching effect), this thesis contributes to the brand extension literature by establishing cognitive and affective routes through which various advertising appeals can influence low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Some studies have already applied the cognitive categorisation-effect tenet of CLT to examine the influence of construal level on brand extension evaluations (Chowdhry et al., 2015; Hansen et al., 2013; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011). However, these studies have not involved low-fit brand extensions or advertising appeals that promote brand extensions. A few studies have used advertising messages to prime construal level (e.g. the brand extension will be available in the near or far future; (Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011; Y. Zhang et al., 2020). However, advertising messages differ from advertising appeals in that an advertising appeal is the approach that is used to communicate an advertising message (Belch & Belch, 2004). The current thesis establishes the superior effect of high-level (v. low-level) construal on low-fit brand extension evaluations by priming construal level via a well-established priming task and via advertising appeals. Thus, it extends prior brand extension studies by using a different and more practical way of priming construal level to reveal its effect on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Moreover, it confirms that the priming task and the advertising appeals actually evoke different construal levels thereby validating the effect of construal level on low-fit brand extension evaluations.

The current study further confirms that the superior effect of high-level construal is underpinned by the enhanced perception of fit between the PB and the low-fit extension. In doing so, it extends the brand extension literature, which has previously demonstrated the effect of construal level on brand extension evaluations mostly without revealing the underlying mechanism of perceived fit (see Lu and Nayakankuppam (2011) for exception). At a broader level, these findings add to prior construal level studies in the consumer literature (e.g. Kelting et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2013) and the advertising literature (e.g. Hong & Lee, 2010; McGowan et al., 2020), which have demonstrated that a high construal level leads to a broader categorisation and thus greater perception of similarity.

An important theoretical contribution of this study is in its application of a different tenet (the matching effect) of CLT to brand extension advertising research. None of the prior brand extension advertising studies have applied CLT's matching-effect tenet. This is a novel approach to understanding the effect of construal level on brand extension evaluations; unlike existing studies that have argued for the superiority of high-level construal for brand extension evaluations (Chowdhry et al., 2015; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011), this study finds that high and low-level construal can be effective for low-fit brand extension evaluations.

Furthermore, the existing brand extension advertising literature has studied a limited number of advertising appeals, such as comparison appeals (Puligadda et al., 2013) and emotional versus rational appeals (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010a). Moreover, there is a paucity of studies that examine the ways that contextual factors could alter the effectiveness of these appeals. Thus, another important contribution of this thesis is in its demonstration of the effectiveness of additional advertising appeals (e.g. abstract and concrete, desirability and feasibility) for low-fit brand extension evaluations across two contextual factors (i.e. social power, CDJ stage). In doing so, it addresses the calls for more research into ways to improve the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions (e.g. Mathur et al., 2023; Miniard et al., 2018; Su et al., 2021). Furthermore, it extends the emerging advertising research body outside the brand extension literature that examines the ways that social power (e.g. Jin & Huang, 2019; Wang & Zhang, 2020; Yang et al., 2021) and the CDJ (e.g. Humphreys et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2023) can influence the effectiveness of various advertising appeals. To the best of the author's knowledge, the interactive effects of the advertising appeals and consumer factors that were examined in this thesis have not been considered in prior advertising studies.

Most importantly, in addition to a cognitive process, this study reveals an affective mechanism for improving low-fit brand extension evaluations. Specifically, this thesis uncovers processing fluency as the underlying mechanism of the effect of a construal level

match between advertising appeals and contextual factors. Although a substantial number of studies have examined the impact of processing fluency on advertising effectiveness (e.g. Auschaitrakul & Mukherjee, 2017; Roy & Phau, 2014; Septianto et al., 2022) and brand-related outcomes (e.g. Brakus et al., 2014; Janiszewski & Meyvis, 2001; Lee & Aaker, 2004), only a handful have tested its role in brand extension evaluations (Goh et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2017). However, these studies considered the fluent processing of the brand extension itself because these studies did not relate to brand extension advertising. Therefore, this thesis uniquely contributes to the brand extension literature by demonstrating that a construal-matching brand extension advertising appeal is processed more fluently, which, in turn, enhances the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

