

The brand likeability scale

An exploratory study of likeability in firm-level brands

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We develop a new measurement scale to assess consumers' brand likeability in firm-level brands. We present brand likeability as a multidimensional construct. In the context of service experience purchases, we find that increased likeability in brands results in: (1) greater amount of positive association; (2) increased interaction interest; (3) more personified quality; and (4) increased brand contentment. The four-dimensional multiple-item scale demonstrates good psychometric properties, showing strong evidence of reliability as well as convergent, discriminant and nomological validity. Our findings reveal that brand likeability is positively associated with satisfaction and positive word of mouth. The scale extends existing branding research, providing brand managers with a metric so that likeability can be managed strategically. It addresses the need for firms to act more likeably in an interaction-dominated economy. Focusing on likeability acts as a differentiator and encourages likeable brand personality traits. We present theoretical implications and future research directions on the holistic brand likeability concept.

Introduction

Researchers advocate the importance of creating, managing and evaluating consumer–brand relationships (e.g. Schmitt 2013; Tuškej et al. 2013).

Scholars stipulate more research to understand the quality of these relationships by investigating topics such as brand perceptions (Brunk 2012) and brand attitudes (Woo & Winterich 2013). In the current study, we conceptualise, develop, refine and test a new multidimensional scale of brand likeability to measure consumers' likeability perceptions of firm-level brands.¹ We posit that likeability is a cognitive process that is a prelude to important outcomes such as brand attachment (Park *et al.* 2010), brand love (Batra *et al.* 2012) and brand satisfaction (Fornell *et al.* 2010), and used to evaluate the quality of consumer–brand relationships (Park *et al.* 2010; Lam *et al.* 2013).

Our conceptualisation of brand likeability submits an innovative scale that encapsulates a broader domain than existing measures. For example, while satisfaction provides a good measure for customers' overall evaluation of the offerings' performance (e.g. Johnson & Fornell 1991; Fornell *et al.* 2010), we recognise that satisfaction is a post-experience measure (Ekinici *et al.* 2008), which is a condition that is not necessary for likeability to occur (Reinhard & Messner 2009). Researchers posit that likeability concerns all phases – that is, pre-, during and post-purchase and consumption (Reysen 2005; Nguyen *et al.* 2013). Developing a likeability scale thus has the potential to measure preceding perceptions, giving brand managers an important and early indication of brand approval among their consumers. In the present study, however, we focus exclusively on the *post-purchase condition*. We note that, for the purposes of our exploratory study and due to the nature of scale development (Bearden *et al.* 2011), we used a sample with actual brand service experiences, thus we did not focus on a pre-purchase condition, but rather on post-purchase brand likeability.

We posit that, to date, few studies have measured the factors influencing consumers' perceptions of brand likeability in firm-level brands (e.g. Reysen 2005; Albert *et al.* 2008; Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). Thus, we respond to this gap with the brand likeability scale, assisting brand managers with the assessment, measurement and evaluation of likeability which, in turn, may predict the quality of the consumer–brand relationship. Our emerging brand likeability concept thus contributes to the brand personality concept (Aaker 1997; Lee 2013) and enhances more long-term consumer–brand relationships (Schmitt 2013), considered as vital in this interactive market (Santos-Vijande *et al.* 2013). It is particularly a priority for firms focusing on a positive brand image (Romaniuk 2013) and brand reputation

¹ We focus on *firm-level brands*, and define these to include services and retail firms, from the perspectives of end consumers, which is not to be confused with retail *product-level* brands.

(Akdeniz *et al.* 2013). In the next section, we present our scale in detail. The process of developing a new measure starts with the *scale development process* (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). This process must be associated with the conceptual development of construct (Lages *et al.* 2005). Hence, in our study, we provide: (1) a conceptualisation that captures the domains of the construct; (2) a brand likeability measure from customers' point of view; and (3) a validation of the psychometric properties of the brand likeability scale.

Theoretical background

The likeability of a brand plays an important role for firms that rely on their brands (Albert *et al.* 2008). In the psychology literature, likeability has been defined as 'a persuasion tactic and a scheme of self-presentation' (e.g. Cialdini 1993; Kenrick *et al.* 2002; Reysen 2005). Researchers find that likeability is described by a multidimensional construct with cognitive and affective components (Alwitt 1987). For example, Reysen (2005) constructed a scale to study features of a person's likeability by looking at factors such as friendliness, approachability, attractiveness, levels of knowledge, similarity to oneself and agreeableness.

