

# **Consumer Evaluations of Cable Network Brand Extensions: A Case Study of the Discovery Channels**

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**ABSTRACT** This case study examines the factors affecting the evaluation of brand extensions of the Discovery network. The results of correlation and multiple regression analysis showed that, among all the variables, perceived fit, evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, and perceived quality variance were significant predictors of the success of the Discovery network's brand extensions.

**KEY WORDS:** television network, brand extension, fit, quality, channel repertoire

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With the popularity of the concept of branding in many industries, the application of brand management has been facilitated in the media industries by increased competition. The rapidly growing number of media outlets has resulted in audience fragmentation (Lin, 1995). This audience segmentation became more vivid with the inception of digital technologies such as digital direct broadcast satellite (DBS) and digital cable. In addition, traditional over-the-air broadcasting has begun to adopt digital technologies. In short, the existence of more channels has led to more market (audience) segmentation. Responding to these structural changes, electronic media companies in all areas such as over-the-air broadcasting, cable, and DBS have had to use positioning strategies based on audience segmentation. For this aim, they have come to focus on brand management.

The concept of branding has been frequently used in media industries since the mid-1990s in trade journals (e.g., Mandese, 1993; Dupree, 1996). These media practitioners' attention to brand manage-

ment was followed by academic research focusing on media branding (e.g., Bellamy, 2000; Chan-Olmsted & Jung, 2001; Galbi, 2001; Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2001; McDowell, 1998; McDowell & Sutherland, 2000; McGovern, 2001). Although this research generally introduced brand management concepts to the media industries, the applications were limited to basic concepts such as brand equity.

The objectives of this article are to integrate the applications of brand management into electronic media studies and to apply the concept of brand extension to the cable television industry. With the increase of available channel capacity, cable networks are introducing new channels. These channels (e.g., CNN Headline News) usually are named based on their original channel names (e.g., CNN). These spin-offs can be more easily explained and their effects will be more exactly estimated if the brand extension (or line extension) concepts are used. Until now few studies have been conducted regarding brand extension in the context of the cable television industry.

Considering these limitations, this study examines important factors that affect the success of cable network brand extension. This article uses a term, evaluation, which many previous studies regarding brand management have used as a dependent variable (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Barwise, 1993; Boush & Loken, 1991; Herr et al., 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park et al., 1989; Shocker et al., 1994; Uncles, 1996). This study measures the audience evaluation of cable network brand extensions as a proxy of success of the extension strategy. Regarding most of the predictive variables, this study adopts variables that have generally been used in brand management literature because few media-specific variables have been tested in the previous research that dealt with branding in the media context. This study, nonetheless, adopts some media specific variables such as channel repertoire in order to enrich knowledge about the effects of brand extension in the cable television context. As exploratory research, this study conducts a survey of college students in order to test the effects of the independent variables on the evaluation of brand extension. It specifically examines the audience evaluation of the Discovery Channel brand extensions as a test case. The Discovery channels were selected given their high brand equity among media brands.

This article is divided into five sections. Section I introduces previous research on brand extension and finds relevant conditions or variables for successful brand extensions. Section II investigates which cable-specific variables can be transferred to the conditions or predicting variables in the context of cable network brand extensions. Section III explains the research design and section IV shows results of the survey. Section V discusses the implications of the results and directions for future research.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON BRAND EXTENSION

Extensions of existing product lines have been shown to account for over 90 percent of the new consumer packaged goods offered each year (Gallo, 1992). Practitioners' proclivity to embrace a brand extension strategy has led to commensurate levels of academic research (e.g., Aaker & Keller, 1990; Herr et al., 1996; Smith & Park, 1992).

### *Concept of Brand Extension*

Researchers have conceptualized a brand as a category in memory with dominant (i.e., those which constitute brand meaning) attributes, benefits or image-related associations, secondary (i.e., non-defining) associations, and an attitudinal component (Boush & Loken, 1991; Cohen & Basu, 1987; Keller, 1993; Myers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Sujan, 1985). Brands function as insurance policies against the potential time, monetary, and social/psychological losses facing consumers when they purchase a product (Delvecchio, 2000).

In a typical brand extension situation, an established brand name is applied to a new product in a category either related or unrelated, in order to capitalize on the equity of the core brand name (DeGraba & Sullivan, 1995). In other words, brand extension uses an established name in one product class to enter another product class (Glynn & Brodie, 1998). A good brand extension strategy is one in which the brand name aids the extension, while a *very* good brand extension enhances the brand name (Aaker, 1991). Numerous studies, however, suggest that an extension strategy may lead to dilution of the brand (e.g. Chakravarti et al., 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; John et al., 1998; Loken & John, 1993).

Brand extensions come in two primary forms: horizontal and vertical (Kim & Lavack, 1996). In a horizontal brand extension, an existing brand name is applied to a new product introduction in either a related product class or in a product category completely new to the firm (Sheinin & Schmitt, 1994). A vertical brand extension involves introducing a brand extension in the same product category as the core brand, but at a different price point and quality level (Keller & Aaker, 1992). This vertical brand extension is sometimes called line extension (Kirmani, Sood & Bridges, 1999). At the conceptual level, cable network spin-offs are similar to vertical or line extension because those spin-offs are made in the same product category.<sup>1</sup> Considering the popularity of the brand

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<sup>1</sup> The choice between horizontal and vertical extensions can depend heavily upon how the product is defined. That is, if we focus on narrower levels of definitions, then the spin-offs of channels can be regarded as horizontal extensions. The authors use the concept of vertical extension because the individual channels are the most basic units sold to consumers and extensions from the units are first-level extensions. If we assume there might be a Discovery Health Channel (first-level extension) and Discovery Health Magazine (second- or higher-level extension) extended from Discovery Channel, then the difference can be easily shown.

extension concept, cable network spin-offs will be called cable network brand extension in this article.