In demonstrating the mediating role of processing fluency, this thesis makes a key methodological contribution. Unlike prior advertising studies outside the brand extension literature that have measured processing fluency to examine its mediating role (Gu & Chen, 2021; He et al., 2020; White et al., 2011), this thesis used an experimental-causal-chain design (Spencer et al., 2005) to confirm the mediating role of processing fluency. The experimental-causal-chain design offers a more rigorous approach to causally testing a mediation effect (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017).

This thesis also makes some other important methodological contributions. First, it employed a variety of well-established construal-level manipulation techniques, including goal priming task, ad's text, social power, and stages in CDJ. Furthermore, to augment the efficacy of goal priming task in Study 1, this research developed and included an additional reading task to make participants mentally ready for the writing task in the original goal priming. Importantly, unlike previous construal-level brand extension research that mostly checked construal-level manipulation indirectly through temporal distance (e.g. Kim & John, 2008; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011), this thesis used BIF (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) and the linguistic category model (Semin & Fiedler, 1988), which are widely used direct construal-level manipulation checks (e.g. Vilches-Montero & Spence, 2015; Williams et al., 2014). This adds credibility to the construal-level effects reported in this thesis.

Moreover, this thesis manipulated the construal-level of ad appeals in a variety of ways, which include abstractness of ad's text and the type of product features (i.e. desirability v. feasibility) and benefits (i.e. promotion v. prevention) communicated in ads. Notably, this thesis conducted several pre-tests before launching the main experiments to select suitable parent brands and their extensions, and check whether construal-level of ads was manipulated as intended. Some pre-tests were also conducted to assess the suitability of ad appeals by

measuring ad realism, appropriateness, and professionalism. This also helped check the potential confounding effects of these ad-related factors.

8.3 Managerial implications

This study offers important practical guidelines for marketers who intend to introduce low-fit brand extensions. The findings of this thesis suggest that marketers should consider the construal level of consumers when introducing low-fit brand extensions because a high-level (v. low-level) construal can affect the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions favourably. Consumers can have chronic high-level construal or it can be primed. Unlike previous brand extension literature that establishes the influence of construal-level on brand extension evaluations (e.g. Kim & John, 2008; Lu & Nayakankuppam, 2011), this thesis used direct construal-level's manipulation and manipulation checks to confirm the impact of construal-level on low-fit brand extension evaluations. To identify consumers' chronic construal level, marketers can use the BIF (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989), which is a well-established scale for measuring chronic construal level, in a test sample or market before generalising to a larger population. Though the current study primed construal level using a writing task, marketers could put consumers in a high construal–level state using more practical ways, such as employing comparative pricing (Allard & Griffin, 2017) or illustrations instead of photos (Septianto et al., 2019). Marketers can apply these more practical ways to evoke high-level construal to generate more favourable low-fit extension evaluations.

The findings further suggest that marketers should generally use abstract rather than concrete advertising appeals when promoting low-fit brand extensions. Abstract advertising appeals can enhance the perception of fit by evoking high-level construal thereby leading to a better evaluation of a low-fit brand extension. The use of abstract and concrete appeals for promoting low-fit extensions appears more practical because it requires modifying the abstractness of the ad message rather than the actual content. Some brands have advertised their low-fit brand extensions using abstract ad appeal. For example, the beer brand, Victoria Bitter (VB), advertised its low-fit extension, perfume, using the abstract language: 'The Essence of Hard Work'. It is important to state that a few studies outside the brand extension research suggests the superiority of concrete ad appeals for promoting novel products (e.g. van Horen et al., 2023). However, this study did not concern low-fit extension whose evaluation is different (e.g. based on parent brand associations, perceived fit) from those of a novel product.

