



CHICAGO JOURNALS

Journal of Consumer Research, Inc.

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Source: *Journal of Consumer Research*, (-Not available-), p. 000

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/675377>

Accessed: 13/02/2014 14:57

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The Impact of Fear on Emotional Brand Attachment

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The current research investigates the role of fear in the creation of emotional attachment to a brand. Previous research examining the influence of incidental negative emotions on brand evaluations has generally found that negative emotions lead to negative evaluations. The current research suggests that for fear, the relationship may be more positive. Since people cope with fear through affiliation with others, in the absence of other individuals, consumers may seek affiliation with an available brand. This, in turn, will enhance emotional attachment to that brand. Four studies demonstrate that consumers who experience fear in the presence of a brand feel greater emotional brand attachment than consumers who experience other emotions such as happiness, sadness, or excitement. The findings from the research advance understanding of consumer-brand relationships by demonstrating that relationships between consumers and brands are not merely metaphorical. Rather, under certain circumstances, brands can actually fulfill interpersonal psychological needs.

Fear is an emotional response to the presence or anticipation of a danger or threat (LaTour and Rotfeld 1997). The emotion of fear has been shown to have a powerful influence on consumer behavior (Boster and Mongeau 1984; Rotfeld 1988). Most prominently, fear can be effective in advertising contexts by persuading consumers to engage in certain activities in order to avoid fearful outcomes (Passyn and Sujana 2006; Roberson and Rogers 1988). For example, advertisements recommending safe driving courses or cautioning against drug use often evoke fear in their messages (Anand-Keller and Block 1996). The experience of fear enhances elaboration and, if carefully manipulated, can have a positive influence on persuasion (Block and Anand-Keller 1998).

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Ann McGill served as editor and Patti Williams served as associate editor for this article.

Electronically published January 29, 2014

The body of work on fear in consumer behavior has focused primarily on message-induced emotion. The experience of incidental fear has received less attention (see Griskevicius et al. [2009], Lee and Andrade [2011], Lerner and Keltner [2001], and Raghunathan and Pham [1999] for exceptions with regard to incidental fear's effect on risk taking), and as such, its influence on brand evaluation is less clear. It may be that when the experience of fear is not linked to a way to manage the emotion (e.g., buying condoms, investing in a retirement plan, driving more slowly, etc.), its effects are negative. Indeed, prior research has shown that negative emotions experienced during television shows can lower evaluations of an unrelated advertisement presented immediately following (Goldberg and Gorn 1987). This may be one factor that has led marketers to avoid associating their brands with fearful content (e.g., ensuring that advertisements do not appear during fear-inducing television shows or avoiding placing brands or products within horror movies [Russell 1998]).

There is, however, reason to suspect that incidental fear could have positive consequences for a brand. Interpersonal research has shown that when people feel scared, they are more likely to seek out affiliation with others (Sarnoff and Zimbardo 1961; Schachter 1959). For example, individuals who experience a fearful event together (e.g., a natural disaster, terrorist act, etc.) display solidarity and group cohesion and demonstrate stronger attachments with those who were present during the experience (Fried 1963; Moore 1958; Tyhurst 1951). If the experience of fear can lead to emotional attachments to other individuals, it may also be that it can

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lead to emotional attachments to brands. The current research considers this possibility.

Emotional brand attachment has been defined as the positive emotional outcomes of a strong connection between a consumer and a brand (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Consumers who feel a strong attachment to a brand will be more loyal and less price sensitive. While most of the research to date has demonstrated that attachment develops and strengthens over time as consumers have numerous experiences with the brand (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Lastovicka and Sirianni 2011; Park et al. 2010; Thomson et al. 2005), we propose that because of its impact on the desire to be with others, the experience of fear can facilitate the attachment process. Specifically, we suggest that if a brand is present with a consumer during a fearful experience, the consumer will have a sense that the brand actually shared the fearful experience, and this will result in a heightened sense of emotional attachment to the brand.

Across four laboratory studies, the current research investigates the effect of incidental fear on emotional attachment to brands. In so doing, we make several contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to research on incidental emotions by demonstrating that fear, a negative emotion, can have positive outcomes on brand evaluation. Specifically we show that incidental fear experienced in the presence of a brand can facilitate emotional attachment to the brand. Second, we provide evidence that this attachment occurs due to a perception that the brand and the consumer shared the emotional experience. As such our work provides some of the first empirical evidence that brand relationships are not merely metaphorical but that people can make psychological, personal connections to brands.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fear in Consumer Behavior

Fear is a basic emotion typically produced by the presence or anticipation of a specific danger or threat (LaTour and Rotfeld 1997). Although a large body of research has examined effects of fear appeals on persuasion (e.g., Anand Keller and Block 1996; Maddux and Rogers 1983; Passyn and Sujana 2006; Rogers 1983; Witte 1992), the influence of incidental fear on consumer behavior has received less attention. The bulk of the research on incidental fear that has been conducted has examined the impact of fear on perceptions of risk (Griskevicius et al. 2009; Lee and Andrade 2011; Lerner and Keltner 2001; Raghunathan and Pham 1999). These findings have shown that when consumers feel anxious or fearful, they are more risk averse, make more pessimistic judgments of risky outcomes, and are less likely to be persuaded by scarcity appeals. Whether incidental fear would, in general, make individuals more positively or negatively disposed toward brands, however, has not been directly investigated.

Research examining incidental negative emotions outside the specific domain of fear indicates that in general negative emotions have negative implications for brand evaluations.

For example, the theory of affect transfer (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986) states that the close proximity of a target to an emotional experience may result in the evaluative meaning of the emotion being transferred to the target. Similarly, mood-congruent processing hypothesizes that consumers' evaluative actions and judgments are biased in accordance with their emotional states (Bower 1981; Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008; Forgas 1995; Gardner 1985). Incidental emotion has been shown to affect a number of outcomes, including product evaluations (Axelrod 1963), evaluations of advertisements (Goldberg and Gorn 1987), attitudes toward brand extensions (Barone, Miniard, and Romeo 2000), and decisions about future consumption (Pham 1998). Overall, positive mood tends to lead to more favorable evaluations, while negative mood tends to lead to more negative evaluations. Perhaps because of this, marketers are somewhat wary of associating their brands with negative contexts and experiences (Russell 1998).

Given this body of work, it is reasonable to suspect that experiencing fear during exposure to a brand would have similar negative implications for the brand. However, it is also important to consider the coping mechanisms that consumers have to deal with these negative emotions. Emotion regulation is a person's spontaneous attempt to intensify, attenuate, or maintain a given emotional state (Cohen et al. 2008). The most commonly regulated states are negative (Lazarus 1991; Morris and Reilly 1987), as people strive to achieve positive emotional states. Thus, when faced with a negative emotional experience, consumers seek ways to cope with the negative feelings. Common regulatory strategies are to avoid and disengage by directing attention away from negative stimuli (Cohen et al. 2008) or by directing attention toward relieving cues (Derryberry and Tucker 1994). People in negative emotional states are more likely to engage in behavior that results in more positive feelings, such as watching comedies, listening to uplifting music, or eating chocolate when sad (Andrade 2005; Cohen and Andrade 2004; Weaver and Laird 1995; Zillmann 1988).

Despite a broad array of consumer research examining the regulation of negative emotions, the specific emotion of fear has received little attention (see Kemp and Kopp [2011] for an exception). However, within the domain of group dynamics, it has been shown that individuals cope with fear through interpersonal means (Morris et al. 1976; Schachter 1959). Specifically, fear motivates people to seek out others to share the fearful experience, using this act of affiliation as a way to cope with the fearful or threatening situation (Schachter 1959).

Positive Effects of Fear in Group Processes

The experience of fear has been shown to positively impact relationships and the perceptions that people have of each other. Specifically, fear leads to the desire to affiliate or connect with others. For example, in times of war, increased camaraderie and "bunching" can be seen among combat troops on the battlefield (Grinker and Spiegel 1945; Janis 1963; Marshall 1947) and even among whole nations

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(Durkheim 1947). Group cohesion and solidarity have also been found to occur for victims of natural disasters (Fried 1963; Moore 1958; Tyhurst 1951). This research finds that solidarity is a function of sharing a common threat or suffering (Fritz and Williams 1957; Sherif 1966). In fact, it appears that the greater the threat, the greater the person's affiliative tendencies (Turner 1967).