Most research on brand extension has focused on finding the conditions that lead to successful brand extensions (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Barwise, 1993; Boush & Loken, 1991; Herr et al., 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park et al., 1989; Rangaswamy et al., 1993; Sunde & Brodie, 1993; Shocker et al., 1994; Uncles, 1996). In this research, many variables or conditions have been suggested. Past research focused primarily on the fit between the existing products affiliated with the brand and the extension category (DelVecchio, 2000). Some research, however, tried to suggest non-fit variables in estimating the brand extension evaluations. This article tries to devise a model for evaluating cable network brand extensions from a broader perspective, so those non-fit factors are important for modeling. Considering this necessity, the authors divide the previous research into two parts: fit-focused research and non-fit-focused research.

#### *Fit-Focused Research*

Two factors have emerged to be important in extension evaluations. One is the effect of the parent brand, and the second one is the similarity between the original and the extension categories (Glynn & Brodie, 1998). Similarly, Aaker and Keller (1990) indicated that the quality of the original brand and the perception of fit between a brand and a brand extension have a direct relationship on the attitude toward the extension.

At first, perceived fit was conceptualized as the similarity or feature overlap between the parent brand and extension category (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Romeo, 1990). Affect is transferred from the parent brand to the extension based on how well the extension is perceived to fit with the brand category (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991).

Boush et al. (1987) noted that the greater the similarity between the current product and the extended product, the greater the transfer of brand affect. Perceived fit was high if the extension category shared important product attributes with the parent brand category (e.g., a cheese cracker extension from a potato chip parent brand would likely fit because both could be seen as dry, salty snacks (Keller & Aaker, 1992)).

While many studies emphasized product attributes such as fit and product similarity, some research highlighted the role of non-product attributes in brand extension (Glynn & Brodie, 1998). Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) demonstrated that unique brand-specific associations that were valued in the extension category could dominate parent affect and category similarity in predicting extension evaluations. Bridges (1992) found that by building associations not tied to the physical product, a brand's growth prospects could be enhanced. A brand's image is also more likely to transfer to an extension if it is more general than product-specific (Nakamoto et al., 1993).

Park et al. (1991) extended the definition of perceived fit beyond category similarity by showing that two brands in the same category could have extensions that varied in fit. In their study, extension evaluations depended on both category similarity and brand consistency. Functional brands with dominant associations related to performance (e.g., Timex) extended best to categories that shared the functional association (e.g., stopwatches), and symbolic brands with dominant associations related to prestige (e.g., Rolex) extended best to categories which shared the prestige association (e.g., bracelets), independent of category similarity.

Bridges et al. (2000) proposed a definition of perceived fit which suggests that any parent brand association, including category, brand concept, or brand-specific associations, can connect the parent brand with an extension and serve as the basis for perceived fit. The critical determinant is not the type of association but whether the association is salient (i.e., accessible from memory) and relevant (i.e., deemed appropriate and important) in the extension context (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Saliency of associations depends, in part, upon the dominant parent brand associations; relevance depends, in part, upon the parent brand-to-extension category relationship. In addition, Bridges et al. (2000) suggested that high perceived fit results when consumers identify “explanatory links” that make the brand category “hang together” and permit it to remain cohesive when an extension is introduced.

#### *Non-Fit Focused Research*

In addition to the fit between the original brand and the extension category, several explanatory variables have been suggested. Boush (1993) and Pryor and Brodie (1998) investigated the influence that priming advertising slogans have on the attitudes and perceptions of consumers toward brand extensions. The results suggest that advertising slogans can play an important role in either supporting or undermining a brand extension strategy.

Brand quality plays an important part in brand extension strategy (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Dacin & Smith, 1994). Similarly, brand attitude toward the original brand can affect consumers’ brand extension fit perception (Bridges et al., 2000).

Brand esteem and familiarity are important determinants of stock market reaction to extensions (Lane & Jacobson, 1995). Taylor and Bearden (2002) researched the effects of price on consumer evaluations of brand extension. Higher prices are more likely to adversely affect consumer perceptions of quality, value, and purchase intentions for similar product extensions.

Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges (1999) researched the ownership effects on brand extension in the line extension context. They proposed that owners have more favorable responses than nonowners to the brand extensions. The ownership effect occurs for upward and downward

stretches on nonprestige brands and for upward stretches of prestige brands. For downward stretches of prestige brands, however, the ownership effect does not occur because of owners' desire to maintain brand exclusivity. In this situation, a subbranding strategy protects owners' parent brand attitudes from dilution.

DelVecchio (2000) focused on the role of brand portfolio regarding brand extension evaluations. Based on Dacin and Smith's (1994) theory, DelVecchio argued that as the number of products affiliated with the brand increases, so does the firm's investment in the brand, resulting in consumers' more favorable attitude toward brands that are associated with a greater number of products. Also DelVecchio introduced the concept of brand quality variance. Brand quality variance measures the extent to which consumers believe that the products affiliated with a brand vary in quality. DelVecchio showed that as the perceived quality variance of the products associated with a brand increases, brand extension evaluation decreases.

