I Really Want to Like It: Motivated Liking

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Motivations to like products can alter consumers’ evaluations of and choices of products. Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate enhanced liking for music thought to indicate refinement and sophistication in people who like it. Study 3 demonstrates that these effects occur counter to people’s expectations, ruling out belief-confirmation and social-desirability as explanations. Study 4 replicates the findings using choices that bear immediate consequences (listening to full songs) and a different motivation: believing oneself to have high emotional-intelligence. Further studies will explore additional motivations and product domains and investigate the process through which consumers learn to like products they are motivated to like.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14680/volumes/v36/NA-36

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spelling and grammatical errors reduce comprehensibility. The presence of a marginal main effect of objective written language proficiency \((p=0.075)\) implies that comprehensibility was affected more for individuals with better written language skills. The presence of a moderating role of gender \((p=0.057)\) indicates that women enjoyed higher comprehensibility than men, although only for version A.

The impact of language quality on general document quality was apparent. Nevertheless, the presence of few grammatical and spelling errors (version B) marginally affect document general quality \((p=0.110)\), while when there were more errors concerning the vocabulary and syntactical elements (version C), the difference was pronounced and significant.

Language quality shapes perceptions of the product and organization by influencing document evaluation. The impact of language quality on document evaluation was important and significant for all levels, implying that document evaluation was determined by document language quality, regardless of personal or demographics factors. No main or moderating effects were found for educational level, objective written language proficiency, and importance accorded to language quality on the previous relationship. However, we found a main effect for age \((p=0.030)\), implying that older consumers had higher document evaluation for all language quality levels and showed more tolerance to inferior language use. Interestingly, no significant correlation was found between educational level and objective written language skills.

Document evaluation fully mediated the relationships between language quality and both product and organization evaluations, implying that language quality impacts both product and organization evaluations through document evaluation. Product and product category knowledge were not found to influence the relationship between document evaluation and product evaluation, indicating the saliency of language quality on product perceptions. For their part, product evaluation shaped the intentions toward the product, and organization evaluation shaped the intentions toward the organization. Findings support the notion that documents accompanying the product are secondary products (Smart, Madrigal, and Seawright, 1996) as product evaluation partially mediated the relation between document evaluation and product intentions.

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Why do we like certain products rather than others? The traditional view in consumer choice theory has preferences develop based on processing of intrinsic product attributes (Simonson, in press; Bettman et al., 1998). However, liking can be based on reasons extrinsic
to product attributes. You might, for instance, like something simply because of its “warm glow of familiarity” (Titchner, 1912), as demonstrated through extensive research on mere-exposure (Bornstein, 1989; Zajonc, 1968; 2000). You might like a product due to situational influences and cues (Berger & Fitzsimmons, in-press; Ferraro et al., in-press). Current physiological state, such as hunger or cold, might also influence liking (Cabana, 1979). Prominently, expectations can also shape liking (Deliza & MacFie, 1996; Hirt, 1990; Lee et al., 2006; Ragunathan et al., 2006).

Motivational bases for evaluation are also prevalent. A broad literature regarding cognitive dissonance indicates that people can come to like items retroactively due to different motivations to justify their decisions and align them with attitudes (Cardozo, 1965; Cohen & Goldberg, 1970; Cummings & Venkatesan, 1976). Famously, Brehm (1955) showed that following choice people bias evaluations to favor their chosen alternative. Further, lack of a possibility to change one’s choice may enhance liking (Gilbert and Ebert, 2002).

Some research outside the dissonance literature has also offered evidence for motivated liking. Berger & Heath (2007) showed effects of social group desirability on liking. Similarly, social motivations’ influence on liking have been demonstrated by Escales and Bettman (2003; 2005), who showed the influence of identification groups on felt connection to brands. In psychology, merely expecting to interact with someone affected liking towards that person (Miller & Marks, 1982).

Dissonance primarily explores post-choice alterations of evaluation. The effects of motivations existing prior to choice and consumption have garnered less attention (though see Riis & McClure, in preparation). In this work, we explore whether motivation to like novel stimuli affected actual post-consumption liking and choice. Further, we seek to establish whether motivations can be artificially implanted by an external source, a possibility with potentially extensive marketing implications.

**Study 1: Everybody Likes Opera**

The first study aimed to examine whether thinking that liking for music shows one to be a more refined, sophisticated listener enhances liking for such music over alternatives associated with less sophistication.

**Methods.** Participants (N=57) listened to and evaluated two songs. The study was a 2 (song) X 2 (order) X 2 (motivation) within subjects design. The stimuli were international songs chosen following pretests that identified them as having moderate complexity and low familiarity.

After listening to each song, participants read reviews of the songs. Manipulations for motivation to like were embedded within the reviews, such that the songs were touted as either simple or complex, and indicating a person to be of either refinement and sophistication or of simple tastes. The wording was designed to avoid direct implications for enjoyability.