Schachter (1959) was the first to show a connection between fear and affiliation, wherein he described affiliation as the strength of the desire to share the experience with others. In his foundational study, participants were induced to feel high or low levels of fear by being told that they would receive either high-intensity or painless electrical shocks. (For clarity we have used the term fear, but in Schachter's work he referred to his conditions as high and low anxiety. Subsequent research by Sarnoff and Zimbardo [1961] and Morris et al. [1976] confirmed that this was actually a manipulation of fear.) After explaining the experiment, participants were asked if they would like to wait for their turn with others or alone. High-fear participants were significantly more likely to choose to wait with others than low-fear participants. Later studies further showed that fear leads to a desire not just to be with someone but rather to be with someone who is about to experience the same event (Schachter 1959). These results have been replicated several times (Darley and Aronson 1966; Gerard and Rabbie 1961; Sarnoff and Zimbardo 1961; Wrightsman 1960; Zimbardo and Formica 1963), all illustrating that fear leads to an increase in the desire to share the experience with others (Morris et al. 1976).

Fear and Emotional Brand Attachment

In all of the above situations, affiliation with an interpersonal other is a successful coping mechanism for fear. However, it is important to note that it is the act of affiliation, rather than the affiliation target, that enables coping. In attachment styles literature, it has been mentioned that an attachment object does not necessarily need to be another person (Bowlby 1971; Mende and Bolton 2011; Winnicott 1958); instead, people can form attachments to objects (e.g., teddy bears or blankets) that provide a substitute attachment object when people are inaccessible. Thus, the act of affiliation, regardless of whether the affiliation is with an interpersonal other, should be enough for a consumer to successfully cope with fear.

We propose that during a fearful experience, consumers' desire for affiliation might lead them to reach out to an available brand as a way to cope. Prior research has argued that consumers can form relationships with brands in much the same way and with similar complexity as they do with interpersonal others (Fournier 1998). Relationships with brands can be conceived of along dimensions of commitment, intimacy, passion, and romantic love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012; Fournier 1998; Lastovicka and Sirrianni 2011). Given that fear results in interpersonal attachment, and given that consumers relate to brands in interpersonal ways, fear may cause consumers to form attachment with brands.

The suggestion that consumers might reach out for an

available brand during fear has support from research on neurobiological reactions to fear, which shows that after a negative emotional experience such as fear, mammals have a heightened sensitivity to the tactile benefits of the environment (Hofer 1987; Martel et al. 1993) and often seek out affiliative touch from others to restore social resources (Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams 2003; McGlone et al. 2007; Panksepp 1998). Affiliation, in turn, leads to a release of oxytocin, which has positive emotional and social benefits such as modulating anxiety and stress (Taylor 2002; Taylor et al. 2000) and increasing trust (Kirsch et al. 2005). We suggest that the perception that the brand has shared a fearful experience can fulfill the consumer's motivation for affiliation, which can, in turn, result in increased emotional attachment to the brand (Thomson et al. 2005).

As mentioned above, fear heightens a desire for affiliation. At the same time, fear also heightens attention and sensitivity to the environment—part of a biological survival response. When experiencing fear, the sympathetic nervous system is activated. This system is responsible for the “fight-or-flight” survival mechanism (Cannon 1929; Izard 1977) and leads to greater sensitivity to the environment (Schupp et al. 2004). Previous research on the relationship between fear and affiliation has shown that this heightened sensitivity to the environment manifests as increased eye contact and visual attention, both of which act as a means of affiliation (Gump and Kulik 1997). In addition, directing attention to relieving cues has been found to effectively regulate negative emotions (Bowlby 1980; Derryberry and Tucker 1994). It is possible, then, that directing attention toward a brand may be a way to help people cope with fear. Given that a fearful consumer is motivated to share the experience, the presence of an attachment object (i.e., the brand) would provide the opportunity. Moreover, since this object should receive heightened attention (because of general sensitivity and as a result of emotion regulation), it should lead to a higher perception of shared experience with the brand.

Brand Attachment. In our theorizing, we propose that fear can heighten the desire for affiliation, which, in turn, should result in higher emotional attachment to the brand. Brand attachment is a marketing construct that describes the strength of a bond between consumers and brands (Park et al. 2010). Drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby 1980), Thomson et al. (2005) developed the concept and measure of *emotional attachment*, which is defined as having positive feelings of affection, passion, and connection for a brand. The authors hypothesized that over multiple interactions, consumers can form emotional attachments to a brand and that these emotional attachments are strong predictors of loyalty.

The literature on brand attachment distinguishes two measures of brand attachment: the Thomson et al. (2005) scale of emotional attachment and the more recent Park et al. (2010) scale of brand attachment. While we acknowledge that both measures examine brand attachment, they focus on different components of attachment. While the Thomson et al. (2005) scale measures the feelings associated with attachment (affection, passion, and connection), the Park et al. (2010) scale

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centers on more cognitive dimensions of brand accessibility and integration into a consumer's identity. Due to these distinctions, and because our research question is on effects of the emotion of fear, we focus on the development of emotional attachment (as measured by Thomson et al. [2005]). We argue that due to its emotional nature, a fearful experience should facilitate the development of emotional attachment to a brand. Brand attachment theories suggest that these attachments take time and multiple interactions with the brand to form (Thomson et al. 2005). However, research has shown that emotional evaluations can occur instantaneously (Edwards 1990; Schwarz and Clore 1983; Zajonc 1980). Given the emotional intensity of fear and its consequent effect on desire for affiliation, sharing a fearful experience with a brand should enhance the emotional connections to the brand. Although we focus on emotional brand attachment in the present research, we return to the potential role of fear in the enhancement of the more cognitive brand attachment (Park et al. 2010) in the general discussion.

We have argued that fear leads to emotional brand attachment because of how consumers cope with fear: a desire to share the fearful experience. Since this coping mechanism is specific to fear, we expect that other emotions would not similarly facilitate emotional brand attachment. Positive emotions such as happiness and excitement have not been reported to lead to the desire for affiliation; indeed, happiness has been shown to be an outcome of social affiliation (Phillips 1967). Some other negative emotions such as sadness have been shown to result at times in withdrawal and disengagement from social activities (Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991; for an exception related to social exclusion, see [Mead et al. 2011]). Because of the distinct characteristic of fear in creating a motivation for affiliation, we expect emotional brand attachment formed during a fearful experience to exceed attachment formed during other emotional experiences.

Summary and Hypotheses

In summary, we expect that unlike other emotions, fear will facilitate the development of emotional brand attachment to an unfamiliar brand. More formally,

- H1:** Consumers who undergo a fearful experience will feel a higher emotional attachment to a brand that is present during the consumption experience than those who experience happy, exciting, or sad emotions.

We expect that the perception that the experience was shared with the brand underlies the relationship between the experience of fear and emotional brand attachment. More formally,

- H2:** The perception that the consumer and the brand shared the experience will mediate the relationship between fear and emotional brand attachment.

Overview of Studies

We test the relationship between fear and emotional brand attachment across four laboratory studies. In study 1, we demonstrate that fear facilitates the development of emotional attachment to a greater extent than other emotions (hypothesis 1). Further, we show that the perception that the consumer shared the fearful experience with the brand mediates the relationship between fear and emotional attachment (hypothesis 2). In study 2, we provide further support for affiliation as our underlying process by satiating feelings of affiliation. We demonstrate that when consumers already feel connected to others, they do not show enhanced emotional attachment to a brand after a fearful experience. In study 3, we address and rule out a possible alternative explanation for our effects. Finally, study 4 provides additional evidence for the role of perceived shared experience, by showing the necessity of brand presence during the emotional experience.

STUDY 1

Study 1 employed a one-factor between-subjects design in which we compared the effects of four emotions: fear, sadness, excitement, and happiness. Eighty-six undergraduate students from the University of British Columbia completed the study in exchange for course credit.

Procedure

The study was run in a laboratory setting. Upon arrival to the lab, the experimenter indicated that the participants were going to complete two unrelated studies: a movie experience evaluation and a brand experience evaluation. For the movie experience study, participants were told that they would be presented with two 5-minute movie clips in one of several possible genres: comedies, horror, dramas, or action films. Prior to beginning the study, a new brand of sparkling water that was not available locally was placed on the desk in front of the participants. Participants were then told that following the movie experience study, they would be doing the brand evaluation study and, therefore, in order to gain initial experience with the brand, they should feel free to try it out during the movie study.