Furthermore, both abstract and concrete advertising appeals can be effective in improving the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions if marketers match them to consumers' construal level. Specifically, marketers should match the construal level of abstract versus concrete advertising appeals (high v. low-level construal) to consumers' construal level that is evoked by high versus low power (high v. low-level construal). Although we manipulated social power in our study using a writing task, marketers could use more practical tactics to evoke feelings of social power, such as via marketing messages (Dubois et al., 2012) or the use of ambient scents in retail shops (Madzharov et al., 2015). Alternatively, marketers may segment the market according to socioeconomic status that correlate with consumers' sense of power (Jin & Huang, 2019). More specifically, marketers should target an abstract (concrete) ad appeal at consumers with high (low) socioeconomic status, occupying managerial roles, and having greater job autonomy whereas concrete ad appeals should be targeted at those low on these factors (Dubois et al., 2011; Marmot, 2004). Another more practical proxy for socioeconomic status can be zip codes (Han et al., 2010). For example, the zip code 90274 (Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA) is among one of the wealthiest areas in the US whereas the zip code 93640 (Mendota, CA) represents one of the poorest areas in the country (Liu & Mattila, 2017).

Another practical guideline concerns the use of various types of advertising appeals at various stages of the CDJ. Our findings suggest that at an early stage (the informational stage) of the consumer's decision process, desirability or promotion advertising appeals should be used to promote low-fit brand extensions. However, feasibility or prevention advertising appeals should be employed when consumers are in the later transactional stage, when they are close to making their purchase decision. Although a clear distinction between stages in CDJ is hard (Vázquez et al., 2014), some practical and evidence-based approaches are available to identify consumers' stage in their decision journey. For example, the user-generated content in social media can help marketers to identify a consumer's decision journey stage (Vázquez et al., 2014). Furthermore, stage in CDJ can also be predicted based on consumers' online search queries in search advertising platforms, which then can provide guidance in effective designing ads (Humphreys et al., 2021) for promoting low-fit extensions.

8.4 Limitations and future research recommendations

This study has several limitations that offer potential avenues for future researchers. First, this study used specific consumer-side construal-evoking factors and construal level advertising appeals. The generalisability of this thesis' findings can be increased by testing other construal-evoking factors and advertising appeals. For example, construal level advertising studies have shown that advertising appeals such as benefits versus attributes (Hernandez et al., 2015), lifestyle versus functional advertisements (Ma et al., 2023) and warmth versus competent appeals (Septianto et al., 2022) are also associated with high versus low construal level. Furthermore, construal level can be evoked through consumer, advertisement or brand factors, such as self-construal (Spassova & Lee, 2013), black-and-white versus colour advertisements (Lee et al., 2014; B. Wang et al., 2020), visual angles (e.g. close-up v. long-shot advertisement images; Kyuha Kim et al. (2019)) and brand experience (Kim & Song, 2019). Therefore, future researchers can investigate whether evoking construal level using these factors and matching to the construal level of other advertising appeals also improves the evaluation of low-fit brand extensions.

Second, this thesis did not examine any boundary conditions for the persuasive effect of a construal level match on low-fit brand extension evaluations. Thus, further insights might be provided by testing important potential boundary conditions. For example, given that a construal level match heuristically affects judgement (Allard & Griffin, 2017), the effect may be reduced or disappear for consumers who have a high level of need for cognition or motivation to process because they would be less susceptible to heuristic processing (Chaiken, 1980; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). In addition, prior studies have suggested that individuals from different cultures may construe information differently (Kim, Sung, et al., 2018). Thus, future researchers should examine culture as a boundary condition of the construal level matching effect that was found in this thesis.

Third, all these experiments were conducted in a scenario-based setting instead of real market conditions and thus it would be useful to conduct research in real life settings, such as within retail stores that promote new low-fit extensions. It would be beneficial if future researchers could capture actual behaviour by conducting field experiments. The findings of this thesis should be cautiously applied to other product categories and markets as other potential product- or market-related characteristics could influence the adoption and consumption of low-fit extensions. Therefore, future research should extend the

generalisability of this research's findings by considering additional brands, product categories, and market segments.

