

**THE ROLE OF CONSUMER FANATICISM IN THE
ACCEPTANCE OF BRAND EXTENSIONS: MERCHANDISING
IN THE VIDEO GAMES MARKET**

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THE ROLE OF CONSUMER FANATICISM IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF BRAND EXTENSIONS: MERCHANDISING IN THE VIDEO GAMES MARKET

ABSTRACT

In the modern marketing environment, many brands seek to expand into new markets while taking advantage of their existing brand name and resources to ensure the success of the venture. However like the introduction of any new product, success is not guaranteed and many factors must be considered when planning the introduction of a brand extension. Aaker and Keller (1990) explain that the “perceptual fit (i.e., whether a “consumer perceives the new item to be consistent with the parent brand”) is a key element in predicting brand extension success” for a number of reasons including “that the transfer of perceived quality of a brand will be enhanced when the two product classes in some way fit together” (Aaker and Keller. 1990, 29).

One group of consumers which would be thought to respond more positively towards brand extensions is fanatics as this type of consumer have a wish to acquire products related to their area of fanaticism and often exhibit extraordinary devotion towards a brand or product of which they are a fan. (Thorne and Bruner 2006) The video games industry is a market which has over the years grown to be one of the main sources of entertainment products in the modern marketplace and is only now reaching maturity. This is a market in which consumer fanaticism is prevalent and in which merchandise is regularly produced to tie in with existing video games/game franchises (i.e. brand extensions)

This study explores the effect which fanaticism has on the acceptance of brand extensions with differing levels of parent brand congruency by video game fans. Respondents were asked to specify their favourite game from the last five years and to apply questions relating to fanaticism and hypothetical brand extensions to that particular game. Three products were chosen as brand extensions in; a video game controller/gamer keyboard, a beanbag and a pair of shoes. These were intended to represent products of high, medium and low parent brand congruency, respectively. However final results indicated that there was not a significant difference between respondents’ ratings of the beanbag and the shoes and so both were used to represent low congruency products.

Respondents were split into two groups; group1 being 'low fans' exhibiting a relatively low level of fanaticism towards video games and group2 being 'high fans' exhibiting a relatively high level of fanaticism towards video games. The ratings given by these two groups in relation to the three products were then compared and it was found that, the high fans gave consistently higher ratings to all three products in terms of congruency and purchase intention than the low fans. In many cases the high fans ratings were significantly higher than that of the low fans.

The ratings were then compared between the products with the most interesting finding relating to the differences in respondents' ratings of purchase intention. It was found that while in relation to parent brand congruency; the high fans almost always gave significantly lower ratings to the low congruency products than the low fans gave to the high congruency product, there was no significant difference between the purchase intention ratings given by the high fans to the low congruency products and those given by the low fans to the high congruency product.

This result suggests that while congruency was a consideration in this case, the level of fanaticism exhibited by a particular target market must also be examined when planning the introduction of a new brand extension.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the modern marketing environment, many brands seek to expand into new markets while taking advantage of their existing brand name and resources to ensure the success of the venture. This may be achieved either by targeting new market segments in their own product class through the use of line extensions or by entering a new product class through a brand extension. Tauber (1988) described brand extensions as "...using a brand in one category to introduce products in a totally different category." (Tauber. 1988, 27)

The use of a brand extension in entering a new market is thought to decrease the risk of failure of a new product in comparison to products introduced by other previously unestablished brands, as the new product will benefit from the existing brand equity and awareness resulting from its association with a brand already established in other markets (or 'parent brand'). The new product may also benefit from the parent brand's existing resources such as distribution channels and promotions if they are relevant to the new market.

Studies have examined the idea that unsuccessful brand extensions may in fact dilute the existing equity of the parent brand “by diminishing the favourable attribute beliefs consumers have learned to associate with the family brand name” (Loken and John. 1993, 79).

Other studies have focused on the idea that a brand extension which conflicts with consumers’ knowledge, beliefs and preconceptions regarding the parent brand’s image, would receive a negative reaction from consumers, leading to the failure of the new product. (Aaker and Keller. 1990)

Salinas and Pérez (2009) examine three different models which have been developed in relation to consumers’ evaluations of brand extensions; with the ‘bookkeeping model’, the ‘typicality model’ and the ‘conversion model’. Under the bookkeeping model, “consumer beliefs always change when faced with any kind of information, even in cases coherent with the parent brand”, while under the typicality model, “incongruent extensions would lead to ‘sub types’ with independent associations within the original category”, and under the conversion model, “brand schem[a]s only change in extremely a-typical examples” (Salinas and Pérez. 2009, 51).

Aaker and Keller (1990) explain that the “perceptual fit (i.e., whether a “consumer perceives the new item to be consistent with the parent brand”) is a key element in predicting brand extension success” for a number of reasons including “that the transfer of perceived quality of a brand will be enhanced when the two product classes in some way fit together” (Aaker and Keller. 1990, 29). This effectively means that brand extensions which are more typical of their parent brand or similar to other product classes the parent brand operates in are more likely to be perceived by consumers to be of similar quality to that associated with the parent brand.

Another factor relating to the acceptance of new brand extensions examined by Aaker & Keller (1990) is the “perceived difficulty of making the extension” in that consumers were more likely to accept a brand extension which they perceived to be more difficult to make, while a brand extension which looked to be extremely easy to make would be seen by consumers “as a blatant effort to capitalise on a brand name image to command higher than justified prices or they may feel it is incongruous to introduce a quality brand name in a trivial product class” (Aaker and Keller. 1990, 30, 36, 38).

From this, it is evident that a brand extension product which is not typical of the parent brand and is perceived to be extremely easy to make will not be considered by consumers to be of the same quality as other products of the parent brand and will most likely be viewed as a cheap gimmick produced only as an attempt to cash in on the existing brand image, rather than a justified extension of the parent brand.

Chowdhury (2007) outlines an item used to evaluate the different variables which shape consumer perceptions towards a brand extension.