Two film clips were used in all four of the genre conditions in order to provide participants with 10 minutes of emotional priming. Movie clips were adapted from previous studies (Andrade and Cohen 2007; Lee and Andrade 2011) and were pretested to ensure that they effectively generated the target emotion. The clips were also pretested for valence to ensure that the negative movies were perceived as equivalently negative and the positive movies were perceived as equivalently positive. In addition, the movie clips were pretested to ensure that the high-arousal emotions (i.e., fear and excitement) were found to be equally arousing and more arousing than the low-arousal emotions (i.e., sadness and happiness).

For the fear condition, participants watched clips from *The*

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TABLE 1
STUDY 1 RESULTS

	Emotion			
	Sadness	Fear	Happiness	Excitement
Emotional attachment	2.54 (1.13)	3.70 (1.21)	2.28 (1.18)	2.11 (1.07)
Perceived shared experience (PSE)	2.74 (1.63)	4.24 (1.40)	2.00 (1.41)	2.05 (1.17)

Ring and Salem's Lot. For the excitement condition, participants watched clips from *Knight and Day* and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. For the sadness condition, participants watched clips from *The Champ* and *I Am Sam*. Finally, for the happiness condition, participants watched two 5-minute clips from episodes of *Friends*.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four discrete emotion conditions. After watching the respective movie clips, participants answered questions about their preferences, in order to maintain the cover story, and indicated their felt level of fear, happiness, sadness, and excitement using items adapted from the long form of the PANAS (Watson and Clark 1994; 7-point scale; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Participants then completed a brand evaluation survey in which they indicated their level of emotional brand attachment using Thomson et al.'s (2005) 10-item emotional brand attachment scale (i.e., *affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delighted, captivated, connected, bonded, and attached*; each 7-point scale; 1 = not at all; 7 = very much; $\alpha = .93$).

To test whether the emotions differentially influenced the extent to which participants perceived that they shared the emotional experience with the brand, we constructed a scale of perceived shared experience based on previous measures of affiliation. Previous research measured affiliation as the desire to be with others prior to experiencing a fearful experience (Gerard and Rabbie 1961; Morris et al. 1976; Sar-noff and Zimbardo 1961; Schachter 1959; Zimbardo and Formica 1963). From these behavioral measures, we created a scale of perceived shared experience using four items, each on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree): *the brand went through the experience with me, the brand and I underwent the experience together, the brand experienced the situation with me, and I felt that the brand was with me*. These items were averaged to create a shared experience index ($\alpha = .94$). Participants also completed a three-item scale that measured involvement with the survey (*involved, motivated, put in effort*) and demographic questions.

Results

Manipulation Check. To check that the target emotions were experienced significantly more than the other emotions, a one-way ANOVA on each of the target emotion measures revealed a significant main effect of emotion (fear [$\alpha = .92$]: $F(1, 82) = 23.92, p < .001$; excitement [$\alpha = .81$]:

$F(1, 82) = 14.95, p < .001$; sadness [$\alpha = .93$]: $F(1, 82) = 63.20, p < .001$; happiness [$\alpha = .94$]: $F(1, 82) = 24.93, p < .001$). Participants in the fear condition felt significantly more scared ($M = 3.09$) than those in the excitement ($M = 1.36$; $F(1, 82) = 43.28, p < .001$), sadness ($M = 1.85$; $F(1, 82) = 25.97, p < .001$), or happiness ($M = 1.04$; $F(1, 82) = 62.22, p < .001$) conditions. For excitement, the clips were more exciting ($M = 3.24$) than the fear ($M = 1.78$; $F(1, 82) = 26.94, p < .001$), sadness ($M = 1.57$; $F(1, 82) = 39.82, p < .001$), or happiness conditions ($M = 1.93$; $F(1, 82) = 21.72, p < .001$). Similarly, the sadness condition was rated sadder ($M = 3.47$) than the fear ($M = 1.50$; $F(1, 82) = 88.85, p < .001$), excitement ($M = 1.16$; $F(1, 82) = 118.81, p < .001$), and happiness conditions ($M = 1.03$; $F(1, 82) = 135.96, p < .001$). Finally, the happiness condition was rated as happier ($M = 3.31$) than the fear ($M = 1.36$; $F(1, 82) = 57.00, p < .01$), excitement ($M = 2.46$; $F(1, 82) = 10.63, p < .01$), and sadness conditions ($M = 1.58$; $F(1, 82) = 51.55, p < .001$).

Emotional Attachment. A one-way ANOVA using emotion as the predictor variable and emotional attachment as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of emotion on emotional attachment to the brand ($F(3, 82) = 7.77, p < .001$; see table 1). As predicted in hypothesis 1, participants in the fear condition felt more emotionally attached to the brand ($M = 3.70$) than those in the excitement ($M = 2.11$; $F(1, 82) = 18.80, p < .001$), sadness ($M = 2.54$; $F(1, 82) = 11.70, p = .001$), and happiness ($M = 2.28$; $F(1, 82) = 15.28, p < .001$) conditions. There were no significant differences in attachment between all other conditions ($F < 1$).

Perceived Shared Experience. A one-way ANOVA on perceived shared experience revealed a significant main effect of emotion ($F(3, 82) = 10.50, p < .001$). Participants who saw the fear clips felt that they had shared the experience with the brand to a greater extent ($M = 4.24$) than those who saw the excitement clips ($M = 2.05$; $F(1, 82) = 22.63, p < .001$), the sadness clips ($M = 2.74$; $F(1, 82) = 12.53, p < .001$), or the happiness clips ($M = 2.00$; $F(1, 82) = 24.35, p < .001$). Only when consumers experienced fear did they have a higher perception that the brand shared the experience with them.

To test whether perceived shared experience with the brand mediated the impact of fear on emotional brand attachment, mediation analysis was run. Bootstrapping anal-

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ysis (Hayes 2012, model 4) revealed that perceived shared experience did mediate the relationship between emotional condition and emotional brand attachment. Specifically, a 95% bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect (.0563, .8279) was obtained, indicating a significant mediation effect at the $p < .05$ level. Further analysis of individual pathways in the model showed that although the direct effect of emotion condition on emotional brand attachment was significant initially ($\beta = 1.36$, $t = 4.66$, $p < .001$), when both emotion condition and perceived shared experience were included in the model, the pathway from perceived shared experience to emotional brand attachment remained significant ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.43$, $p < .05$), while the direct pathway from emotion to emotional attachment decreased in significance ($\beta = .97$, $t = 2.98$, $p < .01$; see table 2 for details). Thus, mediation confirmed that perceived shared experience is the underlying mechanism behind the fear-emotional attachment effect, supporting hypothesis 2.

Discussion

The results of study 1 provided experimental evidence that fear can facilitate the formation of emotional brand attachment. When consumers underwent a fearful experience, they felt more emotionally attached to the brand. No other emotional experience led to higher emotional brand attachment. Importantly, attachment formed with a brand with which participants had no previous experience. Since attachment generally takes time to form, these results suggest that fearful experiences might be beneficial in facilitating the emotional brand attachment process.

In addition, study 1 indicated that the perception that the fearful experience was shared with the brand mediated the influence of fear on emotional brand attachment. This finding suggests that sharing a fearful experience with a brand satisfies the desire for affiliation that is generated to cope with fear. This possibility is important to our central thesis because it indicates that in times of fear, consumers form affiliations not only with other people but also with brands. We address this further in study 2.

STUDY 2

The purpose of study 2 was twofold. First we sought further support for our proposition that satisfying affiliation is the mechanism enabling emotional brand attachment. If sharing the experience with the brand satisfies a desire to affiliate that is generated by fear, then making consumers feel affiliated or socially connected prior to a fearful event should decrease the motivation to share the experience with the brand and, subsequently, mitigate an increase in emotional brand attachment. Thus in this study we satiated affiliation by making participants feel as if they were already connected to others.

