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### A change of heart : the effect of heartwarming advertisements on brand affinity

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A Change of Heart: The Effect of Heartwarming Advertisements on Brand Affinity

by

Hannah Butman

Honors Thesis

Submitted to

Department of Psychology

University of Richmond  
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Advisor: Dr. Kristjen Lundberg

## HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCES AND BRAND AFFINITY

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine if evoking heartfelt responses to advertisements would yield greater brand affinity. It was hypothesized that a heartwarming response would yield greater brand affinity because it was a mixed emotional experience that produced both positive and negative emotions simultaneously. Across two studies, participants were shown both control and heartwarming advertisements for five brands. After each video, all participants were prompted to respond to every measure, regardless of condition. Heartwarming perceptions of the advertisements, overlap of self, feelings of love, and a mixed emotional experience were all significant mediators of video condition and brand affinity. Once they were accounted for, video condition was no longer marginally predictive of brand affinity. These results have clear practical implications for marketers and advertisers looking to create the most effective form of advertisements. By inducing a heartwarming experience, you are developing a stronger relationship with your consumer and ultimately increasing brand affinity.

# HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCES AND BRAND AFFINITY

## Introduction

We seek meaning and relationships, and brands that fail in establishing both are lost amongst the crowd. Marketing campaigns and advertisements that appeal to our emotions are not only successful because they target our psychological composition, but profitable because they create a connection with the consumer which ultimately leads to greater brand preference and affinity. Brands and businesses should capitalize on the psychology behind marketing in order to better understand their consumers and develop the most effective advertisements to yield the greatest return of investment.

### **Emotions are Important in Marketing and Advertising**

Historically, advertising evaluation was dominated by metrics which measured ‘thinking’ rather than ‘feeling’, hindering the growth of emotional advertising (Wiles and Cornwell 1990). However, over the past years, research has expanded beyond the initial hierarchical approaches, processing models, and appraisal theories and moved into the realm of affective content marketing. Heath, Brandt & Nairn (2006) found that favorability toward brands is strongly correlated with emotional content in advertising, not with factual content. From these results, it can be inferred that emotional content in advertising has an influence on brand favorability in the absence of any apparent contribution from a rational message. Even further, one could conclude that emotional content is responsible for building brand relationships. These results raise question to the assumption of most advertising models that the factual messages of advertisements give it its persuasive power.

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Similarly, a study conducted by Baldwin et al. (1996) highlighted how strong attachments develop over time that encourage the development of meaning and invoke strong emotions towards the object of attachment. His research found that attitudes can develop without any direct contact with the specific object of attachment and thus, it is possible for a consumer to have a positive attitude or attachment towards an object without ever having any contact or experience with it. Therefore, it is possible that advertisements can create an attachment between consumer and brand without the consumer ever even coming in contact with the brand or product.

### **Brands That We Like, Love, and Feel Attached to Are More Likely to Get Our Money**

Emotions in advertising are important because brands that we like, love, and feel attached to are more likely to get our money. Thus, marketers look to create brand liking and develop a relationship with their consumer. A study conducted by Shimp (1981) analyzed the influence of affective advertising in terms of feelings the advertisement evoked. They proposed that it is possible for attitudes towards ads to be “transferred” to the brand itself. In other words, ad liking can become brand liking. According to their research, we can conclude that consumers form their preferences on the basis of elements such as liking, feelings, and emotions induced by the advertisement rather than product/brand attribution information. Similarly, when Slater (2000) was studying the relationship between attachments and brands, he found that love and warm feelings were the strongest distinguishers of consumers’ emotional attachments to brands (specifically, Coke and Hallmark). All of these results are consistent with the research from Shimp & Madden (1988) which suggests attachments reflect an emotional bond.

### **We Know That Positive Emotions Can Make Us Like and Feel Attached to the Brand**

Something to note in the literature is that a relationship with a brand is largely reliant on a consumer's positive emotions. By evoking positive emotions within a consumer, brands are in a better position of creating a strong relationship and increasing brand affinity. Brown et al. (1998) conducted a meta-analysis involving positive and negative ad-evoked feelings to determine whether the effects of positive and negative feelings on advertising responses are identical and/or bidimensional. They found that ad-evoked feelings had a substantial impact on brand evaluations and that positive and negative feelings had a disproportionate effect on advertising responses. Positive emotions from an ad influence consumer preferences and are less likely to be discounted in contrast to negative emotions. Under certain conditions, the effect of negative emotions is weakened, whereas positive emotions have an effect regardless of condition.

Much of what researchers in this field know today touch on the notion that positive affect produces a "rose-colored-glasses" effect, making everything appear more desirable (Pham, 2007). Thus, greater loyalty, monetary spend, and favoritism are associated with brands when consumers feel positive emotions. Similarly, a study by Pham et al. (2013) found that, in comparison to negative, neutral, or informative commercials, advertisements that induced positive feelings resonated greater within consumers as compared to the rest. Their results showed that consumers reported more favorably to ads that emphasized positive themes, demonstrating that the emotional content of ads can directly affect a consumer's brand affinity. But, is a good advertisement as simple as inducing positive affect in a consumer? Could it be possible that inducing a little bit of sadness into a positive experience could prove effective?

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### **What About Mixed Emotions?**

We know emotions are not black and white and at times there is a combination of the two. Mixed emotional experiences occur when both positive and negative feelings occur simultaneously. For example, past research has found that we are more likely to experience such mixed emotions during a point in our life where we are reminded of some sort of meaningful ending (Ersner-Hershfield et al. 2008). But what do we know about mixed emotions in terms of advertising? Research has shown positive emotions play a strong role in consumer preference but what about the effect of a mixed emotional experience?