Variable name	Variable description	Scale
Dependent		
Extension quality	The perceived overall quality of the brand extension	1 = inferior, 7 = superior
Try likely	The likelihood of trying the product	1 = extremely unlikely, 2 = extremely
Independents		
Quality	The perceived overall quality of the parent brand	1 = inferior, 7 = superior
Transfer helpful	The usefulness of the manufacturing skills and resources in the original product for developing, refining and making the new product	1 = extremely unhelpful, 2 = extremely
Complement likely	The complementarity of the original and extension products in use	1 = extremely unlikely, 2 = extremely
Substitute likely	The substitutability of the original and extension products in use	1 = extremely unlikely, 2 = extremely
Difficult difficult	The difficulty in manufacturing and designing the extension product	1 = extremely easy, 2 = extremely

(Chowdhury, 2007, 31)

This is supported by Kalamas et.al's (2007) item used to measure perceptions relating to extensions of prototypical brands; which uses similar as well as additional variables to measure prototypicality and brand congruency. The relevant variables for this study were Perceived Quality (overall for the parent), Global Fit (parent/extension), Complement (parent/extension), Manufacturing Transferability, Extension Manufacturing Complexity, Extension Quality and Purchase Intentions (Kalamas et.al. 2007, 200).

One group of consumers exhibiting particularly high levels of knowledge, beliefs and involvement regarding certain brands and products is fanatics. Consumer fanaticism can be found in many different industries and consumer segments ranging from Science Fiction TV shows to gourmet cookware. Consumer fanaticism refers to an

ongoing devotion or involvement with a particular product by consumers at a higher level than that which is considered to be normal by most other consumers, whether this product be a tangible good (e.g. cars) , an activity (sports, games etc.) or a person (i.e. celebrities).

The underlying concepts of fanaticism are outlined by Thorne (2003) with a fan being described as “a person with a focused interest in a particular area, activity or subject.”, fandom being “a subculture composed of like-minded people, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with the shared interest...” and fanaticism being “the degree to which one is a fan of some person, object or activity.”. (Thorne 2003, 3)

As outlined by Thorne and Bruner (2006), high levels of internal involvement are common amongst fans as “they focus their time, energy, and resources intently on a specific area of interest.” and they “... usually have a strong enough interest that small to major changes in their lifestyles are made to accommodate devotion to the focal object.”. Thorne and Bruner go on to explain fans’ desire for external involvement in that “The fan may choose to spend time reading about the material... attending presentations or events... posting to the internet... or attending conventions.” (Thorne and Bruner 2006, 3-5)

Thorne and Bruner (2006) outline a basic framework for measuring levels of consumer fanaticism with questions relating to three characteristics attributed to fanatics; external involvement, desire for interaction with others of like interest and wish to acquire (related material/products). These are set out as follows:

External Involvement

Do you read magazines related to _____ ?

Do you visit websites related to _____ ?

Do others ask your opinion on _____ ?

If you can’t find (the primary materials), what do you do?

Do other fans read more about _____ than you?

Do you like going to _____ events?

Desire for interaction with others of like interest

How many of your friends are involved with _____ ?

How much time do you spend talking about _____ with others?

Do you email or “chat” with others regarding _____ ?

Do you like going to conventions?

Wish to acquire

How much stuff related to _____ do you have?

What was the last item related to _____ that you acquired?

What do you want to get next that relates to _____?

What things do you collect that relates to _____?

If you can not find (primary materials), do you buy (secondary or tertiary materials)?

Approximately how much per month would you say you spend on _____?

What percentage of your income would you say that you spend on _____?

(Thorne and Bruner 2006, Appendix 1)

Thorne and Bruner (2006) then explain fans' wish to acquire objects related to the area of interest as they "like many individuals, choose to use consumption as a means of expressing themselves" (Thorne and Bruner. 2006, 54). A number of reasons are given for this, one of which is the "desire to use the physical item as a link to a pleasurable event experienced during fan activities" (Thorne and Bruner. 2006, 54). This relates to the description by Chung et.al (2007) of an "experience of gratification involv[ing] feelings of satisfaction, fulfilment, indulgence, enjoyment, pleasure, delight, or a combination of these positive sensory encounter(s)" with reference to a "peak experience" related to fan activities and involvement, described as "a high point in life involving the experience of extremely positive emotions" (Chung et.al. 2007, 2086). Fans may seek to recapture this through further consumption, with the product(s) acting as "the influence that returns the consumer to the state of above average involvement with the consumptive object" (Chung et.al. 2007, 2088).

Consumer fanaticism has been prevalent in the video games industry for almost as long as video games have existed. 'Nerds' or 'Geeks' are arguably some of the most fanatical consumers and could be said to identify with video games on a deeper level than most other consumers. Resultantly, they were early adopters of the video games industry as a whole and are generally so for individual video games, systems and related products. One example of consumer fanaticism in the video games industry is the strong following Sony has generated since the launch of the Playstation in December 1994. Since then, Sony has gone on to release various products in the video games industry including the Playstation1 (PS1), PS2 and PS3 and has seen the establishment of fan communities and websites such as the "Sony Defense Force" (www.sonydefenseforce.com).

The video games industry is quickly becoming the largest entertainment industry in the world with estimated yearly revenue exceeding that of Hollywood movie ticket sales in 2005 and the 2004 release of Halo 2 for Microsoft's Xbox generating US \$125m in its first day (Branch et. al. 2006). In the case of Halo 2, the success of this franchise would never have been possible had Halo not been somewhat of a flagship title upon the release of the Xbox as this is an industry which thrives on fanaticism and is truly at the mercy of its consumers when it comes to remaining profitable.

Video game players or 'gamers' may over time develop loyalty towards particular video games and game franchises or series, as well as specific video game systems (also referred to as 'platforms' or 'consoles'; 'systems' is used to describe those specifically manufactured for playing video games as well as personal computers (PCs) used for gaming). A classic example of this is gamers who grew up playing 'Super Mario' games on Nintendo consoles may have developed a loyalty towards Nintendo as well as the Mario franchise, while those who grew up playing 'Sonic the Hedgehog' games on Sega consoles may have developed a loyalty towards Sega as well as the Sonic franchise. This prolonged loyalty to a specific series of games and/or games systems then eventuates in the consumer fanaticism we see for these products today.