## **APPLICATION TO THE CABLE INDUSTRY**

Applying brand equity concepts to over-the-air broadcasting, McDowell (1998) experienced some difficulties. For example, unlike most consumer goods (Taylor & Bearden, 2000), pricing is not a paramount concern for broadcasters. In the case of line extension, price differentiation is generally regarded as an important component. But, in the case of over-the-air, this concept cannot be directly applied. Also, in the context of cable television, pricing might not be a good predictor because most cable subscribers use basic or standard tiers which do not demand different price schemes for individual channels. Pricing can only be used for premium channels or pay per view (PPV) channels. Considering these limitations, this study does not consider pricing as an independent variable that affects consumers' evaluation of cable network brand extensions.

Another important concept is channel repertoire. Generally channel repertoire is defined as "the number of channels that a viewer chooses to watch, without much regard to the total number of channels available" (Ferguson & Melkote, 1997, p.190). Previous research has found that there is a positive relationship between the richer new media repertoire and more active audience (Lin, 1994; Perse, Ferguson & McLeod, 1994). These results imply that the number of channels actually used by viewers does not necessarily increase as the number of available channels increases. From the previous research, we can reason that viewers with more channel repertoire will have more positive evaluations toward cable channel brand extensions because they are more active in using media.

The ownership concept is applied differently to cable. Unlike other consumer products, cable ownership implies multiple meanings. In terms

of direct application, cable ownership means subscribership. This measure, however, does not fully reflect real television consumption. Among cable subscribers (or premium channel subscribers), there might be huge differences in total viewing time. In contemplating these differences, the degree of consumption needs to be considered instead of subscribership.

## HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the previous literature, this study combines independent variables which may affect the evaluation of cable network brand extensions. First of all, previous research (e.g., Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarzyk & Alba, 1994; Bridges et al., 2000) suggests that perceived brand fit is an important factor. Based on these findings, a positive relationship is predicted between the perceived fit and the evaluation of the Discovery Channel brand extension.

*H1: The perceived fit between the original Discovery Channel and extended channels will have a positive effect on brand extension evaluation.*

Aaker and Keller (1990) and Dacin and Smith (1994) suggested that the quality of the original brand affected brand extension evaluation positively. If other conditions hold, the high quality of the original brand will increase the salience of the association between the original brand and the extension category (Bridges et al., 2000). Similarly, Bridges et al. suggested that higher brand attitude toward the original brand will result in higher brand extension evaluation. In this article, considering their high correlation, both perceived quality of the original brand and brand attitude toward the original brand are combined into a new variable (brand evaluation toward the original brand). Also, this variable is consistent with the dependent variable (brand extension evaluation).

*H2: The brand evaluation of the original Discovery Channel will have a positive effect on brand extension evaluation.*

DelVecchio (2000) suggested that the number of products affiliated with the original brand has a positive effect on brand extension evaluation while the perceived quality variance of the products associated with a brand has a negative effect on brand extension evaluation. Applying these findings to cable, the authors suggest the following hypotheses:

*H3: The perception of the number of extended channels affiliated with the original Discovery Channel will have a positive effect on the extension evaluation.*

*H4: The perceived quality variance of the Discovery channels will have a negative effect on the extension evaluation.*

In addition to the fit and non-fit variables addressed by the above hypotheses (H1-H4), this study adopts a couple of cable-specific attributes. Kirmani et al. (1999) proposed that owners have more favorable responses than nonowners to brand extensions. It was explained above that the effect of ownership can be measured differently with regard to cable networks: watching time. Based on Kirmani et al.'s (1999) logic, the authors expect that heavy users of television and the original Discovery network will have more favorable evaluations of the Discovery brand extensions.

*H5-1: Heavy viewers of television will have more positive evaluation of the Discovery brand extensions than light viewers.*

*H5-2: Heavy viewers of the original Discovery Channel will have more positive evaluations to the Discovery brand extensions than light viewers.*

As another cable-specific attribute, the researchers adopted channel repertoire. Channel repertoire refers to the total set of channels that a cable subscriber chooses to view. This article suggests that this channel repertoire will affect the cable network extension evaluation. If a subscriber has many channels in her/his repertoire, the subscriber has a great flexibility in adopting new channels. Conversely, if a viewer has a small channel repertoire, it will be difficult for a new channel to find a place in the restricted repertoire.

*H6: The number of channels in the repertoire of cable subscribers will have a positive effect on the Discovery brand extension evaluation.*

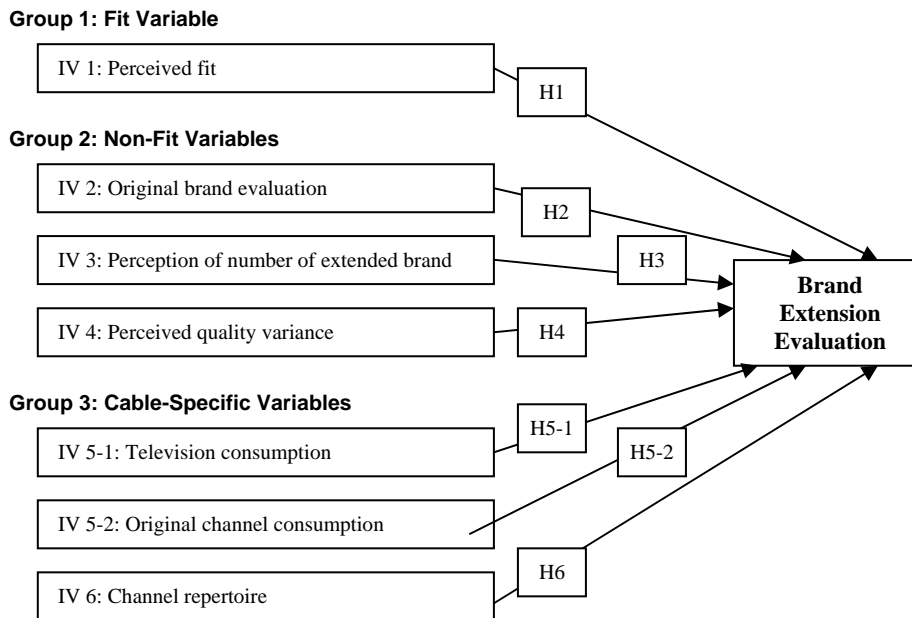
The researchers thus suggest the model in Figure 1 for studying evaluations of cable network brand extension.

