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Priming Bush (vs. Obama) Increases Liking of American Brands: The Role of Intersubjectively Important Values

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Citation

Priming Bush (vs. Obama) increases liking of American brands: The role of intersubjectively important values

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Past research has shown that exposure to cultural symbols can influence personal preferences. The present research extends this finding by showing that cultural symbols acquire their cultural significance in part through their associations with intersubjectively important values—values that are perceived to be prevalent in the culture. In addition, cultural symbols can influence personal preferences through the activation of perceived normative preferences. In Study 1, perceived liking of Bush among Americans was linked to the perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values in the USA. In Study 2, both priming Bush and personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values increased Americans' liking of iconic brands (brands that symbolize American culture). Furthermore, perceived normative preferences for iconic brands fully mediated this effect.

Keywords: Cultural influence; American presidents; Intersubjective culture; Brand evaluation; Cultural fit.

"Miss me yet?" A roadside billboard featuring this caption and a cheery image of George W. Bush hovered over Interstate 35 in February 2010. Soon, similar billboards appeared around the country, and there was a spike in consumer demand for miss-me-yet themed Bush merchandise such as T-shirts and bumper stickers. Despite Bush's waning political popularity, for some Americans, Bush still has a strong marketing appeal. What could be the source of the Bush appeal?

In this article, we propose that a public figure could through its cultural associations influence consumer preferences. To elaborate, some values, hereafter referred to as *intersubjectively important values*, are *consensually*

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perceived by Americans to be strongly endorsed by other Americans. When a public Figure (e.g., Bush) is associated with these values, it can prime liking of other attitude objects that are symbols of American culture (e.g., Apple Computers, Coca-Cola). The processes described above are captured in the following quote from David Boaz (2001), vice president of the Cato Institute. In this quote, Boaz emphasized the cultural significance of Bush, arguing that people who attack these values also hate other symbols of America:

> They hate the culture of markets and liberalism. They hate the Enlightenment and modernity. They hate reason, science, technology, individualism, pluralism, tolerance, progress and freedom. And to be more specific, they hate Wall Street, Hollywood, McDonald's, Starbucks, Microsoft, Ralph Lauren ads, and the casual joy of American freedom.

INTERSUBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE TO CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Past studies have found consistent evidence for the effect of culture priming on personal preferences (Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000; Monga & John, 2007). In these studies, exposing individuals to symbols of their culture increases the strength of personal preferences for other cultural symbols. Indeed, culture priming has been shown to be a prevalent and potent form of cultural influence (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Although the effects of culture priming are well documented (see Chiu & Hong, 2007), an unanswered question is *how* they occur.

In the present article, we tested an intersubjective account of cultural influence (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010; Chiu, Ng, & Au, in press) in the context of brand evaluations. Brand evaluation is the appropriate context for the present investigation because some brands are widely recognized as iconic national brands because of their strong associations with the culture of their country of origin (Torelli & Alhuwalia, 2012; Torelli, Keh, & Chiu, 2010; Torelli, Özsomer, Carvalho, Keh, & Maehle, 2012; Zhang & Gelb, 1996). According to this account, a cultural symbol (Bush) derives its cultural significance from its associations with intersubjectively important values. Although an iconic American brand (e.g., Nike) has other rich associations, after having been primed with a cultural symbol (e.g., Bush), because of the prime's cultural significance, the perceiver would attend to the cultural meanings of the brand and view it as a brand that Americans prefer. Such perceptions, hereafter referred to as *perceived normative preferences*, would in turn elevate the perceiver's personal liking for the brand.

According to the intersubjective account, cultural symbols derive their cultural significance from its associations with intersubjectively important values. Intersubjectively important values are conceptually different from *objectively important ones*, which refer to the values with the strongest endorsement from

members of the culture. Intersubjectively important values are identified by asking cultural informants to rate the importance of various values *to other members of the culture* (Wan & Chiu, 2009). In contrast, objectively important values are identified by asking members of the culture to rate the importance of a representative collection of values to the self (Wan & Chiu, 2009; Wan, Chiu, Peng, & Tam, 2007a; Wan et al., 2007b). Although some intersubjectively important values are also objectively important, and vice versa, for several reasons, the overlap is not perfect (Wan et al., 2007b). First, because people do not have perfect knowledge of the social distribution of values in their society, they may not know which values are objectively important. This is particularly the case in a pluralistic society like the USA. Imperfect knowledge about the social distribution of values also renders objectively important values less predictive of personal preferences. Second, although people may not know the social distribution of values well, because intersubjectively important values are embodied in many external carriers of cultures (e.g., social conventions, cultural artifacts; see Chiu et al., 2010), perceivers can infer what the intersubjectively important values are from the values embodied in the external carriers, instead of anchoring their inferences on their personal values. Finally, past research has shown that most people believe that their values are less culturally typical than those of other cultural members (Wan et al., 2007a). This uniqueness bias also attenuates the correspondence between objectively and intersubjectively important values.

