Extending to fashion category: an exploratory study on an auto brand extension

Langchao Zhang
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

EXTENDING TO FASHION CATEGORY:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON AN AUTO BRAND EXTENSION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

in

Human Ecology
The Department of Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

by
Langchao Zhang
B.E., Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, 2007
December 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to express the greatest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Chuanlan Liu, who has given her valuable time, advice, encouragement, criticism, and correction to this thesis from the beginning up to the end of the writing. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Jenna Tedrick Kuttruff and Dr. Ioan Negulescu, for their support, expert guidance, and suggestions.

In this very special moment, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my beloved parents, Dr. Yuzhu Zhang and Guanai He, for their love, encouragement and both financial and mental supports that made it possible for me to finish my studies in the United States.

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Abstract

Brand extension has been one of the most commonly used marketing strategies. Many industries use existing well-known brand names to launch new lines or categories to reduce the cost for creating awareness. Auto companies have been increasingly looking for opportunities of broadening their brand halo to gain more profit, while the billion-dollar global fashion industries have been seeking the chance of brand extensions from established durable brands. Previous research has examined the factors affecting consumers' attitude toward brand extension, however, the majority of brand extensions are reportedly not successful. There are no known studies investigating the case of extending into fashion categories. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to gain a better understanding of strategic approaches that allow better prediction of the brand extension success, especially where extended into fashion categories.

Data was collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate university students in the southeastern United States via online surveys. The final sample consisted of 468 responses. Multiple regressions and ANOVA/MANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. Results revealed that consumers' favorite attitude toward the fashion products under an auto brand name lead to their purchase intention, but does not affect their attitude and image of the parent brand. Consumers' attitude toward the fashion extension is significantly impacted by perceived fit between the parent brand and the fashion extension, and initial parent brand image, but is not impacted by the perceived parent brand quality, the highly quoted driver to brand extension success. Perceived fit is positively related to consumers' product knowledge, either on automobiles or fashion products. The results provide some suggestion to marketers who want to expand their parent brand or launch fashion extension products. Further research may focus on the impact of individual and cultural differences on consumers' perception of fashion extensions.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A brand name can be a potential complement in consumption that raises consumers' willingness to pay (Smith & Park, 1992). Branding is essential to building product image (Cleary, 1981). It influences a product's perceived worth or value, leads to customers' brand loyalty (Rooney, 1995), and enhances the chance for brand extensions to succeed (Smith & Park, 1992). By building on consumers' brand awareness, knowledge, and loyalty, brand extension strategies seek to increase revenues by prompting consumer purchases across product categories. Brand extension has been one of the most common strategies to launch new products for decades (Aaker, 1996). Strong brands are trusted and valued by consumers, consequently, an extension can leverage brand reputation to create a compelling value proposition in a new segment or market (D. Taylor, 2004). Using an existing well-known brand name to launch new lines or categories of products reduces the need to create awareness and to communicate with consumers(Aaker & Keller, 1990). Strategies using extensions to facilitate entering new markets have been widely adopted. For instance, established durable good brands (i.e. automobiles) have been leveraged to facilitate entering soft goods categories including, fashion clothing, home bedding, and accessory markets.

In fact, fashion industries have been seeking new products extended from established durable brands from other categories, such as automobile or construction equipment (e.g. Caterpillar). Fashion products, including clothing, footwear, accessories, and various other products that bear similar characteristics, make them identifiable and distinguishable from other consumer goods (Kendall, 2009). Fashion products can reflect self-image and they assume

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personal importance to the individual (Forney, Park, & Brandon, 2005). This billion-dollar industry employs millions of people around the world and affects almost all consumers today, more than ever before with our economy becoming more global. Fashion reflects our society and our culture; as a symbolic innovation, it reflects how people define themselves (Soloman & Rabolt, 2009). Diverse theorists have demonstrated the use of clothing as a code, a language that allows a message to be created and selectively understood (Auty & Elliott, 1998; McCracken, 1989). However, research on identifying factors predicting success of fashion clothing extensions is still limited.

The current global automotive industry is highly competitive, with manufacturing capacity far exceeding current demand (Shen, Bei, & Chu, 2011). Moreover, due to current economic conditions, the demand for new automobiles has fallen sharply, both in North America and in other parts of the world. Many manufacturers with relatively high fixed labor costs have to close facilities and reduce fixed costs (Datamonitor, 2010). It is very challenging for the automotive industry to keep their profitability. With their well-established brand names, auto companies have been increasingly looking for opportunities to expand their market in other product categories, in order to broaden the halo of the brands. Almost every car brand is growing its licensed merchandise programs, including specialty outdoor, sporting goods, apparel, eyewear, electronics, luggage, bikes and kids riding toys (Dolbow, 2000). For instance, BMW even launched a whole lifestyle collection, which features trendy apparel, such as polo shirts, T-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, and zip-up tops, as well as sporty caps, poncho-blankets, and light-weight jackets. BMW gadgets, collectibles, and travel accessories also are in abundance, with watches and timepieces, luggage, rucksacks, coffee mugs, leather essentials, iPod cases,

postcards, umbrellas, books, a poker set, and a tic-tac-toe game—all bearing the familiar round logo.

Fashion, home décor, fitness, sports, and culinary arts are among the industries catering to markets with specific lifestyles (Danskin, Englis, Solomon, Goldsmith, & Davey, 2005). Once an automobile brand successfully launches its fashion product lines, there are opportunities to extend and combine product categories across these lifestyle industries. Once a brand is considered a lifestyle brand, consumers may be willing to pay more attention on this brand, or stay loyal to this brand.

However, the majority of brand extensions are reportedly not successful, suggesting the need for more understanding and strategic approaches that allow for better prediction of different categories, especially fashion categories, into which a brand should extend or license.

Numerous studies have focused on identifying and examining factors predicting the success of extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Choueke, 2009; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). The "fit" between the parent brand and the extension has been considered the most important factor in predicting brand extension success. However, there are also many brands that have succeeded in extending into very distant product categories, sharing few attributes or features in common with existing products and appealing to different consumer markets. For example, Ralph Lauren markets a diverse set of offerings under its brand, including sunglasses, paint, dog leashes, restaurants, and home collections. In this case, image fit plays an important role. In fact, research has conceptualized the construct of "fit" into different dimensions such as brand concept consistency (Park, Milberg, &Lawson, 1991), or category coherence (Bridges, Keller, &Sood, 2000).

Research has also been argued that the success of extensions depends on whether benefits transferred from parent brands to extensions will be valued in the extension category (Boush, and Loken, 1991). Clothing has been considered as a means of non-verbal communication to deliver a message about the wearer's personality, identity and social status. Consumers' acceptance of new fashion clothing brands depends on to what degree the brand image matches with their perceptions about identity and self-image. However, how the congruence of brand image between parent brand and extensions affect success of extensions has not been examined.

Furthermore, brands practice such "long-distance stretching" (Park et al.1991) from durable auto brands to fashion clothing categories intend not only to expand markets, but also hope to receive reciprocal effects from successful extensions to rejuvenate parent brands and increase brand equity. However, whether fashion extension generates any positive feedback effects on parent brands has not been examined. To this end, the current research intends to understand extending established auto brands into fashion categories.

1.2 Research Questions

The overall purpose of this research is to examine factors affecting the success of extensions in fashion categories and to analyze the reciprocal transfer of associations between automobile brands and the fashion products under their brand names with the intention to explain the assessment of extensions and the subsequent effects on brand image, considering the moderating role of extension product information. The questions this research seeks to answer are the following: 1) How do consumers respond to the fashion products under auto brand names? 2) Does brand image fit play a role in consumers' acceptance of auto brand fashion extensions? 3) What are consumers' attitude and perception of auto brand fashion extensions? 4) Is advertisement effective in promoting a brand extension? 5) Does a successful brand extension

in fashion categories generate any positive feedback effects on the parent brand attitude? 6) How will consumers' perceptions of the overall quality of the original brand affect their evaluations of an extension?

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to: (1) examine how consumers perceived "fit" in terms of brand image between the original auto products and fashion product category, affects brand extension attitude; (2) examine whether perceived quality from parent brand still affects brand extension attitude with a "long-distance stretching " into fashion category; (3) examine what reciprocal effects fashion brand extension will have on the parent auto brand image; (4) examine whether there are any effects from advertisement on consumers' perception of fit and evaluations of brand extension; (5) examine how consumers' expertise of fashion category or automobile category affects their perceptions of fit and extension evaluation.

The definitions of terms that are used in this study are listed as following in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Definitions of Terms

Term	Definition
Brand Extension	Brand extension is the stretch of the established brand to a different product category. (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Tauber, 1981).
Fashion Extension	Fashion products that are launched under a non-fashion brand name.
Auto Brand Fashion Extension	Fashion products that are launched under an automobile brand name.
Brand Extension Attitude	Consumers' evaluation of the brand extension (Keller & Aaker, 1992)
Brand Extension Acceptance	The likelihood of consumers' intending to try, to buy, and to recommend the brand extension category.