## **METHOD**

### ***Data Collection***

Data was collected via questionnaires administered to 302 undergraduate students at a large southeastern U.S. university in April,

Figure 1. Model of Cable Network Brand Extension Evaluation



2003. This study used a campus intercept method to obtain the respondents. Survey respondents were located on campus and were given a slice of pizza for their cooperation. Although this campus intercept method is an improved method compared to the in-class survey method, it should be noted that this strategy is still a convenient sampling method which cannot secure randomness. Compared with in-class surveys, this intercept method is considered to have a higher external validity in that it can generate a more diverse combination of students. In spite of this effort, the use of a student sample makes it difficult to avoid some limitations compared to research that uses probability and national-level samples. This study, however, aims to test the theoretically constructed relationships among variables rather than to provide generalized explanations about the characteristics of cable viewers. Although there might be some limitations in applying the results to the general population, this study will provide important insights regarding the relationship between brand extension evaluation and several explanatory variables at the exploratory level. For similar purposes, the use of student subjects has been widely accepted in brand extension research in several areas (DeVecchio, 2000).

### **Brand Selection**

This case study selected the Discovery Channel based on two criteria. First, given that brand extensions are typically offered by brands that are both well known and favorably perceived, a cable network with which

the sample is familiar and holds a favorable attitude toward was considered. Second, in the case of extended channels, the channels need to have a low level of brand familiarity among cable viewers considering this study's theorizing that the original brand (channel) unidirectionally affects the extended channels. If the extended channels have a high level of familiarity, it will be difficult to make sure that the relationship is unidirectional.

Considering these two criteria, the authors decided to use the Discovery Channel and extended channels in the final survey for this study. Among the cable networks, the Discovery Channel is considered to have the highest brand equity. For example, the Spring 2003 Equitrend brand study by Harris Interactive showed that the Discovery Channel is the number one media brand in overall quality for the seventh consecutive year, and the number one television network brand in overall quality for the eleventh consecutive year. The Discovery Channel is also a top ten consumer brand among 1,152 measured brands ([www.cabletvad.bureau.com](http://www.cabletvad.bureau.com)). This means Discovery fulfills the first criteria of the assumptions in selecting an appropriate brand. Also, in spite of such familiarity, many of its extended channels are provided as premium services which demand digital cable subscribership. For this reason, its extended cable channels do not have high familiarity among cable viewers. A pilot test which was conducted at the university in October, 2002, showed that most students did not use digital cable service. Thus, this fulfills the second criteria as well.

Among the channels which the Discovery network provides, this study selected seven channels (Discovery Health, Discovery Times, Discovery Kids, Discovery Home and Leisure, Discovery Wings, Discovery en Espanol, and Discovery HD Theater) as the extended channels because these channels contained the name Discovery in their channel names. It did not include channels owned by Discovery that do not use Discovery in their name because these did not represent brand extension: Animal Planet, BBC America, Science Channel, and TLC.

### **Variables**

To predict the factors affecting the evaluation of cable network brand extension, the authors adopted seven independent variables: perceived fit, original Discovery Channel evaluation, perceived quality variance, number of extended channels, overall television consumption, consumption of the original Discovery Channel, and number of channels in repertoire. These variables can be categorized into three groups: (1) fit (perceived fit); (2) non-fit (original brand evaluation, perceived quality variance, and number of extended channels); and (3) cable-specific variables (consumption of television/original Discovery Channel, and number of channels in repertoire).

**Brand Extension Evaluation** Brand extension evaluation was measured by asking whether the brand extension is “desirable,” “favorable,” and “of high quality.” Adopting the scales of Pryor and Brodie (1998), respondents were required to provide evaluative ratings of the brand extension using three 7-point bipolar adjective scales (desirability: 1=undesirable, 7=desirable; favorability: 1=unfavorable, 7=favorable; and quality: 1=low quality, 7=high quality)

**Perceived Fit** To measure the perceived fit, students were asked to rate the similarity of each Discovery extension (Discovery Health, Discovery Times, Discovery Kids, Discovery Home and Leisure, Discovery Wings, Discovery en Espanol, and Discovery HD Theater) to the original Discovery Channel (1=dissimilar, 7=similar). Regarding the measure of the perceived fit, the authors did not provide any descriptions about the extended channels. As in several past studies, the authors just measured unaided responses regarding the fit.

**Original Discovery Channel Evaluation** To measure the students’ evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, the authors used the scales of Pryor and Brodie (1998). The respondents were asked to evaluate the original Discovery brand overall using three 7-point bipolar scales. They were asked whether the original Discovery Channel is “desirable,” “favorable,” and “of high quality” (desirability: 1=undesirable, 7=desirable; favorability: 1=unfavorable, 7=favorable; and quality: 1=low quality, 7=high quality).