Second, we explored the effect of fear on brand attitude. Previous research examining incidental emotions has typically considered their effects on brand attitude. As such, we wanted to explore whether the positive influence of fear on emotional attachment would extend to brand attitude. The prediction is not straightforward. On the one hand, our results suggest that fear results in higher emotional attachment than do other emotions, including positive ones. Following this logic, fear should also result in higher brand attitudes than positive emotions such as happiness or excitement. On the other hand, research on affect transfer has demonstrated that negative emotions lead to lower brand attitudes (Goldberg and Gorn 1987; for negative moods in general, see Aylesworth and MacKenzie [1998]). Therefore, a second potential outcome is that brand attitude when experiencing fear will be lower than when experiencing positive emotions.

In this study we focused only on high-arousal emotions as arousal has been shown to be a key element of affiliation (Walters and Parke 1964). To explore the effects on brand attitude, we wanted to compare fear to a positive, high-arousal emotion; thus, the study employed a 2 (emotion: fear vs. excitement) \times 2 (prime: affiliation vs. neutral) between-subjects design. Sixty-nine undergraduate participants from the University of British Columbia completed the study in exchange for \$10 compensation. Two participants reported a low level of involvement with the survey (rating an average of 1 on a 7-point scale). These participants were removed

TABLE 2

MEDIATION PATH COEFFICIENTS AND INDIRECT EFFECTS FOR STUDY 1

	Path coefficients		Indirect effects	
	To perceived shared experience	To emotional attachment	Estimate	Bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval
Emotion	1.92*** (.37)	.97** (.33)		
Perceived shared experience (PSE)		.20* (.08)		
Emotion-PSE-EA			.39 (.19)	.06, .83

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

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from the analysis. Across all studies a total of seven out of 573 participants indicated a level of involvement of 1 out of 7, and they were removed from the analysis. The pattern of results in all studies remains the same if these participants are included; thus, for brevity they are not discussed further.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be completing several unrelated studies. To manipulate affiliation, we employed a priming manipulation that has been used in previous research to satiate affiliation with others by creating a sense of social connection (Carvallo and Pelham 2006; Jiang et al. 2010). The manipulation consisted of a word search that was conducted under the guise of a different study. Participants were randomly assigned to an affiliation prime or a neutral prime. For participants in the *affiliation prime* condition, the word search consisted of words related to feelings of affiliation and social connection (e.g., accepted, involved, included). For the *neutral prime* condition, participants completed a word search consisting of neutral words (e.g., cloud, vegetable, seeds). To ensure that the priming task was successful, participants then completed a 7-point social connectedness scale (*I feel disconnected from the world around me, I don't feel I really belong, I feel so distant from people, I lose all sense of connectedness with society, there is no sense of brother/sisterhood*; Lee and Robbins 1995) that included measures of affiliation.

After completing the priming task, participants moved on to the same movie experience task, which mirrored the fear and excitement conditions of study 1. Prior to commencing the movie task, a brand of sparkling juice not available locally was placed on the desk in front of the participants. They were told to feel free to test it so that they could answer questions about their brand experience after the movies. Immediately following the movies, participants responded to the same manipulation check questions as in study 1. The brand experience questionnaire consisted of the items from the previous study, including Thomson et al.'s (2005) emotional attachment scale ($\alpha = .96$) and the items measuring perceived shared experience ($\alpha = .97$), and it also included a three-item brand attitude scale (*dislike/like, unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive*; $\alpha = .97$). Finally, participants completed demographics and a measure of involvement.

Results

Manipulation Checks. The affiliation items were reverse-coded so that higher numbers indicated a higher level of felt affiliation. To ensure that our prime was successful, a one-way ANOVA using affiliation prime as the predictor variable and the social connectedness index ($\alpha = .92$) as the dependent variable was run. Analysis revealed that participants who received the affiliation prime felt significantly more socially connected ($M = 5.56$) than those who received the neutral prime ($M = 4.76$; $F(1, 65) = 7.11, p < .01$). In addition, a two-way ANOVA using emotion and prime as predictor variables and feelings of fear ($\alpha = .96$)

as the dependent variable revealed only a main effect of emotion ($F(1, 63) = 89.38, p < .001$), signaling that our emotion prime was successful; people in the fear condition felt significantly more scared ($M = 3.50$) than those in the excitement condition ($M = 1.55$). Similarly, a two-way ANOVA on feelings of excitement ($\alpha = .90$) indicated only a main effect of emotion. Those in the excitement condition indicated feeling more excited ($M = 2.92$; $F(1, 63) = 17.59, p < .001$) than those in the fear condition ($M = 1.87$).

Emotional Attachment. An ANOVA using emotion and affiliation prime as the predictor variables and emotional attachment as the dependent variable revealed marginal main effects for both emotion ($F(1, 63) = 3.49, p = .07$) and prime ($F(1, 63) = 3.42, p = .07$) and a significant interaction of emotion and affiliation prime ($F(1, 63) = 4.13, p < .05$; see fig. 1). Only when participants did not feel affiliated was there increased emotional attachment to the brand during the fearful experience ($M_{\text{fear}} = 4.29$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 2.97$; $F(1, 63) = 7.23, p < .01$). When affiliation was satiated, there was no influence of emotion on emotional brand attachment ($M_{\text{fear}} = 2.97$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 3.03$; $F < 1$). Importantly, those who experienced fear without prior affiliation felt significantly more emotionally attached to the brand ($M_{\text{fear-neutral}} = 4.29$) than those who had prior affiliation ($M_{\text{fear-affiliation}} = 2.97$; $F(1, 63) = 6.97, p = .01$; see table 3).

Perceived Shared Experience. An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of emotion ($F(1, 63) = 12.65, p < .01$), a marginal effect of prime ($F(1, 63) = 2.99, p = .09$), and a significant interaction of prime and emotion ($F(1, 63) = 4.40, p < .05$). When affiliation was satiated, there was no significant influence of emotion on perceived shared experience ($M_{\text{fear}} = 2.88$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 2.33$; $F(1, 63) = 1.12, p > .10$). However, for those who did not feel affiliated prior to undergoing the emotional experience, fear led to significantly higher perceived shared experience ($M = 4.32$) than excitement ($M = 2.19$; $F(1, 63) = 15.19, p < .001$; see table 3). Those who experienced a fearful situation without prior affiliation felt that the brand went through the experience with them to a significantly greater extent than those who had prior affiliation ($M_{\text{fear-no affiliation}} = 4.32$ vs. $M_{\text{fear-affiliation}} = 2.88$; $F(1, 63) = 6.78, p < .05$).

Brand Attitude. An ANOVA revealed no main effects for emotion ($F < 1$) or prime ($F(1, 63) = 2.15, p > .15$) and a marginally significant interaction of emotion and affiliation prime on brand attitude ($F(1, 63) = 3.23, p = .07$). For participants in the fear conditions, brand attitude was significantly lower when affiliation was satiated ($M = 4.08$) than when it was not ($M = 5.17$; $F(1, 63) = 4.93, p < .05$). Among participants who received the affiliation prime, those in the fear condition showed a pattern of lower attitudes than excitement, but this difference did not approach significance ($M_{\text{fear}} = 4.08$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 4.72$; $F(1, 63) = 1.97, p = .16$). There was no difference between

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fear and excitement for the neutral prime ($M_{\text{fear}} = 5.17$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 4.61$; $F(1, 63) = 1.32, p > .10$).

Discussion

Study 2 provided further support for our hypothesis that sharing an experience with a brand is the mechanism underlying the influence of fear on emotional brand attachment. Specifically, we showed that when participants already felt connected to others, there was no need to affiliate with the target brand and thus there was no positive impact on emotional brand attachment.

Study 2 also found a potentially interesting outcome for fear on brand attitudes. When participants had affiliation satiated prior to the fearful experience, fear led to significantly lower attitudes compared to when affiliation was not satiated. It could be that these participants already felt affiliated and did not need to make an emotional connection to the brand; hence, there was no opportunity for a positive influence of emotional attachment. In line with this possibility, we found that attitudes under fear when affiliation was satiated were directionally lower than excitement. Although not significant, the pattern is suggestive of a typical affect transfer effect found for negative emotions. When participants did not have affiliation satiated prior to the fearful experience, and hence made an emotional connection with the brand, fear led to brand attitudes equal to those of the excitement condition. While we did not explicitly predict this outcome, the pattern is suggestive of a balancing effect between the negative influence of affect transfer and the positive influence of emotional attachment.