Finally, from a broader perspective, there are a few potential areas for future research. First, future research should examine whether the effects of construal-level ad appeals (e.g., abstract v. concrete appeal) on low-fit extensions evaluations differ across parent brand's product category (good v. service), parent brand concept (prestige v. non-prestige), and parent brand breath. Past brand extension literature shows that a prestige brand (Monga & John, 2010), service brand (Völckner et al., 2010), or broader parent brand (Peng et al., 2023) makes it easier for consumers to see connection between the extension product and the parent brand. Thus, the similarity enhancing effects of construal-level ad appeals may be further accentuated for prestige, service, or broader parent brands.

Another interesting future research could explore the influence of brand extension naming strategies (i.e. direct branding v. subbranding) on the effectiveness of construal-level ad appeals. Because a subbranding strategy provides additional information about the extension product to consumers to evaluate it (Sood & Keller, 2012), the perceived brand-extension fit may become less important. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how the presence of parent brand elements (e.g. slogan, endorser, colour) in construal-level ad appeals could affect their effectiveness.

Lastly, this thesis considered attitudes towards low-fit extension and its ad to determine the effectiveness of ad appeals. Future research should consider other factors, such as willingness to pay a price premium, social media engagement, and positive word-of-mouth, for the effectiveness of construal-level ad appeals. Also, future research should investigate whether construal-level ad appeals are similarly effective for the spillover effect from low-fit extension to parent brand.

8.5 Conclusion

Firms are often motivated to introduce low-fit brand extensions because these extensions offer several potential benefits, such as exploiting emerging consumer trends (Mathur et al., 2023) and capturing new growth avenues (Su et al., 2021). Every year, as much as 90% of new products is launched through brand extensions (Keller et al., 2011). Yet, the vast majority of these fail (Duckler, 2018). Surely, it is of crucial interest to academia and industry to pinpoint the reasons behind these successes and failures and to tackle the challenges in introducing low-fit brand extensions successfully. However, critical gaps exist

in academic research and marketers often lack guidance on the ways to effectively promote low-fit extensions (Miniard et al., 2018). In this light, this thesis offers insights to help marketers to perform better when they launch low-fit extensions. Although its findings may not help to dramatically reverse the fortunes of firms that have launched failed brand extensions, they should at least nudge marketers in the right direction to improve the success rate whenever a new low-fit extension hits the market. The findings of this thesis suggest that brands can apply the categorisation and matching-effect tenets of CLT to improve the chances that low-fit brand extensions will be successful.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Study 1: Experimental stimuli

High-fit and low-fit brand extension advertisements (Ad#1)





High-fit and low-fit brand extension advertisements (Ad#2)