There is some evidence that public figures would become culturally significant symbols when they are perceived to embody intersubjectively important values. For example, American college students perceive Tom Hanks to be an American icon and rate him favorably after learning that he has publicly exhibited behaviors that are congruent with the intersubjectively important value of "choosing one's own goal" (Wan, Torelli, & Chiu, 2010; see also Jiang et al., 2011). If cultural symbols derive their cultural significance from their associations with intersubjectively important values, there should be positive associations between the perceived likability of the cultural symbol (perceived normative preferences for Bush) and the perceived popularity of the intersubjectively important values in the culture.

We also assume that the perceived normative preferences activated by culture priming can affect personal preferences of culturally iconic brands such as Apple and Nike. According to the shared reality theory (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005; Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009), once people have established a shared reality with others, they can trust others' views of things and use them to guide judgments and actions. Accordingly, people may base their personal preferences on perceived normative preferences. Consistent with this idea, there is a sizable body of evidence that cultural differences in personal preferences are in part mediated by cultural differences in perceived normative preferences (e.g., Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009; Zou et al., 2009). Recent neuroscience

evidence also shows that people often integrate normative opinions spontaneously into their personal opinions (Zaki, Schirmer, & Mitchell, 2011).

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

The present research seeks to make three contributions. First, we seek to provide evidence that cultural symbols derive their cultural significance from their associations with intersubjectively important values. To achieve this goal, in Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that Americans who perceived intersubjectively important values to be more popular in the USA would expect Bush to be more likable among Americans.

Second, we attempt to show that culture priming can influence personal preferences through the activation of perceived normative preferences. To achieve this objective, in Study 2, we tested the hypothesis that priming Bush and its cultural associations would activate the perceived normative preferences for iconic brands among Americans, which, in turn, would enhance personal liking of iconic American brands.

Finally, the social cognitive effect of culture priming is short-lived; sustainability of cultural influence requires internalization of the intersubjectively important values. *Some* members of a culture internalize the intersubjectively important values; these individuals regard intersubjectively important values as personally important. Past research has shown that these individuals tend to identify strongly with their culture and like attitude objects that symbolize their culture (Wan et al., 2007a, 2007b; Wan, Tam, & Chiu, 2010; Zhang & Chiu, 2012). We refer to this effect as the *cultural fit effect*. However, past research has not examined the effects of cultural fit (chronic cultural influence) and culture priming (momentary influence of culture) in the same study. We addressed this research gap in Study 2.As illustrated in Figure 1, we hypothesize that in the
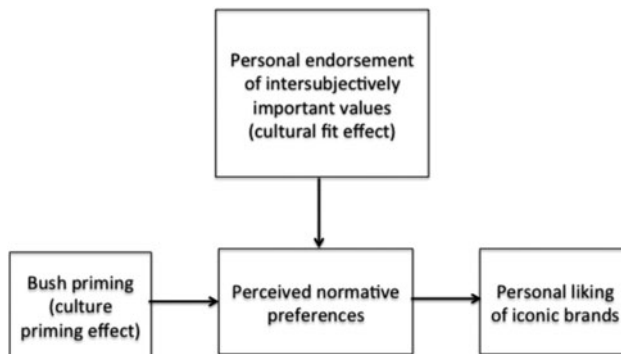
Figure 1. Hypothesized effect of Bush priming and personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values on perceived normative preferences and personal liking of iconic brands.

absence of Bush priming, individuals who have internalized intersubjectively important values are more likely than those who have not to focus on the cultural significance of iconic American brands, view them as brands that Americans prefer, and like these brands more.

STUDY 1

Study 1 has three objectives. First, we sought to demonstrate that intersubjectively important values are different from objectively important ones. Second, we sought to provide a preliminary test of the effect of cultural fit on personal liking for Bush. The studies were conducted between October 2009 and June 2010.Based on our selected review of the popular discourse at the time of data collection, it seems that many Americans associated Bush with the conventional values in the USA. If Bush was associated with intersubjectively important values in the USA, Americans who endorsed these values more strongly would like him more. In contrast, at the time of data collection, Obama was often portrayed as a change agent and hence might not be associated with intersubjectively important American values. We included measures of liking for Obama to explore this possibility. Finally, we included a pilot study for Study 2, which was designed to test the joint effects of Bush priming and personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values on personal liking of iconic American brands.