Attitudes and emotional attachment are similar but distinct

TABLE 3

STUDY 2 RESULTS

	Affiliation prime		Neutral prime	
	Fear	Excitement	Fear	Excitement
Emotional attachment	2.97 (1.33)	3.03 (1.39)	4.29 (1.38)	2.97 (1.41)
PSE	2.88 (1.50)	2.33 (1.47)	4.32 (1.54)	2.19 (1.62)
Brand attitude	4.08 (1.69)	4.72 (1.49)	5.17 (1.12)	4.61 (.99)

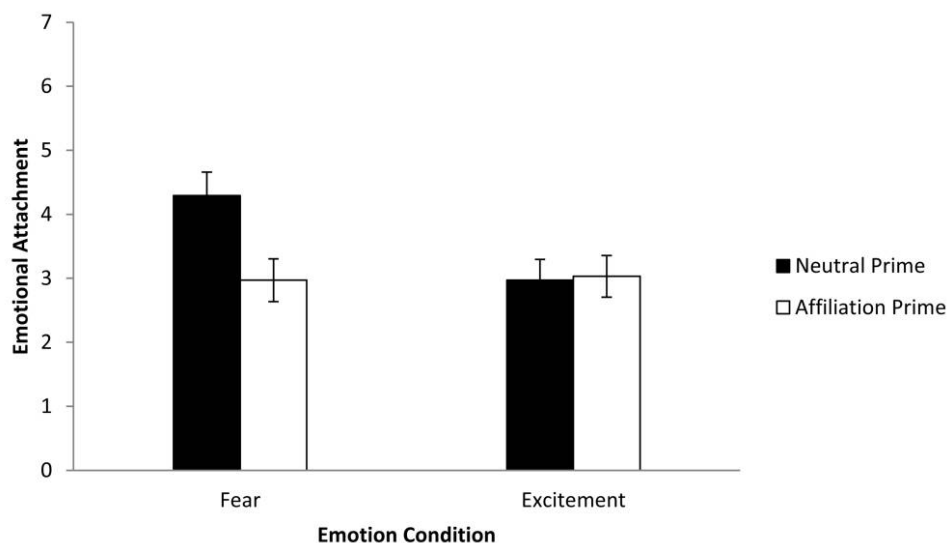
PSE = perceived shared experience.

constructs (Thomson et al. 2005). Attitudes differ from emotional attachment in that they serve essentially as value judgments about the product or brand. They can serve specific functions (e.g., provide information about the benefits the product has to offer, allow consumers to express their central values; Katz 1960), and they reflect a level of consideration separate from an emotional expression of how one feels about the brand (Pham et al. 2001).

Since attitudes can reflect more cognitive elements, we speculate that fear, due to its valence, could have a negative influence on attitudes when affiliation does not factor into the process. This is supported by our finding that fear led to significantly lower attitudes when participants felt affiliated prior to the fearful experience than when they did not. However, when participants affiliated with the target brand and showed an increase in emotional attachment, we suspect that this positively impacted attitudes and counterbalanced the negative influence of fear.

FIGURE 1

STUDY 2 EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT



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In studies 1 and 2, participants were free to consume as much or as little of the product as desired during the movie experience. One possible explanation for the fear-attachment effect is that fear led to a desire to regulate emotion through consumption (Grunberg and Straub 1992; Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister 2001). As such, participants in the fear condition could simply have consumed more of the product relative to those in the other emotion conditions, which in turn, increased their perception of shared experience and resulted in their higher emotional attachment. To rule out this alternative explanation, in study 3 we explicitly manipulate consumption across conditions.

We also address the extent to which physical contact with the brand is required for emotional attachment to occur. Previous research has shown that affiliation can occur through measures other than direct physical interaction. For example, fear has been shown to increase eye contact and visual attention to another person present during the experience (Gump and Kulik 1997). Research on attachment styles similarly finds that when children are afraid, they will visually seek out their attachment object as a way to maintain a sense of security (Bowlby 1980; Mikulincer, Shaver, and Pereg 2003). This line of theorizing garners support from other regulation literature that shows that directing attention to relieving cues can help regulate negative emotion (Derryberry and Tucker 1994). In our context, directing attention toward the brand could be a way to cope with fear and still result in the perception that the brand shared the experience with the consumer. Thus, physical contact may not be necessary to enhance brand attachment for fearful situations.

STUDY 3

Study 3 was designed to examine the role of consumption in facilitating the fear-attachment effect. We also added a neutral emotion condition as a point of comparison. Thus, this study employed a 3 (emotion: fear vs. excitement vs. neutral) \times 3 (consumption: no touch vs. touch vs. forced consumption) between-subjects design. Two hundred and twenty-two undergraduate students from the University of British Columbia successfully completed the study in exchange for course credit.

Procedure

The study was run in a laboratory setting. Upon arrival at the lab, the experimenter indicated that the participants were going to complete two unrelated studies: a movie experience evaluation and a brand experience evaluation. For the movie experience study, participants were told that they would be presented with two 5-minute movie clips of several possible genres: horror (fear), action (excitement), and documentaries (neutral). Prior to the beginning of the study, a new brand of sparkling juice that was not available locally, and therefore, unknown to the participants, was placed in front of the participants. Participants were told that imme-

diately following the movie experience study, there would be a brand experience study.

To manipulate *consumption*, participants in the *no touch* condition were told that due to the rules of the lab, they could not open or try the product but that this would be the brand that they would be evaluating at the end of the study. In the *touch* condition, participants were told that due to the rules of the lab, they could not open or try the product but that they should feel free to pick up and touch it as often as they would like prior to answering the questions. Finally, in the *forced consumption* condition, participants were told that they should open and try the product during the movies in order to gain some experience with the product prior to answering the questions.

To manipulate *emotion*, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three discrete emotion conditions: fear, excitement, and neutral. For the fear and excitement conditions, the movie clips from the prior studies were utilized. In the case of the neutral condition, the movie clips were documentaries that had been pretested to ensure that they did not generate positive or negative emotions. In addition, there were questions embedded in the questionnaire that addressed the participants' level of emotion as a manipulation check.

After watching the movie clips and answering the questions about their preferences (in order to maintain the cover story), participants completed a brand evaluation survey, which included the emotional attachment scale ($\alpha = .94$), the same four questions about perceived shared experience ($\alpha = .95$), and the same brand attitude items (*dislike/like, negative/positive, unfavorable/favorable*, $\alpha = .92$). Finally, participants completed demographics and a measure of involvement with the survey.

Results

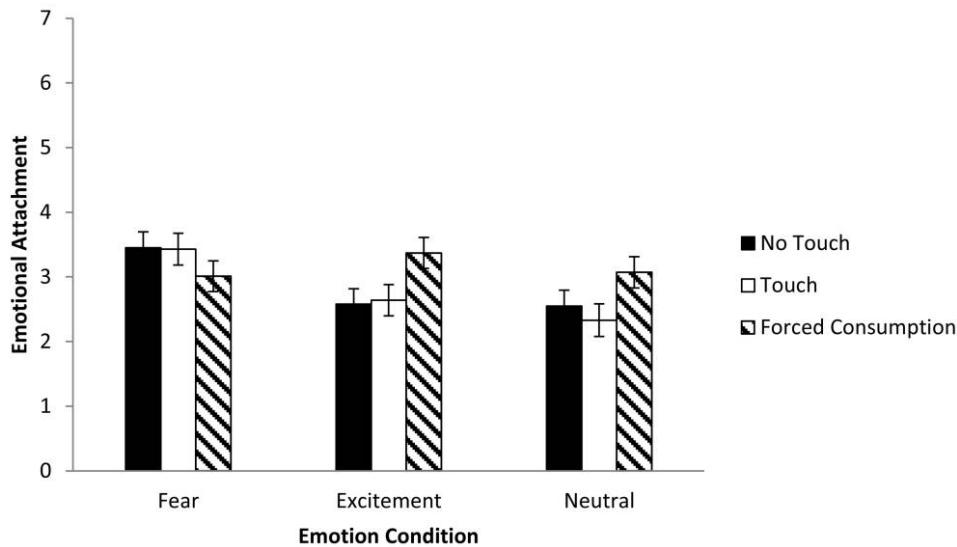
Manipulation Check. An ANOVA using emotion and consumption as predictor variables and measures of fear and excitement as dependent variables revealed a main effect of emotion ($F(2, 213) = 148.54, p < .001$) and a main effect of consumption ($F(2, 213) = 3.36, p < .05$) but no interaction of emotion and consumption ($F(4, 213) = 2.15, p > .05$). Thus, our manipulation was successful. Participants who viewed the fear clips felt significantly more scared ($M = 3.21$) than those in the excitement condition ($M = 1.56; F(1, 218) = 155.40, p < .001$) or the neutral condition ($M = 1.07; F(1, 218) = 254.79, p < .001$). The manipulations for the excitement and neutral conditions were also successful ($p < .05$).