Study 2: Experimental stimuli

Abstract advertisements

High fit



Low fit



Concrete advertisements

High fit



Low fit



Study 3: Experimental stimuli

Abstract advertisement



Concrete advertisement



Study 4: Experimental stimuli

Desirability appeal



Feasibility appeal

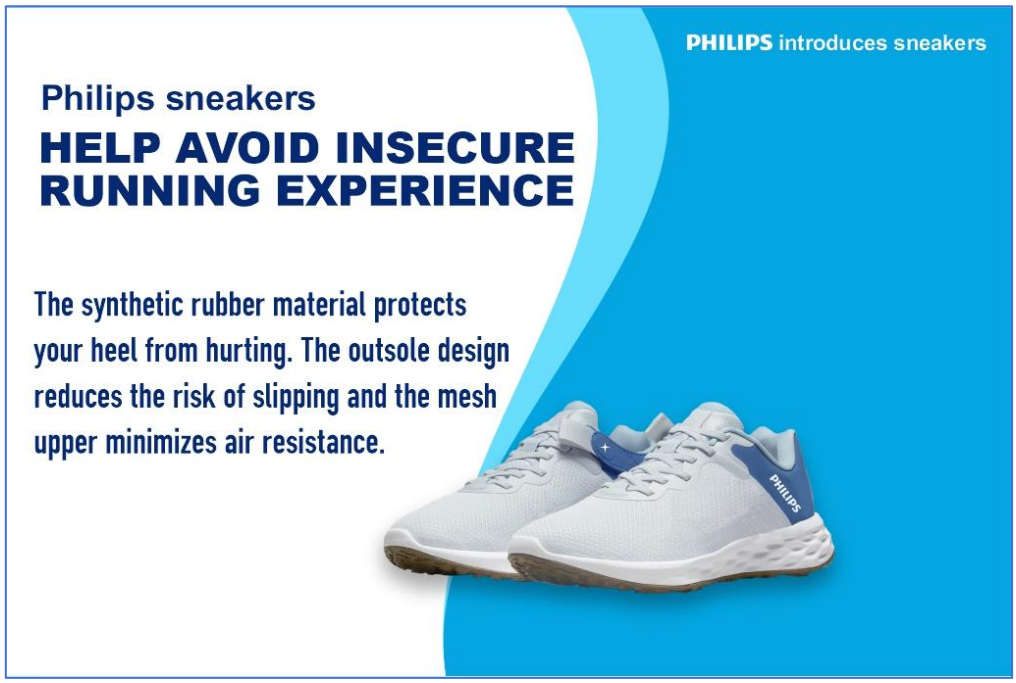


Study 5a: Experimental stimuli

Promotion advertising appeal



Prevention advertising appeal



Study 5b: Experimental stimuli

Fluent advertisement (easy-to-read font)



Disfluent advertisement (difficult-to-read font)



Appendix II

Review of construal level manipulations and manipulation checks

Construal level manipulations

Prior construal level studies have used various manipulations to induce high and low-level construal. Most of these manipulations have induced construal level mindsets (Burgoon et al., 2013). Mindset refers to the set of cognitive processes that create a tendency to respond in a certain way (Gibson, 1941; Gollwitzer, 1990). The induced mindsets play a critical role in explaining individuals' judgement and behaviour (Hamilton et al., 2011). A review of commonly used construal level manipulations is provided.

Goal priming (Freitas et al., 2004)

In this manipulation, the experimenter presents a target goal that is unrelated to the study to participants and asks them to describe 'why achieve the target goal' versus 'how to achieve the target goal' to prime high versus low-level construal mindsets. More specifically, participants see a set of five vertically organised boxes of which the first box contains the target goal. To prime high-level construal mindset, participants use the second box from the bottom to describe why they might like to achieve the target goal. Then, participants explain in the next box why they might want to achieve what they mentioned in the second box. In the next box, they answer why they might want to achieve what they mentioned in the third box. This process continues until the last box is filled. Thus, this task requires participants to describe goals in a more abstract manner in successive boxes. The process for priming low-level construal is the same, except it focuses on the 'how' aspect of the target goal and moves from top to bottom. See Figure 1 for the format of the why/how goal-priming task.