(Table 1.1 Continued)

Parent Brand Image/Attitude	Consumers' evaluation of the parent brand
Feedback on Parent Brand Image/Attitude	The change of consumers' perception of the parent brand after being informed that the brand launched its new products
Perceived Fit	Perceived fit is defined from a broader perspective as "category coherence", measuring how well the brand concept accommodates the extension product (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991), and how well the parent brand and extension category "hang together" and "make sense"(Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000).
Parent Brand Perceived Quality	Consumers' perception of the overall quality of the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990)
Product Knowledge	Consumers' expertise with the product category, either parent brand product category or extension category (Muthukrishnan & Weitz, 1991)
Extension Product Information	Information of the extension products provided to consumers, including verbal information and visual information. Extension product information also includes products features and other information associated with the product to remind consumers of the original parent brand attributes.

Chapter 2. Review of Literature and Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical Background

Consumers purchase merchandise from well-established brands to reduce the risks associated with purchases, to assure that they will receive a consistent level of quality and satisfaction from the company (Loken, Joiner, & Peck, 2002), and to save the time and effort spent on searching and gathering the product information. The key ingredients of a brand are image attributes and product attributes (Loken et al., 2002). Marketing activities and communications can convey either brand image attributes or product information.

Companies need growth, thus they keep offering new products to attract consumers and distributers. However, launching new products usually involves high risks and costs. As success rates are usually below 50% (Taylor & Bearden, 2002), many companies seek to appeal to multiple customer segments with different lines or categories of products all underneath one brand umbrella, when realizing that brands are among their most valuable assets (Martínez, Montaner, & Pina, 2009).

Brand extension, involving using an established brand name to launch new product lines or categories and leveraging the brand equity developed in the traditional market (Aaker & Keller, 1990), is one of the most frequently used branding strategies (Taylor, 2004). For instance, in 2009, ninety-three percent of the new food or beverage products with first-year sales that exceeded $7.5 million were brand extensions (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). Extending brands is usually considered to be profitable because it is assumed that brands that are already known and recognized require lower new product introduction expenses (Völckner & Sattler, 2006).

Keller, Parameswaran, and Jacob (2011) discussed all the potential advantages and disadvantages of brand extension. Both advantages and disadvantages of brand extension include two main aspects: 1) new product acceptance and 2) feedback to the parent brand and company. Well planned and implemented brand extensions offer a number of advantages, such as improving brand image, reducing consumers' perceived risks and costs of introductory/follow-up marketing programs, and increasing the probability of gaining distribution and efficiency of promotional expenditures, as well as clarifying brand meaning, enhancing or vitalizing the parent brand image, increasing parent brand market coverage, and permitting subsequent extensions. On the other hand, despite the potential advantages, companies also face a number of risks when extending into a new category. The worst possible scenario for an extension is not only to fail, but to hurt the parent brand image in the process. Sometimes even though an extension succeeds, it cannibalizes sales of parent brand, or dilutes brand meaning, or makes the parent brand diminish identification with its original categories (Morrin, 1999), or even worse, loses the identification with any one category. For the companies who plan to extend successfully, they need to capture all the benefits while avoiding the negative outcomes.

The success of brand extensions is significantly low. For instance, *Marketing* (2003) reported that, failure rates of brand extensions in many fast-moving consumer good (FMCG) product categories are approximately 80%. Therefore, identifying factors affecting brand extension success have captured an important focus of research inquiry to help managers reduce the failure rates of brand extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). The previous studies revealed factors that play important roles in the success of an extending product, at least under certain conditions. For instance, Aaker and Keller (1990)'s seminal work identified perceived fit between the parent

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brand and brand extension category and perceived parent brand quality as predictors to consumers' attitude toward brand extensions. Völckner and Sattler (2006) identified nine determinants of extension success, including fit between the parent brand and the extension category, marketing support, parent-brand conviction, retailer acceptance, and parent brand experience. However, the authors admitted that some of the determinants are highly related. Nevertheless, most of these previous studies focus on Fast-Moving Consumer Goods, especially on foods and beverages, very few studied durable brands or fashion categories.

Generally, there are two main types of brand extensions: line extension and category extension (Keller et al., 2011). Line extension occurs when companies apply the parent brand to a new product that targets a new market segment with in a product category the parent brand currently serves (Lye, Venkateswarlu, & Barrett, 2001); while category extension refers to entering a different product category from the one it currently serves (Farquhar, 1990). Park et al. (1991) distinguished between fit based on "product-feature similarity" and "brand-concept consistency". In category extension, since the extension category shares few similar features with the category that the parent brand currently carries, brand-concept consistency is more appropriate and plays a more important role.

2.2. Hypotheses development and research model

The consumers' potential response to the extension is important to the company's extension decision, because it may influence the overall concept of the parent brand (Lye et al., 2001). In this case of an auto brand extending into fashion categories, we focus on category extension success.

For the extending brand company, if planned and implemented well, brand extensions can both 1) facilitate consumers' acceptance of the new product and 2) provide feedback benefits

to the parent brand or company as whole. The primary goal of brand extension is achieving its own equity as well as contributing to the equity of the parent brand (Keller et al., 2011).

Extending brands is thought to be profitable because it is generally assumed that brands that are already known and recognized can not only lower new product introduction expenses, such as advertising, trade deals, or price promotions (Collins-Dodd & Louviere, 1999), but also increase the efficiency of promotional expenditures, packaging and labeling. It increases the probability of gaining distributions as well (Montgomery, 1975). In short, an established brand makes it much easier to introduce new products under the imprimatur of the brand.

A successful brand extension also provides positive feed-back influence on the parent brand. It may add new positive associations to the parent brand, clarifies the brand meaning, revitalizes the brand and hence further builds the image of the parent brand (Kendall, 2009). It may also attract later customers to try the original category of the parent brand, hence increase the sale of the original category. Once the extension has done well, it may serve as the basis for subsequent extensions.

In conclusion, a good or successful extension should not only be 1) accepted by the market and the consumers, but also 2) enhance, or at least not harm the parent brand, and 3) enable the parent brand to be extended even farther. As discussed in the introduction, fashion category is an appropriate area for an automobile brand to start extending into, because if done well, it will be easy to extend into categories such as bedding or home furnishing, sports gear etc., and at last grow to be a lifestyle brand. Thus, this study focuses on the other two main goals of brand extension: 1) accepted by the market; and 2) contribute to the parent brand image. Consumers' acceptance of the brand extension and the feedback to the parent brand were examined.

2.2.1 Acceptance and Brand Extension Attitude

Some researchers think that a brand extension succeeds if consumers hold a positive attitude towards the extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Völckner & Sattler, 2006), but some other researchers think that success only occurs when consumers intend to purchase the extension (Lafferty, 2007; O'Cass & Grace, 2004). A consumer holding a positive attitude toward a product is not the same as purchasing the extension. Companies want to know consumers' attitude, however, their purchase intensions are much more important, because it relates to profits. Thus the consumers' purchase intension, or Acceptance, is the focus of the parent brand companies.

Soloman and Rabolt's (2009) fashion decision making model describes the last stages as: evaluation of alternatives (consumer compares several styles and brands of the products in terms of construction, country of origin, or added features) – product choice (consumer chooses one product and tries it on) – outcome (consumer buys the product and enjoys the purchase). According to this model, after evaluating a product, consumer holds a positive or negative attitude toward the product, and his/her decision of purchase is based on the attitude. Thus the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Favorable attitude toward fashion extensions increases the likelihood of consumers' acceptance of fashion extensions.

2.2.2 Feedback to Parent Brand

Brand associations are sensitive to the information introduced by the extension, and enhanced or diluted according to the assessment of the new extension category (Keller et al., 2011; E. Martínez, and Chernatony, Leslie de, 2004). Salinas, Montaner, and Perez's (2009) and Alexander and Colgate's (2005) research also showed consumers attitude towards the extension category has an effect on the overall brand image. To be more specific, consumers satisfied with

retail brand extensions are increasingly more satisfied with the parent brand (Alexander & Colgate, 2005).

Keller (Keller et al., 2011) indicated that brand extension may enhance the parent brand image by "strengthening an existing brand association, improving the favorability of an existing brand association, adding a new brand association, or a combination of these". For example, Keller and Aaker (1992) found that a successful brand extension improved the perceptions of the expertise and trustworthiness of the parent brand. Thus the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2a. Favorable attitude toward fashion extensions is associated with a positive feedback on overall attitude toward parent brand.