Method

To identify intersubjectively important values, we had Caucasian American undergraduates ($N = 89$, 34.8% male; $M_{age} = 18.79$ years, SD $= 1.10$) from a public university in the USA respond to the 56-item Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992)—a survey of seven major clusters of cultural values (embeddedness, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy, hierarchy, egalitarianism, mastery, and harmony). They estimated how important each SVS value was to most Americans on an eight-point scale, ranging from "not important" to "extremely important." In addition, to identify objectively important values, we also had the participants rate the importance of each value to the self, using the same scale.

Before completing the SVS, participants rated their personal liking of Bush and Obama on five evaluation items (unpleasant–pleasant, foolish–wise, awful–nice, unintelligent–intelligent, and dislike–like; $\alpha_{Bush} = .92$; $\alpha_{Obama} = .94$), each on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). They also used the same scale to rate how much they thought Americans liked Bush and Obama on the same set of items ($\alpha_{Bush} = .87$; $\alpha_{Obama=}.91$).

Finally, as a pretest for Study 2, participants were asked to rate the extent to which 14 brands were symbols of American culture on a seven-point scale that

ranged from "definitely not an American brand" to "definitely an American brand" at the end of the study. In past research (Torelli et al., 2010), 7 of these 14 brands received high iconicity ratings (*American Express*, *Ford*, *Apple Computer*, *Walmart*, *Starbucks*, *Coke*, and *Nike*) and 7 (*Coffeemate*, *Heinz Ketchup*, *New Balance*, *Gateway Computer*, *BIC pen*, *Caribou Coffee*, and *Chrysler*) received relatively low iconicity ratings. The iconic and non-iconic brands were matched on product categories. Participants were debriefed and awarded course requirement credits at the conclusion of the study.

Results

Intersubjectively and objectively important values

Table 1 summarizes the variables measured in the current study. We followed the standard scoring procedures (Schwartz, 1992) to construct measures of the importance of each of the seven value clusters (e.g., embeddedness, intellectual autonomy) to self and to most Americans. Next, for each participant, to measure the degree of correspondence between values that were important to the self and those that were perceived to be important to Americans, we correlated the relative importance of the value clusters to the self with the relative importance of the value clusters to Americans. The mean of the intraindividual correlations was small (mean $r = .16$, SD $= .46$), although it was significantly above 0, $t(87) = 3.41$,

TABLE 1
Summary of key variables and hypotheses

	Intersubjectively important values	*Objectively important values*
Definition	Values *consensually perceived* by cultural informants to be strongly endorsed by cultural members	Values that *receive* the strongest endorsement from members of the culture
Perceived popularity of	Individual differences in the extent to which the intersubjectively important values are *perceived* to be popular among other cultural members	Individual differences in the extent to which the objectively important values are *perceived* to be popular among other cultural members
	Hypothesize to predict *perceived* normative preferences of cultural icons, which may indirectly influence personal liking of the icons	
Personal importance of	Individual differences in the strength of *personal endorsement* of intersubjectively important values	Individual differences in the strength of *personal endorsement* of objectively important values
	Hypothesize to predict *personal* liking of cultural icons	

TABLE 2

Mean levels of importance of the seven categories of cultural values to Americans and the self

	Importance to Americans	*Importance to the self*
Hierarchy	6.85 (1.07)	5.33 (1.20)
Affective autonomy	6.44 (1.00)	6.82 (0.79)
Mastery	6.21 (1.07)	6.89 (0.66)
Egalitarianism	6.20 (0.93)	7.09 (0.80)
Embeddedness	6.13 (0.93)	6.77 (0.75)
Intellectual autonomy	5.54 (1.21)	6.73 (0.90)
Harmony	4.89 (1.26)	6.04 (1.25)

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses.

$p = .0005$. This result supported our assumption that intersubjectively and objectively important values are partially dissociated at the individual level.

Table 2 shows the means (across participants) of the two types of importance ratings for the seven value clusters. The two most intersubjectively important values were hierarchy and affective autonomy. Americans were perceived to value hierarchy more than the remaining categories of values ($ts > 3.22$, $ps < .002$). With the exception of hierarchy, Americans were also perceived to value affective autonomy more than other categories of values ($ts > 1.99$, $ps < .05$). These two intersubjectively important values did not receive the strongest personal endorsement from the participants. The most objectively important values were egalitarianism and mastery. Participants endorsed egalitarianism more strongly than they did other categories of values ($ts > 2.33$, $ps < .05$). With the exception of egalitarianism, participants also endorsed mastery more than they did other categories of values ($ts > 4.46$, $ps < .001$). Taken together, consistent with past findings (Wan et al., 2007a, 2007b), intersubjectively and objectively important values do not have much overlap.