In the realm of mixed emotions and psychology there are conflicting results on the idea that mixed emotions yield positive or negative attitudes. Williams and Aaker (2002) found that certain individuals have more negative attitudes toward mixed emotional appeals, not as a result of the negative emotion in the stimulus, but rather because of the experience of the third independent emotion of discomfort. These mixed emotional appeals resulted in heightened levels of discomfort in certain individuals who in turn reported more negative attitudes.

However, we have reason to believe the opposite as well. Lerner, Small, and Loewenstein (2004) found that the experience of sadness often motivates people to restore a loss in some way, such as by acquiring new goods. Thus, individuals who experience feelings of sadness from advertisements could in turn look to fill that void by purchasing more product.

### **Not Just a Mixed Emotional Experience, But Heartwarming.**

Although there is a wider range of literature today, most still only assess the relationship between emotions, decision making, positive affect, and consumer behavior, none touching on

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the notion of heartwarming experiences. In tugging at our heartstrings, heartwarming advertisements induce not only positive emotions, but also sadness. For example, an advertisement that sparks joy and love as it portrays a heartwarming father-daughter relationship might also leave you with tears in your eyes. Little is known about the effect of such mixed emotional experiences (i.e. both positive and negative) on brand affinity. My research will evaluate this specific, different version of mixed emotions in advertising that revolves around the idea of a heartwarming experience. I propose that these experiences could predict even stronger brand affinity due to their unique nature. For the sake of my research I will define a heartfelt experience as the emotional experience of mixed affect, both positively happy and positively sad, that yields a deeper meaning and connection to the subject. A brand could potentially want their advertisements to yield a heartwarming feeling within their consumer so that a feeling of love, warmth, and connection is associated with their product, therefore resulting in stronger brand affinity. Similarly, under the assumption of the negativity bias, which refers to the notion that things of more negative natures have a greater effect on one's psychological state and processes, one could propose that heartwarming advertisements would generate greater brand affinity because of its ability to produce both positively happy and positively sad reactions. I hypothesize that a heartwarming experience will yield stronger brand affinity because of its ability to evoke both positive and negative emotions simultaneously and establish a greater connection with the consumer.

The variables I will be testing include brand affinity, specific commercials, positive and negative emotions, overlap of self, mixed emotional experience, feeling of meaning, and the consumers' heartwarming emotional response. Because people have a tendency to encode



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information on a deeper level when the self is implicated, it could be possible that heartwarming emotional reactions would produce such an effect and therefore lead to brand preference. Lastly, it is also viable that the delivery of a heartfelt message has the ability to elicit the feeling of love, which in return results in brand affinity. Said brand affinity can be explained because when the consumer experiences the feelings of love through a heartfelt emotional experience, they subconsciously associate those with the advertisement, and therefore, brand. Building off of literature on ad-evoked feelings and decision making, my study will provide a different approach to the emotional aspect of advertisements by focusing on the consumers' heartfelt emotional reactions, something no study has discussed before. If supported, this research will expand the limited literature and strengthen our confidence on the topic of heartfelt emotional experiences and their relationship to advertisements.

In this research we conducted two studies, the second building off of the first. The first study looks at heartwarming perceptions of two advertisements, both for Toyota. The second study looks at heartwarming perceptions to ten advertisements: two for Chevy, two for Toyota, two for Google Chrome, two for Toys R Us, and two for Guinness. The second study is essentially an expanded version of the first, with all of the same measures except for one additional measure of participant eudaemonia.

### Study 1

#### Method

**Participants.** Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk for a study on "Emotions in Everyday Life" ( $N = 102$ ; 52.9% male, 47.1% female; 85.3% white, 14.7% non-

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white; age in years  $M = 34.8$ ,  $SD = 11.3$ ). All provided informed consent and were compensated for their time. The study reported here was embedded within a larger study, in which participants completed a collection of measures assessing emotion-relevant individual differences and outcomes, including daily experiences of emotions, emotion-related skills and traits, health and well-being, social and prosocial outcomes, and personality traits. Only the variables of interest are discussed here.

### **Materials and Measures.**

**Advertisements.** Participants were randomly assigned to view one of two advertisements for Toyota. The “heartwarming” video depicted the relationship between a father and daughter from childhood to adulthood. It concluded with the father dropping his daughter off at the airport for her deployment in the army. The control video was also an advertisement for Toyota but a humorous one about a man who gets bitten by a snake. The bitten man approaches the closest people to him and asks if they know if his bite was poisonous. The people don’t speak English, and the bitten man interprets their response as “yes” when they really said “no.” Because nothing happens to the man’s bite, he concludes that he is immune to venom and proceeds to brag about it to his friends over a campfire. These videos were selected so that they matched in length and quality. The heartwarming videos were selected purposely to portray a mixed emotional experience, not just a positive experience while the control videos were selected to be positive, but not heartwarming.

**Brand Affinity.** Brand affinity was measured by five semantic differential items about Toyota. Regardless of which video type they watched (heartwarming or control), participants

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were prompted to respond to the same five semantic differential items pertaining to the Toyota brand. Participants were instructed to respond to the question: “When thinking about Toyota, to what extent do you feel...” on a rating scale of -3 to 3 in terms of the following pairs of words: cold/warm, distant/close, unpleasant/pleasant, untrusting/trusting, unfavorable/favorable. Responses to these five items were averaged such that higher numbers represented greater brand affinity ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Potential Mediators.** To allow additional exploration of *why* participants who watched one video type might report greater brand affinity, several additional variables were measured. First, to assess their emotional responses to the advertisement, participants completed the modified Differential Emotions Scale (mDES; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). They were asked to indicate the intensity of their response while watching the advertisement using each of 20 trios of emotion adjectives (e.g., “amused, fun-loving, silly,” “angry, irritated, annoyed”) on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). From the mDES, we were able to analyze participants’ reports of feelings of love. On top of that, to assess mixed emotions, I looked at the variables of joyful and sadness and summed them together to see if there was a significant effect. Higher numbers indicated the presence of mixed affect.