H2b. Favorable attitude toward fashion extensions is associated with a positive feedback on image of parent brand.

2.2.3 Perceived Parent Brand Quality

The next hypothesis seek to find out what factors play important roles when consumers evaluate the extension. Aaker and Keller (1990) found that both a perception of fit between the original and the extension product categories and a perception of high quality for the parent brand led to more favorable extension evaluations.

The perceived quality of the parent brand is one of the important factors that affect the attitude toward the extension. Consumers often think high-quality brands are more credible, expert, and trustworthy. If the brand is associated with high quality, the extension may benefit (Aaker & Keller, 1990) – consumers are willing to pay more for the brand extension, and recommend it to others (Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008). As a result, even if they believe a relatively distant extension does not really fit with the parent brand, they may be more willing to

give a high-quality brand the benefit of the doubt than a brand considered as average quality (Keller & Aaker, 1992).

H3: Perceived parent brand quality is positively associated with favorable attitude toward fashion extensions.

2.2.4 Perceived Fit

Perceived fit is undoubtedly the most cited success factor in the research on brand extensions (Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Boush, 1987; K. L. Keller, 1993). Many researchers have adopted "categorization" perspective from psychology (Boush, 1987; John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006). A categorization view considers that consumers' evaluations of brand extensions follows a two-step process: First, consumers determine whether there is a match between what they know about the parent brand and what they believe to be true about the extension; Second, if they match, consumers might transfer their existing brand attitudes to the extension (Keller et al., 2011). Greater perceived similarity between the current and new product leads to a greater transfer of positive or negative affect to the new product (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Any association with the parent brand serves as a potential basis of fit (Keller et al., 2011). Most academic researchers assume consumers' judgments of similarity are a function of salient shared associations between the parent brand and the extension product category.

Park et al. (1991) contend that product feature similarity and brand concept consistency are two factors that differentiate successful and unsuccessful extensions. Consumers take into account not only information about the product level feature similarity between the new category and existing category, but also the concept consistency between the parent brand and the brand extensions. This study focuses on the scenario that an automobile brand extends into fashion

categories, which is considered distant extension. Since there is no product similarity between the parent brand and the extension, this study only focuses on conceptual similarity, and Perceived Fit refers to concept consistency.

Brand-concept consistency is the brand unique image associations that arise from a particular combination of attributes, benefits, and the marketing efforts used to translate these attributes into higher order (Park et al., 1991). They found that different types of brand concepts from the same original product category may extend into the same category with varying degrees of success, even when product-feature similarity is low.

H4: Perceived fit between parent brand and extensions leads to favorable attitude toward fashion extensions.

2.2.5 Initial Parent Brand Image

Psychological researchers suggest that people do not deliberately and individually evaluate each new stimulus to which they are exposed, instead, they usually evaluate a stimulus in term of whether they can classify it as a member of a previously defined mental category. Thus it is argued that consumers use their knowledge of brands and products to simplify, structure and interpret their marketing environment (Keller et al., 2011). Lane (2000) found that with repeated exposure to a brand name or other stimuli, consumers have higher affective preference for the stimuli. If consumers saw a brand extension as closely related or similar to the brand category, they could easily transfer their existing attitude about the parent brand to the extension, then directly imply the brand associations to a more positive evaluations of brand extensions (Salinas, Montaner, & Pérez, 2009). Yeung and Wyer Jr (2005) even found that if a brand evokes a strong positive emotional attraction, consumers are likely to be less influenced by

the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is as follows:

H5: Favorable perceptions of parent brand image lead to favorable attitude toward the fashion extension.

2.2.6 Consumers' Product Knowledge

Consumers' perceptions of fit may depend on how much consumers know about the product categories, either about the initial product category of the parent brand, or the extension category. According to Muthukrishnan & Weitz (1991), expert consumers are more likely to use technical or manufacturing similarity to judge fit, while less knowledgeable consumers are more likely to use superficial, perceptual considerations. Hoyer and Brown (1990) also found that consumers who are less familiar with a product category are more likely to rely on brand awareness as a heuristic to guide evaluations of the brand extension.

H6: The more expertise/knowledge customers have on (a) parent brand category and (b) extension category, the less degree of "fit" between parent brand and extension they will perceive.

2.2.7 Brand Extension Information

Any associations with the parent brand may serve as a potential basis of fit (Keller et al., 2011). Most researchers think that, the more common and the fewer distinctive associations that exist, the greater the perception of overall similarity, whether based on product- or non-product-related attributes and benefits (MacInnis, Nakamoto, & Mani, 1992).

A number of studies have shown that the information provided about brand extension, by "triggering selective retrieval from memory", may process the consumer decision making and affect extension evaluation (Keller et al., 2011). In general, the most effective strategy appears to

be one that recognizes the type of information already salient for the brand in the minds of consumers when they first consider the proposed extension, and that highlights additional information they would otherwise overlook or misinterpret (Keller et al., 2011).

Keller and Aaker (1992) found that elaborating briefly on specific extension attributes about which consumers were uncertain or concerned led to more favorable evaluations. Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000), as well as Klink and Smith (2001), found that providing information could improve perceptions of fit when consumers perceived low fit between the brand and the extension, either by reinforcing an overlooked basis of fit or by addressing a distracting negative association.

Lane (2000) found that repeating an ad that evoked primarily brand associations could overcome negative perceptions of a highly incongruent brand extension. Moreover, for moderately incongruent brand extensions, even ads that evoked peripheral brand associations could improve negative extension perceptions with sufficient repetition.

H7a: Perceived fit varies with different levels of Extension Product Information

H7b: Brand Extension Attitude varies with different levels of Extension Product Information

Based on the above discussion, a research model was proposed to guide this empirical study as presented in Figure 2.1 on the next page.
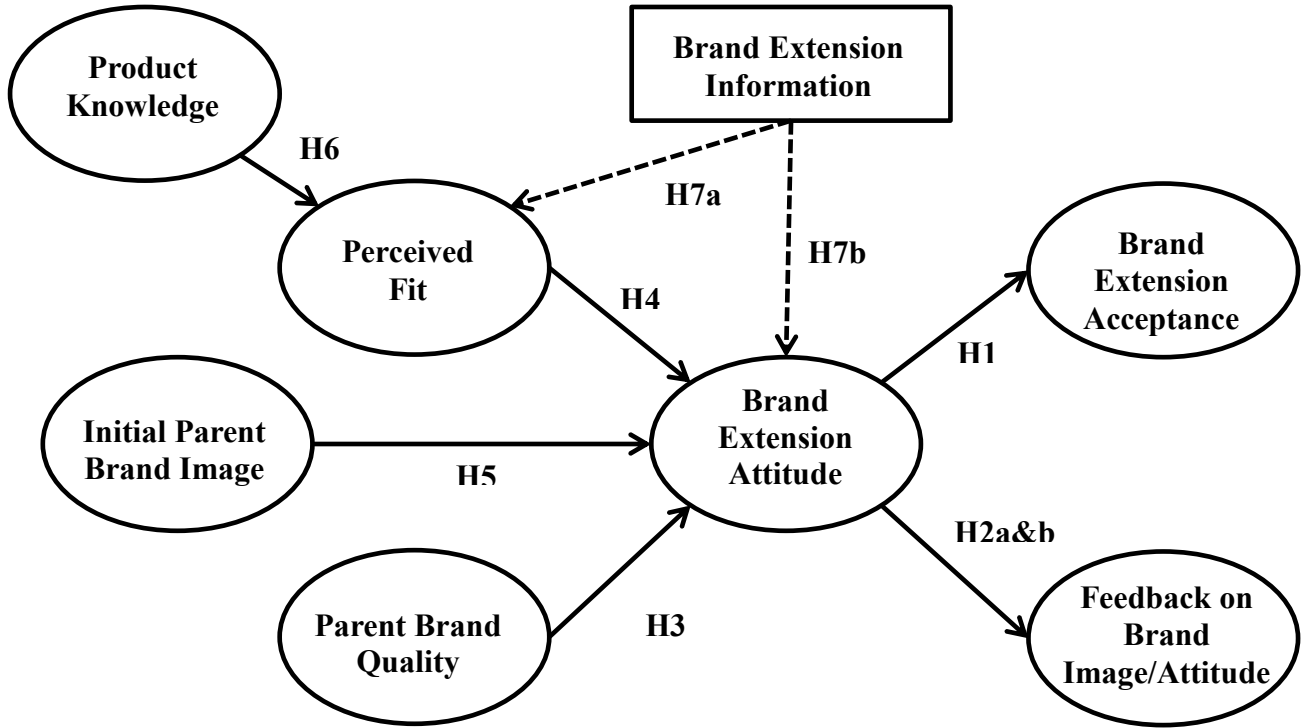
Figure 2.1 Research Model

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Procedure and Sample

A web-based survey was conducted to empirically examine the proposed hypotheses and research model to understand consumers' opinion of an auto brand extending into fashion categories. A convenience sample was drawn from a university in the southeastern United States. Invitation letters with survey links were sent to individuals, and the data were collected through the survey website. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

3.1.1 Research Instrument

In this study, Ford was used as the automobile brand name and menswear was used as the extension category. One of the baselines for brand extension is that the consumers already know about the parent brand. Ford is the second-largest U.S.-based automaker and the only one of the "big Three" whose reputation was not extremely damaged during the automotive industry crisis of 2008-2010 (Shen et al., 2011). Moreover, Ford Motor Company manages more than 300 licensees across all its vehicle brands (Wilensky, 2007), thus we assume Ford has the potential and ambition to grow itself as a lifestyle brand.