Emotional Attachment. An ANOVA using emotion and consumption as predictor variables and emotional attachment to the brand as the dependent variable revealed a significant interaction of emotion and consumption ($F(4, 213) = 2.56, p < .05$, see fig. 2). There was also a main effect of emotion ($F(2, 213) = 5.52, p < .01$) but no effect of consumption ($F(2, 213) = 1.78, p > .15$). Notably, for the fear conditions, there was no difference in the degree of

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FIGURE 2

STUDY 3 EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT



emotional attachment as a function of consumption (all $p > .15$). Replicating our previous studies, participants who underwent the fear experience in both the no touch condition and the touch condition felt significantly more attached to the brand ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 3.45$, $M_{\text{touch}} = 3.43$) than those in the excitement condition ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 2.58$; $F(1, 213) = 6.45$, $p < .05$; and $M_{\text{touch}} = 2.64$; $F(1, 213) = 5.37$, $p < .05$) and the neutral condition ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 2.55$; $F(1, 213) = 6.77$, $p < .01$; and $M_{\text{touch}} = 2.33$; $F(1, 213) = 9.85$, $p < .01$, respectively). Interestingly, participants who were explicitly told to consume the product did not show any significant differences between fear ($M = 3.01$), excitement ($M = 3.37$; $F(1, 213) = 1.14$, $p > .10$), and neutral conditions ($M = 3.07$; $F < 1$). Indeed, for those in the excitement condition, forcing participants to consume the product led to significantly higher emotional attachment ($M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.37$) than not being able to touch the product ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 2.58$; $F(1, 213) = 5.40$, $p < .05$) or being able to touch it but not consume it ($M_{\text{touch}} = 2.64$; $F(1, 213) = 4.62$, $p < .05$). A similar pattern occurred for the neutral emotion; forced consumption led to significantly higher emotional attachment than touch ($M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.07$ vs. $M_{\text{touch}} = 2.33$; $F(1, 213) = 4.49$, $p < .05$), although not significantly higher than no touch ($M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.07$ vs. $M_{\text{no touch}} = 2.55$; $F(1, 213) = 2.30$, $p = .14$).

Perceived Shared Experience. An ANOVA using emotion and consumption as predictor variables and perceived shared experience as the dependent variable revealed significant main effects for emotion ($F(2, 213) = 4.81$, $p < .01$) and consumption ($F(2, 213) = 22.42$, $p < .001$) and a significant interaction of emotion and consumption ($F(4,$

$213) = 3.09$, $p < .05$; see table 4). Participants who underwent the fear experience for both the no touch and touch conditions felt that the brand underwent the experience with them to a greater extent ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 2.79$, $M_{\text{touch}} = 2.80$) than those in excitement conditions ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 1.65$; $F(1, 213) = 9.05$, $p < .01$; and $M_{\text{touch}} = 1.91$; $F(1, 213) = 5.40$, $p < .05$) and the neutral conditions ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 1.69$; $F(1, 213) = 8.11$, $p < .01$; and $M_{\text{touch}} = 1.76$; $F(1, 213) = 7.06$, $p < .01$). Notably, for the fear conditions, there was no difference in the degree of perceived shared experience as a function of consumption (all $p > .15$). Once again, participants who were explicitly told to consume the product did not show any significant differences between fear ($M = 3.15$) and excitement ($M = 3.32$; $F < 1$) and neutral conditions ($M = 3.63$; $F(1, 213) = 1.60$, $p > .10$). Indeed, for those in the excitement condition, forcing participants to consume the product led to significantly higher perceived shared experience ($M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.32$) than not being able to touch the product ($M_{\text{no touch}} = 1.65$; $F(1, 213) = 19.75$, $p < .001$) or being able to touch it but not consume it ($M = 1.91$; $F(1, 213) = 13.77$, $p < .001$). The same pattern occurred for the neutral emotion ($M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.63$ vs. $M_{\text{no touch}} = 1.69$; $F(1, 213) = 25.61$, $p < .001$; and $M_{\text{forced_consumption}} = 3.63$ vs. $M_{\text{touch}} = 1.76$; $F(1, 213) = 23.19$, $p < .001$).

Brand Attitude. An ANOVA using emotion and consumption as predictor variables and brand attitude as the dependent variable revealed no effects of either emotion ($F(2, 213) = 1.51$, $p > .20$), consumption ($F < 1$), or their interaction ($F < 1$).

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TABLE 4
STUDY 3 RESULTS

Consumption	Fear			Excitement			Neutral		
	No touch	Touch	Forced consumption	No touch	Touch	Forced consumption	No touch	Touch	Forced consumption
Emotional attachment	3.45 (1.21)	3.43 (1.06)	3.01 (1.46)	2.58 (1.24)	2.64 (1.22)	3.37 (1.22)	2.55 (1.08)	2.33 (.99)	3.07 (1.25)
PSE	2.79 (1.60)	2.80 (1.55)	3.15 (1.65)	1.65 (1.03)	1.91 (1.23)	3.32 (1.54)	1.69 (.91)	1.76 (.96)	3.63 (1.35)
Brand attitude	4.78 (1.17)	4.53 (1.23)	4.83 (1.36)	4.35 (1.01)	4.25 (1.10)	4.57 (1.24)	4.50 (.93)	4.54 (1.32)	4.44 (.97)

PSE = perceived shared experience.

Discussion

Study 3 ruled out an alternative explanation for what drives the fear-attachment effect: fear increased consumption, which increased attachment. This study showed that even when the brand was simply present in the room (*no touch*) or the participants were allowed to touch but not consume (*touch*), fear led to higher emotional brand attachment and perceived shared experience than either excitement or neutral emotions. The finding that emotional attachment occurred in the no touch and touch conditions indicates that consumption is not a requirement to increase emotional attachment during a fearful experience. Rather, the simple presence of the brand is sufficient to facilitate emotional attachment to a brand.

The significant interaction of consumption and emotion in this study highlights an interesting result. It seems that explicitly forcing participants to consume the product resulted in a significant increase in the perception that the brand shared the experience and at least a directional increase in brand attachment regardless of emotional prime. While tangential to our hypotheses, our instruction to consume the product seems to have forced participants to share the experience with the brand. In our previous studies, the instruction to participants was to “feel free” to consume the product, which provided the opportunity, but not the requirement, to connect with the brand. Because fear results in the coping mechanism of affiliation, this may have motivated those in the fear condition, but not the other emotion conditions, to interact with the brand to a greater extent. In the current study, participants in the forced consumption conditions were explicitly instructed to “try” the product, and we speculate that this may have changed the degree of interaction for the excitement and neutral conditions. This, in turn, may have resulted in the increase in emotional brand attachment.

In our final study, we sought additional evidence for the role of perceived shared experience in the effect of fear on emotional brand attachment. Given our hypothesis that it is the perception that the brand shared the experience with the consumer that leads to emotional brand attachment, presence of the brand during the emotional experience should be a necessary component to enable affilia-

tion. Thus, only when the brand is present during the fear experience should we see an increase in perceived shared experience and emotional brand attachment. If the brand is introduced directly after the experience, there should be no way for the consumer to use the brand as an affiliation object, and, therefore, there should be no positive effect on emotional brand attachment. To test this, we manipulated whether participants received the brand during or just after the fearful experience.

STUDY 4

Study 4 employed a 2 (presence of product: during experience vs. after experience) × 5 (emotion: neutral vs. fear vs. sadness vs. excitement vs. happiness) between-subjects design. One hundred and ninety-one undergraduate participants from the University of British Columbia successfully completed the study in exchange for \$10 compensation.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in a computer-based environment. Participants arrived at the computer laboratory in groups of 15–20 and were randomly assigned to one of the 20 computers. Prior to beginning the experiment, participants were told that they would be completing two unrelated studies: a movie experience study and a brand experience study.