Brand extensions are common in the video games market, with many brands extending their name into various merchandising ventures including figurines and collectibles, clothing and fashion accessories as well as life sized statues of in game characters and special one-off promotional items. (<http://www.theipfactory.com/>, <http://www.popcultcha.com.au/video-game-c-18.html>)

In relation to the years of development and testing which video game developers go through prior to releasing a game; these types of products seem trivially easy to produce. Although they may be more complex than consumers think, in comparison to the typical products attributed to these brands, these may be viewed as cheap, mass manufactured products being sold above their normal price range as a result of their parent brand's name. These products are also relatively incongruous with the primary products of the video games market which consist primarily of sophisticated software and hardware specifically designed to provide an interface between it and the user.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

It is apparent that fanatics desire products related to the subject of their fanaticism for a number of reasons and would therefore be likely to purchase or at least consider purchasing a new product in a completely different category, if it were related to the subject of their fanaticism i.e. if it were a brand extension by the creator of the product or brand of which they are a fan.

The idea that fans of a product or brand would continue to purchase new products released under the same name, or 'fans will buy merchandise' is a widely held view and may be more an assumption than anything in the modern marketing environment. However this does not take into account the effect which fanaticism has on consumers' perception of the new product and begs the question; are fans more likely to purchase a brand extension just because it has the same branding as the subject of their fanaticism, or do they actually evaluate the product differently to other consumers?

Fanatics are often referred to as having a dogmatic mindset, possessing a "personalised view of the world, resistance to change, disdain/dismissal and certainty." (Redden and Steiner. 2000) Taking this mindset into account, as well as fanatics' high level of involvement with their area of interest, it should be examined as to the effect consumer fanaticism would have on consumers' evaluations of brand extension congruency as well as their overall intention to purchase the product. This will be used to measure the acceptance by consumers of a new brand extension.

To gain an understanding of the effect which consumer fanaticism has on the acceptance of a new brand extension, consumers from a particular industry with differing levels of fanaticism amongst them should be examined to ascertain the way in which each group would respond to the introduction of a new brand extension by their favourite brand.

Thorne and Bruner (2006) outline differing levels of fanaticism belonging to different types of pop-culture fanatics, with the lowest being Dilettante with a "casual involvement with the primary source material", then the Dedicated Fan who "actively adjusts [their] lifestyle" to pursue their interest and "actively seeks out other fans", the Devoted Fans who "make major changes to their lifestyle in order to pursue [their]

interest and devote a great deal of free time to the activities associated with fandom” and the Dysfunctional Fans who are “engaged in the activity so deeply that they may alienate or become estranged from their family and become engaged in antisocial activities”. (Thorne and Bruner, 2006, 58)

By determining respondents’ levels of fanaticism and gauging their reactions towards the introduction of new brand extensions by their favourite brand, possessing both high and low brand congruency the impact that differing levels of consumer fanaticism has on the acceptance of new brand extensions may be measured.

HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

As indicated by the pre-test and in relation to the concept of parent brand congruency, the three hypothetical brand extensions chosen are expected to have different levels of congruency in relation to each respondent’s specified favourite video game from the last five years (it being used as the parent brand). The video game controller is expected to receive high ratings in terms of each element of congruency, while the beanbag is expected to receive medium level ratings and the shoes low ratings. Therefore it is expected that these will be significantly different from one another in congruency and purchase intention.

Hypothesis 1

There will be a significant positive increase between respondents’ rating of each brand extension in terms of;

H1a: Image fit

H1b: Complexity

H1c: Transfer

H1d: Complement

H1e: Extension quality

H1f: Category fit

H1g: Intent to purchase

It is expected that the levels of congruency indicated by the pre test and with reference to related literature will carry over to the ratings given by respondents with both higher and lower levels of fanaticism for all elements of congruency as well as purchase intention; the controller receiving the highest ratings as it was indicated in

the pretest to have a high level of congruency; the beanbag receiving lower ratings as it was indicated as having a moderate level of congruency; and the ratings for the shoes being lower still as this is shown to be a low congruency product. Therefore it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 2

Between the brand extensions of low, medium and high parent brand congruency, respondents indicating a high level of fanaticism will exhibit a significant positive increase in the following as expected parent brand congruency increases.

H2a: Image

H2b: Complexity

H2c: Transfer

H2d: Complement

H2e: Extension quality

H2f: Category fit

H2g: Intent to purchase

Hypothesis 3

Between the brand extensions of low, medium and high parent brand congruency, respondents indicating a low level of fanaticism will exhibit a significant positive increase in the following as expected parent brand congruency increases.

H3a: Image

H3b: Complexity

H3c: Transfer

H3d: Complement

H3e: Extension quality

H3f: Category fit

H3g: Intent to purchase

Due to fans' high level of involvement and devotion towards their area of interest, it is likely that consumer fanaticism will have a positive effect on consumers' perceived overall quality of the parent brand. Due to fans' desire to involve themselves further with their area of interest through further consumption, it is also likely that consumer fanaticism would have a positive effect on their evaluation of an individual brand

extension in terms of parent brand congruency and purchase intention. Therefore it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 4

Between the brand extensions of low, medium and high parent brand congruency, respondents indicating a high level of fanaticism compared to those indicating a low level of fanaticism, will exhibit significantly higher ratings for:

H4a: Image fit

H4b: Complexity

H4c: Transfer

H4d: Complement

H4e: Extension quality

H4f: Category fit

H4g: Intent to purchase

As well as a significant positive increase in ratings of

H4h: Overall quality of the parent brand

As there is limited available literature regarding the comparison of reactions by different groups of fans to different products, it is difficult to form a hypothesis regarding the differences between the high level and low level fan groups' ratings of each product regarding parent brand congruency and intent to purchase.

One point of view would suggest that a brand extension which is perceived to have a high level of parent brand congruency – such as a video game controller in this case – would have a higher likelihood to be purchased by any fans, regardless of their level of fanaticism, than a brand extension – such as shoes or a beanbag – which is perceived to have a lower level of parent brand congruency. This is based on the idea that parent brand congruency is a key measure of brand extension success and is therefore the overriding factor in respondents' intention to purchase each product.

