# The Effect of Evoked Feelings and Cognitions, Parent Brand Fit, Experiences and Brand Personality on the Adoption Intention of Branded Electric Cars for Early and Late Adopter Segments

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## 1 Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Electric cars may be an environmentally-friendly answer to the ecological consequences of personal mobility. Large car brands are preparing to launch an electric car in the near future or they just did (Renault, Opel, Nissan, BMW). A brand is a portfolio of meanings and associations (Guzman et al., 2006). Cars are branded products that evoke all kinds of associations, functional as well as symbolic. Symbolic associations, such as brand personality and brand experience, are major components of brand identity and brand image (Biel, 1993; Kapferer, 2008; De Pelsmacker et al., 2007; Brakus et al., 2009). The present study focuses on the role of brand personality and brand experiences in the usage intention formation of branded electric cars. Earlier research (Moons and De Pelsmacker, 2012) also revealed that emotions evoked by the electric car and positive cognitions are important drivers of the usage intention of electric cars. Another factor that have emerged as important in determining extension evaluation is the perceived fit or congruency between an extension and the parent brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Patro and Jaiswal, 2003; Grime et al., 2002). Finally, people can be placed in categories according to their likelihood and speed of adopting an innovation. The innovators and the early adopters are of major importance to get an innovation launched on the market.

The purpose of this study is to explore how early and late majority segments, described by means of different attitudinal and behavioural characteristics, react differently to the idea of a branded electric car extension in terms of usage intention formation. We investigate how early and late adopter consumer groups form intentions towards using a branded electric car, and more particularly what the relative importance in this intention formation is of emotional and cognitive responses, perceived extension – parent brand fit, anticipated experiences with and perceived personality of the car.

The contribution of this paper is that it systematically and jointly analyses the impact on electric car extension evaluation of emotional, cognitive and fit responses to the extension, perceived brand experiences and brand personality.

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This is relevant for advertising practitioners. Appealing to early adopter segments is crucial for the success of a new product introduction. Our results provide guidelines on how to position and present the branded electric car in order to be attractive to early adopter segments.

## 2 Literature Background and Research Questions

According to the associative network theory, brand image is a mental scheme formed by a network of concepts (nodes) interconnected by linkages or associations (Anderson, 1983, Morrin, 1999). Brands can have rational and symbolic associations. Brand personality and brand experience are major components of symbolic brand associations. Consumers use or value brands for self-expression (Swaminathan et al., 2007). Therefore, symbolic associations such as anticipated experiences with the car or perceived brand personality may be important drivers of brand evaluations and buying intentions (Biel, 1993; De Pelsmacker et al., 2007; Brakus et al., 2009). Similarly, symbolic brand extension associations can have a major impact on brand extension evaluations.

Besides rational, cognitive appreciations, there is an overwhelming evidence that affective responses play a major role in shaping consumers' evaluative reactions to (new) products (Perlusz, 2011; Bagozzi et al., 1999; Richins, 1997; Kim et al., 2007; Penn, 2007). Earlier research revealed that this is also the case for eco-friendly innovations in high involvement product categories, such as cars (Moons and De Pelsmacker, 2012). Evoked emotions and cognitions may therefore be important drivers of evaluative responses to branded electric cars.

Another important factor that determines brand extension evaluation is the perceived fit between the extension and the parent brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Patro and Jaiswal, 2003, Grime et al., 2002). Therefore, extension-parent brand fit may be an important determinant of positive extension evaluation.