In line with past studies, we consider likeability as a construct made of multiple dimensions (Chaiken & Eagly 1983; Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). We view brand likeability in the context of service experiences and adopt the consumer behaviour approach. Thus, from the consumer behavioural perspective, brand likeability is defined as the assessment of appeal a customer has for a brand (Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). The context, which led to developing a multidimensional measure, builds on several key points pertaining to several gaps in the existing literature. Scholars put forward that: (1) commonly used single-item measures lack reliability and validity (e.g. Hair *et al.* 2006); (2) single-item scales do not contribute to understanding likeability as a multidimensional concept (Reysen 2005); (3) in the marketing context, the dominant focus has been on satisfaction or brand reputation, which does not encapsulate the broad dimensionality of likeability perceptions (Nguyen *et al.* 2013b). The conceptual model of brand likeability used for our study draws from existing studies in likeability and aims to refine these existing conceptualisations. We propose to develop a measure of brand likeability and a corresponding model of likeability that include both psychological and functional brand attributes, which influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. It will aid researchers and practitioners in understanding and handling likeability

differently and efficiently. As resources invested in consumer–brand relationships and interactive brand personalities are increasing, we suggest that the evaluation of likeability is essential. This precedes the objective of assessing the impact of likeability on key outcomes such as satisfaction and increased loyalty.

Development of a brand likeability scale

We build on validated and reliable measurement scales from cognitive psychology (Reysen 2005) and branding (Nguyen *et al.* 2013a) to propose a multidimensional scale to assess brand likeability in a service experience context. We conceptualise brand likeability in Figure 1. Our new brand likeability scale comprises four dimensions: (1) positivity; (2) interaction; (3) personified quality; and (4) brand contentment. We extend previous studies by adapting, refining and testing the four scales in an integrated model and scale (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005; Reysen 2005; Klaus & Maklan 2012a). Our definition of brand likeability corresponds with our conceptualisation and the verified brand likeability scale: ‘Brand likeability is the assessment of positivity, interaction, personification and contentment in a multidimensional framework.’ We propose likeability as an underlying commonality among the four dimensions and integrate

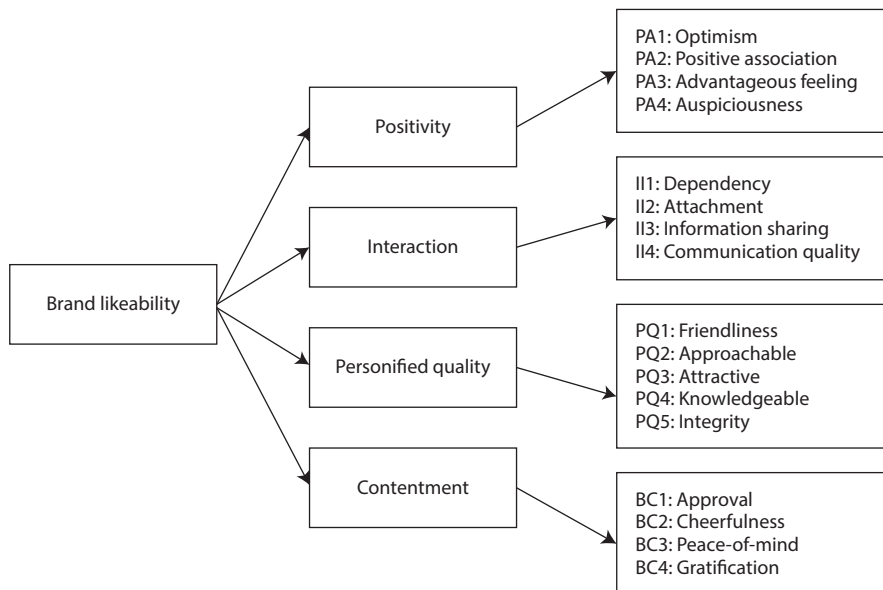


Figure 1 The brand likeability scale

previously isolated measures into a unique multidimensional scale. We explain these in detail next.

Positivity associations

We define the positivity dimension as the extent to which associations directed towards the source are optimistic and positive. Based on the positivity scale (Narvaez 2006), our definition emphasises the amount of optimistic attitude a customer has towards a brand. In addition, we draw from the positive aspect of attributions theory (Helson 1948), and provide guidance in understanding the inferences that people make when they wonder why an event occurred (Weiner 1985; Folkes 1988; Campbell 1999). Heider (1958) proposed the importance of looking at how individuals interpret events, and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour. The attributions concept, therefore, suggests that likeability occurs when customers have positive associations/inferences towards a firm's activities – that is, when a positive motive is attributed to a firm, customers may find the firm likeable.