**Perception of Number of Extended Channels** This index is based on DelVecchio (2000). Although objective measures of the number of channels affiliated with Discovery are readily available, this study captured consumers’ perceptions of the number of channels associated with Discovery. This is because in evaluating a product, consumers typically draw on their own knowledge and perceptions. For this aim, the students were required to rate their perception of the total number of Discovery channels (1=too small, 7=too large)

**Perceived Quality Variance** Using the DelVecchio (2000) scale, this variable was measured by three 7-point questions (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The statements used to measure perceived quality variance were: (1) If I were to watch the Discovery channels, I would feel very certain of the levels of quality that I am getting; (2) The channels offered by Discovery are consistent in terms of quality; and (3) The channels offered by Discovery provide very predictable levels of quality. Hypothesis 4 states the negative relationship between the perceived quality variance and the evaluation of brand extension. The questionnaire, however, used reversed forms in order to avoid misconceptions by respondents.

***TV Consumption and Original Discovery Channel*** Regarding the consumption of television, respondents were asked to answer how much they watch television per day. In case of the consumption of the original Discovery Channel which respondents were not supposed to watch every day, this study asked respondents to answer how frequently they watch the Discovery Channel per week (0 to 7 days).

***Number of Channels in Repertoire*** Using Neuendorf, Atkin, and Jeffres' (2001) definition of secondary repertoire, this study asked respondents about the number of television channels viewed at least weekly.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

Zero-order correlation and multiple regression analyses are used to test the given hypotheses. Correlation analyses between evaluation toward brand extension and each of explanatory variables directly test the hypotheses assuming the effects of the other explanatory variables. In that they do not consider the effects of the other variables, however, correlation analyses can provide only partial support for the hypotheses. As the second step, this study uses a multiple regression analysis including all the explanatory variables. Through the regression analysis, this study seeks to discover which explanatory variables are significant in predicting the evaluation of brand extension controlling the effects of other variables.

In addition to correlation and multiple regression analyses, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and Cronbach's alpha were used to test the appropriateness of data and reduce the number of items.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Descriptive Statistics and Data Screening***

***Sample Characteristics*** The sample consisted of 302 students with a mean age of 20.4. Female students comprised 51% of the sample and male students 49%. It is noteworthy that although this study used a campus intercept method, the sample turned out to include equivalent number of respondents in terms of gender. Based on this, the authors used one-way ANOVA tests to see if there is any significant difference between male and female students. With regard to gender, the between-group differences were found in terms of consumption of the original Discovery Channel. Males (M=2.1 days per week) reported watching the Discovery Channel more than females (M=1.5 days per week). In addition, among all the extended brands of Discovery, females are relatively more familiar with Discovery Health (Mean of females=3.62;

Mean of males=2.98) and Discovery Kids (Mean of females=2.58; Mean of males=2.16) than males, while less familiar with Discovery Wings (Mean of males=2.46; Mean of females=1.63).<sup>2</sup> The difference was also found in perceived quality variance. More females think the channels offered by Discovery are consistent and predictable in terms of quality than males.

A majority of respondents were seniors and juniors, averaging 3.06 years in college. One-way ANOVA tests were used to examine if there was a significant difference among the four groups of students according to their grade or college year. The outcome showed that there was no significant difference except in the original brand evaluation. That means, the longer a student is in college, the higher the evaluation of original Discovery Channel (Mean of 1st year=4.24; Mean of 2nd year=4.73; Mean of 3rd year=5.27; Mean of 4th year=5.29). Although there is no other significant difference among the four groups of students, it could be a limitation of this study not to have an equivalent number of students for each of the four groups.

***Descriptive Statistics*** The respondents reported they were watching television three hours and six minutes per day on average with an average channel repertoire of 8.39. A majority of respondents (72%) reported they were watching the Discovery Channel more than one day per week (M=1.79 days per week). Respondents appeared to be somewhat familiar with the Discovery Channel (M=4.79), while they were not familiar with other extended channels provided by Discovery (e.g., Discovery Kids, Discovery Times, etc). Among the seven extended channels of Discovery, students were relatively more familiar with Discovery Health (M=3.31) than the other six channels (M=1.54~2.37). This outcome supported one of assumptions of this study that students will be significantly more familiar with the original Discovery Channel than the extended channels.

As for the evaluation of original brand, students appeared to have a relatively positive attitude toward the Discovery Channel, stating that it is “desirable” (M=4.84), “favorable” (M=4.99), and “of high quality” (M=5.50). While respondents did not report that the seven extended channels are similar to the original Discovery Channel (M=2.75~3.61), their evaluation of brand extensions appeared to be relatively positive, reporting that all the Discovery channels were “desirable” (M = 4.85), “favorable” (M = 4.88), and “of high quality” (M = 5.25).

Turning to perceived quality variance, students appeared to be positive in evaluating how the channels offered by the Discovery are

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<sup>2</sup> The authors controlled for familiarity using familiarity data for each extended channel. Regression analysis was made with the familiarity variables and the independent variables. None of the familiarity variables for the individual extended channels were significant and the p values of the independent variables were relatively unchanged, so the authors do not include those familiarity variables in the analysis in this article.

consistent and predictable in terms of quality (M=4.51~4.67). Regarding the number of extended brands, students evaluated the total number of Discovery channels as relatively high (M=4.65).