Value associations of Bush

Next, we tested the hypothesized relationship between the perceived normative preferences for Bush and the perceived popularity of the intersubjectively important values. We hypothesize that participants who perceived the intersubjectively important values to be more popular among Americans would estimate Bush to be more likable among Americans. To test this hypothesis, we constructed a measure of perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values using the weighted mean of the perceived popularity of the seven value clusters. Specifically, we ranked the value clusters according to their mean perceived importance to Americans (Intersubjective Rank). For each participant, we created a measure of perceived popularity of intersubjectively important

TABLE 3

Correlation of perceived normative preferences and personal liking for Bush and Obama with perceived popularity of intersubjectively and objectively important values

	Perceived normative preferences for Bush	*Personal liking for Bush*	*Perceived normative preferences for Obama*	*Personal liking for Obama*
Perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values 1 P(Int.Val)[a]	.23*	.12	.07	.08
Perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values 2 P(Int.Val$'$)[b]	.23*	.13	.04	.05
Perceived popularity of objectively important values 1 P(Obj.Val)[c]	.10	.15	.14	.11
Perceived popularity of objectively important values 2 P(Obj.Val$'$)[d]	.12	.07	.07	.12

*$p < .05$.
[a] P(Int.Val) $= \Sigma$(8-Intersubjective Rank$_i$) $\times$ Popularity Rating(Value$_i$).
[b] P(Int.Val$'$) $=$ Popularity Rating (Hierarchy) $+$ Popularity Rating (Affective Autonomy).
[c] P(Obj.Val) $= \Sigma$(8-Objective Rank$_i$) $\times$ Popularity Rating (Value$_i$).
[d] P(Obj.Val$'$) $=$ Popularity Rating (Egalitarianism) $+$ Popularity Rating (Mastery).

values [P(Int.Val)] using the following formula:[1]

$$P(\text{Int.Val}) = \sum (8 - \text{Intersubjective Rank}_i) \times \text{Popularity Rating (Value}_i).$$

Participants with higher scores on this measure perceived intersubjectively important values to be more popular among Americans.[2]

As shown in Table 3, participants who rated intersubjectively important values to be more popular among Americans also expected Americans to like Bush more ($r = .23, p = .03$). Perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values did not predict perceived normative preferences for Obama ($r = .07, p = .53$) or personal liking of Bush ($r = .12, p = .26$) and Obama ($r = .08, p = .48$). This result suggests that despite Bush's waning political popularity, Americans still associated him with intersubjectively important American values. When Bush left the Oval Office, as some commentators noted, Bush retained his American

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[1] P(Int.Val) $= 7 \times$ Popularity Rating (Hierarchy) $+ 6 \times$ Popularity Rating (Affective Autonomy) $+ 5 \times$ Popularity Rating (Mastery) $+ 4 \times$ Popularity Rating(Egalitarianism) $+ 3 \times$ Popularity Rating (Embeddedness) $+ 2 \times$ Popularity Rating (Intellectual Autonomy) $+ 1 \times$ Popularity Rating (Harmony).

[2] We created an alternative measure of perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values P (Int.Val$'$) using the mean of the perceived popularity of hierarchy and affective autonomy, the two values with significantly higher mean importance to Americans than did the remaining five values. As shown in Table 3, the results were consistent across measures. Normative preferences for Bush among Americans was positively correlated with P(Int.Val$'$) ($r = .23, p = .03$). In contrast, perceived liking for Obama among Americans was not correlated with P(Int.Val$'$) ($r = .05, p = .65$).

cowboy image through his accent and strong anchorage to his Texas roots. For example, Piers Morgan, Editor of the British *Daily Mirror*, wrote, "I think people look at him [Bush] and think John Wayne" (Rodgers, 2003).

Unlike perceived popularity of intersubjectively values, perceived popularity of objectively important values did not predict perceived normative preferences or personal liking for Bush or Obama. We created a measure of perceived popularity of objectively important values by first ranking the seven value clusters according to their mean importance to the self (Objective Rank). Next, for each participant, we created a measure of perceived popularity of objectively important values [$P(\text{Obj.Val})$] using the following formula:

$$P(\text{Obj.Val}) = \sum (8 - \text{Objective Rank}_i) \times \text{Popularity Rating}(\text{Value}_i).$$

Participants with higher scores on this measure perceived objectively important values to be more popular among Americans.[3]

As shown in Table 3, perceived popularity of objectively important values did not correlate with perceived normative preferences for Bush ($r = .10, p = .38$) or Obama ($r = .14, p = .21$). It also did not predict personal liking of Bush ($r = .15, p = .15$) or Obama ($r = .11, p = .33$).