Five market segmentation characteristics that could be indicative of early adoptership of this eco-friendly innovation are further explored here: environmental concern, environmental behaviour, opinion leadership, innovativeness and product involvement. Environmental concern is a powerful predictor of the willingness to engage in actions that protect the environment (Gärling and Thøgersen, 2001; Oliver and Rosen, 2010). Heffner et al. (2007) found that consumers who show high levels of environmental concern, chose a HEV (Hybrid or electric vehicle) to communicate interests and values related to environmentalism. Consequently, for electric cars, environmental concern may be important to distinguish early and late adopters. When people act in an environmentally friendly way in one area, this behaviour tends to spill over into other areas (Thøgersen, 1999). Environmental behaviour is therefore an important potential determinant of electric car adoption. Opinion leadership

reflects an individual's ability to influence other individuals' attitudes or overt behaviour in a particular domain (e.g. cars). Opinion leaders are often the first ones to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 1995; Gatignon and Robertson, 1991; Chaudhuri et al., 2010; Gärling and Thogerson, 2001; Jansson, 2011). In the context of the adoption of hybrids, Oliver and Rosen (2010) identified opinion leadership as a relevant variable to distinguish segments. Consumer innovativeness is defined as the predisposition to buy new and different products and brands (Steenkamp et al., 1999). Innovativeness is the bottom-line type of behaviour in the diffusion process (Rogers, 1995) and is central to the theory of diffusion of innovations (Midgley and Dowling, 1978). Therefore innovativeness is a relevant indicator to distinguish early and late adopters of electric cars. Self-identification and feeling good about oneself are partly met through consumers' identification with certain brands. These brands must belong to product categories that are involving for the consumer. The effect of involvement with a product category is the intensive search for the product, extensive brand evaluations and the evocation of word-of-mouth spread of information. So, highly involved individuals gain a lot of insights about the product and may also become aware of new products earlier than others do. They are also likely to more quickly adopt these new products (Bloch et al., 1986). Consequently, involvement may be an important segmentation variable to identify early adopters.

The present study thus tries to answer the following research question:

*To what extent do consumer groups that differ in terms of environmental concern, environmental behaviour, opinion leadership, innovativeness and product involvement differ in the formation of their intentions to use a branded electric car in function of their emotional and cognitive responses to an electric extension of an existing car brand, perceived extension-parent brand fit, anticipated experiences and perceived extension personality?*

## 3 Research Method

The study was conducted in a sample of 512 consumers, representative of the Belgian population in terms of age and gender. Each respondent was exposed to an electric car concept that was presented by means of visual and verbal characteristics. This extension was explicitly linked to one of four brands, i.e., Alfa, BMW, Toyota and Volvo, in order to investigate extension attitudes based on a sufficiently broad diversity of car brands. In a pre-test, these cars came out as substantially different in terms of brand experience and brand personality. Respondents were randomly assigned to the four groups. Half of the respondents in each brand condition owned a car of the given brand Each of the participants was exposed to a set of 8 pictures: one general picture of a car with six distinct

characteristics, six pictures highlighting the details of each of the six characteristics, and the general picture again. Respondents were told that the brand to which they were assigned was going to launch an electric extension like the one they just saw. They were then asked to indicate their emotions and cognitive reactions to the extension, perceived extension-parent brand fit, anticipated experiences, perceived brand personality, and intention to use the electric extension. They were then asked to answer questions about their environmental friendliness and behaviour, their innovativeness, opinion leadership and involvement with cars. Finally they had to provide a number of socio-demographic characteristics.

*Measures:* An overview of the measures is shown in appendix: extension usage intention (*PIExtension*), the valence of the emotions towards the extension (*EmoExtension),* the valence of the cognitions towards the extension (*CogExtension*), parent brand - extension fit (*Parentfit*), anticipated experiences towards the extension: Sensorial *(EXSensory),* Behavioural *(EXBehav)* and Intellectual *(EXIntell)*, and brand personality of the extension: Responsible (*PRespons*), Active(*PActiv*), Bold (*PBold*), Simple (*PSimple*) and Emotional (*PEmotional*). The new environmental paradigm scale (Dunlap, 2008) was used to measure the *environmental concern* of individuals. The *environmental behaviour* measure is a list of 15 possible environmental friendly behaviours one can act upon. Environmentally friendly behaviour was calculated as the number of behaviours that an individual claims to do for environmental reasons. Further, the degree of *opinion leadership* with respect to cars, *innovativeness* and *product category involvement* were measured. All constructs were measured on 5-point scales. All scale items loaded on one factor or subfactor (for experience and personality) and all scales had good alpha scores (see appendix). Scores per scale were were averaged across items for further analysis. The five consumer segmentation variables were median split (median scorers were removed) in order to compare individuals scoring high and low on each characteristic.