The procedure mirrored study 1, with three exceptions. First, we utilized a different product in the brand experience study (i.e., a brand of potato chips not locally available). This change was done to generalize across product type from more utilitarian (i.e., sparkling water/juice) to more hedonic (i.e., junk food). Second, a neutral emotion condition was again included as a control condition. Third, presence of the brand was manipulated.

To manipulate *presence of the brand* during the laboratory phase of the study, the brand was placed on the desk in front of the participants at two different times. For participants in the *during-the-experience* condition, the procedure mirrored that of study 1, such that the brand was placed on the desk in front of them prior to beginning the movie study. For participants in the *after-the-experience* condition, the

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TABLE 5
STUDY 4 RESULTS

Product presence	Fear		Sadness		Excitement		Happiness		Neutral	
	During	After	During	After	During	After	During	After	During	After
Emotional attachment	3.31 (1.11)	2.57 (1.25)	1.68 (.87)	2.28 (1.15)	2.33 (1.19)	2.42 (1.04)	2.10 (1.14)	2.12 (.90)	2.03 (1.07)	2.11 (1.06)
PSE	3.36 (1.48)	1.98 (1.41)	1.81 (1.10)	2.56 (1.30)	2.36 (1.23)	1.72 (.98)	2.39 (1.53)	1.80 (1.14)	1.70 (1.23)	2.19 (1.25)
Brand attitude	4.38 (.83)	4.05 (.88)	3.47 (.99)	3.96 (.65)	4.02 (.80)	4.10 (.62)	3.89 (1.07)	4.09 (.95)	4.05 (.96)	4.12 (.63)

PSE = perceived shared experience.

brand was placed on the desk in front of participants only after they had completed watching the movie clips and answering questions about the movie experience. Participants in both conditions were informed that while they could not eat the product at that moment, they would receive a bag to take home.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the five emotion conditions. After watching the movie clips, participants were asked the same cover story and emotion conditions as in previous studies. They then reported their emotional attachment to the brand ($\alpha = .95$), brand attitude ($\alpha = .92$), and perceived shared experience ($\alpha = .95$). Finally, participants completed demographics and a measure of involvement with the survey.

Results

Manipulation Check. A series of ANOVAs using emotion and presence of the brand as predictor variables and measures of fear, excitement, sadness, and happiness as dependent variables revealed that our manipulation of emotion was successful. Analysis revealed only a main effect of emotion ($F(4, 181) = 65.90, p < .001$). Participants who viewed the fear clips felt significantly more scared ($M = 3.43$) than those in the excitement ($M = 1.45; F(1, 181) = 136.75, p < .001$), sadness ($M = 1.80; F(1, 181) = 87.78, p < .001$), happiness ($M = 1.14; F(1, 181) = 190.44, p < .001$), or neutral conditions ($M = 1.11, F(1, 181) = 191.74, p < .001$). ANOVAs for the other emotions revealed the same patterns, and these are omitted solely for brevity.

Emotional Attachment. An ANOVA with emotion and presence of the brand as predictor variables and emotional attachment to the brand as the dependent variable revealed a main effect of emotion ($F(4, 181) = 5.13, p = .001$), no effect of presence ($F < 1$), and a directional interaction of emotion and presence ($F(4, 181) = 1.90, p = .11$). As expected, when the brand was introduced after the emotional experience, there was no difference between any of the emotion conditions (all $p > .20$). Thus, focusing only on the during conditions, our results replicated previous studies, such that fear led to significantly higher emotional attachment ($M = 3.31$) than the excitement ($M = 2.33; F(1, 181) = 8.37, p < .01$), sadness ($M = 1.68; F(1, 181) = 21.10, p < .001$), happiness ($M = 2.10; F(1, 181) = 13.16, p <$

$.001$), and neutral conditions ($M = 2.03; F(1, 181) = 14.53, p < .001$; see table 5).

Perceived Shared Experience. An ANOVA using emotion and presence of the brand as predictors and perceived shared experience as the dependent variable revealed a marginal main effect of emotion ($F(4, 181) = 1.97, p = .10$), no main effect of presence of the brand ($F(1, 181) = 2.15, p > .05$), and a significant interaction of emotion and presence of brand ($F(4, 181) = 4.43, p < .01$). Once again, when the brand was present during the emotional experience, those in the fear condition felt that brand shared the experience with them to a significantly greater extent ($M = 3.36$) than those in the excitement ($M = 2.36; F(1, 181) = 6.14, p < .05$), sadness ($M = 1.81; F(1, 181) = 13.65, p < .001$), happiness ($M = 2.39; F(1, 181) = 5.91, p < .05$), or neutral conditions ($M = 1.70; F(1, 181) = 17.42, p < .001$). Within the brand-present-after conditions, only sadness compared to excitement led to marginally significantly higher perceptions of shared experience ($M_{\text{sadness}} = 2.56$ vs. $M_{\text{excitement}} = 1.72; F(1, 181) = 3.62, p < .06$). This result will be returned to in the discussion.

Brand Attitude. An ANOVA with emotion and presence of the brand as predictor variables revealed no main effect of presence ($F < 1$), no effect of emotion ($F(4, 181) = 1.67, p = .16$), and no interaction of emotion and presence ($F(4, 181) = 1.11, p > .30$). While not significant, subsequent exploratory analysis revealed significant differences between conditions. Only directional, contrast analysis revealed significant differences between conditions. Similar to emotional attachment, there was no significant difference between any of the emotion conditions when the brand was introduced after the experience (all $p > .70$). Among participants for whom the brand was present during the experience, those in the sadness condition rated the brand marginally significantly lower ($M = 3.47$) than those in the excitement condition ($M = 4.02; F(1, 181) = 3.69, p = .06$), although not lower than happiness ($M = 3.89; F(1, 181) = 2.21, p = .14$). In line with our speculation regarding a possible balancing effect of emotional attachment and affect transfer, those in the fear condition had significantly higher brand attitudes than those in the sadness condition ($M_{\text{fear}} = 4.38$ vs. $M_{\text{sadness}} = 3.47; F(1, 181) = 10.48, p = .001$) and not different from those in the excitement

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condition ($M = 4.02$; $F(1, 181) = 1.83$, $p = .18$). Surprisingly, fear was marginally higher than happiness ($M_{\text{fear}} = 4.38$ vs. $M_{\text{happiness}} = 3.89$; $F(1, 181) = 3.42$, $p = .07$).

Discussion

Study 4 illuminates several important aspects of the fear-attachment effect. First, this study provided further support for perceived shared experience as the underlying mechanism. Specifically, this study found that the brand must be present during the fear experience in order for consumers to show an increase in affiliation and attachment. Across all independent variables, when the brand was introduced directly after the emotional experience, there was no significant difference between any of the emotion conditions. One exception to this conclusion was the finding that for perceived shared experiences, sadness was rated as significantly higher than excitement. While this was not expected, and is not directly relevant to our investigation of fear, it may have been that for sad participants, the receipt of a bag of chips immediately following their sad experience acted as a relieving cue and as such drew additional attention.

Second, study 4 provided interesting insight for the possible impact of fear on brand attitudes. Again, for fear, it appears that there may be a balancing of the the negative impact of affect transfer and the positive impact of emotional attachment, resulting in brand attitudes that were similar to the positive emotions of excitement and happiness but significantly higher than sadness—a result that would not be predicted by a straightforward affect transfer effect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across four empirical studies the current research demonstrates that the experience of fear can result in enhanced emotional attachment to a brand. We show that fear motivates a specific interpersonal coping mechanism, a desire to share the experience with others. The presence of the brand can satisfy this motivation, essentially taking the place of an interpersonal other. Fear enhances the perception that the brand shared the experience with the consumer, which results in greater emotional attachment to the brand.