However as fanatics can be irrational in their thought processes and have a desire to acquire products related to the focus of their fanaticism, it could be that consumers with a higher level of fanaticism would choose to ignore the inconsistencies between a new brand extension and their beliefs regarding the parent brand in favour of maintaining their connection with the parent brand through further consumption of

related material. Consumers with a high level of fanaticism would then be as, if not more likely to purchase a brand extension with lower parent brand congruency than consumers with a lower level of fanaticism would be to purchase a brand extension with a high level of parent brand congruency. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 1

To explore the differences between respondents' parent brand congruency and intent to purchase ratings of brand extensions with high, medium and low expected parent brand congruency, taking into account the level of fanaticism exhibited by the respondents for the parent brand.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by surveying 111 respondents with 55 belonging to group1 or the 'low fans', who exhibited a relatively low level of fanaticism for video games. It is thought that these respondents fall mainly into the Dilettante Fan category and possibly exhibit behaviours associated with the Dedicated Fan category. 54 respondents belonged to group2 or the 'high fans', who exhibited a relatively high level of fanaticism towards video games. It is thought that these respondents fall mainly into the Devoted Fans category and possibly exhibit behaviours attributed to the Dysfunctional Fans category. Two respondents did not complete all parts of the fanaticism item and so were automatically excluded from grouping by their overall level of fanaticism.

Demographics were measured in the interests of reliability of results, however as this study is not primarily aimed at examining any particular relationships between any demographic variables and respondents' levels of fanaticism or their reactions towards new brand extensions, results relating to demographics will not be included in this paper. Therefore although there was some effort made to obtain a wide spread of demographics among respondents; no specific quotas were assigned to demographics for this study.

Respondents were asked to specify their favourite video game from the last five years at the beginning of the survey and apply all questions thereafter to that specific game.

This allowed for a wide range of video game fans to be sampled while ensuring timeliness of results.

This was originally planned to relate to the respondent's favourite game of all time, however the period of time from the release of the game to present was limited to five years due to several factors relating to the scale used to measure fanaticism. Due to the nature of video games, an individual may remain a fan of a particular game and possess the enduring connection with it that is typical of fanatics, but may not have played the game for many years, having already finished it multiple times.

This would eventuate in a low score being given for questions relating to frequency of gameplay by some respondents who consider an older game to be their all time favourite. These respondents may also have not had access to media such as the internet at the height of their involvement with their favourite game and so would give a low score in relation to visiting websites and chatting online regarding their favourite game. Respondents who identify a video game from their childhood as their all time favourite may also have not had the authority to purchase related products or access related media such as magazines and the internet at the height of their involvement with the game and so would give a low score for related questions.

By limiting the timeframe to five years it is ensured that; respondents have played the game in the last five years, they most likely had access to the internet at the time and – as all respondents must be over eighteen years of age – they would have been at least thirteen years of age at the height of their involvement and would have had access to related media and the ability to purchase related products.

Respondents were asked to answer questions relating to the fanaticism they feel towards their favourite game in order to determine whether they fall into the Casual Gamer or the Hardcore Gamer category. They were then presented with questions relating to three hypothetical brand extensions introduced by the publisher of their favourite game; one having a high level of perceptual fit and perceived difficulty of production in relation to video games, one having a medium level of perceptual fit and perceived difficulty of production and the final one having low levels of the same attributes.

It was originally intended that there would be only two products presented as hypothetical brand extensions, one with high levels of perceptual fit and perceived difficulty of production and the other with low levels of these. However feedback received during the pre-testing stage of this research indicated that more useful data would be rendered from the use of three products of differing perceptual fit and perceived difficulty of production.

INSTRUMENT

Fanaticism

Thorne and Bruner's (2006) model for measuring fanaticism was adapted to create a quantitative scale to suit the video games market and was further adapted to suit the particular area of interest of the respondents. This used a nine-point interval scale so as to better differentiate casual and hardcore gamers and group respondents accordingly.

Perceived difficulty and fit

Chowdhury's (2007) model was adapted to measure the perceived difficulty and fit of both products in relation to the parent brand. To avoid repetition, items relating only to the parent brand were separated and all other questions were asked in relation to all three products. The size of the scales were altered to suit this study as the 1-2 scale used for many of the questions will not display a sufficient range of consumer perceptions. These questions were also based on Kalamas et.al.'s (2007) model relating to brand extension congruency, with only relevant items from the model included in the questionnaire.

The wording of the questions was adapted specifically to the video games market as well as being non-specific towards any brand to ensure interchangeability between brands. The model used covered the elements of image fit, complexity, transfer, complement, extension quality, category fit and perceived quality of the parent brand.

Purchase Intention

Intentions to purchase the brand extensions were measured by a three-item instrument in the form of a seven-point scale adapted from Pascal, Sprott and Muehling (2002). Previous Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was shown as $> .90$, indicating that it is a reliable measure of purchase intention. Respondents were posed with the question of

‘...how likely would you be to purchase this product?’ and items available were; Likely / Unlikely, Probable / Improbable, Possible / Impossible.

Pre-testing

Focus groups were conducted with several academics and several video game fans in order to determine the appropriateness of questions used in the questionnaire as well as which example products should be used as hypothetical brand extensions. Six different products were put forward in pre-testing; a video game controller, a video game headset, a backpack, shoes, jewellery and a beanbag. From this, three were agreed upon as being appropriate high, medium and low congruency products to be measured, taking into account respondents’ different levels of fanaticism.

		Product’s Level of Congruency with the Parent Brand		
		High	Medium	Low
Level of Fanaticism	High	<u>High Fans/Controller</u>	<u>High Fans/Beanbag</u>	<u>High Fans/Shoes</u>
	Low	<u>Low Fans/Controller</u>	<u>Low Fans/Beanbag</u>	<u>Low Fans/Shoes</u>

Through discussion regarding the fanaticism item and its appropriateness in measuring respondents’ fanaticism towards their favourite game, it was decided that this should be amended to focus only on video games from the past five years and for all questions to be in regards to the peak of respondents’ fanaticism towards their specified game.

DATA COLLECTION

Respondents were surveyed both in person using hard copy questionnaires for data collection and via social networking websites using the Qualtrics system. The hard copy questionnaires allowing for more casual gamers who are less likely to be reached online to be surveyed while Qualtrics allowed for collection of survey data to be carried out electronically, thereby streamlining the processes of finding and contacting suitable respondents, collecting data and entering data as well as minimising missing data in enforcing responses for each question

ANALYSIS

A review of the congruency item indicated that the variables relating to the complexity of each brand extension were inconsistent with the other areas of congruency examined. This was attributed to the wording of the question in that this referred only to the manufacturing complexity of the brand extensions themselves, while all other variables referred to each brand extension specifically in relation to the parent brand. Complexity was therefore removed from further analysis resulting in H1b, H2b, H3b and H4b being unconfirmed due to lack of suitability of the question used.