To verify that participants in the two conditions differed in their perceptions of the advertisements as heartwarming, participants also responded to the following two questions: 1. “To what extent did you feel that this advertisement was heartwarming?” and 2. “To what extent did you feel that this advertisement was touching?” Participants responded to these questions on the same 5-point scale used for the mDES (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). Responses to these two

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questions were averaged such that higher scores indicated greater heartwarming perceptions ( $r = .96, p < .05$ ).

Finally, to evaluate brand connection, participants completed an adaptation of the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale (Aron, A. Aron E. N., & Smollan, D., 1992). The IOS consists of seven pairs of circles — in this case, one representing Toyota and one representing the self — that vary in the extent to which they overlap with each other. Participants were prompted to indicate which circle best describes the connection felt with Toyota after watching the previous video. Higher scores correspond to pairs of circles that increasingly overlapped and thus represented greater self-other overlap.

### Results

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables of interest are reported in Table 1. To summarize, as expected, perceptions of the advertisement as more heartwarming corresponded with significantly higher reports of brand affinity, as well as average positive emotions, overlap of self (brand connection), feelings of love and sadness, and mixed emotions ( $ps < .001$ ). Brand affinity was also significantly and positively correlated with all of the hypothesized mediators, average positive emotions, overlap of self and feelings of love ( $ps < .001$ ), but not with sadness ( $ps > .05$ ).

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	Heartwarming Perceptions of the Ad	Average Positive Emotions	Brand Affinity	Overlap of Self	Feelings of Love	Mixed Emotion	Feelings of Sadness
Heartwarming Perceptions of the Ad	<b>2.92 (1.40)</b>						
Average Positive Emotions	.604***	<b>1.38 (.992)</b>					
Brand Affinity	.371***	.547***	<b>.682 (1.26)</b>				
Overlap of Self	.418***	.501***	.534***	<b>2.61 (1.60)</b>			
Feelings of Love	.674***	.802***	.430***	.534***	<b>1.32 (1.37)</b>		
Mixed Emotion	.588***	.690***	.329***	.464***	.902***	<b>1.84 (1.90)</b>	
Feelings of Sadness	.214**	.234**	0.038	0.165	.381***	.743***	<b>.52 (.89)</b>

Table 1. *Note.* Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) appear in bold along the diagonal. \*\*\*  $p < .0001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

### *Did Participants Respond Differently to the Advertisements?*

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare brand affinity, heartwarming perceptions of the ad, average positive emotions, feelings of love, overlap of self, mixed emotions, and feelings of sadness in the control video and the heartwarming video conditions (see Table 2). Results suggest that those who watched the heartwarming advertisement instead of the control advertisement reported significantly greater heartwarming perceptions of the ad, average positive emotions, feelings of love, overlap of self, mixed emotions, and feelings of sadness. The only variable for which video condition had a marginal effect was brand affinity ( $p = 0.07$ ), with those who watched the heartwarming video reporting higher brand affinity ( $M = 0.91$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) than those who watched the control advertisement ( $M = 0.46$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

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	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test
Brand Affinity	0.46 (1.22)	0.91 (1.26)	$t(100) = -1.817, p = 0.072$
Heartwarming Perceptions of the Ad	2.02 (.98)	3.83 (1.15)	$t(100) = -8.57, p < 0.001$
Average Positive Emotions	1.03 (.808)	1.74 (1.03)	$t(100) = -3.88, p < 0.001$
Feelings of Love	0.55 (.945)	2.10 (1.30)	$t(100) = -6.883, p < 0.001$
Overlap of Self	2.27 (1.49)	2.94 (1.65)	$t(100) = -2.134, p = 0.035$
Mixed Emotion	0.75 (1.35)	2.90 (1.72)	$t(100) = -7.15, p < 0.001$
Feelings of Sadness	0.20 (0.66)	0.84 (.97)	$t(100) = -3.94, p < 0.001$

*Table 2. Note.* Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for video conditions. Significance test indicates the results of an independent samples *t*-test evaluating differences in these variables between those who watched the heartwarming versus the control advertisement.

### *Mediation Models*

After establishing that those who watched the heartwarming video reported marginally greater brand affinity, my next step was to explore the potential mediators that could explain that relationship. Mediation models and effects for all variables of interest are reported in Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6. I chose to focus on four mediating variables (feelings of love, heartwarming perceptions, mixed emotional experience, and overlap of self) rather than all six variables because I felt that positive emotions and feelings of sadness were not as pertinent to my hypothesis. First, to determine whether heartwarming perceptions mediated the relationship between video condition and brand affinity, I followed the four-step approach of Baron and Kenny (1986), using an SPSS macro developed by Hayes and Preacher (2014). Predictor variables were mean-centered prior to the analysis such that a score of zero represented the sample mean. In Step 1, video condition was marginally significantly predictive of brand affinity ( $B = .447, SE = .246, p > .05$ ). In Step 2, video condition was positively and significantly

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predictive of heartwarming perceptions ( $B = 1.813, SE = 0.211, p < .001$ ). In Step 3, heartwarming perceptions of the ad were positively and significantly predictive of brand affinity ( $B = .396, SE = 0.113, p < .001$ ). In support of our hypothesis, when controlling for heartwarming perceptions of the ad, video condition was not a significant predictor of brand affinity ( $B = -.271, SE = 0.312, p > .05$ ). These results suggested a mediation of the relationship between video condition and brand affiliation, a conclusion that was supported in Step 4 with the estimation of a significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.72, 95% CI: [0.32, 1.27]).