Effects of cultural fit

Next, we examined the effect of personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values on personal liking of Bush and Obama. We constructed a measure of personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values [$E(\text{Int.Val})$] using following formula:

$$E(\text{Int.Val}) = \sum (8 - \text{Intersubjective Rank}_i) \times \text{Personal Endorsement}(\text{Value}_i).$$

Higher scores on this measure indicated stronger personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values. For comparison purpose, we also constructed a measure of personal endorsement of objectively important values [$P(\text{Obj.Val})$] using the following formula:

$$P(\text{Obj.Val}) = \sum (8 - \text{Objective Rank}_i) \times \text{Personal Endorsement}(\text{Value}_i).$$

As shown in Table 4, personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values was associated with greater liking for Bush ($r = .23, p = .04$), but not with liking for Obama ($r = -.11, p = .30$). Personal endorsement of objectively

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[3] We created an alternative measure ($P(\text{Obj.Val}'')$) using the mean of the personal endorsement of egalitarianism and mastery, the two values with higher mean importance to the self than did the remaining values. The results were consistent across measures. As shown in Table 3, perceived normative preferences and personal liking for Bush and Obama were not correlated with this alternative measure.

TABLE 4
Correlation of perceived normative preferences and personal liking for Bush and
Obama with personal endorsement of intersubjectively and objectively important
values

	Perceived normative preferences for Bush	Personal liking for Bush	Perceived normative preferences for Obama	Personal liking for Obama
Personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values 1 P(Int.Val)[a]	.05	.23*	.09	−.11
Personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values 2 P(Int.Val′)[b]	.02	.35**	.09	−.13
Personal endorsement of objectively important values 1 P(Obj.Val)[c]	.06	.09	.06	−.07
Personal endorsement of objectively important values 2 P(Obj.Val′)[d]	.04	.05	.07	−.02

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.
[a] P(Int.Val) $= \Sigma$(8-Intersubjective Rank$_i$) $\times$ Personal Endorsement (Value$_i$).
[b] P(Int.Val′) $=$ Personal Endorsement (Hierarchy) $+$ Personal Endorsement (Affective Autonomy).
[c] P(Obj.Val) $= \Sigma$(8-Objective Rank$_i$) $\times$ Personal Endorsement (Value$_i$).
[d] P(Obj.Val′) $=$ Personal Endorsement (Egalitarianism) $+$ Personal Endorsement (Mastery).

important values was not associated with personal liking for Bush ($r = .09$, $p = .39$) or Obama ($r = −.07$, $p = .52$).[4]

Perceived Americanness of brands

As a pretest for Study 2, participants rated the extent to which they regarded the 14 brands as American brands. Seven of these brands had previously been shown to be iconic American brands (Torelli et al., 2009). For each participant, we performed a within-subjects regression across the 14 brands, with the brands' rated Americanness as the dependent variable and the iconicity of the brands based on past studies ($0 =$ non-iconic brand; $1 =$ iconic brand; Torelli et al., 2009) as the predictor. The mean of the regression coefficients obtained from the 89 participants was 0.94 (SD $= 0.72$), which was significantly greater than 0, $t(88) = 12.37$, $p < .001$. This result showed that the participants rated the iconic brands as more American than they did the non-iconic ones.

Discussion

Our results show that (a) intersubjectively and objectively important values do not fully overlap, (b) perceived popularity of intersubjectively important values

[4] As shown in Table 4, we obtained identical results when we used alternative measures of personal endorsement of intersubjectively or objectively important values.

predicts perceived normative preferences for Bush, and (c) personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values predicts personal liking for Bush. These results support the predictions from the intersubjective account of cultural influence.

Objectively important values are values that are statistically more popular in the USA. Due to imperfect knowledge of the social distribution of values in the USA, Americans may not know which values are objectively important in their country. Imperfect knowledge about the social distribution of values also renders objectively important values less predictive of personal preferences. It is possible that the association between intersubjectively and objectively important values may be stronger in more culturally homogeneous or less pluralistic societies, and the relationship between personal endorsement of objectively important values and personal preferences may also be stronger in such societies. This possibility merits future investigation.

Our results do not imply that liking for Bush or Obama is unrelated to personally important values. Some people endorse the intersubjectively important values, and some do not. Because of the association of Bush with intersubjectively important values, people who endorse these values would like him better. By the same argument, although Americans do not associate Obama with intersubjectively important values, they may associate him with other values. People who personally endorse the values that are perceived to be associated with Obama should like him more.

STUDY 2

The current study was designed to test the hypothesis that priming Bush would increase liking for iconic versus non-iconic American brands. Specifically, we predicted that priming Bush would increase the proneness to perceive iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands as brands Americans prefer and hence the tendency to like them more. In addition, consistent with the results of Study 1, in the Control Condition, without Bush priming, personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values should also enhance the perceptions of iconic brands as brands Americans prefer and increase personal liking for these brands.