In study 1 we showed that relative to other emotions such as happiness, sadness, and excitement, fear resulted in higher emotional brand attachment, which was mediated by the perception that the participant and the brand shared the fearful experience. Study 2 provided further evidence for the underlying mechanism by demonstrating that when consumers already had a sense of affiliation with others, the perception that the brand shared the experience was mitigated, and the increase in emotional brand attachment did not obtain. In study 3, we addressed the extent to which the degree of physical contact (i.e., touching or consuming) played a role in the formation of emotional brand attachment. We found that fear resulted in equivalent emotional brand attachment regardless of the degree of contact. Interestingly, we also found that for the other emotion conditions, emotional brand attachment was not heightened by the mere

presence of a brand or by touching but did increase somewhat through forced consumption of the product. Finally, study 4 provided additional support for the role of perceived shared experience by demonstrating the necessity of the presence of the brand during the emotional experience to enhance brand attachment.

Theoretical Contributions of the Research

This article makes contributions to several streams of research. Specifically, this research contributes to work on brand attachment. Prior conceptualizations of brand attachment suggest that attachment takes multiple interactions and experience with the brand to form (Park et al. 2010; Thomson et al. 2005). Our research extends the understanding of brand attachment by demonstrating that under certain conditions, emotional attachment can occur instantly with an unfamiliar brand.

The findings from our research also contribute to work on incidental emotions by showing that not all negative emotions have negative implications for brand evaluations. We show that fear can positively influence measures of evaluation that are more interpersonal in nature, such as brand attachment. This research also explores how fear, through emotional attachment, can exert a positive influence on brand attitudes. Our findings suggest that the positive influence of emotional brand attachment may offset the negative impact of affect transfer on brand attitude. In study 2, we showed that the experience of fear led to lower brand attitudes when consumers already felt affiliated than when they did not. Interestingly, when consumers did not already feel affiliated, fear and excitement led to equivalent attitudes, supporting the idea of a positive influence of emotional attachment on attitude. Study 4 provided further support for this possibility by showing that fear led to higher brand attitudes than sadness, but not different from excitement and only marginally different from happiness. Although these findings are exploratory, they are consistent with the notion that the experience of fear might have positive implications for brand attitude. Additional research is necessary to understand fully the relationship between fear and brand attitude.

Perhaps the most interesting contribution this research makes is to the literature on consumer-brand relationships. This research provides evidence that an interpersonal coping mechanism, that is, a desire for affiliation with others in response to fear, occurs with brands.

Specifically, we show that when faced with situations in which consumers' desire for affiliation is heightened, in the absence of other consumers, they will seek out and affiliate with an available brand. This provides a deeper understanding of the process by which consumers form relationships with brands. It suggests that the way in which consumer-brand relationships is conceived goes beyond metaphorical; indeed, on a psychological level, brands can fulfill interpersonal needs.

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Emotional Attachment versus Cognitive Brand Attachment

In this article, we sought to demonstrate that brands have the ability to fulfill interpersonal needs. To do this, we demonstrated that to cope with fear, people will affiliate with an available brand and this enhances emotional attachment. While we focused on emotional attachment (Thomson et al. 2005), it is important to note that there is another measure of brand attachment in the literature. In addition to Thomson et al.'s (2005) measurement of emotional attachment, a more recent measure of brand attachment is that of Park et al. (2010).

Thomson et al. (2005) based their scale on attachment theory by Bowlby (1980), which states that there are positive emotional outcomes to feeling attached to an interpersonal other (e.g., affection, passion, and emotional connection). The authors reasoned that if consumers can form attachments to brands along similar lines to interpersonal others, then consumers should have the same positive emotional outcomes when attached to a brand. As such, Thomson et al.'s (2005) scale focuses on these positive emotional outcomes of brand attachment.

Park et al. (2010) presented a new measure of brand attachment that incorporates two elements: (1) connectedness between the brand and the consumer and (2) brand prominence in the mind of the consumer (i.e., accessibility). The basis for Park et al.'s (2010) scale is the conceptualization of brand attachment, which stresses that attachment requires multiple interactions and time to form, thus becoming integrated into the cognitive aspects of self (Park et al. 2010; Thomson et al. 2005).

Due to the distinctions in the two measures of brand attachment, it would be important for future research to examine not only the differences in the facilitation of emotional attachment (Thomson et al. 2005) and cognitive brand attachment (Park et al. 2010) but also a potential model of relationship between these two measures.

While this is a topic for future research, we speculate a potentially interesting relationship between emotional and cognitive attachment. In our study, we show that fear can facilitate initial emotional attachment without the necessity of time. The decision to focus on emotional attachment was driven by research that shows that emotional evaluations occur instantaneously, without thought (Zajonc 1980), and that they often inform later cognitive evaluations (Edwards 1990; Schwarz and Clore 1983). This line of inquiry suggests that emotional attachment should occur naturally during a highly emotional experience such as fear but that a more cognitive form of attachment should still require time to form. As such, we speculate that while fear enhances initial emotional attachment, it would not affect initial cognitive attachment. Rather, this initial emotional attachment may provide a platform for a positive increase in cognitive attachment at a later time. Additional research is needed to investigate this intriguing possibility.

Limitations and Future Research

The current research does have limitations that can seed future investigations. One key limitation is the exploratory investigation of brand attitude. While our results are generally supportive of a positive influence of emotional attachment on brand attitudes that can offset the negative impact of affect transfer, not all effects are significant. Whether this is an issue of power or a systematic effect is unclear; nonetheless, we cannot draw strong conclusions from the results. Future research is needed to examine this potentially interesting effect and shed light on the complexity of emotional experiences on brand attitudes.

Another limitation lies in how our studies focused on defining four discrete emotions that have been typically studied in consumption contexts (happiness, sadness, fear, and excitement). More recent research, however, has examined emotions and motivation through the lens of cognitive appraisal theory, which classifies emotions according to six appraisal dimensions: certainty, pleasantness, attentional activities, control, anticipated effort, and responsibility (Lerner and Keltner 2001). According to this framework, fear is appraised as an uncertain emotion, low in situational control. Future research could consider these other dimensions of fear and examine the relative importance of control or certainty in exerting our effects.

Another limitation revolves around product category. Although we attempted to examine the effect across both hedonic and utilitarian products, all the products used in our studies were food or beverages. It would be useful to see if emotional brand attachments form similarly for nonfood products.

Our investigation focused on the creation of emotional brand attachment with an unfamiliar brand. An issue that naturally arises from this is the role that brand familiarity might play in the effectiveness of the fear-attachment relationship. Therefore, the question is whether this fear-attachment relationship would still be enhanced if the brand were familiar. We speculate that because fear leads to a general motivation to affiliate, emotional brand attachment would be enhanced regardless of the familiarity with the brand. However, it would be interesting if future research could examine how familiarity mitigates or magnifies the effects.

Previous research has shown that affiliation can be measured by a marked increase in eye contact and visual attention (Gump and Kulik 1997). Future research could use eye-tracking data to examine the amount of visual attention directed to the brand across emotion conditions. This would provide additional insight into the results of study 3, which showed that attachment occurred under fear even when there was no physical contact with the brand.

Given that our research suggests that a brand can be a relationship partner, the extent to which the partner has human-like qualities would be worthy of investigation. It may be that emotional brand attachment occurs more readily for brands with more anthropomorphic qualities or for

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brands that typically represent social communities (e.g., sports teams, Harley Davidson, school paraphernalia).

One of the most common ways that consumers come in contact with the emotion of fear is voluntarily through media (e.g., horror movies) or risky experiences (e.g., sky diving). Individuals who seek out such fearful experiences do so primarily because the mixed emotions of fear and happiness can, for these individuals, increase enjoyment of the consumption experience (Andrade and Cohen 2007). Although this research shows that while fear-approach individuals feel the same level of fear as fear-avoidant people, it is possible that the positive emotions they feel reduce the need to cope with the fear experience. As such, it would be important to understand the degree to which the motivation for affiliation occurs for fear-approach people.

Finally, our studies focus only on fear as a high-arousal negative emotion. The question arises as to whether any high-arousal negative emotion, such as anger, could have the same effect. It would be interesting to examine whether fear is unique in its construction or if there are other negative emotions that exhibit similar components (i.e., anger is a high-arousal negative emotion and loneliness deals with social loss, which could be coped with through affiliation) that would also enhance emotional attachment.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first and second author supervised the collection of data for all studies by research assistants at the University of British Columbia Research Lab from Autumn 2011 to Autumn 2013. The first author analyzed these data. The first and second authors jointly discussed the data and designed studies.

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