The positivity construct comprises four items, namely: (1) optimism; (2) positive association; (3) advantageous feeling; and (4) auspiciousness. Positivity is a crucial element of likeability. Consumers with optimistic attitudes (Narvaez 2006), positive associations and inferences towards brands (Campbell 1999), feelings of being advantageous (Nguyen & Simkin 2013), and assertions on auspiciousness – that is, a brand's continued fulfilment of its promises (Ambler & Styles 1996) – characterise attributes that provide positive likeability perceptions.

Interaction interest

Rather than traditional one-way communication, scholars suggest that communicating with customers is becoming more interactive (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Mamic & Almaraz 2013). This interactional process is often known as the dual creation of value (Boulding *et al.* 2005), or value co-creation (Troye & Supphellen 2012). We define the interaction dimension as customers' interest in interacting and communicating, i.e. sharing information with the brand. In our scale, we focus on those interactions that arise from interested customers, thereby the sub-scale 'interaction interest'. We assume here that, when customers are interested in building a relationship through interaction (Boulding *et al.* 2005), they like the brand, which they interact with. We posit, for example, that the

use of social media, customisation of deals and offers, and personalised messages, make it vital to understand the importance of personalised communication and interaction. Firms communicate with their customers on a one-to-one basis as part of their customer engagement tactics, using tools such as customer relationship management (Boulding *et al.* 2005) or customer experience management (Klaus & Maklan 2012a). This is especially popular via social media and web communities such as Twitter and Facebook, or blogs, where firms interact with their customers individually (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). The benefits include opportunities for a more engaging experience (Peppers *et al.* 1999), better service (Simonson 2005) and more intimate relationships (Dibb & Simkin 2009). These elements link directly with increased loyalty, leading to opportunities for upselling and cross-selling (Peppers & Rogers 2010; Frow *et al.* 2011).

The interaction interest construct comprises four items, namely: (1) dependency; (2) attachment; (3) information sharing; and (4) communication quality. It assesses the extent to which there is a permanent interaction between consumer and brand (Lages *et al.* 2005). We adapt the interaction conceptualisation from Lages *et al.* (2005) and Menon *et al.*'s (1999) work on communication quality. Communication is defined as a two-way exchange to achieve shared understanding (Duncan & Moriarty 1998). We extend the construct with dimensions related to our study, namely attachment (Ahuvia 2005) and dependency (Boulding *et al.* 2005), thus advocating that both the level of attachment and dependency are attributes influencing interaction levels (e.g. Kleine *et al.* 1995; Britton & Rose 2004; Park *et al.* 2010). We consider interaction interest between consumer and brand to be an intrinsic element of likeability. Bleeke and Ernst (1993) suggest that communication is the most important element in successful inter-firm exchange, and that most relationships will crumble without good, frequent communication.

Personified quality

Researchers suggest that there is a personification of firm brands (e.g. Park *et al.* 2010; Lee 2013). As Reysen (2005) suggests, customers respond positively to individual treatment, things that interest them and content they like. Thus, we note that the personification of firms entails a firm differentiation strategy to engage with customers individually. Scholars define personified quality as a scheme of self-presentation (e.g. Cialdini 1993; Kenrick *et al.* 2002), suggesting the conscious influence of

consumers' image perception (Reysen 2005). For example, in the context of celebrity endorsements, research suggests that using celebrities is a way for firms to induce likeability, aiming to create a positive personality for a firm's services. Such a front figure captures customers' attention and creates brand loyalty (McCracken 1989). The personified quality construct captures the brand's desire to develop a likeable personality, by targeting customers appropriately, and thereby create consumer–brand relationships that are beyond those of today (Nguyen *et al.* 2013a).

The personified quality construct comprises five items, namely: (1) friendliness; (2) approachable; (3) attractive; (4) knowledgeable; and (5) integrity. As identified by the source attractiveness model (McGuire 1985), a likeable personality depends on factors such as attractiveness, friendliness, expertise and credibility (Hovland & Weiss 1951; McCracken 1989; Reysen 2005). While many of the likeability theories are often in the context of people, researchers propose that if these likeability traits from individuals could be applied to a firm and its relationship with customers, the firm could be interpreted as striving to become more likeable (e.g. Park *et al.* 2010). Therefore, it would have to emphasise friendliness, approachability and attractiveness, and use compliments and associations in order to attain likeability (Hovland & Weiss 1951; McGuire 1985; Reysen 2005). Furthermore, appropriate levels of knowledge, stirring customers' interest and generating agreeableness are key aspects of being likeable (Chaiken & Eagly 1983).