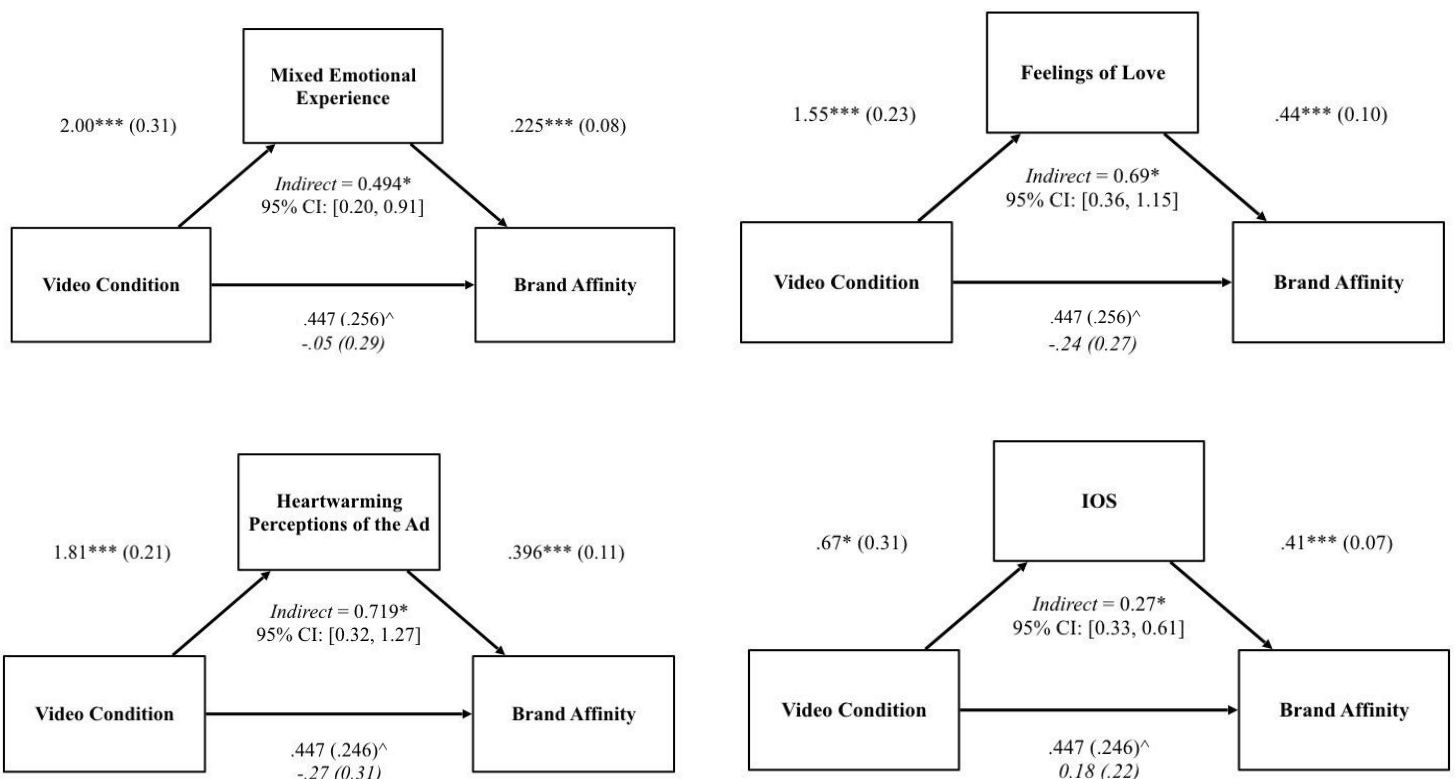
I repeated the four-step approach of Baron and Kenny (1986) to examine whether overlap of self mediated the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. Given that Step 1 was the same, in Step 2, video condition was positively significantly predictive of overlap of self ( $B = .674, SE = 0.311, p < .05$ ). In Step 3, overlap of self was positively and significantly predictive of brand affinity ( $B = .413, SE = .072, p < .001$ ). When controlling for overlap of self, video condition was not a significant predictor of brand affinity ( $B = .182, SE = 0.221, p > .05$ ). These results suggested a mediation of the relationship between video condition and brand affiliation, a conclusion that was supported in Step 4 with the estimation of a significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.27, 95% CI: [0.33, 0.61]).

A third mediation model was run to examine whether feelings of love mediated the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. Results from Step 1 remained the same. In Step 2, video condition was positively significantly predictive of feelings of love ( $B = 1.552, SE = 0.231, p < .001$ ). In Step 3, feelings of love were positively and significantly predictive of brand affinity ( $B = .441, SE = 0.101, p < .001$ ). When controlling for feelings of love, video condition was not a significant predictor of brand affinity ( $B = -.241, SE = 0.274, p > .05$ ). These

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results suggested a mediation of the relationship between video condition and brand affiliation, a conclusion that was supported in Step 4 with the estimation of a significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.69, 95% CI: [0.36, 1.15]).

Finally, a fourth mediation model was run to examine whether mixed emotional experience mediated the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. Results from Step 1 remained the same. In Step 2, video condition was positively significantly predictive of a mixed emotional experience ( $B = 2.00$ ,  $SE = 0.312$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In Step 3, a mixed emotional experience was positively and significantly predictive of brand affinity ( $B = .225$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When controlling for a mixed emotional experience, video condition was not a significant predictor of brand affinity ( $B = -.054$ ,  $SE = 0.291$ ,  $p > .05$ ). These results suggested a mediation of the relationship between video condition and brand affiliation, a conclusion that was supported in Step 4 with the estimation of a significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.494, 95% CI: [0.20, 0.91]).





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Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6.

*Note:* Unstandardized regression coefficients (Bs). Coefficients in parenthesis indicate the standard errors of the estimates. Coefficients in italics indicate the estimated values for perceived brand affinity when controlling for video condition. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (Video condition is coded 0 = control, 1 = heartwarming).