## 4 Results

In Table 1, an overview is given of the differences in usage intention of an electric car between the consumer groups defined above. Usage intention substantially differs between each of these consumer groups in the expected direction. Therefore they can all be considered as relevant characteristics to distinguish early from late adopters.

The analyses are split up in two parts. In each part, the usage intention towards the extension is predicted by the emotions and cognitions evoked by the extension and perceived extension-parent brand fit. In the first analysis (Table 2) additional independent variables are the anticipated experiences towards the extension. In the second analysis (table 3), additional independents are the

perceived personality characteristics of the extension. These analyses are all carried out on groups scoring low and high on each of the segmentation variables.

*Table 1. Differences in usage intention of an electric car between consumer segments*

| Consumer segments | Low | High | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Environmental behaviour | 2.401 (.990) | 2.856 (1.075) | <.001 |
| Environmental concern | 2.534 (1.026) | 2.783 (1.042) | .010 |
| Opinion leadership | 2.375 (.960) | 2.992 (1.104) | <.001 |
| Innovativeness | 2.307 (.996) | 2.889 (1.014) | <.001 |
| Involvement | 2.562 (.993) | 2.765 (1.094) | .041 |

Cells are mean scores on 5-point scales (standard deviation)

Evoked cognitions by the electric car extension are the most important determinant of the intention to use the electric extension in all segments and in all analyses. The effect of evoked emotions and perceived parent brand fit is also a significant driver of intention formation. For certain segments, emotions are a relatively more important driver of intention formation than for others. Highly environmentally concerned individuals, innovators, as well as lowly involved people are significantly more driven by emotions towards the extension than other segments. Highly involved individuals and people that are not innovative mainly take parent brand fit into account. In all segments, the usage intention towards the extension is influenced by the anticipated intellectual experience of the electric extension. The anticipated sensorial experiences on usage intention is less important for highly ecological concerned people and for those who score low on opinion leadership.

*Table 2. Intention to use the extension as a function of the anticipated experience of the extension, the emotional and cognitive response towards the extension, and perceived extension-parent brand fit, per subcategory of respondents.*

| | Ex-sensory | Ex-Behav | ExIntell | Emo Extension | Cog Extension | Parent fit | $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low concern | .212 (.008) | .103 (.160) | .226 (<.001) | .083 (.168) | .235 (<.001) | .055 (.354) | .557 |
| High concern | .104 (.192) | .07 1 (.328) | .158 (.014) | .228 (<.001) | .295 (<.001) | .084 (.116) | .545 |
| Low opinion leadership | .094 (.228) | .06 7 (.365) | .172 (.014) | .181 (.007) | .315 (<.001) | .027 (.656) | .472 |
| High opinion leadership | .201 (.038) | -.043 (.611) | .255 (<.001) | .178 (.019) | .313 (<.001) | .062 (.363) | .607 |
| Low Innovative-ness | .179 (.034) | .028 (.707) | .271 (<.001) | .070 (.279) | .256 (<.001) | .102 (.075) | .522 |
| High Innovative-ness | .156 (.042) | .117 (.104) | .143 (.011) | .183 (.003) | .247 (<.001) | .031 (.276) | .519 |
| Low involvement | .239 (.003) | .024 (.748) | .205 (.001) | .188 (.002) | .277 (<.001) | .026 (.440) | .563 |
| High involvement | .158 (.050) | .131 (.076) | .166 (.020) | .074 (.255) | .271 (<.001) | .114 (.053) | .533 |
| Low environm. Behaviour | .231 (.005) | .087 (.275) | .212 (.001) | .159 (.022) | .186 (.003) | .018 (.764) | .513 |
| High environm. Behaviour | .157 (.039) | .010 (.881) | .193 (.003) | .151 (.010) | .304 (<.001) | .142 (.009) | .585 |

Cells are Betas (p-value – level of significance)

For the models that include perceived personality characteristics (Table 3), an emotional as well as a responsible personality is attractive for the low ecologically concerned individuals. A simple car personality is strongly appreciated by the low opinion leaders. Strong opinion leaders have a stronger preference for responsible cars. People who are less innovative are more driven by the simplicity and the emotionality of the car extension, while more innovative people value a responsible car personality more. The usage intention of individuals that do not act in an environmentally-friendly way is more influenced by the simplicity of the car, while the highly environmentally behaving group takes a responsible image more into account.