Brand contentment

Researchers posit that consumers have ideas about what they consider a likeable brand (Rahinel & Redden 2013). These ideas are based on reference points and are developed continuously from a number of sources, including social norms, life, previous transactions, competing brands and perceived value of the brand (Feinberg *et al.* 2002). For example, by keeping customers happy, a firm may be able to increase its prices without being disliked, by broadening its 'likeability range' and 'likeable zone' (Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). This can be done with charitable donations or other activities that build goodwill. Over time, these firms may increase their overall brand likeability. Drawing from the Sustainable Happiness Model (Sheldon *et al.* 2009), we posit that the brand contentment dimension identifies the likeability range, and may be defined as the cognitive and emotional state of *happiness*, resulting from the evaluation of the brand. Researchers find that, under certain conditions, emotions are integral parts

of brand likeability. Nguyen *et al.* (2013a) find that likeability occurs in stages, where some are more perceptual while others have elements of affect and emotion. Such complexity is underpinned by the level of familiarity, commitment and appeal that a consumer has for a brand (e.g. Aaker 1997). We support the conceptualisation of a more holistic brand likeability concept, which is novel to the branding literatures.

The brand contentment construct comprises four items, namely: (1) approval; (2) cheerfulness; (3) peace-of-mind; and (4) gratification. We posit that both approval and cheerfulness assess the emotional aspect of likeability. Peace-of-mind with the brand is considered a key attribute to inducing contentment. It is often implicitly assumed that, when a consumer has peace-of-mind, it is probable that the customer likes what he or she has purchased and/or experienced (Fornell *et al.* 2010). Finally, when a consumer has feelings of gratification, it is suggested that his or her needs are fulfilled, which in turn leads to contentment and, subsequently, likeability.

Table 1 Dimensions of the brand likeability scale

Brand likeability dimensions			
Positivity associations	Interaction interest	Personified quality	Brand contentment
PA1: Optimism	II1: Dependency	PQ1: Friendliness	BC1: Approval
PA2: Positive association	II2: Attachment	PQ2: Approachable	BC2: Cheerfulness
PA3: Advantageous	II3: Information sharing	PQ3: Attractive	BC3: Peace-of-mind
PA4: Auspiciousness	II4: Communication quality	PQ4: Knowledgeable	BC4: Gratification
		PQ5: Integrity	

Method

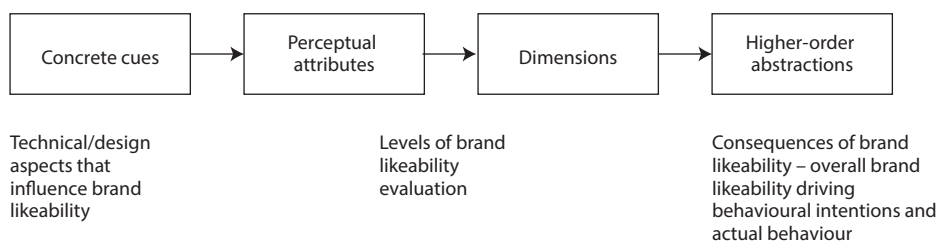
Our study employed the systematic scale development procedures suggested by Churchill (1979), DeVellis (2003), Lages *et al.* (2005), Netemeyer *et al.* (2003) and Parasuraman *et al.* (2005). This process of scale development follows conventional guidelines for scale development, consisting of systematic phases: articulate the meaning and domain, scale generation, initial purification, refinement and validation of the brand likeability scale. The scale resulted from in-depth interviews, a literature review of likeability, and survey tests. In order to achieve a reliable and valid measure, scholars propose that the constructs of interest must have theoretical and observable meanings that satisfy psychometric analysis for unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity

(Nunnally 1978; Churchill 1979; Steenkamp & Trijp 1991; DeVellis 2003; Netemeyer *et al.* 2003).

To represent the wide range of possible criteria and ways to assess likeability from the literature, we propose a theoretical framework that is based on the means–end chain approach to understand consumers’ cognitive structures (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). This approach suggests that consumers retain information in memory at multiple levels of abstraction (Young & Feigen 1975; Olson & Reynolds 1983), and follows the established approach to explore and validate quality measures (Klaus & Maklan 2012b). Using the means–end framework allows a theoretical foundation for the exploration of brand likeability attributes and dimensions. The proposed means–end chain approach is illustrated in Figure 2.

As illustrated in Figure 2, we suggest that brand likeability’s antecedents are specific concrete cues, such as price, promotion, service and experience, which trigger perceptual attributes of brand likeability. These perceptual attributes, in turn, are the evaluation of brand likeability and join together to form evaluations along more abstract dimensions (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). In combination, these attribute- and dimension-level evaluations lead to a higher-order abstraction (Zeithaml *et al.* 2002). This more global and higher level of abstraction is the overall assessment of brand likeability, which influences behavioural intentions and actual behaviour (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). Scholars suggest that the specification of perceptual-level attributes as the domain of scale items is appropriate for several reasons.