Dependent variables were self-reported enjoyment and desire for more information anchored by 1 (not at all) and 9 (very much) scales, and quality of song rated on a 9 point scale anchored by 1 (very low) and 9 (very high). Cronbach alpha for the three measures was .779, so the measures were averaged as a single DV.

**Results.** We ran ANOVA analysis controlling for song and order of manipulation, including song X condition interaction (non-significant). Participants reported enhanced impressions of the songs for which liking was ostensibly indicative of higher sophistication: F(1, 106)=3.89, p=0.05. LSmeans were 5.9 for low sophistication, and 6.6 for high sophistication.

**Discussion.** When liking for a song was described as indicating higher sophistication (due to its complexity), participants evaluated the song more highly than when it was described as indicating lower sophistication (due to its simplicity). The effects could potentially be explained by social desirability, as participants might indicate how participants want to seem rather than how they truly feel about the songs. Thus, in the next study we added a choice phase where participants could choose between CD collections of the two musical styles for a drawing. Given that such choices could have actual implications for the participants, the choice measure could reasonably be expected to be more indicative of participants’ true liking for the songs.

**Study 2: Effects on Choice**

**Method.** The general methodology was similar to that of study 1. After completion of the first part of the study, participants (N=59) were asked to choose a compilation of one of the two musical styles for a drawing.

**Results and discussion.** As before, participants evaluated songs more highly when liking for them was presented as indicating greater sophistication: F(1, 113)=4.82, p=0.03. LSmeans 5.8 (low) vs. 6.4 (high). This enhanced evaluation seemed to reflect participants’ genuine feelings about the songs, as it was reflected in CD choices that could have real consequences. Participants were more likely to choose the high-sophistication CD (70%) than the lower sophistication CD (30%): F(1, 113)=20.84, p=.001. Again, note that both choice and evaluation occurred prior to choice, and so could not be explained by post-choice dissonance reduction.

**Study 3: Belief Confirmation?**

Arguably, being told that a more complicated song indicates greater sophistication would lead people to believe complex songs should and would be liked more, and subsequently lead to expectation fulfillment. The design of the studies reported above reduces the credibility of such an explanation. For one, information regarding the songs’ complexity was presented either before or after each song was played (between-participants). If the process was simply one of expectation-fulfillment, information should have had greater effect if presented before songs. If anything, results indicate the opposite (information presented after each song yielded a greater effects).

We know, however, that beliefs can alter judgment retroactively, after consumption experiences (Braun, 1999). If this type of retroactive belief-confirmation occurred here, beliefs in a song’s complexity indicating sophistication would lead people to expect they would like complex songs more than simple songs. If people do not think they would like such songs better, the process whereby the previous effects were obtained cannot, by definition, be one of simple belief-confirmation.

To test this notion, we presented participants in the third study (N=32) with an account of the relation between liking for complex songs and sophistication similar to studies 1-2. However, instead of listening to the songs, participants just rated how much they expected to enjoy simple (condition 1) or complex (condition 2) songs. Participants assigned to the complex-song rating condition expected to enjoy songs less (3.73) than participants assigned to the low-complexity condition (4.58): t(1, 50)=2.14, p=.04. Thus, it appears that the process
whereby consumers come to like that which they are motivated to like is not simply one of belief confirmation. Consumers’ expectations for liking are in fact the reverse of their actual reported liking given a chance to listen to songs.

**Study 4: The Bach Effect**

*Method.* The current study employed a different motivation in order to generalize our results. Specifically, we told participants that liking for some music styles is diagnostic of emotional-intelligence. Under the guise of familiarizing them with the idea, participants heard three 30-second song samples in each of three styles. After listening to each sample, participants were told about its associated level of emotional-intelligence (high, low, or non-indicative). As an incentive-aligned dependent variable, participants (N=59) were asked to choose three songs to listen to. They could choose the full songs from which they’d heard clips, songs of the same styles, or unrelated control songs.

*Results.* Participants (N=45) chose more songs from styles presented as diagnostic of high emotional-intelligence (1.4) than from those presented as non-diagnostic (.77) or diagnostic of low emotional-intelligence (.84). The overall effect controlling for country and interaction (non-significant) was highly significant: F(2, 126)=8.29, p=.0004 contrast between low and medium to high.

**Limitations and Further Studies**

The studies reported here provided some evidence for the influence of different motivations on product evaluation and choice. Further studies will explore additional motivations and explore the process through which consumers learn to like what they want to like. Suggested mechanisms include differential encoding during consumption, post-choice editing of memories, and motivationally-biased construction of evaluation. Notably, motivations to like could be so powerful that they override the robust expectation fulfillment processes known in current research.

**References**