**Data Screening** Among the eight variables, four variables were measured by single items in the questionnaire. However, three of seven items were used in the questionnaire when measuring the following variables: the evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, perceived fit, brand extension evaluation, and perceived quality variance. Thus, the authors needed to combine the multiple items used to measure the four variables into single items for convenient analysis. For this scale refinement process, the scale reliabilities were estimated using Cronbach's alpha. All of the four constructs had Cronbach's alphas exceeding the standard acceptance norm of 0.80: evaluation of the original Discovery Channel (.86), perceived fit (.89), brand extension evaluation (.91), perceived quality variance (.91)<sup>3</sup> Based on this result, the study averaged the multiple items of each construct.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

This study used zero-order (Pearson) correlation and multiple regression analyses. Although the regression analysis is ultimately used to determine support for the hypothesis, Pearson correlation was used as the first step in order to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the brand extension evaluation and all other explanatory variables. Among the seven explanatory variables, three variables, such as the perception of the number of extended brands, overall television consumption, and the number of channels in repertoire, revealed no statistically significant relationship with the brand extension evaluation. Thus, the correlation analysis did not support H3, which states that the perception of the number of extended channels will have a positive effect on the evaluation of the Discovery brand extensions. The results also showed that H5-1, which assumes the relationship between overall television consumption and the Discovery brand extension evaluations, is not supported. In addition, the results did not support H6, which predicts positive relationship between the number of channels in the repertoire of cable subscribers and the evaluation of the Discovery brand extensions.

Except for these three, all the other variables appeared to have some statistically significant relationship with the brand extension evaluation. First, perceived fit appeared to be moderately related to the brand extension evaluation ( $r=.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ), supporting H1, which states that the

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<sup>3</sup> Although there is no golden standard about how high coefficients should be in order to consider reliability as 'good,' some rough guidelines are offered: reliability coefficients around .90 can be considered 'excellent,' values around .80 as 'very good,' and values around .70 as 'adequate' (Kline, 1998, p. 194).

perceived fit between the original Discovery Channel and the extended channels will have a positive effect on brand extension evaluation.

H2, H3, and H4 predict the effects of non-fit variables on the Discovery brand extension evaluation. The correlation results showed that, among others, evaluation of the original Discovery Channel ( $r=.77$ ,  $p<.01$ ) showed a strong, positive relationship with the evaluation of brand extensions, supporting H2, which states that the brand evaluation of the original Discovery Channel will have a positive effect on brand extension evaluation. That means, the higher the evaluation of the original Discovery brand, the more positive the evaluation of the extensions. The correlation analysis also revealed a strong relationship between perceived quality variance and the Discovery brand extension evaluation ( $r=.68$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This result supports H4, which predicts the negative relationship between perceived quality variance and brand extension evaluation. The more subscribers feel that the Discovery channels are consistent and predictable in terms of quality, the more likely that they will evaluate the Discovery brand extensions positively.

Third, correlation analysis was also used to examine the effects of cable-specific variables on the evaluation of Discovery brand extensions. The cable-specific variables in this study include consumption of overall television as well as of the original Discovery Channel, and the number of channels in repertoire. As discussed above, the consumption of overall television and the number of channel repertoire have not been found to have any statistically significant relationship with the extension evaluation. This result did not support H5-1 and H6. Meanwhile, the consumption of the original Discovery Channel had a moderately positive relationship with the evaluation of the Discovery brand extension ( $r=.39$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It indicates that the more a viewer watches the Discovery Channel, the more likely it is for him or her to evaluate the brand extensions positively.

Overall, the correlation analysis revealed that the two non-fit variables relating to evaluation of the original Discovery brand ( $r=.77$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and perceived quality variance ( $r=.68$ ,  $p<.01$ ) have the strongest relationship with the evaluation of the brand extensions. Meanwhile, perceived fit appeared to have a moderately positive relationship ( $r=.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ), which is less effective than those two non-fit variables. However, as a correlation analysis provides only partial support for the hypothesis testing, this study used multiple regression to find out which explanatory variables are significant in controlling the effect of the other variables.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the seven hypotheses. In this model, perceived fit (H1), original Discovery Channel evaluation (H2), perception of number of extended brands (H3), perceived quality variance (H4), consumption of television (H5-1), consumption of original Discovery Channel (H5-2), and channel repertoire (H6) were entered as independent variables. The dependent variable in this model was brand extension evaluation. All seven independent variables were entered into the regression model.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix for Dependent and Independent Variables

	Dep	1	2	3	4	5-1	5-2	6
Dependent: Brand extension evaluation	-							
1: Perceived fit	.34**	-						
2: Original brand evaluation	.77**	.31**	-					
3: Perception of number of extended channels	-.00	.03	.00	-				
4: Perceived quality variance	.68**	.30**	.56**	.03	-			
5-1: Consumption of television	.04	.07	.07	-.13*	-.01	-		
5-2: Consumption of original cable channel	.39**	.16*	.45**	-.14*	.28**	.16**	-	
6: Channel repertoire	.11	.05	.14*	-.05	.11	.46**	.21**	-

Before conducting the regression analysis, the authors examined whether the data satisfy the assumptions required for regression analysis. Among several assumptions, this study checked multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity problems. The analyses showed that the data are appropriate for regression analysis although there are a few minor violations. First, with regard to the multicollinearity problem, variance-inflating factors (VIF) of all the independent variables (VIF = 1.04 ~ 1.75) was significantly less than 10, which is regarded as a critical point. Second, with regard to heteroscedasticity, the authors used the Park test (Park, 1966), which adopts a regression equation showing the relationships between a log-transformed squared residues and log-transformed independent variables. The result showed that most of the independent variables did not exhibit the heteroscedasticity problem except for one variable (perceived quality variance).