### Discussion

These findings suggest that people who viewed a heartwarming advertisement reported greater brand affinity than those who viewed a positive control advertisement. Additionally, these results suggest that this increased brand affinity was due to the heartwarming nature of the advertisement, including its evocation of a loving and mixed emotional experience and of a closer connection with the brand featured.

This helps me to better define “heartfeltedness” because, from my results, I know that a heartwarming experience is a mixed emotion of both positive and negative feelings due to their correlations. As heartwarming perceptions of the advertisements, overlap of self, feelings of love, and a mixed emotional experience were all significant mediators of video condition and brand affinity, we can deduce that a heartwarming experience contains each factor. Once they were accounted for, video condition was no longer marginally predictive of brand affinity. These results support my hypothesis that the mixed emotional experience of “heartfeltedness” will produce stronger brand affinity because of its ability to evoke the feeling of love. Additionally, I could also propose that a heartfelt experience produced stronger brand affinity because it was a mixed emotional reaction that induced both positive and negative emotions and ability to evoke the feelings of love.

When looking at this experiment there are several limitations to my study. Because there were only 102 participants who reported results for my experiment, the strength of my argument could be questioned as to whether I truly had a strong representation of a population. In Study 2,

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we would like to add questions analyzing the perceptions of meaning participants found in the advertisements because we believe their results could strengthen our argument on heartwarming experiences. Because video condition was only marginally significant of brand affinity, we want to better assess it using a high power repeated measures test. Part of the appeal of running a second study is to use more advertisements and assign participants to view a mix of heartwarming and control advertisements, thereby permitting a more powerful repeated measures design.

Study 2 introduces the concept of eudaimonic quality in determining what leads to heartwarming perceptions of advertisements for it is feasible that heartwarming experiences could lead to greater brand affinity due to the eudaemonic quality of heartfeltness. While hedonic qualities focus on happiness in a literal or physical response (pleasure attainment and pain avoidance), eudaemonic qualities focus on meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From a eudaemonic perspective, happiness is more than pleasure; the premise of eudaemonia proposes that people will feel happy if they experience life purpose and that we seek content that provides meaning in our life. Research conducted by Waterman (2013) found that individuals have greater closer, caring, intimate personal relationships whose behaviors reflect eudaimonic functioning than those who do not. They were also found to engage in a wider range of prosocial activities. Because heartfelt experiences have a eudaemonic function and it has been found that purpose and meaning are valued over hedonic qualities, it is possible that heartwarming experiences will yield greater brand affinity. We speculate that a critical part of our heartwarming advertisements is the ability to evoke perceptions of meaning and purpose, thus we decided to directly test that idea by including items relevant to a eudaimonic/meaningful response in Study 2.

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## Study 2

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk for a study on "Advertising and Consumer Preferences Study." ( $N = 176$ ; 52.2% male, 47.7% female, 86% white, 14% non-white; age in years  $M = 35$ ,  $SD = 10.9$ ). All participants were compensated for their time. Informed consent was obtained for all participants.

### Materials and Measures.

Participants were randomly assigned to view one of two blocks of advertisements. The 5 videos included in Block A were: Chevy (control video), Google Chrome (heartwarming video), Toyota (control video), Toys R Us (heartwarming video), Guinness (control video). The 5 videos included in Block B were: Chevy (heartwarming video), Google Chrome (control video), Toyota (heartwarming video), Toys R Us (control video), Guinness (heartwarming video). For each brand, one advertisement was a "heartwarming" video and one was a control video. The "heartwarming" and control videos for Toyota were the same advertisement that were used in Study 1. Control videos were chosen to be positive but not heartwarming, and were approximately matched in length. A description of every video can be found in the appendix.

**Perceptions of the Brand.** To assess perceptions of each brand, I tested brand affinity and inclusion of other in self. Brand affinity ( $\alpha$  min. = .93;  $\alpha$  max. = .95) and inclusion of other in self were measured by the same measure used in Study 1.

**Responses to Advertisements.** Participant responses to the advertisements were measured by testing for heartwarming response ( $r$  min. = .88;  $r$  max = .90,  $p < .0001$ ), mixed affect, and

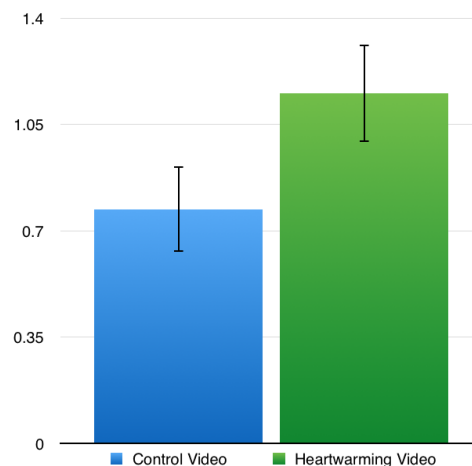
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feeling of eudaimonia ( $\alpha$  min. = .90;  $\alpha$  max. = .95). All measures were the same as used in Study 1 with the exception for one addition. To measure consumers' feeling of eudaimonia, I created a set of four items for participants to respond to, including: "To what extent did this advertisement make you feel that your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it?"; "To what extent did this advertisement make you feel that people are basically good?"; "To what extent did this advertisement make you feel something bigger than yourself?"; and "To what extent did this advertisement make you feel full of life?". Participants responded using a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*).

### Results

*How did participants respond to the heartwarming advertisements?*

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables of interest are reported in Table 7.



To gauge whether participants reported more brand affinity after viewing heartwarming advertisements than after watching control advertisements, I first calculated two additional brand

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affinity scores for each participant, one representing mean brand affinity following heartwarming and the other representing mean brand affinity following control advertisements. A dependent samples *t*-test was run to assess the relationship between video condition and brand affinity.

Participants reported significantly higher brand affinity on average after watching heartwarming advertisements relative to watching control advertisements,  $t(175) = -4.60, p < 0.001$ .