Reliability Analysis

Upon review of the fanaticism item, the variable relating to 'free time goes towards games in general' was excluded from analysis as it was not considered to be relevant to fanaticism held specifically towards one game. A reliability analysis was then conducted using the remaining variables and a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.925 was found indicating that the variables used were a consistent measure of fanaticism.

The analysis suggested that the variable 'others knew more than you' could be removed without affecting the reliability of the item as its Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted value was 0.925. There had been some discussion as to whether this was a relevant question as it may be interpreted differently by respondents with different levels of fanaticism and so it was decided to exclude this variable from further analysis.

A reliability analysis was also conducted for the purchase intention item with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.883, indicating that the three variables used for each product were a consistent measure of respondents' purchase intentions.

Overall Fanaticism Score

This was calculated as a mean score for each respondent of their recorded scores for all variables relating to fanaticism, excluding the two which were found to be inconsistent with the rest of the items. This was used as an overall measure of the fanaticism each respondent exhibits towards their specified game in the rest of the analysis. Two of the 111 respondents did not complete all questions relating to fanaticism and so were not given an overall score, leaving 109 respondents to be included in the analysis.

Median Split

The median level of fanaticism of respondents was calculated using each respondent's mean fanaticism score to determine which respondents would belong to the high fans group and which would belong to the low fans group. The median was found to be a score of 4.714286 on the 1-9 scale used. As such, of the 109 respondents which were given a mean score, 55 fell below the median indicating a relatively low level of fanaticism and so belonged to group 1 or the 'low fans' group, while 54 were found to be above the median indicating a relatively high level of fanaticism and so belonged to group 2 or the 'high fans' group.

Mean Purchase Intention

This was calculated using the scores for all three variables in the purchase intention item and obtaining a mean of these scores in relation to each product for individual respondents. This was used as an overall score of the purchase intention each respondent held towards the three brand extensions.

One way ANOVA

One way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the relationship between respondents' ratings of each individual product for the relevant dimensions of congruency and purchase intention. The first test examined the ratings given by all respondents. Gabriel Post Hoc test was used for the analysis.

H1a: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 49.479$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H1c: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of transfer for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 28.488$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H1d: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 53.872, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H1e: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 48.791, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H1f: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 49.479, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H1g: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the three products, $F(2, 330) = 49.479, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

Upon examining the differences between respondents' ratings of congruency and purchase intention for each product, it is evident that the controller was rated higher than the other two products and so can be described as having high parent brand congruency. However it is also apparent that the shoes and the beanbag were rated similarly and so should both in this case be thought of as having relatively low parent brand congruency, rather than one being moderate and the other being low.

Respondents were then split into the high and low fan groups, resulting in two different sets of results. Gabriel Post Hoc test was used for the analysis.

H2a: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 25.864$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H2c: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of transfer for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 15.566$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H2d: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 29.929$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H2e: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 30.484$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H2f: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 19.223$, $p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H2g: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the three products, $F(2, 159) = 13.916, p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3a: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 26.866, p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3c: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of transfer for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 14.369, p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of image fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3d: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 29.116, p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of complement for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3e: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 23.747, p < .05$
- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of extension quality for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3f: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 28.843, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of category fit for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

H3g: Hypothesis partially supported

- The ANOVA table indicated that there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the three products, $F(2, 162) = 14.564, p < .05$

- Post Hoc test indicated there is a significant difference between the ratings of purchase intention for the controller and the beanbag ($p < .05$) and for the controller and the shoes ($p < .05$), but not for the shoes and the beanbag ($p > .05$).

Upon examining the mean ratings of dimensions of congruency given by the two fan groups for all three products, it is apparent that while the differences between the product ratings are similar for both fan groups, the high fan group gave consistently higher ratings to all three products in each dimension of congruency.

Independent Samples T-Tests

An independent samples T-Test was conducted to examine the differences between the two fan groups' ratings of each product in relation to congruency and purchase intention.

H4a: Hypothesis accepted

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller image fit as; $F(1, 107) = 3.333, p = .071$ $t(107) = 2.94, p = 0.004$

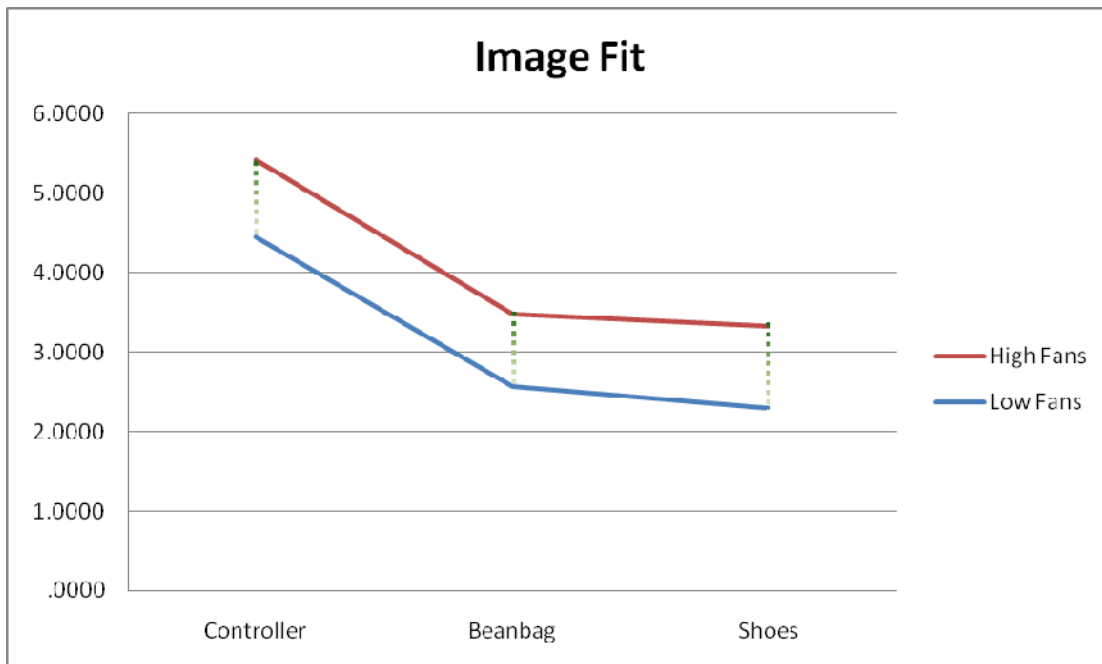
The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.4259 Low fans = 4.4545