Regression analyses are processed in three steps. First, this study examined whether the overall regression model is significant. Second, this study investigated whether the individual independent variables are significant. Third, this study conducted a hierarchical regression analysis using three blocks of independent variables devised by the suggested model: fit, non-fit, and cable-specific variables.

In the first step, the regression analysis showed that the overall regression model is significant. The model explained 69.2% of entire variance and F-test confirmed that the model is significant ( $F=69.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In the second step, the regression result indicates that three independent variables, perceived fit ( $B=.095$ ,  $t=1.999$ ,  $p=.047$ ), evaluation

of original Discovery Channel ( $B=.574$ ,  $t=11.048$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and perceived quality variance ( $B=.328$ ,  $t=6.757$ ,  $p=.000$ ), among seven independent variables, were significant variables that affect the brand extension evaluation.

The analysis supported H1, which assumes the relationship between perceived fit and brand extension evaluation. The analysis also confirmed H2, indicating that the brand evaluation of the original Discovery Channel has a positive effect on the evaluation of the extensions. In addition, the result also supported H4, revealing that the perceived quality variance of the Discovery channels has a negative effect on the extension evaluation. The other hypotheses, H3, H5-1, H5-2, and H6, were not supported by the analysis.

In the third step, the hierarchical regression analysis showed that fit and non-fit variables were significant as separate blocks of variables while the input of cable-specific variables did not increase the explanatory power of the regression model. Specifically,  $R^2$  changes following the input of each block showed that fit variable block ( $R^2$  change=.120,  $F=30.207$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and non-fit variable block ( $R^2$  change=.569,  $F=133.220$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were significant. Cable-specific variables as a whole did not make a significant contribution ( $R^2$  change=.004,  $F=.921$ ,  $p=.432$ ).

Table 2. Regression Analysis of the Suggested Model

Independent Variables	B	SE of B	$\beta$	t	Sig
Constant	.504	.312		1.619	.107
Perceived fit	.095	.047	.081	1.999	.047
Original brand evaluation	.574	.052	.552	11.048	.000
Perception of number of extended channels	-.071	.044	-.063	-1.638	.103
Perceived quality variance	.328	.049	.310	6.757	.000
Consumption of television	.000	.000	.035	.805	.422
Consumption of original cable channel	.053	.037	.063	1.426	.155
Channel repertoire	-.002	.009	-.012	-.270	.787

$R^2=.692$ , Adjusted  $R^2=.682$ ,  $F=69.44$ ,  $p<.01$

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Block	Variables	$R^2$ Change	F Change	Sig
Fit	(H1) Perceived fit	.120	30.207	.000
Non-fit	(H2) Original brand evaluation (H3) Perception of number of extended channels (H4) Perceived quality variance	.569	133.220	.000
Cable-specific	(H5-1) Consumption of television (H5-2) Consumption of original cable channel (H6) Channel repertoire	.004	.921	.432

## DISCUSSION

This study proposed seven hypotheses regarding the factors affecting the evaluation of brand extensions. The explanatory variables included perceived fit (which belonged to the “fit” category), evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, perception of the number of extended channels, perceived quality variance (which fell into the “non-fit” category), overall television consumption as well as original Discovery Channel consumption, and the number of channels in a viewer’s repertoire (which were included in the “cable-specific” category).

Regression analyses showed that perceived fit, original brand evaluation, and perceived quality variance were significant predictors of successful brand extensions. Based on this result, H1, H2, and H4 were supported while H3, H5-1, H5-2, and H6 were rejected.

Although perceived fit appeared to have a significant relationship with brand extension evaluation, the explanatory power of this variable was less than the two non-fit category variables (original brand evaluation and perceived quality variance), contrary to our expectation. This result is different from the findings in previous literature (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Milberg & Lawson, 1991) that showed that perceived fit is generally the most powerful explanatory variable for brand extension evaluation. This result suggests some implications. First, the operationalization and measurement of “fit” in the context of cable can be discussed. In previous studies, perceived fit was conceptualized as the similarity or feature overlap between the parent brand and extension category (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Romeo, 1990). The question arises: what are the sources of consumers’ perception of fit in the cable context? It is generally assumed that most of the viewers are likely to perceive fit or similarity between the original brand and extensions in terms of the program genre. This study asked how much the extended Discovery channels are similar to the original Discovery Channel based on the current channel line-up, most of which have been characterized as *educational* and *informational*. Accordingly, audiences are likely to perceive the similarity or fit between the current Discovery channels (e.g. Discovery Health, Discovery Kids, etc.). However, the educational and informational programming provided by the Discovery channels is clearly different from those such as drama, sports, and entertainment. Let us suppose that Discovery offers drama or sports. Then consumers’ perception of fit between the original Discovery Channel and Discovery Health may be different from the perceived similarity between the original Discovery Channel and Discovery Sports. Second, the authors assume that the weak effect of the “fit” on brand extension evaluations can also be explained by the measurement and conceptualization issue of line extension versus brand extension. As stated earlier, the authors proposed that cable network spin-offs are called cable network brand extensions in the present study. However,

channel extensions in the cable network industry can be defined as line extensions rather than pure “brand extensions,” because those spin-offs are made in the same product category. That means, pure “brand extension” of cable networks can be measured by the cable network’s expansion into other media such as newspaper, radio, or the Internet. Therefore, the authors assume that measuring “inter-media” fit would result in a different outcome regarding possible effects of perceived fit.