Method

Caucasian undergraduates ($N = 103$, $M_{age} = 19.24$, SD $= 1.16$) from a public university in the USA participated in this study in exchange for course requirement credits. We used a Priming (3 levels: Bush vs. Obama vs. Control; between-subjects) $\times$ Brand Iconicity (iconic vs. non-iconic; within-subjects) $\times$ Endorsement of Intersubjectively Important Values (continuous individual difference) design. Given that many Americans viewed Obama as a change agent at the time of data collection, we included an Obama Priming Condition to explore whether priming Obama would reduce personal liking for iconic American brands.

We primed Bush or Obama by having participants perform a computer-administered categorization task individually in separate cubicles. On each of the 36 trials in the task, participants saw the name of a famous person on the computer display and identified the gender of the person by pressing a designated key on the keyboard as fast as they could. There were three male and three female target persons, and each person was presented six times in a random order. In all three conditions, the filler names were Michael Phelps, Leonardo Dicaprio, Demi Moore, Kate Winslet, and Lindsay Davenport. Bush (Obama) was the third male target person in the Bush (Obama) Condition. In the Control Condition, we replaced Bush or Obama with Steven Spielberg. After the priming task, participants were presented with the seven iconic American brands and the seven non-iconic ones used in Study 1 in a random order. They rated on a five-point scale how much they liked each brand (1 = "dislike a lot" to 5 = "like a lot"). To test whether perceived normative preferences mediated participants' personal liking of the brands, we had the participants use the same scale to rate how much they thought American consumers liked each brand.

Finally, participants indicated their personal endorsement of the values in the SVS (Schwartz, 1992). We applied the same formula in Study 1 to construct the measure of personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values.

Results and discussion

Effect of brand iconicity on brand liking

We adopted a multilevel approach to analyze the data. First, we classified the 14 brands into iconic brands and non-iconic ones. Next, for each participant (i), we regressed liking of the brands on their iconicity (0 = non-iconic brands; 1 = iconic brands). That is, we estimated the predicted liking of participant$_i$ for brand$_j$ (Liking$_{ij}$) with the following regression equation:

$$\text{Liking}_{ij} = a + b_{1i} \times \text{Iconicity}_j. \tag{1}$$

The sign and size of b_{1i} in Equation 1 indicated the direction and the magnitude of the effect of cultural iconicity of the brands on the liking of the brands, respectively.

Across the 103 participants, the mean of b_{1i} was 0.26 (SD = 0.54), which was significantly greater than 0, $t(102) = 4.85$, $p < .0001$. This result indicated that the participants liked the iconic brands more than they did the non-iconic ones.

Perceived normative preferences mediated the iconicity effect

Next, we tested whether perceived normative preferences mediated the greater liking for the iconic brands by performing the following within-subjects regression:

$$\text{Perceived Normative Preference}_{ij} = a + b_{2i} \times \text{Iconicity}_j, \qquad (2)$$

$$\text{Liking}_{ij} = a + b_{1i} \times \text{Iconicity}_j + b_{3i} \times \text{Perceived Normative Preference}_{ij}. \qquad (3)$$

In Equation 2, b_{2i} was significant ($M = 0.47$, SD $= 0.42$; $t(102) = 11.46$, $p < .0001$), indicating that the participants expected Americans to like the iconic brands more than the non-iconic ones. In Equation 3, b_{3i} was significant ($M = 0.31$, SD $= 0.47$; $t(102) = 6.69$, $p < .0001$), but the effect of iconicity (b_{1i}) was not ($M = 0.10$, SD $= 0.56$, $t(102) = 1.88$, $p = .06$). This result, as illustrated in Figure 2, indicated that perceived normative preferences for iconic brands fully mediated the participants' greater liking of the iconic brands, Sobel's $z = 5.78$, $p < .0001$.[5]

### Effects of Bush priming and endorsement of intersubjectively important values

In the next step of our analysis, we performed level-2 (between-subjects) analysis to evaluate the effect of Bush (vs. Obama) priming and personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values on the effect of iconicity on brand liking. We regressed the effect of iconicity on brand liking (b_{1i} in Equation 1) on priming (Contrast 1: Bush vs. Control; Contrast 2: Obama vs. Control), endorsement of intersubjectively important values (mean-centered), and their interaction.

There was a significant main effect of priming, $F(2, 96) = 6.22$, $p = .003$. Priming Bush (vs. Control) significantly increased the participants' liking of iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands ($b = 0.21$, SE $= 0.07$, $t = 3.02$, $p = .003$). In contrast, priming Obama (vs. Control) significantly reduced the participants' liking of iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands ($b = -0.24$, SE $= 0.08$, $t = -3.14$, $p = .002$).