*Table 3. Intention to use the extension as a function of the perceived personality of the extension, he emotional and cognitive response towards the extension, and perceived extension-parent brand fit, per subcategory of respondents.*

| | Prespons | Pactiv | Pbold | Psimple | Pemo | Emo Extension | Cog Extension | Parentfit | $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low concern | .019 (.796) | .054 (.489) | .009 (.860) | .133 (.022) | .110 (.044) | .268 (<.001) | .351 (<.001) | .096 (.163) | .469 |
| High concern | .192 (.004) | .070 (.350) | .021 (.676) | .023 (.665) | .045 (.385) | .295 (<.001) | .349 (<.001) | .112 (.044) | .526 |
| Low opinion leadership | -.042 (.580) | .109 (.156) | -.040 (.449) | .239 (<.001) | .081 (.137) | .362 (<.001) | .399 (<.001) | -.003 (.957) | .483 |
| High opinion leadership | .221 (.003) | -.166 (.068) | .026 (.668) | .010 (.871) | .059 (.310) | .319 (<.001) | .413 (<.001) | .117 (.111) | .574 |
| Low innovativeness | .073 (.401) | -.018 (.832) | .011 (.852) | .104 (.083) | .148 (.010) | .242 (.001) | .365 (<.001) | .125 (.047) | .463 |
| High innovativeness | .114 (.063) | -.023 (.754) | .007 (.891) | .072 (.212) | .038 (.476) | .304 (<.001) | .341 (<.001) | .094 (.127) | .470 |
| Low involvement | .163 (.023) | .026 (.731) | -.028 (.610) | .065 (.294) | .115 (.039) | .295 (<.001) | .293 (<.001) | .067 (.314) | .488 |
| High involvement | .168 (.038) | -.053 (.552) | .036 (.504) | .072 (.231) | .073 (.221) | .169 (.018) | .401 (<.001) | .133 (.037) | .490 |
| Low environm. Behaviour | .122 (.106) | .096 (.269) | -.008 (.888) | .157 (.010) | .158 (.004) | .304 (<.001) | .310 (<.001) | -.008 (.898) | .473 |
| High environm. Behaviour | .120 (.071) | -.033 (.633) | .000 (.998) | .074 (.176) | .032 (.550) | .262 (<.001) | .364 (<.001) | .183 (.002) | .548 |

Cells are Betas (p-value – level of significance)

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

For the formation of the intention to use the electric car extension, cognitions are at least as important as emotions and also overrule the effect of parent fit. Nevertheless, emotions are also important determinants of intention formation towards the brand extension in all segments. This is in line with the evidence of the role of affective reactions in consumer decision making (Perlusz 2011; Bagozzi et al., 1999; Richins 1997; Kim et al., 2007; Penn, 2007) and illustrates that this is the case even in the context of high involvement eco-friendly innovative products, particularly during the early stages of really new product introductions (Wood and Morreau, 2006). The effect of parent fit, although less important, is also significant for all the segments. Also the relevance of anticipated experiences and brand personality is demonstrated. In all segments, the usage intention towards the electric extension is influenced by its anticipated intellectual experience. The effect of anticipated sensorial experiences is also important for different segments. A responsible brand personality image is an important determinant of a favorable intention towards the extension for all segments. It seems that the extension 'electric' evokes appreciation for this personality trait. Also a more emotional and bold personality is appealing for people belonging to different segments.