- Compared to concrete cues, perceptual attributes are more enduring evaluative aspects (Scholderer & Grunert 2004).
- Since concrete cues are generally of a technical nature, customers may not be aware of them or have the knowledge to assess how good they



Source: Scholderer & Grunert 2004; Parasuraman *et al.* 2005

Figure 2 A means–end framework of the brand likeability scale

are. Perceptual attributes are more experiential and thus more readily assessable by all customers (Aurifeille & Valette-Florence 1995). Researchers note that perceptual attributes are more ‘scalable’ than concrete cues, suggesting that they can be rated along a continuum, whereas concrete cues, in contrast, are either present or absent (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005).

- Perceptual attributes ratings are more specific than dimension-level assessments, thus capable of offering better insight into brand likeability areas that affect the outcomes most (Cohen & Warlop 2001).
- As implied in the theoretical framework, the links between the brand likeability evaluative process (perceptual/dimensional level) and its consequences (higher-order abstractions) constitute the nomological net (Cronbach & Meehl 1955) for verifying the construct validity of the scale that consists of perceptual-attribute level items (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005) using empirical evidence.

Thus, using the means–end chain approach as the theoretical framework, we form a solid underpinning to link attributes of brand likeability and its consequences (Grunert *et al.* 2001).

A critical initial step in the development of the brand likeability scale is the correct specification of the domain from which items are drawn in constructing the scale (Churchill 1979). Based on our review, we specify the domain construct to include four brand likeability categories. Specifically, we refer to brand likeability as ‘the extent to which a brand has appeal over four dimensions labelled positivity associations, interaction interest, personified quality and brand contentment’.

In the initial stage of our research, we explored the perceptual attributes of brand likeability. This was to ensure that the scale measures covered the entire meanings of the construct for the study. We conducted 40 in-depth interviews using the soft-laddering technique (Grunert & Grunert 1995), which is a technique where the interviewer strives to assess internal attitudes, cognitive structures, feelings and underlying purchase motivations (e.g. Reynolds *et al.* 1995; Klaus & Maklan 2012a). Based on the qualitative study, we designed a set of items to measure each of the dimensions. We modified some original items and, consequently, the names of the four dimensions, for the purposes of clarity.

In conducting this step, the views and opinions of the respondents offered great insights into the phenomenon of brand likeability. This helped in generating and revising the appropriate measurement scale items.

Based on the in-depth interviews, we refined the brand likeability items and adjusted several measures to the present context. To assess for the content and face validity of the generated items, we asked a panel of marketing experts and academics to comment on the readability of the items. Content validity refers to the degree a measure's items represent a proper sample of the theoretical content domain of a construct. Face validity refers to the extent to which a measure reflects what it is intended to measure (Nunnally & Bernstein 1994; Hair *et al.* 2006). The panel of experts was also asked about the similarity of the items. Importance was given to aspects such as the breadth of theoretical content covered by the item, consistency of contents, clarity of meaning and comprehensiveness (Matsuno *et al.* 2000; Lages *et al.* 2005). This procedure generated 17 final items. Appendix 1 shows the full item measures. Table 1 presents the listing and their scale reliability scores. The average internal reliability is 0.84.

Data-collection procedure

In the next stage of the scale-development process, we administered our questionnaire. We used respondents who are frequent users of a range of service experience vendors, such as auto repair, supermarkets and service providers, as these represent a 'credence' and 'experience' service (Iacobucci 1992). It was important that the vendors varied in perceived quality and product variety (apparel, books, CDs, computer hardware, drugs, electronics, flowers, groceries, toys) (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). We identified the respondents as appropriate, as 'a sample who could offer some ideas and insights into the phenomenon of study' (Churchill 1979). We contacted and screened the respondents to determine if they had sufficient shopping experience with the mentioned services; this was specified as having used a retail vendor at least six times during the past three months and having made at least three purchases within that period. We note that the three purchases do not necessarily entail the same retailer, or the same services or products. Rather, we sought to ensure that our sample had appropriate exposure to the retail services setting. In addition, as we focused on the post-purchase condition of brand likeability, their frequent use aided in our conceptualisation, and subsequent scale validation. Respondents were directed to a website containing the self-administered questionnaire, and instructions were given. To encourage participation, respondents had the option to enter their details to participate in a prize draw with a £50 cash prize. This process generated 458 completed questionnaires, which were

subsequently analysed using SPSS 16 and AMOS. Appendix 2 presents the profile of the sample in detail.