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag image fit as; $F(1, 107) = 0.101, p = .751$ $t(107) = 2.77, p = 0.007$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.4815 Low fans = 2.5636

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes image fit as; $F(1, 107) = 3.303, p = .072$ $t(107) = 3.39, p = 0.001$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.3333 Low fans = 2.2909



H4c: Hypothesis partially supported

- There is no significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller transfer as; $F(1, 107) = 1.453, p = .231$ $t(107) = 1.79, p = 0.076$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.2778 Low fans = 4.7091

- There is no significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag transfer as; $F(1, 107) = 1.403, p = .239$ $t(107) = 1.96, p = 0.053$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.7778 Low fans = 3.1818

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes transfer as; $F(1, 107) = 1.704, p = .195$ $t(107) = 2.50, p = 0.014$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.9815 Low fans = 3.2182



H4d: Hypothesis accepted

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller complement as; $F(1, 98.638) = 7.675, p = .007$ $t(98.638) = 2.01, p = 0.047$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.50 Low fans = 4.8727

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag complement as; $F(1, 107) = 0.229, p = .663$ $t(107) = 3.75, p = 0.000$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.8889 Low fans = 2.7636

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes complement as; $F(1, 107) = 2.036, p = .157$ $t(107) = 2.50, p = 0.014$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.4259 Low fans = 2.6727



H4e: Hypothesis accepted

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller extension quality as; $F(1, 94.099) = 11.723, p = .001$ $t(94.099) = 2.8, p = 0.006$

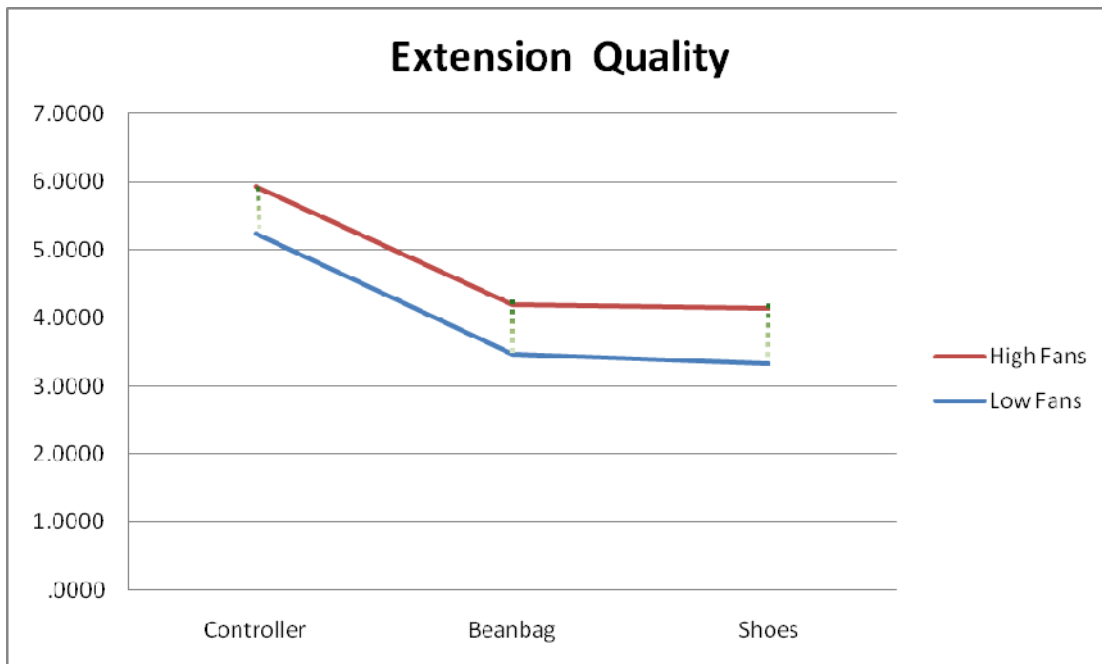
The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.9259 Low fans = 5.2364

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag extension quality as; $F(1, 107) = 0.980, p = .324$ $t(107) = 2.41, p = 0.017$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 4.1852 Low fans = 3.4727

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes extension quality as; $F(1, 107) = 1.120, p = .292$ $t(107) = 2.64, p = 0.010$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 4.1481 Low fans = 3.3273



H4f: Hypothesis partially supported

- There is no significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller category fit as; $F(1, 107) = 0.513, p = .476$ $t(107) = 1.46, p = 0.147$

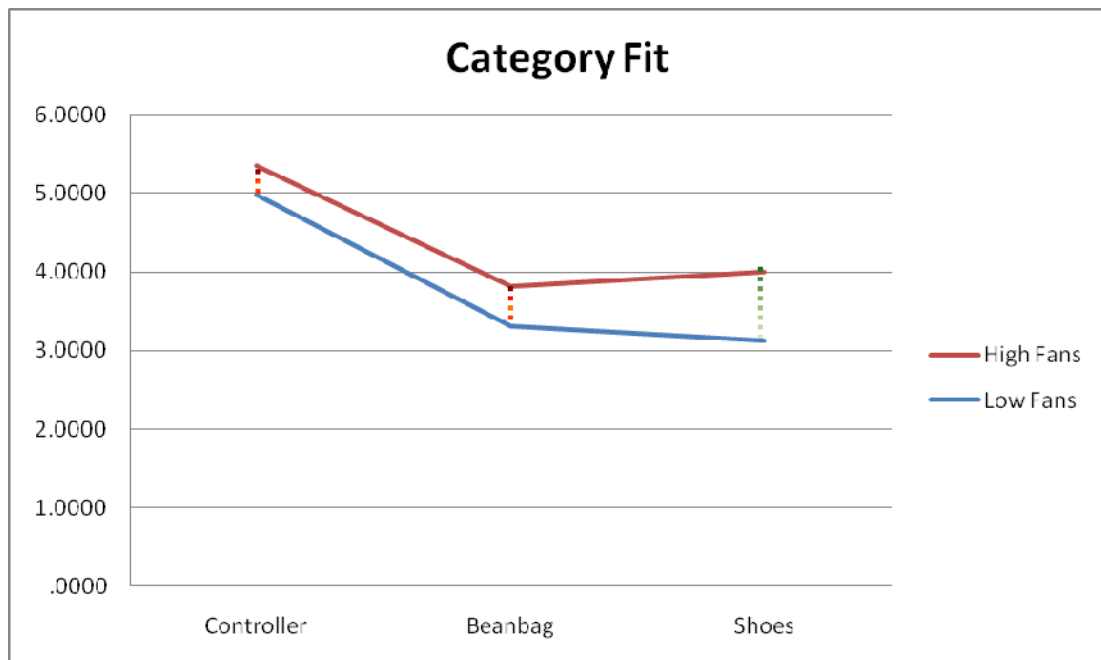
The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.3519 Low fans = 4.9818