Menswear was selected as the fashion category that Ford was extending into. When a brand extension is associated with fashion, merchandisers need to offer a wide assortment of fashion products to meet the preferred image, quality, design/beauty, color, and/or style dimensions (Forney et al., 2005). A sample of undergraduate university students enrolled in Textiles, Apparel Design and Merchandising program were chosen to select appropriate categories to extend into, and pictures to be used in later surveys. Menswear was selected for this study because these participants thought automobiles were usually associated with "speed",

"power", "technology", "muscularity", "outdoorsy", and so on. Twelve junior and senior university students majoring in Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising selected two sets of pictures for this study, one from the 2013 Ford Menswear advertising catalogue, and the other from the Ford Apparel online store (*Ford*, 2013). The products in these two sets were similar, in order to reduce the impact of product differences on survey participants' perceptions. Because of these students' expertise and knowledge of the apparel and fashion market, it was assumed that selected fashion product pictures meet the evaluative criteria that consumers use to make fashion product decisions. To be specific, the color/style/design of the Ford menswear pictures they chose were the products that consumers were most likely to buy.

The questionnaire developed to collect the empirical data included three parts. The first part included questions about consumers' knowledge of apparel/fashion and consumers' knowledge of automobiles. The second part included questions related to parent brand image, parent brand attitude, and parent brand quality; and the third part included questions related to the fit between parent brand and brand extension, brand extension attitude, and brand extension acceptance.

Four versions of the questionnaire were developed, and participants were randomly assigned to four different groups and sent one of the web-based questionnaire links with an email invitation to participate the research. The four groups were: 1) control group; 2) verbal information group; 3) graphic advertisement group; and 4) basic-view information group.

In group 1, the control group, there were no questions related to the brand extension. The questionnaire only included part 1 and part 2. The participants' answers for brand image/brand attitude of Ford will be considered as the initial parent brand image/initial parent brand attitude.

The same question items were used to measure consumers' initial brand image/attitude and the final brand image/attitude.

In groups 2, 3, and 4, participants were requested to provide responses about parent brand image after they finished evaluating the brand extension. Participants in group 2 only received text information indicating that Ford is launching its brand extension in menswear category, but were not exposed to any graphic information about the products. Participants in Group 3 and Group 4 were shown a set of chosen pictures of Ford Menswear respectively: Group 3 were shown pictures from an advertising catalogue containing parent brand information (Ford logo, cars and pick-ups), while Group 4 were shown the plain views of the apparel products (Martínez, Montaner, & Pina. 2009).

3.1.2 Pretesting

Two pretests of the questionnaire were conducted. The first round of pretesting was conducted with two female graduate students. Feedback was requested regarding the wording of the questions and the layout of the survey. Modifications were made based on the comments from the two participants.

The second round of pretesting was conducted on 56 undergraduate students at Louisiana State University. The purpose of the second round pretest was to (1) investigate whether the components identified from the relevant literature and incorporated in the research model are applicable to this research; (2) check the clarity of each statement; and (3) conduct preliminary analysis for substantive validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1991). Analysis of the responses from the pretest revealed that each component measured was uni-dimentional with alpha levels of .7 or greater. The survey was refined for clarity based on the pretest findings, and the revised survey was then deemed to be ready for use in collecting data.

3.1.3 Sampling and Sample

A web-based survey was conducted through Qualtric.com. Participants were recruited from students registered in 2013 summer semester at a major university in the southern United States. A random sample of 3,500 summer students was drawn by the university administration office. The sample was anonymous, and only individuals' email addresses were listed. Individuals were randomly assigned to four different groups and sent invitations to participate in one of the online survey links with different levels of brand extension information. The survey did not collect individuals' personal information, but demographic data was collected, and at the end of each link, individuals were asked to provide email address only if they would like to participate in the gift draw. The invitations were sent twice, and the purpose of the second invitation was to collect non-response data to minimize bias.

A total of 549 responses (15.68%) were received. The low response rate compared with that for other studies may result from the fact that some email-systems automatically marked the invitation emails as spam. After data cleaning, 468 valid responses were usable for this study. The number of valid responses for each group is listed below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Survey Responses

Group Number	N of valid responses	N of invitation sent
1	77	800
2	128	900
3	166	900
4	97	900
Total	468	3500

3.1.4 Survey Administration

The research instrument (see Appendix B) was administered online. Within the email invitation of participation was a hyperlink to the URL of one of the four online surveys. The

URLs enabled the invitation recipients to go directly to the survey page with one click from the email. The initial invitation was sent out on a Monday, and the follow-up reminder was sent out on the following Thursday. The responses were then checked on the subsequent Tuesday afternoon. The incentive offered for participation includes book store gift cards and USB flash drives.

3.2 Measurement

The web-based questionnaire contained measures of the following components (Table 3.2): Product Knowledge, Brand Familiarity, Perceived Parent Brand Quality, Parent Brand Image, Parent Brand Attitude, Perceived Fit, Brand Extension Attitude, and Brand Extension Acceptance.

All the variables were adopted from the existing literature and measured through seven-point Likert scales. Table 3.2 summarizes the characteristics of the scales and the previous works on which they are based.

Brand Familiarity was included in the research model, because it is the baseline for consumers evaluating a brand extension that they have some awareness of and positive associations about the parent brand in memory (Keller et al., 2011). Brand Familiarity refers to the strength of a brand's presence in the customer's mind, and in this study we employ the four-item-scale of Yoo, Donthu, & Lee (2000).

Product Knowledge was measured by a combined scale from Flynn & Goldsmith (1999) and O'Cass (2004). Both Fashion Product Knowledge (extension category) and Automobile Product Knowledge (category that parent brand initially carries) were measured.

Brand Image consisted of two dimensions, Brand Image Status and Brand Image Conspicuousness, adopted from Truong, Simmons, McColl, & Kitchen (2008). *Perceived Fit*

was measured by a three-item-scale considering the beliefs of individuals about the logic or appropriateness of launching the extension category (Keller & Aaker, 1992). *Parent Brand Quality* was measured following Yoo et al.'s (2000) six-item-scale. *Parent Brand Attitude* and *Brand Extension Attitude* was measured by the same three-item-scale adopted from Musante (2007). *Brand Extension Acceptance* was measured by Purchase Intension from Dall'Olmo Riley, Pina, & Bravo (2013), who adopted O'Cass & Grace (2004) and Lafferty (2007)'s scale to generate their three-item-scale.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure involved several major steps: profiling the respondents, assessing measurements of research components, and hypothesis testing, which includes assessing causal relationships and the differences among groups with different extension product information.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to profile respondents by their demographics. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first conducted to examine the basic structure of the measures. And then Reliability of the scales was assessed. To test the hypotheses regarding relationships, Regression analysis was applied. To test the hypotheses regarding differences, ANOVA and MANOVA were applied.