The interaction of priming and personal endorsement of intersubjectively important values was also significant, $F(2,96) = 4.14$, $p = 0.02$. As shown in Figure 3, in the Control Condition, personal endorsement of intersubjectively

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[5] It could be argued that participants were more familiar with the iconic brands than the non-iconic ones. Hence, the iconic versus non-iconic brand manipulation might be confounded with brand familiarity. This, however, is unlikely because all the selected brands are familiar to US consumers. In addition, we also had participants rate their familiarity with each brand on a five-point scale. When we included familiarity in the level-1 (within-subjects) regression analysis, perceived normative preferences still significantly mediated the effect of iconicity on brand evaluations (Sobel's $z = 4.78$, $p < .0001$). Furthermore, Bush versus Obama priming did not moderate the relationship between brand familiarity and brand liking ($F = 0.65$, $p = .53$). The robust mediation effect of perceived normative preferences and the lack of Bush versus Obama priming effect on the relationship between brand familiarity and brand liking together help to assuage the concern that the iconicity manipulation was confounded with brand familiarity.
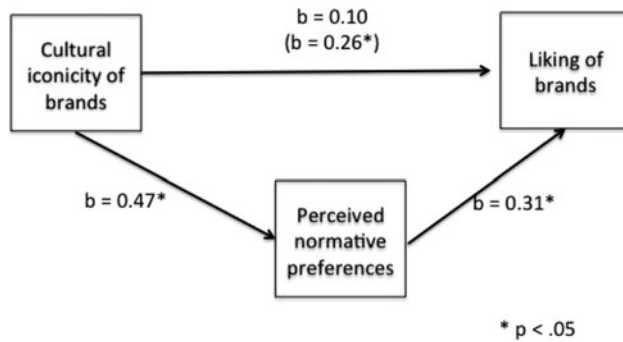
Figure 2. Perceived normative preferences of Americans mediated liking for iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands (Study 2). The effect of cultural iconicity of brands became nonsignificant (*b* dropped from 0.26 to 0.10) after controlling for perceived normative preferences.

important values had significant positive effect on the liking of the iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands ($b = 0.0066$, SE $= 0.003$, $t = 2.22$, $p = .03$). This result replicated the results of Study 1: Without Bush or Obama priming, participants who endorsed intersubjectively important values more liked iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands more. In both the Bush Priming Condition and the Obama Priming Condition, endorsement of intersubjectively important values was not related to liking of iconic brands over non-iconic ones (Bush Priming: $b = -0.0034$, SE $= .0034$, $t = 1.03$, $p = 0.31$; Obama Priming: $b = -0.0046$, SE $= 0.0033$, $t = -1.41$, $p = .17$).
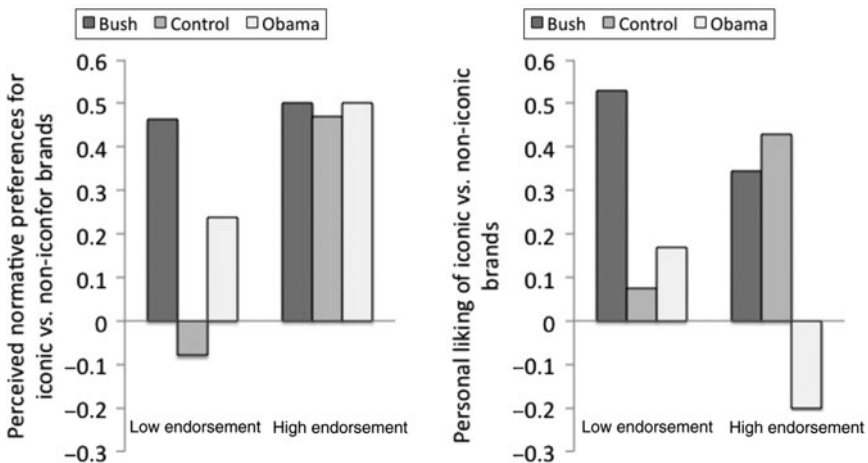
Figure 3. Effects of Bush priming on perceived normative preferences for and personal liking of iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands among participants with relatively high (one standard deviation above the mean) and weak endorsement (one standard deviation below the mean) of intersubjectively important values: Study 2.