Our results confirmed the overwhelming importance of the original brand evaluation. This indicates that the more subscribers perceive the original cable channel positively, the more likely for them to positively evaluate brand extensions of the original cable channel. This outcome confirms the previous study that showed that the more positive brand attitude toward the original brand resulted in higher brand extension evaluation (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bridges et al., 2000; Dasin & Smith, 1994). This finding has some strategic implications for the cable network industry. It indicates that viewers’ positive evaluation of cable channel extensions relies on the strong brand power of the original channel, if controlling for the effects of the other variables such as the fit or similarity between the parent brand and extended channels and the perceived quality variance of the extended channels. It appears that the cable network brand managers’ first task would be building and managing strong brand equity of the original brand. Continuous marketing communications would be important in building and enhancing the original or parent brand’s positive image. With strong brand equity of the original brand, the brand extension strategies could be employed even if there is no apparent fit between the original brand and the extensions.

This study also found that the perceived quality variance of the Discovery channels has a negative effect on the extension evaluation. This result indicates that severe quality variance among channels under the same brand can blur the brand equity of the original channel, which is assumed to have a strong effect on brand extension evaluation. This implies that when a cable network launches or acquires a new channel, it is strategically necessary for the network to consider the generally perceived quality of the new channel. If the new channel is evaluated to have a significantly lower level of quality compared with the original channel, then the network may not need to use a brand extension strategy for the new channel. More strategically, the marketing tactics may need to focus on building an image of consistency. Specifically, it is important to make the audience believe that a cable network/channel and its extensions are consistent in terms of quality, and that the network provides very predictable levels of quality.

This study did not show that the perception of the number of brand extensions significantly affect the brand extension evaluation within the context of cable television. Although the current study cannot completely prove the possible effect of perceived number of extended channels in the context of cable television, some alternative hypotheses can be suggested.

For example, we can assume that the relationship between the evaluation toward the brand extension and the perception of number of extended channels is non-linear (e.g. curvilinear). That is, an increasing trend with a positive relationship between the number of extended brand and evaluation of brand extension might stop, or even drop, after the number of extended channels reaches a certain point. It is crucial for brand managers to figure out the appropriate number of extensions so as not to confuse consumers or dilute brand meaning.

The effect of cable-specific variables such as overall television consumption, original channel consumption, and channel repertoire were not proved in this study. In the case of overall television consumption, this unexpected result can be understood in that general television watching behavior is not directly related to evaluation toward a specific channel or brand extension related to the channel. Interpreting the results regarding the effects of consumption of original channel and channel repertoire, however, demands some caution. First, in the case of original channel consumption, the correlation analysis showed a moderate relationship with evaluation of brand extension ( $r=.39, p<.01$ ). Original channel consumption also shows a strong association with evaluations of the original channel. It is reasonable to believe that the more a viewer watches a channel, the higher the viewer evaluates the channel. Therefore, the insignificant relationship between original channel consumption and brand extension evaluation needs to be investigated in the context of association with the other independent variables. Second, in the case of channel repertoire, we need to use more diverse operationalizations. In this study, only one item (number of channels a viewer watches weekly) was used for measuring the concept of channel repertoire. It is necessary to use additional items with more objective or narrowly tailored meanings before discarding this variable.

In summary, our results indicate that audience will positively evaluate the extension of the Discovery channels, provided that the network has strong brand power in the original channel and that viewers expect consistency in terms of the quality of programs that the original channel and the extended channels provide together. A cable network might use the brand extension strategy based on the strong brand power of the original brand even without perceived fit between the original brand and extensions. However, it is strongly recommended to consider the quality variance factor for the successful brand extension.

## CONCLUSION

The objectives of this article were to enhance the applications of brand management in media management studies, especially applying the concept of brand extension in the context of the cable television industry. This case study examined the factors affecting evaluation of brand extensions of a cable network: the Discovery Channel. The explanatory

variables included perceived fit, evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, perceived number of extended channels, perceived quality variance, consumption of overall television as well as of the original Discovery Channel, and number of channels in repertoire. The results showed that, among all the variables, perceived fit, evaluation of the original Discovery Channel, and perceived quality variance were strong predictors of the success of Discovery network's brand extensions.

Although three variables were proved, four variables were rejected by this study. None of cable-specific variables were proved significant. This indicates the necessity of more refined conceptualization and operationalization of the variables in the context of cable networks. For example, although this study did not consider pricing as an important factor in the media context, pricing could be conceptualized as the time audiences invest in viewing a network (i.e., whether it is worth a viewer spending one hour watching the Discovery Channel). In addition, due to the limitation of using a student sample, the reported results are to be interpreted with consideration of the sample characteristics. Specifically, it should be noted that college students are not the primary target audience of the Discovery Channel and the extended channels.

Further, because this is a case study, it is difficult to generalize the findings to all cable networks. This study examined the case of the Discovery Channel and its current channel line-up for the example of an original brand as well as extended brands. As many respondents were already familiar with the Discovery Channel and the extended channels, the results reflected their current attitude and perception of the Discovery Channel, which already had strong brand power, and the successful line-up of extended channels. Therefore, future study should include a cable network without established brand equity as a control case in order to compare the audience evaluation of extensions by cable networks with strong brand power and those without. Future study may also use hypothetical cable brand extensions in order to control consumers' prior familiarity and attitude toward established extensions.

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