Do Brands Like Us?  
The Perceived Liking of the Brand for the Self and Brand Attraction

Lora Mitchell Harding  
Belmont University

Ashlee Humphreys  
Northwestern University

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Do brands like us, and what is the role of such perceptions in consumer-brand relationships?
Consumer-brand relationships

Brands extend beyond physical attributes of product/service

- Host of associations, which include user imagery, employee imagery, etc. (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993)

Brands are thought to have human characteristics

- Brands are parasocial entities with personalities (Aaker 1997; Gardner and Levy 1955; Plummer 1985)

Brands are capable of serving as active relationship partners

- Consumers develop relationships with brands (Fournier 1998, 2009; see also Blackston 1993)
- Potential for a dyadic component largely overlooked (for exceptions, see Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Blackston 1993)

Interpersonal relationships

People like those who like them

- Perceived partner liking one of the primary determinants of interpersonal attraction (Eastwick and Finkel 2009)

Told a stranger would like them → Attracted to that stranger

(Backman and Secord 1959)
Cues of brand liking

**Partner actions a primary source of perceived partner liking**  
(Backman and Secord 1959; Byrne and Rhamey 1965)
- Friendly behaviors of brand employees
- Friendly behaviors of brand users
- Friendly behaviors of brand (e.g., promotional offers)

**Self-other similarity increases attraction through perceived partner liking**  
(Aronson and Worchel 1966; Condon and Crano 1988; Singh et al. 2007)
- Perceived similarity to brand users
- Attitudinal similarity with brand

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**Roadmap**

- **Exp. 1** → Brand liking cues increase brand attraction
- **Exp. 2 & 3** → Perceived liking of brand for self mediates this effect
- **Survey** → Perceived liking of brand for self distinct from initial liking for brand
- **Exp. 4** → Moderating role of brand selectivity
Exp. 1: Cues of brand liking increase brand attraction

**Brand actions** 

**Self-brand similarity**

Cues of brand liking → Perceived liking of brand for self → Brand attraction

**H1**: Consumers are more attracted to brands that exhibit cues of liking, either through friendly brand actions or self-brand similarity

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**Exp. 1: Cues of brand liking increase brand attraction**

**Target brand**: Element Fragrance, a fictitious fragrance brand

**Product description** → **Focus group results** → **Interaction with fragrance representatives** → **Purchase interest**

**Self-brand similarity** *(high vs. low)*

**Brand actions** *(friendly vs. neutral)*
Exp. 1: Cues of brand liking increase brand attraction

**Purchase Interest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral Brand Actions</th>
<th>Friendly Brand Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar Users</td>
<td>Similar Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar Users</td>
<td>Similar Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brand actions x self-brand similarity

Exp. 2, 3: Perceived liking of brand for self is the mediating mechanism

**H2** Consumers’ perceptions that the brand likes them mediates the effect of brand liking cues on brand attraction
Exp. 2: Effect of self-brand similarity mediated by perceived liking of brand

Target brand: Element Fragrance, a fictitious fragrance brand

- Product description ➔ Focus group results ➔ Perceived liking of brand for self ➔ Purchase interest

Self-brand similarity (high vs. low)

Exp. 2: Effect of self-brand similarity mediated by perceived liking of brand

- Self-Brand Similarity ➔ Perceived Liking of Brand for Self ➔ Purchase Interest

\[
\text{Indirect Effect} = .84, \text{CI [.18, 1.00]}
\]

\[
.34^* \quad (0.06, p > 0.60) \quad .37^{**} \quad .67^{***}
\]
Exp. 3: **Effect of brand actions mediated by perceived liking of brand**

**Target brand:** Grove Bank, a fictitious bank

![Diagram](Image)

**Exp. 3: Effect of brand actions mediated by perceived liking of brand**

![Diagram](Image)

Indirect Effect

.37, CI [.17, .63]
Cues of brand liking

Brand attraction

Perceived liking of brand for self

H3: Consumers’ perceptions that the brand likes them are correlated with, but distinct from, their initial liking for the brand

Survey: Perceived liking of brand distinct from consumers’ initial liking for brand

Participants’ attitudes
(Byrne 1971)

Describe Chevy as a person
(Aaker 1997)

Chevy’s attitudes

Self-brand similarity
(continuous)

Initial liking for brand

Perceived liking of brand for self

Brand attitude

Self liking of brand
(continuous)

Brand liking of self
(continuous)
Survey: Perceived liking of brand distinct from consumers’ initial liking for brand