Finally, we repeated the between-subjects (level-2) analysis, replacing the dependent variable with b_{2i} in Equation 2—the tendency to expect Americans to prefer iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands. There was a significant main effect of priming, $F(2, 93) = 5.89$, $p = .004$. Participants expected Americans to have a stronger preference for iconic brands following Bush priming (vs. Control), $b = 0.137$, SE $= 0.051$, $t = 2.71$, $p = .008$, but not after Obama priming (vs. Control), $b = 0.019$, SE $= 0.055$, $t = 0.34$, $p = 0.73$. Participants who endorsed intersubjectively important values more strongly also expected Americans to like iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands more; the main effect of endorsement of intersubjectively important values was significant, $b = 0.006$, SE $= .001$, $t = 4.02$, $p = .0001$.

The interaction was also significant, $F(2, 93) = 4.50$, $p = .01$. As illustrated in Figure 3, in the Control Condition, endorsement of intersubjectively important values was positively related to the perception that Americans preferred iconic brands, $b = 0.0103$, SE $= 0.002$, $t = 4.84$, $p < .0001$. However, the effect of endorsement of intersubjectively important values was nonsignificant when participants were primed with Bush or Obama. Following Bush or Obama priming, endorsement of intersubjectively important values was unrelated to the perception that Americans preferred iconic brands (Bush Priming: $b = 0.0007$, SE $= 0.0024$, $t = 0.29$, $p = 0.77$; Obama Priming: $b = 0.0049$, SE $= 0.0032$, $t = 1.53$, $p = 0.14$).

When we designed the present study, we observed that the image of Obama in popular discourse was more of a change agent than a guardian of conventional values. Consistent with this observation, following Obama priming (vs. Control), the participants, irrespective of how strongly they endorsed intersubjectively important values, lowered their liking for iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands. Thus, although the participants in the Obama Priming Condition (particularly those who endorsed intersubjectively important values strongly) were aware of the stronger normative preferences for iconic brands, they did not like iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands more. However, because we did not measure Obama as a symbol of change, this result should be interpreted with caution.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Past culture priming studies have shown that exposure to cultural symbols increases the likelihood of displaying culturally typical behaviors (Hong et al., 2000). This effect occurs allegedly because cultural symbols are magnets of meaning that connect many diverse elements of cultural knowledge (Betsky, 1997). Thus, these symbols can spread activation in a network of cultural constructs (Hong et al., 2000).

However, there is little research on what constructs in the cultural knowledge network are activated when individuals are exposed to cultural primes. The present research builds on the recently formulated intersubjective perspective to

cultural influence (Chiu et al., 2010) and argues that cultural symbols acquire their cultural significance in part through their associations with intersubjectively important values and that cultural symbols can influence personal preferences through the activation of perceived normative preferences. That is, when individuals are exposed to symbols that are associated with intersubjectively important values, these symbols would activate the perceived preferences of ingroup cultural members, which, in turn, affect personal preferences.

To establish our arguments, we first demonstrated that at both individual and group levels, although intersubjectively and objectively important values overlap, the extent of the overlap is small. After we have identified the values that are objectively important (e.g., egalitarianism and mastery) and those that are intersubjectively important (e.g., hierarchy and affective autonomy), we showed that the perceived liking of Bush among Americans is linked to intersubjectively important values only. Although intersubjectively important values are values that are widely believed to be popular in the USA, there are individual differences in the strength of this belief. Americans who believe in the popularity of these values more strongly also estimate Bush to be more likable among Americans.

Next, we showed that Americans like brands that symbolize America (vs. those that do not) more. Moreover, consistent with the past finding that perceived normative preferences could influence personal preferences (e.g., Zou et al., 2009), we found that perceived normative preferences fully mediated the greater liking for iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands. Furthermore, consistent with our idea that culture priming influences personal preferences through the activation of perceived normative preferences, we found that priming Bush strengthened the perception that Americans prefer iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands as well as the participants' liking for iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands.

There are individual differences in how strongly people endorse intersubjectively important values. Consistent with past findings related to the effect of cultural fit (Wan et al., 2007a, 2007b; Zhang & Chiu, 2012), we found a positive association between endorsement of intersubjectively important values and personal liking for Bush in Study 1. In Study 2, we obtained the same cultural fit effect on the perceived normative preferences for iconic brands and on the participants' personal liking of iconic (vs. non-iconic) brands. However, this effect became nonsignificant following Bush or Obama priming. This result shows that situated cultural influence through culture priming can overpower chronic cultural influence on personal preferences (Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

Future studies are required to establish the generality of our results beyond college student samples and to identify the boundary of the Bush priming effect. Nonetheless, our findings underscore the importance of intersubjective processes in cultural influence: Even among Americans who do not endorse intersubjectively important values, priming Bush could temporarily draw

attention to the perceived normative preferences of Americans and strengthen the positive evaluation of iconic brands.

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