Data analysis

Gerbing and Anderson (1988) advocate the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess reliability and validity. Their work builds on Churchill's (1979) approach to scale development. For our study, we used confirmatory factor analysis to validate the measurement scale items and to examine scale properties such as unidimensionality, reliability and construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity). Using maximum likelihood estimation procedures, tests were performed using LISREL (Joreskog & Sorbom 1993) and AMOS (Hair *et al.* 2006).

Confirmatory factor analysis

We restricted each item to load on a pre-specified factor (with the four first-order factors allowed to correlate freely), as advocated by Lages *et al.* (2005). We assessed the fit of the measurement and structural models using multiple indices, as advocated by Hoyle and Panter (1995), Klaus and Maklan (2012a) and Lages *et al.* (2005). These included type 2 incremental fit index (IFI), type 3 comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Table 2 shows the fit statistics, indicating that the brand likeability scale is robust. The recommended thresholds are met for all measurement models: the chi-square is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 145.95$, $df = 66$, $p = 0.05$). IFI,

Table 2 Measurement, reliability and validity

Measurement model	Construct reliability Confirmatory ($n = 458$)	Average variance extracted Confirmatory ($n = 458$)
Satisfaction	0.92	0.82
Positive word of mouth	0.88	0.80
<i>BLS dimensions</i>		
Positivity	0.86	0.88
Interaction	0.84	0.86
Personified quality	0.84	0.80
Contentment	0.82	0.82

Goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2 = 910.40$; $df = 260$; CFI = 0.920; RFI = 0.940; TLI = 0.925; RMSEA = 0.046

Note: Internal reliability (Cronbach 1951); variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker 1981)

CFI and TLI are >0.90; RMSEA of 0.05, demonstrating excellent model fit (Hair *et al.* 2006).

Tables 2 and 3 show the psychometric properties using CFA. All items load on their respective factors, indicating high construct reliability. Specifically, all four dimensions have Cronbach's alpha (α) values >0.60, composite reliability (ρ_c) values >0.60, and average variance extracted (ρ_{ave}) values >0.50. Additionally, the results from the convergent reliability tests of the scale measures (Table 3) show that all four dimensions have factor loadings >0.70, all *t*-values are well above >1.96 and, overall, show that the RMSEA and CFI are satisfactory, indicating an acceptable model fit (Fornell & Larcker 1981). The results from the discriminant validity tests (chi-square tests) also show that the dimensions are acceptable (Anderson & Gerbing 1988).

Unidimensionality is evidenced as each of them loads only on one corresponding dimension (average loading size was 0.75). We subject the purified scales to validity tests including convergent validity and discriminant validity. For the convergent validity test, we examined the coefficients and their statistical significance. All coefficients were found to be above the recommended values and statistically significant (Bagozzi

Table 3 Construct reliability analysis

Brand likeability dimensions	Item	Construct reliability score
Positivity (composite reliability = 0.80)	PA1	0.780
	PA2	0.710
	PA3	0.662
	PA4	0.782
Interaction (composite reliability = 0.82)	II1	0.820
	II2	0.752
	II3	0.702
	II4	0.710
Personified quality (composite reliability = 0.78)	PQ1	0.820
	PQ2	0.780
	PQ3	0.792
	PQ4	0.786
	PQ5	0.780
Contentment (composite reliability = 0.78)	BC1	0.760
	BC2	0.708
	BC3	0.768
	BC4	0.820

Note: Internal reliability (Cronbach 1951); composite reliability (Bagozzi 1980)

1980). We also showed that Fornell and Larcker's (1981) index of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was >0.50 for all four constructs.

We revealed evidence of discriminant validity based on two results: (1) all construct inter-correlations are significantly different from 1; and (2) shared variance among any two constructs is less than the average variance explained in the items by the construct (Fornell & Larcker 1981; MacKenzie *et al.* 1999; Lages *et al.* 2005). We tested discriminant validity by carrying out a chi-square difference test (Klaus & Maklan 2012a). We compared chi-square values for every pair of estimated constructs, i.e. the values obtained from an unconstrained and a constrained model in which the correlation between the constructs was set to be zero (Anderson & Gerbing 1988). Discriminant validity is revealed by non-significant correlations among the four first-order constructs and the new construct (Lages *et al.* 2005). We concluded that all constructs were found to have adequate discriminant validity (p -values <0.01).