- There is no significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag category fit as; $F(1, 107) = 0.334, p = .565$ $t(107) = 1.86, p = 0.066$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.8148 Low fans = 3.3091

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes category fit as; $F(1, 107) = 1.147, p = .287$ $t(107) = 3.08, p = 0.003$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 4.0 Low fans = 3.1273



H4g: Hypothesis accepted

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Controller purchase intention as; $F(1, 99.132) = 10.283, p = .002$ $t(99.132) = 3.98, p = 0.000$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.2037 Low fans = 3.9152

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Beanbag purchase intention as; $F(1, 107) = 0.000, p = .998$ $t(107) = 5.51, p = 0.000$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 4.2346 Low fans = 2.5818

- There is a significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Shoes purchase intention as; $F(1, 107) = 0.217, p = .642$ $t(107) = 4.58, p = 0.000$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 3.6667 Low fans = 2.3515

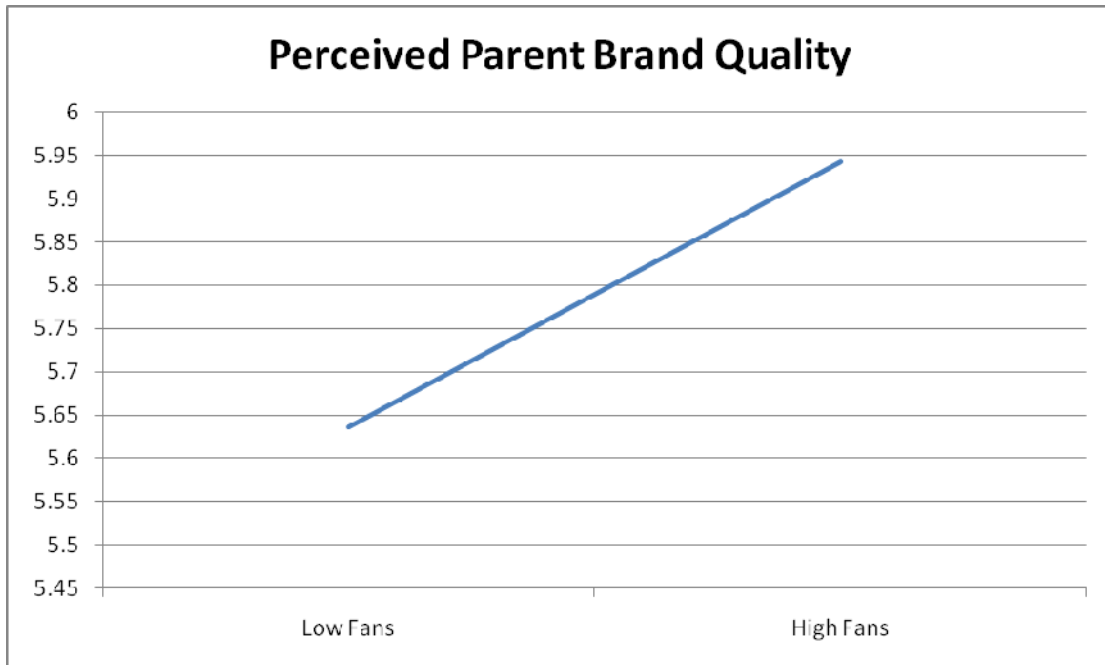


H4h: Hypothesis rejected

- There is no significant difference between high and low level fans' ratings of Perceived quality of the parent brand as;

$$F(1, 101.248) = 4.956, p = .028 \quad t(101.248) = 1.35, p = 0.179$$

The mean ratings of each group were: High fans = 5.9423 Low fans = 5.6364



Examination of the differences between the two fan groups' ratings of congruency and purchase intention for each product indicated that there is a significant difference between the two groups' ratings of image fit, complement, extension quality and purchase intention for all three products, as well as for transfer and category fit in relation to the shoes.

Comparison of Low Fans' vs High Fans' Ratings			
	Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Image Fit	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*
Transfer	p > .05	p > .05	p < .05*
Complement	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*

Extension Quality	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*
Category Fit	p > .05	p > .05	p < .05*
Purchase Intention	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*

*indicates there is a significant difference between ratings given by the two groups for that product.

Exploratory Analysis – Research Question 1

A one way ANOVA test was conducted to explore the differences between the high fan group and low fan group's ratings of parent brand congruency and purchase intention ratings of each brand extension. Gabriel Post Hoc test was used in the analysis. (When viewing the interpretation of this note: *indicates there is a significant difference between ratings given by the two groups for that/those products) There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of image fit as $F(5, 321) = 26.579, p < .05$

Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Image Fit		Fan group 1 (low fans)		
		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*
	Beanbag	p < .05*	p > .05	p < .05*
	Shoes	p < .05*	p > .05	p < .05*

There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of transfer as

$F(5, 321) = 14.497, p < .05$

Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Transfer		Fan group 1 (low fans)		
		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	p > .05	p < .05*	p < .05*
	Beanbag	p < .05*	p > .05	p > .05
	Shoes	p > .05	p > .05	p > .05

There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of complement as
 $F(5, 321) = 28.030, p < .05$

Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Complement		Fan group 1 (low fans)		
		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$	$p < .05^*$
	Beanbag	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$
	Shoes	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p > .05$

There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of extension quality
as

$F(5, 321) = 25.213, p < .05$ Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Extension Quality		Fan group 1 (low fans)		
		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$	$p < .05^*$
	Beanbag	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$
	Shoes	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p > .05$

There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of category fit as
 $F(5, 321) = 22.038, p < .05$ Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Category Fit		Fan group 1 (low fans)		
		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$	$p < .05^*$
	Beanbag	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p > .05$
	Shoes	$p < .05^*$	$p > .05$	$p < .05^*$

There was a significant difference between each groups' ratings of purchase intention
as

$F(5, 321) = 24.467, p < .05$ Post Hoc results are interpreted in the following table.