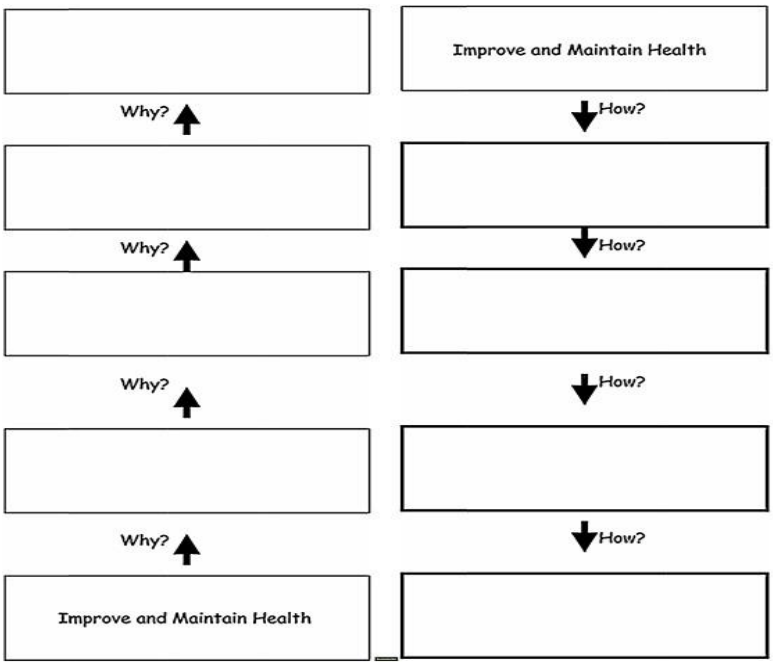


Figure 1: Format of why/how goal-priming task

Scholars have used some modified versions of Freitas et al.'s (2004) goal-priming task (e.g. Alter et al., 2010; Carrera et al., 2020; Henderson, 2013). These modified versions of the goal-priming task use different goal(s) and in many cases do not require the writing of answers hierarchically. For example, one modified version presents six behaviours (e.g. 'Laura is considering buying a computer') and asks participants to describe why (in high-level construal condition) or how (in low-level construal condition) the subjects (e.g. Laura) would perform those behaviours (Liberman, Trope, McCrea, et al., 2007). In another version, participants are asked to use a specific goal (i.e. to receive a good grade in class) or a non-specific goal (i.e. goal you want to achieve next week) and write four reasons (ways) why (how) they want to achieve the selected goal to prime high-level (low-level) construal (Davis et al., 2016). Unlike the single goal that is considered in Davis et al.'s (2016) goal-priming task, Henderson (2013) allows participants to mention three things that they want to achieve. Then, participants in the high-level (low-level) construal condition are instructed to describe three reasons (ways) behind (of) achieving the three goals that they mentioned. Instead of allowing participants to choose their own goals, Alter et al. (2010) requires participants to write why (how) they might perform three everyday behaviours (i.e. backing up computer, driving a car, getting dressed in the morning) to manipulate high-level (low-level) construal.

Although Henderson's (2013) and Alter et al.'s (2010) modified goal-priming tasks do not require participants to provide responses in a hierarchy, they involve more intensive

writing (i.e. nine hows/whys for three goals) than Freitas et al.'s (2004) original goal-priming task that requires participants to write four whys or hows for accomplishing a specific task (i.e. maintaining and improving health).

Exemplars versus category task (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006)

Another widely used construal level priming is the category versus exemplar task. In this task, participants are presented with 15 to 40 common words (e.g. computer, dog, table, tree). Participants in the high-level construal condition are asked to generate a category for each of the given words by answering the question '_____ is an example of?' for each given word. Meanwhile, low-level construal participants are asked to generate an example of each word by answering 'An example of _____ is?' For example, prior studies have used a list of 15 nouns J. Wang et al. (2018) or 16 nouns (Xu et al., 2013) to manipulate construal level by asking participants to generate a category label versus an exemplar for each noun in the high versus low-level construal conditions.

Navon letters task or hierarchical letters (Navon, 1977)

The Navon task is one of the most popular manipulations and measures of level of abstraction. It was developed as a measure and later established as a manipulation (Navon, 1977). The task involves presenting participants with a series of single, large letters that consist of many small letters, for example, a big H consisting of numerous small Fs or a big F consisting of numerous small Ls (see Figure 2). A total of eight large letters (i.e. Fs in a T, Fs in an H, Hs in an L, Ts in an F, Hs in an F, Ls in an H, Ls in a T and Ts in an L) are usually used to prime construal level (Aggarwal & Zhao, 2015). Participants are asked to name the large letters to induce high-level construal whereas low-level construal is induced by asking them to name the small letters. Some consumer studies have used the Navon letters task to induce construal level mindsets (e.g. Hansen et al., 2013; Lerouge, 2009; Wright et al., 2012).