Table 3.2 Measurement of Research Constructs

Constructs	Items	No. of items	
Brand Familiarity (Yoo et al., 2000)	I know what Ford looks like	4	7-point Likert scale 1=Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	I can recognize Ford among other competing brands		
	Some characteristics of Ford come to my mind quickly		
	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of Ford		
Product Knowledge (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999; O'Cass, 2004)	If I had to make a decision about buying fashion/automobile products today, I would need very little information	5	7-point Likert scale 1= Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	If a friend asked me about fashion/automobile clothes, I could give him/her a lot of information		
	I feel I know a lot about fashion clothes/automobiles		
	I am an experienced user of fashion clothes/automobiles		
	I would classify myself as an expert on fashion clothes/automobiles		
Perceived parent brand Quality (Yoo et al., 2000)	Reliability of Ford Products	6	7-point Likert scale 1=Not at all 7=Very Much
	Trustworthiness of Ford products		
	Durability of Ford products		
	Function (poor--superior)		
	Overall quality (inferior -- superior)		
	Overall value for money		
Perceived Fit (Keller & Aaker, 1992)	Menswear products showing above fits Ford brand	3	7-point Likert scale 1=Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	Ford extending into Menswear category is logical		
	Ford extending into Menswear category is appropriate		
Parent Brand Image (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013; Truong et al., 2008)	To what extent can Ford indicate a person's social status?	6	7-point Likert scale 1= Not at All 7=Very Much
	To what extent is Ford a symbol of achievement?		
	To what extent is Ford a symbol of wealth?		
	To what extent is Ford a symbol of prestige?		
	To what extent does Ford attract attention?		
	Can a person use the brand Ford to express other people?		
Parent Brand Attitude (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013; Musante, 2007)	Do you think the brand Ford is favorable?	3	7-point Likert scale 1=Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	Do you like the brand Ford?		
	Do you think the brand Ford is appealing?		
Brand Extension Attitude (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Kirmani, Sood, & Bridges, 1999; Musante, 2007)	In your opinion, is Ford Menswear favorable?	3	7-point Likert scale 1=Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	Do you like Ford Menswear?		
	Do you think Ford Menswear is appealing?		
Brand Extension Acceptance (Lafferty, 2007; O'Cass & Grace, 2004)	I would like to try on apparel/fashion products from Ford	3	7-point Likert scale 1=Strongly Disagree 7=Strongly Agree
	I would like to buy apparel/fashion products from Ford		
	I would recommend my friend to buy apparel/fashion products from Ford.		

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic profile

Participants were recruited from students registered in 2013 summer semester at a major university in the southeastern United States. The sample was composed of 58.5% female respondents and 41.5% male respondents. The age range of respondents is between 18 and 54 years old. Among all the respondents, 63% are undergraduate students and the rest of 37% are graduate students. Most of the undergraduate respondents were juniors and seniors. The majority of the respondents were White (67.1%); the next largest ethnic group was Asian (12.4%). African American respondents account for 10.9%.

Table 4.1 Demographics

Gender (*N*=468)	*%*	Ethnic group (*N*=468)	*%*
Male	41.5	Caucasian/White	67.1
Female	58.5	African American	10.9
		Hispanic	3.8
Classification (*N*=468)	*%*	Asian/Pacific Islander	12.4
Freshman	2.1	Other	4.9
Sophomore	10.9		
Junior	18.6	**Age group (*N*=468)**	*%*
Senior	22.2	≤19	10.1
Fifth year or more	7.5	20-24	54.9
Graduate Student	37.0	25-34	29
Other	.9	35-44	4.2
		≥45	1.8

4.2 Measurement Assessment

EFAs (Exploratory Factor Analysis) were first conducted to examine the basic structure of the measures. And then reliability of the scales was assessed.

In this study, EFAs were used separately for each variable, based on the hypotheses. Using a principal component extraction method, all of the measures were analyzed using Varimax rotation. Items exhibiting low factor loadings (<0.40), high cross-loadings (>0.40), or low communities (<0.30) were eliminated. All the EFAs exhibit very clear structure and high factor loadings, as presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 EFA Assessment Results for Research Constructs

Components	Items	Loading
Fashion Knowledge	I feel I know a lot about fashion clothes	.960
	I am an experienced user of fashion clothes	.934
	If a friend asked me about fashion clothes, I could give him/her a lot of information	.932
	I would classify myself as an expert on fashion clothes	.909
Automobile Knowledge	I feel I know a lot about automobiles	.935
	If a friend asked me about automobiles, I could give him/her a lot of information	.925
	I would classify myself as an expert on automobiles	.884
	If I had to make a decision about buying automobile products, today I would need very little information	.799
Parent Brand Quality	Trustworthiness	.845
	Reliability	.815
	Overall quality	.810
	Function	.784
	Durability of Ford	.782

Table 4.2 Continued

Perceived Fit	Ford clothing showed above fits the parent brand Ford	.904
	Ford clothing conveyed the same impression as parent brand Ford	.882
	Ford clothing has similar images as Ford	.851
	Ford extending into such clothing category is logical	.804
	Ford extending into such clothing category is appropriate	.762
Brand Extension Attitude	Do you like above-shown Ford clothing?	.944
	Do you think above-shown Ford Clothing is appealing?	.927
	In your opinion, is Ford Clothing favorable?	.914
Brand Extension Acceptance	Buy Ford clothing for myself or family	.957
	Recommend to my friends to buy Ford clothing	.946
	Try Ford clothing	.918
	Buy Ford clothing as gifts	.897
Parent Brand Attitude	Do you like Ford?	.938
	Do you think Ford is appealing?	.935
	Is Ford favorable?	.889
Brand Image	To what extent is Ford a symbol of prestige?	.883
	To what extent is this brand a symbol of wealth?	.876
	To what extent is Ford a symbol of achievement?	.868
	To what extent does Ford attract attention?	.818
	Can a person use the brand Ford to impress other people?	.800
	To what extent can Ford indicate a person's social status?	.719

Reliability Statistics of variables for the questionnaire are presented in Table 4.3. As listed below, every variable shows a Cronbach's Alpha higher than 0.7, thus the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 4.3 Reliability Statistics of Research Conponents

Variable Name	Standardized Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Fashion Knowledge	0.951	4
Automobile Knowledge	0.909	4
Parent Brand Quality	0.866	5
Perceived Fit	0.896	5
Brand Extension Attitude	0.920	3
Brand Extension Acceptance	0.948	4
Parent Brand Attitude	0.910	3
Brand Image	0.908	6

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

An index variable was created using the mean of included scale items for each research construct. Regression analyses were conducted to test proposed relationships between variables and MANOVA analyses were conducted to test the proposed moderating effects.

4.3.1 Relationships Testing

Regression analysis was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The proposed research model was tested in three different phases. First, the impact of consumers' attitude towards brand extension on their acceptance of brand extension was tested. Second, the impact of initial brand image, parent brand perceived quality, and perceived fit between parent brand

and brand extension on consumers' attitude towards brand extension was tested. Then, the impact of consumer knowledge of category on perceived fit was tested.

To test Hypothesis 1, "Favorable attitude toward fashion extensions increases the likelihood of consumers' acceptance of fashion extensions," Brand Extension Acceptance was regressed on Brand Extension Attitude. The results are presented below in Table 4.4. Results show that H1 is supported.

Table 4.4 Regression Results for Testing Hypothesis 1

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coefficient Beta	t-value	Sig.	R^2
Brand Extension Acceptance	Brand Extension Attitude	.697	19.078	.000	.486

This study proposed that Parent Brand Quality (H3), Perceived Fit (H4), and Initial Parent Brand Image (H5) have positive association with Brand Extension Attitude. Regression analyses were employed to test these proposed relationships with Brand Extension Attitude as the dependent variable, and Perceived Fit, Parent Brand Image, Parent Brand Quality as the independent variables. The testing results are presented below in Table 4.5.

The R^2 value is .465, indicating that the proposed Brand Extension Attitude can be significantly predicted by Perceived Fit, and Brand Image. The regress coefficients between Perceived Fit (.414), Brand Image (.131) and Brand Extension Attitude indicate the attitude towards the brand extension is positively affected by the fit between the parent brand and brand extension, and the parent brand image. Thus, H4 and H5 are supported.

However, the relationship between Brand Extension Attitude and Perceived Parent Brand Quality is not significant ($>.05$), which suggests the perceived quality of the category that parent

brand initially carries does not significantly affect respondents' attitude towards the brand extension. Thus, H3 is not supported.

Table 4.5 Multiple Regression Table for Testing H3, H4, and H5

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coefficient Beta	t-value	Sig.	Model R^2
Brand Extension Attitude	Perceived Fit	.414	8.774	.000	.465
	Brand Image	.132	2.645	.009	
	Parent Brand Quality	.029	.588	.557	

Hypothesis 6 proposed that consumer knowledge of the fashion product (H6a) and automobile product (H6b) affect perceived fit. To test H6, Fashion Product Knowledge and Automobile Product Knowledge were regressed on Perceived Fit. The testing results are presented below in Table 4.6. Both regression coefficients between Fashion Product Knowledge (.114) and Auto Product Knowledge (.130) and Perceived Fit are significant indicating that H6a and H6b are supported.

Table 4.6 Multiple Regression Table for Testing H6

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coefficient Beta	t-value	Sig.	Model R^2
Perceived Fit	Fashion Product Knowledge	.114	2.190	.029	.024
	Automobile Product Knowledge	.130	2.510	.012	

4.3.2 Differences Testing

This study proposed that consumers' attitude towards brand extension has feedback on parent brand image (H2a) and parent brand attitude (H2b). To do so, we test (1) the difference of brand image perceptions and (2) the difference of brand attitude between the control group and the other three groups with treatment introduced. An ANOVA test was run to assess whether there is any difference in responses from control group (group 1) and the rest of the groups with different treatments introduced.