Independent samples *t*-tests for all variables of interest are reported in Table 8. These tests were run to report the statistical differences between the means of the control videos and heartwarming videos. We found that participants who watched the heartwarming videos reported greater brand affinity, feelings of love, mixed emotions, perceptions of meaning, heartwarming perceptions, and brand relationship.

### *How did their heartwarming perceptions affect their reports of brand affinity?*

A series of mediation models were run to confirm that the heartwarming videos were producing greater brand affinity for the expected reason. We verified that what we thought were the heartwarming videos were actually perceived by the participants as heartwarming. These heartwarming perceptions fully mediated the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. We considered our other hypothesized mediators because we predicted that these elements would make up a heartwarming experience. All hypothesized mediators were significant mediators of the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. We believe this is because a heartwarming experience is a mixed emotional experience that induces the feeling of love, evokes a feeling of meaning, and creates a relationship with the brand and consumer.

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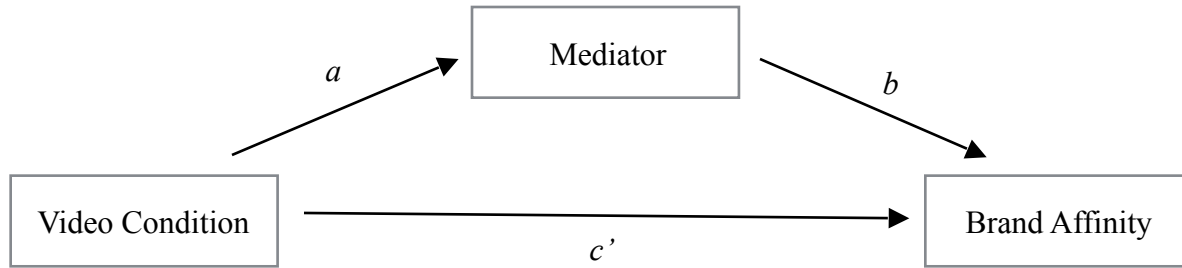


Table 9. Guinness

Mediators	$\beta_a$	$\beta_b$	$\beta_{c'}$	Indirect Effects
Perceptions of Meaning	1.28***	0.59***	-0.18	0.76 95% CI: [0.54, 1.04]
Feelings of Love	1.45***	0.37***	0.04	0.53 95% CI: [0.34, 0.81]
Mixed Emotions	0.94***	0.25***	0.33	0.24 95% CI: [0.12, 0.43]
Perceptions of Heartwarming	1.69***	0.60***	-0.44**	1.02 95% CI: [0.76, 1.36]
Brand Relationship	1.12***	0.42***	0.11	0.47 95% CI: [0.25, 0.71]

In a regression model where video condition is the only predictor of brand affinity, the parameter estimate for the c pathway is .576 ( $SE = .179$ )  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .005$

Table 10. Toyota

Mediators	$\beta_a$	$\beta_b$	$\beta_{c'}$	Indirect Effects
Perceptions of Meaning	1.34***	0.61***	-0.33	0.81 95% CI: [0.57, 1.10]
Feelings of Love	1.94***	0.53***	-0.54	1.03 95% CI: [0.76, 1.38]
Mixed Emotions	1.07***	0.19***	0.29	0.20 95% CI: [0.08, 0.40]
Perceptions of Heartwarming	2.02***	0.60***	-0.72	1.21 95% CI: [0.89, 1.59]
Brand Relationship	1.47***	0.43***	-0.14	0.62 95% CI: [0.38, 0.89]

In a regression model where video condition is the only predictor of brand affinity, the parameter estimate for the c pathway is .490 ( $SE = .179$ )  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .005$

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Table 11. Chevy

Mediators	$\beta_a$	$\beta_b$	$\beta_c$	Indirect Effects
Perceptions of Meaning	1.11***	0.77***	-0.53***	0.86 95% CI: [0.60, 1.16]
Feelings of Love	1.97***	0.62***	-0.89***	1.22 95% CI: [0.87, 1.60]
Mixed Emotions	0.93***	0.24***	0.10	0.22 95% CI: [0.09, 0.42]
Perceptions of Heartwarming	2.13***	0.76***	-1.29***	1.61 95% CI: [1.24, 2.09]
Brand Relationship	1.07***	0.45***	-0.16	0.48 95% CI: [0.26, 0.73]

In a regression model where video condition is the only predictor of brand affinity, the parameter estimate for the c pathway is .321 ( $SE = .200$ )  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .005$

Table 12. Google Chrome

Mediators	$\beta_a$	$\beta_b$	$\beta_c$	Indirect Effects
Perceptions of Meaning	-0.50***	0.69***	0.07	-0.35 95% CI: [-0.59, -0.13]
Feelings of Love	-1.05***	0.53***	0.28	-0.56 95% CI: [-0.84, -0.36]
Mixed Emotions	-0.52**	0.33***	-0.11	-0.17 95% CI: [-0.38, -0.02]
Perceptions of Heartwarming	-1.05***	0.73***	0.49***	-0.77 95% CI: [-1.08, -0.53]
Brand Relationship	-0.52**	0.41***	-0.07	-0.22 95% CI: [-0.42, 0.00]

In a regression model where video condition is the only predictor of brand affinity, the parameter estimate for the c pathway is .281 ( $SE = .173$ )  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .005$

Table 13. Toys R Us

Mediators	$\beta_a$	$\beta_b$	$\beta_c$	Indirect Effects
Perceptions of Meaning	-0.55***	0.65***	0.06	-0.36 95% CI: [-0.62, -0.13]
Feelings of Love	-1.27***	0.50***	0.34**	-0.63 95% CI: [-0.91, -0.44]
Mixed Emotions	-0.35	0.38***	-0.16	-0.13 95% CI: [-0.34, 0.02]
Perceptions of Heartwarming	-1.47***	0.63***	0.64***	-0.93 95% CI: [-1.22, -0.65]

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<b>Brand Relationship</b>	-0.59	0.38***	-0.07	-0.22 95% CI: [-0.44, -0.03]
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In a regression model where video condition is the only predictor of brand affinity, the parameter estimate for the c pathway is .294 (SE = .172)  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .005$

### Discussion

Viewing a heartwarming advertisement creates higher brand affinity and causes participants to report stronger favorability. All hypothesized mediators were significant mediators of the relationship between video condition and brand affinity. We believe this is because a heartwarming experience is a mixed emotional experience that induces the feeling of love, evokes a feeling of meaning, and creates a relationship with the brand and consumer.