Nomological validity

Once we had established psychometric properties, we assessed nomological validity by testing our measures with other theoretically related constructs (Churchill 1995). The purpose of nomological validity is to ensure that the brand likeability measure works and correlates in the theoretically predicted way with measures of different, but related, constructs (Hair *et al.* 2006). We modelled brand likeability as a formative construct with the dimensions driving brand likeability perceptions reflectively (Jarvis *et al.* 2003; Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). Inspired by previous scale development studies (Klaus & Maklan 2012a), we utilised satisfaction and positive word of mouth for testing nomological validity. We thus expected a positive relationship between brand likeability and satisfaction (Argyriou & Melewar 2011) and positive word of mouth (Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). The rationale for choosing these two constructs is mainly due to their popular use in the marketing literature (Fornell *et al.* 2010), but also given their theoretical relationship with brand likeability (Nguyen *et al.* 2013b). As shown in Table 4, we demonstrate nomological validity as the brand likeability measures' scores positively and significantly correlated with satisfaction and positive word of mouth.

Overall, the CFA analysis and model fit statistics exhibit good fits (Table 2). All of the dimensions are shown to be reliable and valid as there are no offending estimates and all parameters are acceptable (Table 3). Thus the CFA results specify scale items as reflective indicators

Table 4 Brand likeability dimensions and outcomes

	Satisfaction	Positive word of mouth
Positivity	0.84**	0.92**
Interaction	0.74**	0.74*
Personified quality	0.76*	0.70*
Contentment	0.90**	0.82**

Note: * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test); ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

of latent constructs, allowing them to inter-correlate. Table 4 shows the correlation coefficients between the four brand likeability dimensions and satisfaction and positive word of mouth. Given that all the coefficients are positive and significant at $p < 0.05$, we conclude that brand likeability has a positive impact on satisfaction and positive word of mouth. Hence, the nomological validity of the four measures is supported (Cadogan *et al.* 1999; Lages *et al.* 2005).

Discussion

We find that customers evaluate brand likeability at varying levels, namely overall level, dimensional level and attribute level. Perceptions on each level drive the next level (Klaus & Maklan 2012b). This finding improves our understanding of how customers evaluate services' likeability as a more holistic concept. Based on our nomological validity test, our findings further existing understanding of how customers evaluate firms' brand likeability, linking their evaluation to positive outcomes including satisfaction and positive word of mouth (Landwehr *et al.* 2011). By using the brand likeability scale to assess consumer–brand relationships, managers may define strategies that address likeability, increasing customers' satisfaction (Reysen 2005; Nguyen *et al.* 2011b).

The hierarchical structure of brand likeability presents theoretical implications to the branding literatures. Our brand likeability conceptualisation is a cognitive evaluation process of psychological processes, and thus goes deeper into human cognition than surface judgements of service and product quality (Schoderer & Grunert 2004). While we may not have captured all dimensions of brand likeability, we have extracted the underlying commonality among the dimensions using the means–end chain approach (Parasuraman *et al.* 2005). Thus we have captured an overall assessment of brand likeability, including customers' evaluation of the four dimensions.

Unlike existing measures, there is not yet a scale of likeability that captures its multidimensional attributes in branding. Our study fills this gap with an empirically validated multidimensional scale that assesses the likeability of a brand in a service experience context. Our findings support and extend previous research on a broad and holistic likeability conceptualisation (e.g. Nguyen *et al.* 2013a). We extend previous single-dimensional likeability measures (e.g. Reysen 2005) with four dimensions. The four brand likeability dimensions support both credibility and attractiveness theories (Hovland & Weiss 1951; McGuire 1985) and adopt several theories, including attributions and comparison theories. Our contribution is the extension of the above theories to a branding context and combining them into a multidimensional quality scale. We found new dimensions including positivity associations, interaction interests, personified quality and contentment. The new dimensions incorporate relevant attributes that reflect customers' likeability evaluations in a highly competitive service context, extending existing knowledge in branding literatures (Akdeniz *et al.* 2013; Romaniuk 2013).

For practitioners, we propose that our brand likeability concept and scale be utilised in the following ways: (1) to systematically focus on likeability as a differentiator between firms; (2) to identify consumers' current attitudes and perceptions, and take appropriate action; (3) to stimulate increased interaction; (4) as an identification tool, built around the four dimensions and increasing effort into specific areas, which may be lacking in likeability; (5) as a segmentation tool to categorise consumers' level of likeability and target those that may have perceptions of dislikeability; and (6) to increase the 'likeability zone', by linking likeability to brand personality, identity and reputation. The latter can be achieved with a strategic focus on likeability and with continuous monitoring of consumers' likeability perceptions.