There are specific drivers of usage intention that are typical for early adopter segments. They can inform designers and advertisers on how to persuade early adopter segments to adopt the electric car. Emotions towards the electric car are a strong driver to persuade early adopter segments. This is especially true for highly environmentally concerned people and innovators. Also cognitions play an important role, especially for people who already behave in an environmentally friendly way. Evoking a sensorial and an intellectual experience and showing sophistication, and an active, emotional and bold personality is also important for all early adopter segments. A strong anticipated intellectual experience is especially appealing for groups highly involved in cars. Presenting the extension as responsible, and more responsible than the individual, is particularly important for innovators, opinion leaders and highly involved people. Presenting the extension as bold and emotional is particularly important for highly involved and highly environmentally concerned groups. Positioning the extension as more emotional than the individual is an important motivator for innovators and highly environmentally concerned people. Highly involved individuals are also triggered by anticipated behavioural experiences and by the idea that the car has a more active personality than themselves.

Overall, to appeal to early adopter segments, the electric car should be positioned as a sophisticated, responsible car with an emotional and active personality. It should evoke anticipated intellectual experiences, but also sensorial ones. And, most importantly, it should evoke strong positive emotional reactions and be aspirational in terms of responsibility and emotionality.

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## 7 Appendix

*Item description and source of the extension response scales*

| | Scale and items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** | **Usage Intention towards the branded electric extension (PIExtension)**<br>• I have the intention to use this electric BRAND<br>• I will recommend using this electric BRAND others<br>• I expect using this electric BRAND in the near future | Cauberghe and De Pelsmacker (2011) |
| **2.** | **Emotions towards the branded electric extension (EmoExtension)** | Cauberghe and De Pelsmacker (2011) |
| • | The electric BRAND shown evokes positive feelings in me | |
| • | I would find it very pleasant it to drive the electric BRAND shown | |
| • | Driving the electric BRAND shown could frustrate me (r) | |
| • | Driving the electric BRAND shown could easily bore me (r) | |
| • | The electric BRAND shown gives me a negative feeling (r) | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3. Cognitions towards the branded electric extension (CogExtension)**<br>• This electric BRAND provides me with a lot of advantages<br>• I find this electric BRAND innovative<br>• The media will promote this electric BRAND<br>• The government will take measures to stimulate the use of this electric BRAND | Moons and De Pelsmacker (2012) |
| **4. Anticipated experience of the branded extension**<br>***Sensory (EXSensory)***<br>• Will make a strong impression on my senses<br>• Will stimulate my senses<br>• Will be an emotional car<br>***Behavioural (EXBehav)***<br>• Will incite me to active driving<br>• Will make me feel things fysically<br>***Intellectual (EXIntell)***<br>• Will stimulate me to drive consciously<br>• Will stimulate my curiosity and problem-solving capacity | Brakus et al. (2009) |
| **5. Fit between the electric extension and the parent brand (Parentfit)**<br>• This is very fitting for BRAND<br>• This is very logical for BRAND<br>• This is very appropriate for BRAND | Dens and De Pelsmacker (2010) |
| **6. Environmental concern**<br>• We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support<br>• Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs<br>• When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences<br>• Human ingenuity will insure that we do not make the Earth unliveable<br>• Humans are seriously abusing the environment<br>• The Earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them<br>• Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist<br>• The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations<br>• Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature<br>• The so-called “ecological crisis” facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated<br>• The Earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources<br>• Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature<br>• The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset<br>• Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it<br>• If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe | Dunlap (2008) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **7. Innovativeness**<br>• I like to have new experiences and changes in my daily routine<br>• I am constantly looking for new ideas and experiences<br>• I like variation and new things in my daily life<br>• When getting bored, I look out for new challenges and experiences<br>• I am more interested in buying new than known products<br>• I like to buy new and different products<br>• New products excite me<br>• I am usually among the first to try new products<br>• I know more than others on latest products<br>• I try new products before my friends and neighbours | Roehrich (2004)<br>Venkatraman and Price (1990) |
| **8. Involvement**<br>• Buying a car is an unimportant decision<br>• Buying a car demands not much thinking<br>• Making a wrong decision in buying a car can mean a big loss for me | Dens and De Pelsmacker (2010) |