Figure 2: Example of hierarchy letters

Kimchi–Palmer figures (Kimchi & Palmer, 1982)

This construal level manipulation exposes participants to a large geometric shape target figure (e.g. a triangle), which is composed of different smaller, geometric shapes (e.g. squares; see top left quadrant in Figure 3). Then, participants see two more figures underneath the target figure: one that has a concrete or local (e.g. squares) element that matches the concrete element of the target figure (e.g. squares) and the other that has a concrete or local element (e.g. triangles) that matches the abstract element of the target figure (e.g. triangles; see Figure 5). Participants in the high-level construal condition are asked to select one of the two images whose local elements match the global shape of the target figure whereas participants in the low-level construal condition are instructed to select one of the two images whose local elements match the local elements of the target figure. This technique has been used as a measure (Steidle et al., 2011) and manipulation (Wakslak & Trope, 2009).

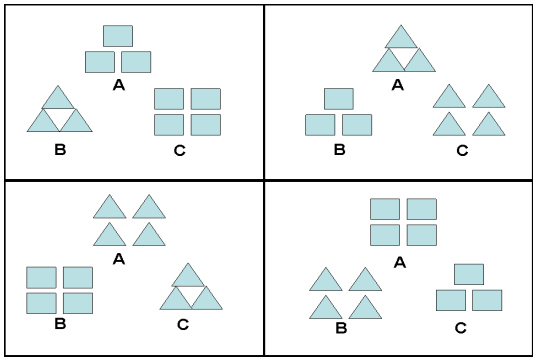


Figure 3: Sample Kimchi–Palmer figures

Map task (Förster, 2009a)

This manipulation requires participants to focus on a map to answer subsequent questions about it. In the abstract construal condition (global processing), participants are instructed to examine the map as a whole to answer the following questions about the overall shape and look of the map. Participants are informed to not worry about the specific details and to focus on the overall shape. However, participants in the concrete construal level condition are asked to pay close attention to the map to gather as many details as possible (e.g. cities, states). They are also informed that later they will be asked questions about particular locations on the map.

Construal level manipulation checks

Behavioural identification form (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989)

The BIF was designed to measure the level at which individuals identify their behaviour. According to action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989), individuals identify their behaviours at a low level (how the behaviour is performed) or a high level (why the behaviour is performed). Given the conceptual similarity, the BIF was later used to measure individuals' chronic construal level or to confirm construal level manipulation (Burgoon et al., 2013; Kirshner, 2021; Lee, 2019). The BIF contains 25 items in which each item represents a neutral action (e.g. 'greeting someone') and two possible descriptions of that action. One description is lower in level and specifies the means of the action ('saying hello') whereas the other describes the action at a higher level ('showing friendliness'). Participants are instructed to choose one of the descriptions that they think is more appropriate for each action. The number of high-level descriptions that are chosen shows the construal level in which higher scores (i.e. >14) suggests high-level construal.

Manipulation check using consumer textual responses (Fujita, Henderson, et al., 2006)

Fujita, Henderson, et al. (2006) devised a manipulation check using the texts that are written by participants in response to the why/how goal-priming task. This manipulation check invites two judges who are blind to the experimental conditions to evaluate each participant's responses on two criteria: 'X by Y' and 'Y by X'. Here, X = participants' responses and Y = prime (i.e. why/how of goal).

The ‘X by Y criterion’ states that Y helps to obtain X (i.e. participants’ responses are a superordinate goal that is served by prime Y). For example, ‘maintaining and improving health’ (Y) is instrumental to achieving a higher-order goal of ‘to live a long life’ (X). However, a ‘Y by X criterion’ states that X is a means to achieve Y (i.e. participants’ responses are a subordinate means to achieve prime Y). For example, a response ‘eating healthy diet’ (X) helps to ‘maintain and improve health’ (Y).