Conclusion, limitations and future research directions

Our research created a brand likeability scale to assess firm-level brands' likeability. We hope that our scale will be used as an alternative to traditional measures, including satisfaction and reputation indices, as it captures perceptions that precede these existing measures (Nguyen *et al.* 2013b). We advance existing research in branding and contribute to further advancement of consumer–brand relationships (Schmitt 2013). In this interactive age, a measure of brand likeability may be an important differentiator and contributor to successful firm-level brand personalities.

We acknowledge some research limitations. First, we recognise that our proposition that the brand likeability scale be used as an early indicator and pre-purchase measure needs further testing. We note that, due to the nature of scale development (Bearden *et al.* 2011), we have focused exclusively on post-purchase brand likeability, and used a sample with actual experiences of services in our development. Second, the study was conducted in a single setting (i.e. services), meaning that it would be problematic to generalise the results to other settings (Hair *et al.* 2006). Third, the research design is cross-sectional, representing static relationships between the variables. Netemeyer *et al.* (2003) note that, in a cross-sectional study, the causality of the linkages between the constructs cannot be fully proven, so caution is required when inferring cause and effect among the variables. Longitudinal studies will be more desirable, as they will allow better insight into consumers' changing attitudes over a period of time. Another limitation is associated with the relatively small sample size. Consequently, our results may be regarded as suggestive rather than conclusive (Lages *et al.* 2005). Finally, we acknowledge that some researchers argue that higher-order reflective constructs and formative constructs cannot represent 'real' constructs in any ontology that makes coherent sense (Cadogan & Lee 2013) – despite their common use and discussion in methodological and applied literature (for a deeper understanding, see Cadogan *et al.* 2013).

We encourage the adoption of our brand likeability scale for tests in other settings, including multiple industries and contexts. Using different samples and contexts (e.g. high- vs low-involvement products) may prove the stability of the scale and enhance the generalisability of the model. We further encourage researchers to add new items and continue to refine the brand likeability scale. We also propose a new study that compares the performance of our brand likeability scale with other existing brand scales and scales developed commercially, such as those of Millward Brown and Y&R, in order to test robustness and reliability. In addition, we further note that, while satisfaction and likeability are conceptually different constructs, we initially found aspects of satisfaction in our multidimensional scale. However, this was expected. To avoid any confusion between the two concepts, we omitted satisfaction from our scale. We thus call for more research to compare and contrast these two concepts. Future research may develop an *opposite* consumer-level brand likeability scale to assess, from the firm's point of view, how likeable certain customers' behaviours are. This approach will be useful in various segmentation schemes. Lastly, more research is warranted in understanding the consequences of likeability.

A comprehensive framework may be developed linking past behaviours and other marketing outcomes such as brand identity, image, loyalty, trust and purchase intentions.

Appendix 1: Measures of construct

Brand likeability scale

Each scale item use a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree) or as Do not know/Not applicable. The items below are grouped by dimensions for expositional convenience; they appeared in random order in the survey. The codes preceding the items correspond to the variables named in Table 1.

Dimensions	Item measures
posass	<i>Process leading to positive associations</i>
PA1	I strongly believe that the brand can keep its promise to me.
PA2	The brand is associated with a positive motive.
PA3	I feel that I am favoured and given priority by the brand.
PA4	I believe that the brand continues to get better and better.
intint	<i>Interest to interact between customers and brand</i>
II1	I stay with this brand because I am dependent on them.
II2	I feel attached to the brand.
II3	The brand openly shares information with me.
II4	I have continuous interaction with the brand.
perqua	<i>Quality associated with the brand's personality</i>
PQ1	I would describe the brand as friendly.
PQ2	I would say that the brand is approachable.
PQ3	This brand is very attractive.
PQ4	I would ask for advice because the brand is knowledgeable.
PQ5	It is important that the brand has a high level of integrity.
bracon	<i>Consumers' content with the brand</i>
BC1	Overall, I approve of this brand.
BC2	I feel cheerful when shopping at this brand.
BC3	The brand takes care of everything for me.
BC3	I am grateful for the brand's offering of services.

Appendix 2: Sample profile

Variable	Percentage (n = 458)
Age	
<25	36.46 (167)
25–40	42.58 (195)
41–55	13.32 (61)
>55	7.64 (35)
Sex	
Male	39.96 (183)
Female	60.04 (275)
Level of education	
High school or less	25.76 (118)
Some college	27.07 (124)
College graduate	43.02 (197)
Other	4.15 (19)
Annual household income	
<\$25,000–49,999	62.66 (287)
\$50,000–74,999	30.79 (141)
\$75,000 or more	6.55 (30)

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