Perceptions of brand liking x self-brand similarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Brand Liking Perceptions (-1 std)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Brand Liking Perceptions (+1 std)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dissimilar Attitudes (-1 std)  Similar Attitudes (+1 std)

2.77  4.54

4.84  3.79

Roadmap

Exp. 1 → Brand liking cues increase brand attraction

Exp. 2 & 3 → Perceived liking of brand for self mediates this effect

Survey → Perceived liking of brand for self distinct from initial liking for brand

Can these findings be explained by simple associative learning (i.e., affect transfer)? (Sweldens, Van Osselaer, and Janiszewski 2010)

When will consumers question the truth value of brand liking cues?
Exp. 1: Brand liking cues increase brand attraction

Exp. 2 & 3: Perceived liking of brand for self mediates this effect

Survey: Perceived liking of brand for self distinct from initial liking for brand

Exp. 4: Moderating role of brand selectivity

Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

Consumers may question the truth value of brand liking cues when those cues are directed to everyone in general

Cues of brand liking → Reason to doubt cues → Selectivity of liking cues (Eastwick and Finkel 2009) → Perceived liking of brand for self → Brand attraction
Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

Consumers may question the truth value of brand liking cues when those cues are directed to everyone in general.

- **H4a**: Selective (i.e., dyadic) brand actions will be *more* diagnostic.
- **H4b**: Unselective (i.e., generalized) brand actions will be *less* diagnostic.

**Cues of brand liking** → **Perceived liking of brand for self** → **Brand attraction**

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**Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity**

- **Favorite clothing brand**
- **Email with promo offer**
- **Offer sent to few or all other customers**
- **Brand actions (friendly vs. neutral)**
- **Brand selectivity (dyadic vs. generalized)**
- **Brand attitude**
- **Brand attitude change**
- **Perceived liking of brand for self**
Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

**Brand Attitude**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dyadic Brand Actions</th>
<th>Generalized Brand Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand selectivity</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x brand actions</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>7.70</td>
</tr>
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<th>Actions</th>
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<td>8.18</td>
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Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

**Brand Attitude Change**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand selectivity</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x brand actions</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
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Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

Perceived Brand Liking

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<tr>
<td>Brand selectivity x brand actions</td>
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<td>Neutral Actions</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>Friendly Actions</td>
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Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

Indirect Effect

\[ a_3 b = -.21, \ SE = .16, \ CI [-.64, -.002] \]

Perceived Brand Liking

\[ a_3 = -.38, \quad t = -2.15, \ p < .05 \]

Brand Actions

\[ b = .28, \quad t = 2.47, \ p < .05 \]

Brand Selectivity

\[ c'_1 = -.59, \quad t = -3.05, \ p < .05 \]

Brand Actions x Brand Selectivity

--- \[ p < .05 \]

--- \[ n.s. \]
Exp. 4: Diagnosticity of brand liking cues and brand selectivity

Indirect Effect
\[ a_3b = -0.15, SE = 0.11, CI [-0.47, -0.002] \]

Perceived Brand Liking

Brand Actions

Brand Selectivity

Brand Actions x Brand Selectivity

Brand Attitude Change

\[ a_1 \]
\[ a_2 \]
\[ a_3 = -0.38, t = -2.15, p < 0.05 \]
\[ c'_1 \]
\[ c'_2 \]
\[ c'_3 = -0.48, t = -3.46, p = 0.001 \]

Summary

- Consumers are more attracted to brands that exhibit cues of brand liking
- Mediated by perceptions that the brand likes the consumer
- Perceived liking of the brand for the self distinct from initial liking for the brand
- Cues of brand liking not simply accepted at face value; only diagnostic when brand is perceived to be selective
Summary

Robustness
- Real and fictitious brands from different categories – fragrance, bank, automobile, apparel
- Experimental and survey methodologies

Convergence
- Brand action cues – interactions with brand employees, the brand itself
- Self-brand similarity cues – similarity to brand users, attitudinal overlap with the brand
- Brand attraction – purchase interest, brand attitude, attitude change

Alternative explanations
- Not attributable to consumers’ initial liking for the brand
- Not a result of simple affect transfer

Theoretical contributions
- First to empirically validate the existence and impact of perceived brand liking and, consequently, the reciprocal liking of the consumer for the brand
- Provides support for the view that consumer-brand relationships are a two-way street, with the thoughts and actions of both partners influencing consumer behavior
Thank you!