### Theoretical implications of this study

From past research, it is fair to say that advertisements which evoke positive emotions affect brand affinity and increase liking of the brand. This study and results not only reinforces that idea but also builds on it to include the aspect of negative emotions in the equation. Although Williams and Aaker (2002) found mixed emotional appeals resulted in heightened levels of discomfort in certain individuals who in turn reported more negative attitudes, our results are a direct counterpoint to his specific study. This could be in part because our results looked at heartwarming advertisements, which do generate the feelings of discomfort. Our results support the previous research on positive emotions and brand affinity while also introducing this new concept of heartwarming into the marketing and advertising literature.



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### **Limitations and Future Directions**

When looking at this experiment there could be several proposed limitations to my study. At first glance, one could argue that this emotional experience I define as heartfelt could simply be a more specific type such as poignancy, time passing, or salience of ending. One could suspect a heartfelt experience might just be another form of poignancy based on results from Ersner-Hershfield et al. (2008). They found a connection between poignancy and meaningful experiences, stating that the experience of poignancy can be considered a mixed emotional experience when reminded of the passage of time. These results could impact the way we define heartfelt experiences as some of what most people consider heartwarming involve the passing of time and meaningful endings. While it is true that those could be contributing factors, it seems unlikely to be the only factor because the Guinness and Toys R Us video contain neither.

A factor that could be limiting my results would be the fact that this was a tightly controlled study. It would be incredibly challenging to attempt to replicate how people would potentially be experiencing advertisements in the real world as the average person comes in contact with hundreds of advertisements on a daily basis, consciously and subconsciously. Research has indicated that the average person comes into contact with approximately 76 noticed exposures and 600-625 potential exposures (whether noticed or not) (Media Matters, 2007). In conjunction with these statistics, our results could be affected in the sense that people might not be paying as much attention to the content of the advertisement and thus not fully comprehending the mixed emotional experience.

Similar to Study 1, a significant limitation to Study 2 were the demographics of the participant pool and advertisements. Because all actors and actresses in the advertisements were

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White, non-White participants could have perceived that negatively and in turn respond to both advertisements more negatively. Most participants were white as with the actors in the advertisements. Therefore, we have limited ability to test for moderation effects involving race and ethnicity. The heartfelt emotions from the advertisements might not generalize amongst various ethnicities in the sense that it's difficult to say whether other aspects of the ads were important in producing these effects (e.g. seeing actors with whom one identifies). Future research could look to explore that but there doesn't seem to be much theoretical reason to suspect that heartwarming experiences and liking of a brand would not generalize.

### **Practical Implications**

Brands are constantly trying to come up with different strategies to differentiate themselves from each other. When devising marketing campaigns and advertisements, they look for unique and creative ideas that their competitors might not think of. These findings could be helpful for marketing agencies and professionals looking to create the most effective advertisement, in terms of increasing brand affinity. By inducing a heartfelt mixed emotional experience, consumers could, in turn, like specific brands more than others. Creative directors and copywriters could look to create content that purposefully evokes heartfelt emotions as a way to increase brand affinity.

Not only does this research expand the limited literature on brand affinity, it strengthens our confidence on the topic of heartfelt emotional experiences and their relationship to advertisements, providing a foundation for future researchers to build upon.

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## Appendix

Table 7.