The testing results are presented below in Table 4.7. Results of both Brand Image and Brand Attitude showed no significant difference between groups, indicating that there is no significant difference between initial brand image (respondents' image of parent brand before being informed the brand extension) and final brand image (respondents' image of parent brand after being informed the brand extension), nor significant difference between initial parent brand attitude and final parent brand attitude. Thus, there is no significant feedback on parent brand, in other words, respondents' attitude toward the fashion extension does not affect their brand image nor their attitude toward the parent brand. Neither H2a nor H2b is supported.

Table 4.7. ANOVA Table for Testing Hypothesis 2

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference	Sig.[b]
Brand Attitude	1 -- Control Group	2 -- Group without pictures	.122	.469
		3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	-.054	.737
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	.265	.136
Brand Image	1 -- Control Group	2 -- Group without pictures	-.009	.959
		3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	-.048	.777
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	.026	.891

We also proposed that different amount and types of extension product information will affect consumers' perceived fit between parent brand and brand extension (H8a) and their attitude towards brand extension (H8b). MANOVA was employed to measure whether there are differences on Perceived Fit and Brand Extension Attitudes among groups. The testing results are presented below in Table 4.8. The results show that there are significant differences between Group 2 and Group 4, Group 3 and Group 4, but no significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3; while the results of Brand Extension Attitude show that there is a significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3, Group 2 and Group 4, but no significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4. The results indicate that the amount and type of information affect consumers' attitude towards the brand extension. Thus, both H8a and H8b are supported.

Moreover, there is little significant difference of Perceived Fit between Group 2 and Group 3, while the mean score of Group 2 is significantly higher (1.2146) than that of Group 4, and mean score of Group 3 is even much higher (1.4795) than that of Group 4. It may be because the pictures presented to Group 3 were more consistent with the image of Ford Menswear in consumers' mind than that of Group 4.

An interestingly different result was shown on Brand Extension Attitude. The highest mean score of Brand Extension Attitude is Group 2, which is significantly higher than that of Group 3 (0.7987) and Group 4 (0.8790), while there is little significant difference between Group 3 and Group 4. The result of Brand Extension Attitude is not consistent with that of Perceived Fit may be because consumers evaluate a fashion extension not only based on how much the product fits the parent brand, but also on other attributes, such as Parent Brand Image.

Table 4.8 MANOVA Results for Hypotheses Testing

Components			Mean Difference	Sig.
Perceived Fit	2 -- Group without pictures	3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	.265	.076
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	-1.215	.000
	3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	2 -- Group without pictures	-.265	.076
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	-1.480	.000
	4 -- Group viewing basic products	2 -- Group without pictures	1.215	.000
		3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	1.480	.000
Brand Extension Attitude	2 -- Group without pictures	3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	-.799	.000
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	-.879	.000
	3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	2 -- Group without pictures	.799	.000
		4 -- Group viewing basic products	-.080	.719
	4 -- Group viewing basic products	2 -- Group without pictures	.879	.000
		3 -- Group viewing commercial pictures	.080	.719

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary and Conclusions

The findings reveal that favorable attitudes towards brand extension directly leads to acceptance of brand extension, and that favorable attitudes occur when brand extensions are made with high brand concept consistency, and consumers hold favorable perceptions of parent brand image. The more product knowledge consumers know about the category in which the parent brand has been established or the category into which the brand extends, the higher perceived fit between the parent brand and brand extension. These findings are consistent with the findings in previous literature (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Soloman & Rabolt, 2009; (Lafferty, 2007; O'Cass & Grace, 2004; etc.).

Perceived parent brand quality does not affect consumers' attitude towards brand extension indicating that "product-feature similarity" between automobile brands and fashion categories does not play a role in consumers' attitude formation toward brand extensions. Generally, consumers often see high-quality brands as more credible, expert, and trustworthy. As a result, even if they believe a relatively distant extension does not really fit with the brand, they may be more willing to give a high-quality brand the benefit than a brand they see as average in quality (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003). However, all brands have boundaries. In the case of extending auto brand to fashion categories, when perceived fit is low, the consumer may question the ability of an automobile company to make attractive fashion products, as a result, the transfer of a brand's perceived quality may be inhibited.

Consumers' attitude towards brand extension does not affect parent brand image, neither the overall attitude toward parent brand, when an automobile brand extends into fashion categories. It may also be due to the low product-feature fit. Loken and John (1993) found that

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perceptions of quality for a parent brand in the health and beauty aids area decreases with the hypothetical introduction of a lower-quality extension in a similar product category. However, quality perceptions of the parent brand were unaffected when the proposed extension was in a dissimilar product category. Similarly, Keller and Aaker (1992) found that unsuccessful extensions in dissimilar product categories did not affect evaluations of the parent brand. On the other hand, Morrin (1999) examined the impact of brand extensions on the strength of parent brand associations in memory and found that the advertised introduction of an extension did not improve memory of the parent brand to the same level from the advertising directly promoting the parent brand. Thus, we can conclude that extending into fashion categories, whether successful or not, does not affect the parent brand. In other words, for automobile brands, it is a safe decision to license the brand name for launching fashion product lines, in order to increase profits without diluting parent brand image.

Different amounts and types of extension product information affect consumers' perceived fit between parent brand and brand extension, and their attitude towards brand extension. A number of studies have shown that the information provided about brand extension may frame the consumer decision process and affect extension evaluations. For instance, Klink and Smith (2001) found that providing information could improve perceptions of fit when consumers perceived low fit between the brand and the extension. Our findings also supported these previous research findings. However, our results did not support Keller, Parameswaran and Jacob's (2011) findings that elaborating briefly on specific extension attributes about which consumers were uncertain or concerned led to more favorable evaluations. It may be due to individual differences, the uniqueness of fashion products and competitive fashion market. Consumers evaluate fashion products based on the preferred image, quality, design/beauty,

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and/or color/style dimensions (Forney et al., 2005). A fashion extension may benefit from the parent brand, but the baseline is that the extension products should meet consumers' requirements. The finding on Brand Extension Attitude is not fully consistent to previous findings (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003;Salinas, Motaner, & Perez, 2009), and this requires further research.

5.2 Implications

This research tried to provide a better understanding of consumers' evaluation of an automobile brand extending into fashion categories, by comprehensively reviewing previous research relating to this subject, and developing a research rationale. Empirical data were collected through an online survey to assess how consumers perceive fashion extensions of automobile brands. Finally, regression and multivariate analysis of variance were used to test the proposed research model and hypotheses.

To better understand consumers' perception of brand extension, especially when an auto brand extends into fashion categories, our thinking should not be limited to the current available theories. The findings of this research provide practical suggestions for durable product brands, because the results show that they could license their brand names to launch fashion products without the risk of diluting the brand image.

To maximize the consumers' acceptance of the fashion extension, an auto company should choose the appropriate categories to enter the market. Based on the results of a single question of "which category do you think is appropriate for Ford to extend into?" the three highest-scored categories are Men's wear, Active/Sports wear, and Footwear/Leather goods. This may be due to the strong parent brand personality of "Tough", "Masculine" and "Outdoorsy".

In addition, the findings from comparing the differences of brand extension attitude among groups provide a guide to launching fashion products for auto brands. Consumers tend to have a more favorable attitude towards the fashion extension when actually seeing the picture of the products, whether commercial advertising pictures or just basic plain views of the product. Even though the basic view of the products do not fit with their imagination of the extension products, consumers still holds a more favorable attitude towards the extension than those who did not see the product pictures. Thus, our suggestions for introducing auto brands' fashion extensions are: (1) the company should provide sufficient repetition of visual advertisements to consumers, and (2) the advertisement should address parent brand associations while focusing on the product itself.

One of the most interesting and unexpected findings is that consumers' attitude towards the brand extension is not significantly related to the parent brand quality. Generally, the extension benefits more if the parent brand is considered high-quality. It may be due to the uniqueness of fashion products. Compared with other categories, fashion products evoke more symbolic meaning. When consumers make purchase decision of fashion products, they don't just consider the quality, instead, their decision-making is more based on the preferred image, quality, design/beauty, and/or color/style dimensions (Forney et al., 2005). Although consumers may still transfer the association of "high-quality" to the fashion extension, they may rely more on other symbolic features. Thus, our suggestion for designing the fashion products under an automobile brand name is to pay more attention to ensure the fashion product fit the parent brand image, as well as be attractive and stylish.

5.3 Study Limitations

First, there are some limitations with respect to our data collection. An online survey was used to collect data from a major university in the southeastern United States. Our survey suffered from the problems normally associated with a convenience sample. The population was biased – participants are younger and higher-educated. The non-response rate was high, even though there was no significant difference between the first group of responses and the second group of responses.