Purchase Intention	Fan group 1 (low fans)		
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		Controller	Beanbag	Shoes
Fan group 2 (high fans)	Controller	p < .05*	p < .05*	p < .05*
	Beanbag	p > .05	p < .05*	p < .05*
	Shoes	p > .05	p < .05*	p < .05*

DISCUSSION

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were all partially supported as a result of respondents from any level of fanaticism rating the beanbag and the controller similarly in terms of parent brand congruency and purchase intention, while the controller was rated significantly higher than the other two products for all elements of congruency as well as purchase intention. This indicates that a more extreme low congruency product should have been used rather than shoes as they were considered to be fairly similar to the beanbag. This also indicates that respondents considered the controller to have significantly more congruency with their favourite game than the other two products. Hypotheses 4a, 4d, 4e and 4g were accepted, indicating that higher level fans rated all three products significantly higher than low level fans in terms of image fit, complement, extension quality and purchase intention. Hypotheses 4c and 4f were partially supported, indicating that higher level fans only rated shoes significantly higher than low level fans in terms of transfer and category fit.

The most interesting results found from Research Question 1 were in regards to differences in the two groups' purchase intention regarding the three products. In relation to congruency, there were significant differences between the ratings given for each product and between the three products, however when these are compared with the differences in purchase intention, it is evident that the difference is much larger and that higher level fans are as, if not more likely to purchase any of the products, regardless of congruency than the low level fans are to purchase the most congruent product.

The analysis shows that the low level fan group gave significantly higher ratings to the controller than the high level fan group gave to the beanbag and the shoes in every element of congruency (the only exception being high fans' ratings of shoes in terms of transfer). This would suggest that the low level fan group would be significantly more likely to purchase the controller than the high level fan group would be to

purchase the shoes or the beanbag. However it was found that there was no significant difference between the low fans' ratings of purchase intention for the controller and the high fans' ratings of purchase intention for the shoes or the beanbag.

This suggests that while parent brand congruency may affect the consumer's purchase intention towards a product, the level of fanaticism felt towards the parent brand also has a significant impact on the success of a brand extension. A brand extension with a high level of parent brand congruency but a low level of fanaticism felt for the parent brand will experience similar levels of success to another brand extension with a low level of parent brand congruency but a high level of fanaticism felt towards the parent brand.

Managerial Implications

Therefore it is necessary in markets such as video games where consumer fanaticism is prevalent, to plan for the success of a brand extension not only taking into account perceived parent brand congruency of the new product, but also the level of fanaticism felt towards the parent brand by the brand extension's target market.

From this and future research, marketers will be able to better determine what type of brand extension is most appropriate to their target market by examining the level of fanaticism felt towards their brand. It is fair to say that a more congruent product will always be more successful regardless of the target market's level of fanaticism, but this additional knowledge allows marketers to gain a competitive advantage in releasing a brand extension.

This is due to the nature of products with different levels of congruency; take for example the hypothetical brand extensions used in this study. The controller and the beanbag were chosen for this study because they both cost roughly the same amount at retail outlets, meaning purchase intention would not be affected by price sensitivity. However the beanbag may cost a fraction of what the controller does to produce and so would generate a higher profit margin per unit. Knowing that high level fans would be as likely to purchase the beanbag as low level fans would be to purchase the controller, it may in fact be more profitable – and therefore a more successful introduction of a brand extension – to introduce the beanbag.

This of course depends on the strategy undertaken by a particular brand, the resources available to it and the market it operates in. What this study provides to marketers is a different perspective on what contributes to the success of a brand extension and what products are appropriate to introduce in a given set of circumstances.

Conceptual/Methodological Implications

There has been little to no previous research focusing on quantitatively measuring levels of consumer fanaticism and so the development of a quantitative model based on concepts developed by previous studies in this field holds methodological value in that there is potential for future application of this in studies relating to consumer fanaticism. Although the model used was not completely ideal as there are other concepts of fanaticism which could have been measure and the scope was limited in terms of the timeframe allowed from peak of fanaticism to present, this scale proved to be a reliable measure of the items which were included and can be elaborated on in future research.

Furthermore, the relationship between consumer fanaticism and the acceptance of brand extensions has not been examined in great detail previous to this and has yet to be applied to this market. Therefore, new concepts relating to this specific area of consumer behaviour may be developed through this study and the application of the existing concepts used to this particular market can also be examined.

LIMITATIONS

The model used for the measurement of respondents' levels of fanaticism was adapted from a set of questions used for a purely qualitative study and so was not an ideal research instrument to be used as a quantitative measure. This limited the scope of the research in regard to the timeframe which could be allowed between the release of a respondent's favourite video game and the time of the research, due to the nature of video games and the behaviour of video game fans over extended periods of time. In future research, a model should be adapted or constructed to better deal with the nature of fanaticism with regards to the specific area of interest.

While the congruency items used gave a general idea of respondents' ratings of congruency and purchase intention towards each brand extension, a more extensive

model should have been used in which more elements of parent brand congruency were measured. Perceived manufacturing complexity of the brand extensions was excluded from analysis as it was found to be inconsistent with the rest of the items used. A more extensive model with a re-wording of this particular question would allow it to be included in future research as an element of congruency.

The example brand extension products used were not appropriate for their intended purpose as the shoes and the beanbag were found to be too similar in terms of parent brand congruency and purchase intention. It was intended that the controller would be a high congruency product, while the beanbag would have a medium level of congruency and the shoes a low level of congruency. As the shoes and beanbag were found to be rated similarly by respondents, they were both used as low congruency products, which impacted negatively on the range of results available for analysis. In future, more rigorous pretesting should be done to determine a more appropriate example of a brand extension which would have extremely low parent brand congruency.

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