

# Why we love it or hate it: The 3 E's

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Why do brands such as Manchester United and Apple capture hearts and minds? When consumers feel a strong emotional attachment to a brand, there is seemingly nothing we would not do—from paying more for it to defending it against detractors. For all the millions of dollars spent on advertising and other efforts, however, consumers rarely feel an affinity for brands. So how do marketers make consumers develop a strong attachment for a product or service? According to a recent study from USC Marshall School of Business, it is achieved by appealing to people's aesthetic needs (enticing/annoying to the self), functional needs (enabling/disabling for the self) and spiritual needs (whether something is enriching/impoverishing). In short, brands to which we are loyal, evoke warm feelings and provide pleasure, speak to who we are and help manage the problems we have in daily life.

"Attachment-aversion (AA) model of customer-[brand](#) relationships," published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* and co-authored by USC Marshall's C. Whan Park, Joseph A. DeBell Chair in Business Administration and professor of marketing; Andreas B. Eisingerich, associate professor of marketing, Imperial College (London) Business School; and Jason Whan Park, Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh, identifies three factors that must be in place in order to build strong [emotional attachment](#) to brands and, conversely, limit aversion to a product or service. Marketers who want to build emotional affinity for their brands need to appeal to consumers on three fronts: strong [aesthetics](#) or self-enticing properties such as the taste of deep chocolate or the [sleek design](#) of a European car, have self-enabling benefits or the ability to solve customer problems (such as [Swiss Army Knife](#), which allows one to feel

power over one's environment) and self-enriching benefits or those that resonate with customers' beliefs or values and support their self-identities (activated for example, by location brands such as one's hometown, a membership to nonprofit or a luxury brand such as Rolex that is aspirational). These factors, the three E's—enticement, enablement and enrichment—are critical for all brands and their interplay determines our distance to the brand: whether we are more attached or have an aversion.

"There are many cases these days where people are very adverse to certain brands. This is a serious issue," said Park. "Why people become so antagonistic toward a brand is based on these three reasons, when it displeases them aesthetically or doesn't help them solve their daily problems or is contrary to their personal beliefs."

To test their attachment-aversion model, the researchers carefully developed the four-item scale of the attachment-aversion measure and conducted three studies, assessing consumer purchasing behavior over time, based on carefully chosen products: Apple, a product brand that draws strong consumer loyalty from their compelling design and emphasis on creativity; Manchester United, a soccer franchise that tends to generate extreme reactions in Great Britain (both positive and negative); and a grocery store chain in Austria. The scholars measured attachment and aversion by looking at attitudes and actions: what consumers would do for these brands, including defending them against criticism, participating in an affiliated charity event and feeling happy (sad) when good (bad) things happened to a brand. The researchers found that their model was better able to predict consumer reactions through not only their stated future intentions, but actual purchasing behavior during the final study.

Whether a brand was self-enriching was the stronger predictor of whether there would be a small distance/attachment or a larger

distance/aversion to a brand. The researchers cite the strength of Nike's "Just Do It" as an example. In addition, the researchers also found that the older consumers were more motivated by self-enriching qualities of brands versus self-enticing benefits (aesthetic appeal), while the opposite was true for younger consumers.

The study also distinguished two other attitudes towards brands that marketers need to address quite differently: the mixed (both positive and negative) perceptions of a brand and indifference. Brand managers need to focus on reducing the distance between customers and a brand, by examining how much value customers perceive from the current offering of a brand with respect to those three E's.

"Great brands simultaneously offer sensory pleasure and self-pride. Sensory pleasure comes from the self-enticing product cues (e.g., product design, package design, color, brand logo, etc.). Self-pride comes from two different sources: self-enabling benefits of a product and self-enriching message of a brand," said Park.

Self-enabling benefits provide a boost of self-efficacy and self-confidence. "That's when you feel proud of yourself—when you can deal with daily problems without difficulty and feel secure," said Park. "Self-enriching messages of a brand makes you feel good about yourself because you relate yourself to its moral values and philosophies."

Provided by USC Marshall School of Business

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