	Chevy			Google Chrome			Toyota			Toys R Us			Guinness		
	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test	Video Condition 1 "Control"	Video Condition 2 "Heartfelt"	Significance Test
<b>Brand Affinity</b>	0.69 (1.34)	0.37 (1.31)	$t(100) = -1.607, p = 0.110$	1.48 (1.22)	1.20 (1.07)	$t(100) = -1.63, p = .106$	1.09 (1.23)	0.60 (1.09)	$t(100) = -2.73, p = .007$	1.19 (1.14)	0.90 (1.14)	$t(100) = -1.70, p = .089$	1.11 (1.23)	0.54 (1.14)	$t(100) = -3.21, p = .002$
<b>Feelings of Meaning</b>	3.10 (1.07)	2.00 (.868)	$t(100) = -7.58, p < .000$	3.45 (1.10)	2.95 (1.13)	$t(100) = -2.97, p = .003$	3.19 (1.24)	1.85 (0.85)	$t(100) = -8.35, p < .000$	3.13 (1.19)	2.58 (1.07)	$t(100) = -3.20, p = .002$	3.30 (1.27)	2.02 (1.01)	$t(100) = -7.41, p < .000$
<b>Average Positive Emotions</b>	1.98 (.956)	1.37 (.704)	$t(100) = -4.84, p < .000$	2.25 (0.92)	1.6 (1.01)	$t(100) = -2.70, p = .008$	1.91 (1.11)	0.99 (0.65)	$t(100) = -6.65, p < .000$	2.07 (1.02)	1.55 (1.01)	$t(100) = -3.39, p = .001$	2.00 (1.12)	1.11 (0.79)	$t(100) = -6.09, p < .000$
<b>Heartwarming Perceptions of the Ad</b>	4.14 (1.03)	2.01 (.952)	$t(100) = -14.28, p < .000$	4.28 (0.95)	3.23 (1.13)	$t(100) = -6.64, p < .000$	3.75 (1.23)	1.85 (0.85)	$t(100) = -12.26, p < .000$	3.97 (1.03)	2.51 (1.11)	$t(100) = -9.08, p < .000$	3.69 (1.24)	1.99 (1.07)	$t(100) = -9.68, p < .000$
<b>Overlap of Self</b>	3.20 (1.79)	2.12 (1.34)	$t(100) = -4.50, p < .000$	3.78 (1.76)	3.25 (1.65)	$t(100) = -2.03, p = .044$	3.45 (1.90)	1.98 (1.22)	$t(100) = -6.11, p < .000$	3.42 (1.86)	2.83 (1.69)	$t(100) = -2.19, p = .030$	3.32 (1.92)	2.20 (1.39)	$t(100) = -4.22, p < .000$
<b>Mixed Emotion</b>	2.36 (1.34)	3.29 (1.50)	$t(100) = -4.37, p < .000$	2.91 (1.42)	2.39 (1.65)	$t(100) = -2.24, p = .026$	2.70 (1.75)	1.63 (1.62)	$t(100) = -4.21, p < .000$	2.80 (1.35)	2.45 (1.55)	$t(100) = -1.59, p = .113$	2.47 (1.61)	1.52 (1.39)	$t(100) = -4.21, p < .000$
<b>Feelings of Sadness</b>	1.11 (1.21)	0.27 (0.65)	$t(100) = -5.77, p < .000$	0.29 (0.69)	0.30 (0.82)	$t(100) = .006, p = .953$	0.69 (1.09)	0.26 (0.76)	$t(100) = -3.03, p = .003$	0.31 (0.76)	0.25 (0.85)	$t(100) = -.507, p = .613$	0.31 (0.69)	0.17 (0.57)	$t(100) = -1.49, p < .000$
<b>Feelings of Love</b>	2.71 (1.26)	0.74 (1.03)	$t(100) = -11.40, p < .000$	2.75 (1.26)	1.70 (1.27)	$t(100) = -5.49, p < .000$	2.40 (1.46)	0.46 (0.76)	$t(100) = -11.05, p < .000$	2.37 (1.35)	1.10 (1.10)	$t(100) = -6.83, p < .000$	2.10 (1.41)	0.65 (0.93)	$t(100) = -8.06, p < .000$

Table 8.

	Heartwarming Perceptions	Average Positive Emotions	Brand Affinity	Overlap of Self	Feelings of Love	Mixed Emotion	Feelings of Sadness	Feelings of Meaning
<b>Heartwarming Perceptions</b>	min: 2.73 (1.16) max: 3.25 (1.48)							
<b>Average Positive Emotions</b>	.638 < r's < .828	min: 1.44 (0.89) max: 2.05 (1.06)						
<b>Brand Affinity</b>	.47 < r's < .65	.546 < r's < .658	min: 0.53 (1.14) max: 1.33 (1.33)					
<b>Overlap of Self</b>	.368 < r's < .685	.408 < r's < .759	.339 < r's < .594	min: 2.65 (1.66) max: 3.52 (1.80)				
<b>Feelings of Love</b>	.694 < r's < .825	.765 < r's < .884	.426 < r's < .589	.351 < r's < .695	min: 1.37 (1.37) max: 2.23 (1.51)			
<b>Mixed Emotion</b>	.511 < r's < .666	.655 < r's < .831	.28 < r's < .49	.453 < r's < .567	.575 < r's < .749	min: 1.99 (1.46) max: 2.82 (1.77)		
<b>Feelings of Sadness</b>	-.018 < r's < .298	-.021 < r's < .220	-.205 < r's < -.060	.054 < r's < .267	-.037 < r's < .377	.445 < r's < .652	min: 0.24 (.632) max: 0.69 (1.06)	
<b>Feelings of Meaning</b>	.698 < r's < .789	.762 < r's < .859	.546 < r's < .680	.445 < r's < .754	.698 < r's < .789	.570 < r's < .678	-.020 < r's < .302	min: 2.51 (1.12) max: 3.21 (1.31)

## HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCES AND BRAND AFFINITY

### Advertisements:

#### Toyota

- **Control Video:** “Snakebite.” Advertisement humorously portrays a photographer getting bit by a snake, believing it’s poisonous, and telling his friends around a campfire how he is immune to poison.
- **Heartwarming Video:** “My Bold Dad.” Advertisement portrays the relationship between a father and daughter over the course of 10 years and ends on her leaving for her army deployment.

#### Chevy

- **Control Video:** “Happy Grad.” Advertisement humorously portrays a graduate mistaking his graduation present (a fridge on the side of the road) with the Chevy convertible parked on the side of the road.
- **Heartwarming Video:** “Maddie.” Advertisement portrays the relationship between a woman and her dog throughout their lifetime.

#### Google Chrome

- **Control Video:** “Frank Restaurant.” Advertisement portrays a couple opening a restaurant.
- **Heartwarming Video:** “Dear Sophie.” Advertisement portrays a father using Google Chrome to document/write to his daughter throughout her childhood.

#### Toys R Us

- **Control Video:** “C’mon Let’s Play.” Advertisement portrays kids running around a virtual playground inside Toys R Us, toys coming alive, and children becoming their toys.
- **Heartwarming Video:** “What You Wish For.” Advertisement portrays a son playing with a toy and his father on Christmas morning when the toy leads him to his mother coming home from deployment.

#### Guinness

- **Control Video:** “The History of Pool.” Advertisement portrays the history/making of the game of pool over beers at a bar.
- **Heartwarming Video:** “Basketball.” Advertisement opens to a shot of 6 friends playing basketball in wheelchairs and ends with all of them but one getting out of their wheelchair to enjoy a beer at the bar.