Second, this research did not take into account the individual differences that can affect how consumers make an extension decision and will moderate extension effects. For example, brand engagement, measuring the importance of brand in consumers' daily lives and the strength of their self-brand associations (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009).

The third limitation is that we examined only one American auto brand. Even though Ford was considered a successful brand that can represent many auto brands, there is still a need for examining other brands. The results showed that consumers tend to evaluate Ford as a "functional" "budget" brand with a personality of "tough" "masculine" and "outdoorsy". However, there are successful brands that are viewed "prestige" and "luxury" (such as Porsche), or with a less distinguishable personality (such as Toyota) that should be taken into account.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Several suggestions for future research on brand extending into fashion categories are offered. One recommendation is to take individual differences into account. Specifically, brand engagement deserves more study because the importance of brands in one's life may vary. The parent brand plays a dominant role in brand extension research, thus, the group of consumers

who just do not care about brands at all may not be considered as the target market of the brand extension. These consumers should be identified in future research.

Another recommendation is to take other types of auto brands into account, especially functional/luxury, budget/prestige, and brand personality. Literature shows that consumers may perceive fit between the parent brand and brand extension based on the evaluation of those factors (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Batra, Lenk, & Wedel, 2010; Keller et al., 2011; Park et al., 1991).

The third recommendation is to take cultural differences into account. Automobile brands usually target the global market. However, successful and popular products in one area may not have a same performance in another area of the world, due to cultural differences. Monga and John (2007) found that consumers from Eastern cultures (such as China) have a more holistic style of thinking and perceive higher levels of extension fit than do consumers from Western cultures (such as United States) who have a more analytical style of thinking. Thus, examining the impact of cultural differences on brand extension success may help auto brands to extend further.

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Appendix A: IRB Forms

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

-- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
   (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
   (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
   (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
       *If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
   (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
   (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php)
   (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf)

LSU

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
131 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/irb

1) Principal Investigator: Langchao Zhang   **Rank:** Graduate Student

Dept: Human Ecology   **Ph:** 225 229 1721   **E-mail:** lzhan26@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
   *If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Dr. Chuanlan Liu
Associate Professor
School of Human Ecology
225-578-2400   cliliu@lsu.edu

IRB# E-8257 LSU Proposal #
☑ Complete Application
☑ Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title: Extending to Fashion Category: An Exploratory Study on an Auto Brand Extension

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 5/27/2016

4) Proposal? (yes or no) No   **If Yes, LSU Proposal Number** [blank]

Also, if YES, either   ○ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
            OR   ○ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) College Students
   *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature [signature]   **Date** 3/26/2013 (no per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ✓ Not Exempted ___ Category/Paragraph 2

Signed Consent Waived? Yes / No

Reviewer Mathews   **Signature** [signature]   **Date** 5/28/13

Consent Script

Dear Respondent,

I am a graduate student majoring in Fashion Merchandising at Louisiana State University. I am conducting a research to gain a better understanding on consumers' attitude and perception toward auto brands extending into fashion categories.

You are invited to participate in this study and your answers are very important to my study. You must be 18 years old or older. It only takes about 15 minutes to complete this survey. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Your answer will be kept confidential and used for research purpose only. You can complete the survey at your private place. You may stop filling out this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable. By filling out this survey, you are considered agreeing to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to email us. We would be glad to assist you. In addition, this study has been approved by Louisiana State University Institution Review Board; if you concern your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair of Institution Review Board, at 225-578-8692.

Researchers:

Langchao Zhang, Graduate Student   225-229-1721 lzhan26@lsu.edu

Dr. Chuanlan Liu, Associate Professor   clliu@lsu.edu

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 5/27/2018

Appendix B: Questionnaires

LOUSIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear participant:

Thank you for your input into this research. I am a graduate student majoring in fashion merchandising at Louisiana State University. The purpose of this study is to better understand consumers' attitude and perception toward Auto brand extensions in fashion categories.

You are invited to participate in this study and your answers are very important to my study. You must be 18 years old or older. It only takes about 15 minutes to complete this survey. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Your answer will be kept confidential and used for research purpose only. You can complete the survey at your private place. You may stop filling out this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable. By filling out this survey, you are considered agreeing to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to email us. We would be glad to assist you. In addition, this study has been approved by Louisiana State University Institution Review Board; if you concern your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair of Institution Review Board, at 225-578-8692.

If you have any concern or questions, please contact us.

Dr. Chuanlan Liu

Associate Professor, Phd & MBA
Textiles, Apparel Design, and
Merchandising
School of Human Ecology
Louisiana State University
Phone: 225 -578-2400
Fax: 225-578-2697
Email: clliu@lsu.edu

Langchao Zhang

Graduate Student
Textiles, Apparel Design, and
Merchandising
School of Human Ecology
Louisiana State University
Email: lzhan26@lsu.edu

Part 1: The following two sets of questions are about your expertise/knowledge as a consumer.

1. Based on your experiences in buying and wearing fashion clothes, please indicate to what degree you agree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Diasgree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I had to make a decision about buying fashion products today, I would need very little information	1	2	3	4	5		7
If a friend asked me about fashion clothes, I could give him/her a lot of information	1	2	3	4	5		7
I feel I know a lot about fashion clothes	1	2	3	4	5		7
I am an experienced user of fashion clothes	1	2	3	4	5		7
I would classify myself as an expert on fashion clothes	1	2	3	4	5		7

2. Based on your experience in buying and using cars or other types of vehicles for personal/family use, please indicate to what degree you agree with each of the following statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Diasgree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I had to make a decision about buying automobile products, today I would need very little information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If a friend asked me about automobiles, I could give him/her a lot of information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel I know a lot about automobiles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am an experienced user of automobiles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would classify myself as an expert on automobiles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Please tell us how familiar you are with the automobile brand Ford.

|	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know what Ford looks like	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can recognize Ford among other competing brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am aware of Ford	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Some characteristics of Ford come to my mind quickly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of Ford	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have difficulty in imagining Ford in my mind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

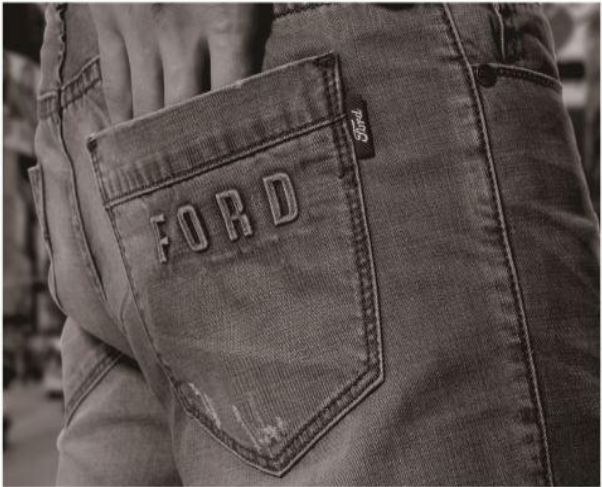4. Please tell us your opinion about the quality of Ford products