The judges independently assign values to the responses of each participant such that +1 is assigned to a response that meets the ‘X by Y criterion’, –1 if a response meets the ‘Y by X’ criterion and 0 if none of the criteria are met. It is important to note that the judges are not asked to see whether participants followed laddering. Then, a sum of the values that are assigned to the participants’ responses by a judge is calculated. Given that each participant has four responses, this ranges from +4 to −4. Next, researchers calculate the correlation coefficient between the sum of the ratings of the two judges to measure the extent of agreement between them. After this, the two sets of sums are averaged together to form a single value for each participant. Finally, the average of these values is calculated for each group (i.e. low and high-level construal) and a significant difference between the two means confirms the success of the manipulation.

Probability-based manipulation check (Wakslak et al., 2006)

Construal level studies have also used a probability-based manipulation check. This is consistent with the basic premise of CLT, which posits that the likelihood of an event determines the level of construal, and vice versa. That is, events that are more likely are construed concretely whereas events that are less likely are construed abstractly (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Further, individuals who have abstract construal perceive a lesser likelihood of an event happening but people who have concrete construal perceive a greater likelihood of the occurrence of an event (Wakslak et al., 2006). In other words, manipulating the construal level of individuals increases or decreases their likelihood of the occurrence of an event. This holds when construal manipulation and events are completely unrelated (Wakslak et al., 2006). For example, Wakslak and Trope (2009) revealed that manipulating participants’ construal level mindsets through why/how tasks influenced their likelihood judgements about seven unrelated tasks. However, a recent close replication of Wakslak and Trope’s (2009) original study found no evidence about the impact of construal level on likelihood (Calderon et al., 2020).

Study 3: Manipulation of power

High power

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to obtain something they wanted or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Please take as much time as you need to recall a situation such as this. Try to recall yourself in that position. Try to imagine exactly what happened. Use the following box to **provide a detailed description of this situation** in which you had power—what happened, how you felt, etc.

Low power

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which someone had control over your ability to obtain something you wanted or was in a position to evaluate you. Please take as much time as you need to recall a situation such as this. Try to recall yourself in that position. Try to imagine exactly what happened. Use the following box to **provide a detailed description of this situation** in which you did not have power—what happened, how you felt, etc.

Study 4: Manipulation of stages in consumer decision journey. Source: Humphreys et al. (2021)

Stages in consumer decision journey (information search to purchase)



Informational stage



Transactional stage



Study 5a: Manipulation of stages in consumer decision journey

Informational stage

Information-gathering is the first step in the buying journey. Imagine that you are in the information-gathering stage and want to gather information about sneakers so you can determine whether you might need a pair of sneakers in the future.

Transactional stage

Product-selection is the last step in the buying journey. Imagine that you do not have a pair of sneakers but need to choose one for a hiking tour that you are doing tomorrow. So, you are at the last step (i.e. product-selection) of the buying process.

Appendix III

Study 1: Short BIF scale

The action of ‘washing clothes’ can be described as:
a. removing stains/odours from clothes
b. putting clothes into the machine.

The action of ‘locking a door’ can be described as:
a. securing the house
b. putting a key in the lock.

The action of ‘voting’ can be described as:
a. influencing the election
b. stamping a ballot paper.

The action of ‘brushing teeth’ can be described as:
a. preventing teeth decay
b. moving a brush around one’s mouth.

The action of ‘taking a test’ can be described as:
a. showing one’s knowledge
b. answering questions.

The action of ‘eating’ can be described as:
a. getting nutrition
b. chewing and swallowing.

The action of ‘growing a garden’ can be described as:
a. getting fresh vegetables
b. planting seeds.

The action of ‘pushing a doorbell’ can be described as:
a. seeing if someone is home
b. pressing a button.

The action of ‘painting the room’ can be described as:
a. making the room look fresh
b. moving a paint brush on the wall.