|	Very bad	Bad	Poor	Neither Good nor Bad	Fair	Good	Very Good
Reliability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trustworthiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Durability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Function	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Overall quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part 2:
Survey 2: As many other automobile brands do, Ford is planning to launch its apparel products. Please answer the questions below and tell us your opinion about Ford apparel products.
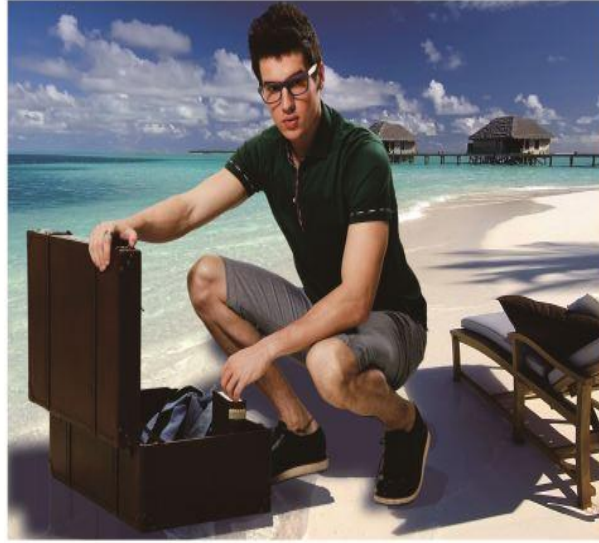
Survey 3:As many other automobile brands do, Ford has launched its apparel products. Pictures shown below are some of the Ford fashion clothing. Please answer the questions below and tell us your opinion about Ford apparel products.
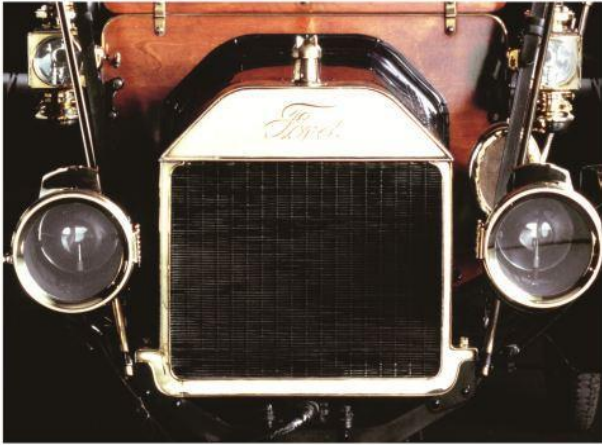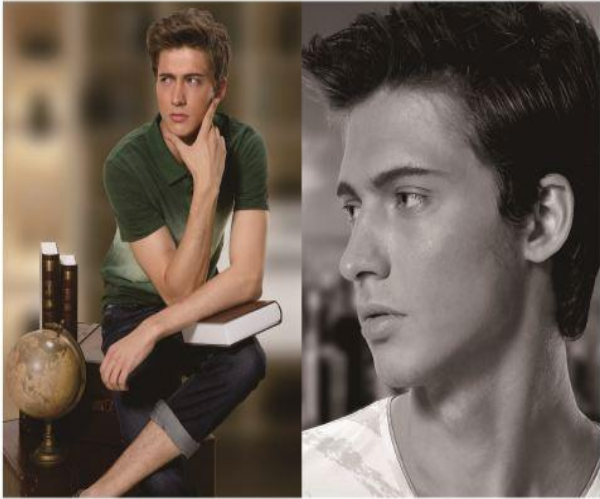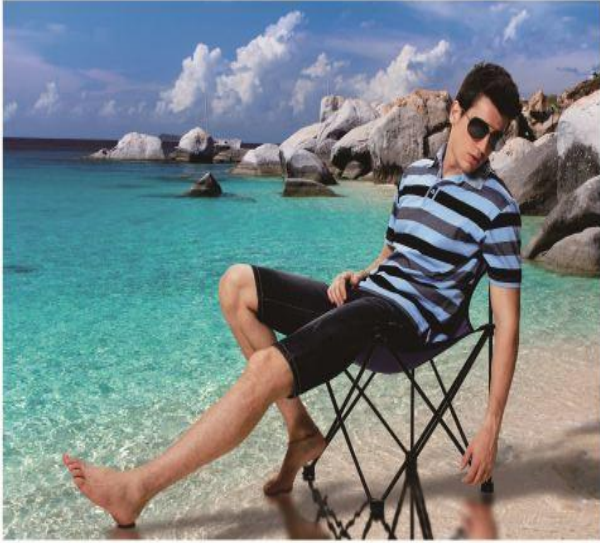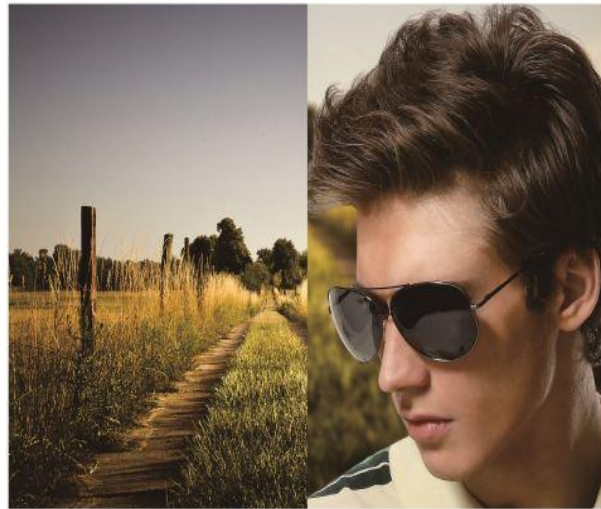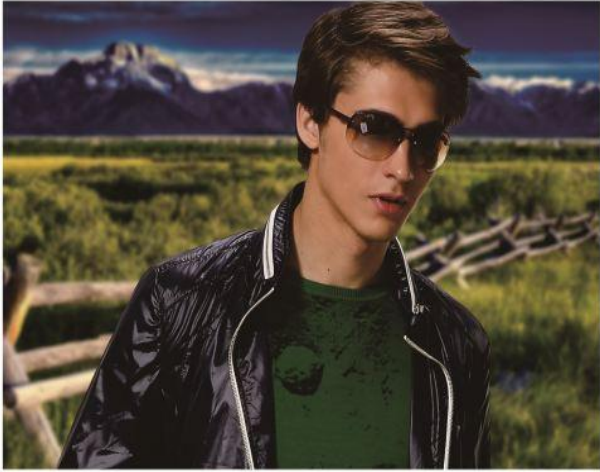
Survey 4: As many other automobile brands do, Ford has launched its apparel products. Pictures shown below are some of the Ford fashion clothing. Please answer the questions below and tell us your opinion about Ford apparel products.

5. Based on your view about the products shown above, please indicate to what degree you agree with the following statements.\

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Ford clothing has similar images as the parent brand Ford	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford clothing conveyed the same impression as parent brand Ford	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford clothing shown above fits the parent brand Ford	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford extending into such clothing category is logical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford extending into such clothing category is appropriate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Based on your view about the products shown above, please indicate your responses toward the following statements.

Does Ford clothing look budget or luxury?	Budget 1		2	3	4	5	6	Luxury 7
Does Ford Clothing look functional or prestige?	Functional 1		2	3	4	5	6	Prestige 7
In your opinion, is Ford Clothing favorable?	Unfavorable 1		2	3	4	5	6	Favorable 7
Do you like above-shown Ford clothing?	Dislike 1		2	3	4	5	6	Like 7
Do you think above-shown Ford Clothing is appealing?	Unappealing 1		2	3	4	5	6	Appealing 7

7. If those Ford clothing are available at stores and prices are very reasonable to you, how likely will you accept Ford Jeans?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Undecided	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Likely
Try Ford clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Buy Ford clothing for myself or family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Recommend to my friends to buy Ford clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Buy Ford clothing as gifts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. In your opinion, which of the following Ford products sounds appropriate?

	Very Inappropriate	Inappropriate	Somewhat Inappropriate	Neutral	Somewhat Appropriate	Appropriate	Very Appropriate
Ford active/sports wear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford womenswear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford home bedding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford footwear and leather goods	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford handbag and luggage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford children's wear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ford menswear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part III. The following questions are about your responses about the parent brand Ford based on your views, feelings, and experiences.

9. Based on your experiences or opinion, how do you think, perceive, and feel about the brand Ford.

Is Ford a budget or luxury brand? (1)	Budget 1		2	3	4	5	6	Luxury 7
Is Ford a functional or prestige brand? (2)	Functional 1		2	3	4	5	6	Prestige 7
Is Ford favorable? (3)	Unfavorable 1		2	3	4	5	6	Favorable 7
Do you like Ford? (4)	Dislike 1		2	3	4	5	6	Like 7
Do you think Ford is appealing? (5)	Unappealing 1		2	3	4	5	6	Appealing 7

10. Describe the social function of the brand Ford in one's daily life.

	Not at all	Not Very	Undecided	Slightly	Moderately	Quite	Extremely
To what extent can Ford indicate a person's social status?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent is Ford a symbol of achievement?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent is Ford a symbol of wealth?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent is Ford a symbol of prestige?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent does Ford attract attention?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Can a person use Ford to impress other people?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part IV. Tell us about yourself.
11. Please tell us your age

12. Please tell us your gender
- ❍ Male (1)
- ❍ Female (2)

13. Please tell us your Race/Ethnicity
- ❍ Caucasian/White (1)
- ❍ African American (2)
- ❍ Hispanic (3)
- ❍ Asian/Pacific Islander (4)
- ❍ Native American/Aleut (5)
- ❍ Other (6)

14. Please indicate your classification
- ❍ Freshman (1)
- ❍ Sophomore (2)
- ❍ Junior (3)
- ❍ Senior (4)
- ❍ Fifth year or more (5)
- ❍ Graduate Student (6)
- ❍ Others (7) _____

15. On average, how much money do you spend on buying clothes or fashion accessories every 6 months?

16. Do you own a car or other type of automobile? If the answer of the question above is "yes", what is the brand and model of your car or automobile?
- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

17. Thanks a lot for your participation. Please tell us your email address if you would like to participate in the draw for gift.

Vita

Langchao Zhang was born in 1985, in Hunan Province, People's Republic of China. She finished her undergraduate studies and earned a Bachelor of Engineering in Textile Science and Engineering degree at Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, China, in July, 2007. Later, in 2007 she worked as a buyer in a home décor company in China. In August 2010, she came to Louisiana State University to pursue graduate studies in textile and apparel merchandising.