A Familiar Story: The Moderating Effect of Identification on Narrative Advertising

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Abstract

In this study evaluative conditioning of a neutral conditioned stimulus following a short story was tested. The effect of different endings was studied, as well as the moderating effect of identification with the main character. Whereas previous studies have carried out research on both story endings with evaluative conditioning and identification, these factors have not been combined in one study as of yet. The experiment ($N = 123$) used a 2 x 2 within-participant design. All participants were asked to read 40 stories. Brands were presented after these stories that either ended positively or negatively. Additionally, some main characters in the stories shared the same political preference as the participant, while other main characters held a differing political orientation. After these stories participants were asked to rate the brands. Results indicate a clear preference for brands associated with good-ending stories. Brands linked to stories involving a main character that is similar to the reader were evaluated more positively than when the main character was dissimilar, even when the story ends negatively. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: storytelling, identification, evaluative conditioning, advertising

Since the time of hunters and gatherers, stories have been told around the campfire to pass knowledge from one human to another. These stories served several functions, such as shaping the group's identity and setting mutual values and boundaries (Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005). In modern times we use stories for many of the same reasons, to empathize with others (Lind & Thomsen, 2018), creating a shared history (McAdams, 1993), instill values in us (Fog et al., 2005), or simply to entertain us. Bruner (1991) even argues that storytelling, or *narrative mode* as he called it, is an important way for people to understand the world. This narrative mode regards the intentions of ourselves and others over a span of time not just as a sequence of events, but a way to attach meaning to the world.

Storytelling in Advertising

Commercial companies using stories in their advertising is certainly nothing new. Where storytelling would require brands to overcome some barriers in the past, most of these have disappeared with the rise of modern technology and the internet. For example, Pulizzi (2012) explains people are a lot more receptive to content from non-media and smaller brands and content producers are more willing to work for non-media brands than before. These days it is easier to share stories with the world and have customers engage in your content without the use of traditional media (Pulizzi, 2012). Storytelling commercials do not talk about why the product or service is superior or desired but use a story to create a brand identity. Some famous examples of storytelling commercials include Nike's '*Just do it!*' campaign or Dove's '*Real beauty*' campaign. These campaigns focus on inner strength and societal beauty standards rather than the products offered itself. A consumer trust report conducted by the Nielsen Company (2012) shows an increasing demand of a personal connection in the way consumers gather information while a study conducted by Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and Van Riel (2013) reported

interesting findings between groups who were exposed to brand storytelling and groups who were exposed to mere advertising without storytelling. Consumers who were exposed to the storytelling reported about the brand in more positive terms and were even willing to pay more for the products of said brand. The working mechanisms of these commercials on consumers have been researched in several studies. For example, a recent study on conditioned association between stories and brand images found that a good-ending story is predictive for higher brand evaluations, compared to negative-ending stories, both implicit and explicit (Strick & Volbeda, 2018, Experiment 1). In a larger follow-up study on explicit attitudes, these results were replicated. In the current research the appreciation of a brand is also tested through evaluative conditioning, defined as a change in the liking of a stimulus (conditioned stimulus; CS) that results from pairing that stimulus with other positive or negative stimuli (unconditioned stimulus; US) (Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens, & Crombez, 2010). The stories, or unconditioned stimuli, in this study will either result in a positive or a negative conclusion, after which a picture of a brand, the conditioned stimulus, is briefly shown. Even though previous research suggests that evaluative conditioning effects are stronger when the CS and US are shown simultaneously, instead of presenting the CS before or after the US, the effects do not differ significantly, suggesting that evaluative conditioning is relatively robust against the timing factor (Hofmann et al., 2010).

Identification

Identification happens when people believe they have something in common with someone or something else, or believe they are unlike someone or something else (Kent, 2015). People tend to attribute their identity largely to the (social) groups they belong to. According to the Social Identity Theory, described by Tajfel, Turner & Austin (1979), group memberships like

social class, family, nationality or political orientation represent important sources of self-esteem and pride. In order to increase our own self-image, we enhance the status of the groups we belong to (ingroups) and find negative aspects about groups which we are not a part of (outgroups). In the same way, we tend to be more attracted to people who are similar to us, compared to people we perceive to be less similar to us. In a meta study by Montoya, Horton & Kirchner (2008), 460 effect sizes from 313 laboratory and field investigations were analyzed and large significant effects were found of similarity, both perceived and actual, on interpersonal attraction. Several different reasons can be found to explain the link between similarity and liking. People experience a consensual validation when interacting with similar others, meaning other people with similar attitudes validate our own attitudes or might even make them appear like a virtue (Sprecher, Treger, Hilaire, Fisher, & Hatfield, 2013; Hampton, Fisher Boyd, & Sprecher, 2018). Another explaining factor is cognitive evaluation. We base our impressions of people on the information we have available and generalize from there. When we learn that somebody is similar to us, we perceive them more positively and assume that they must have other similar characteristics we would regard as positive (Hampton et al., 2018). Other people similar to us are more likely to like us as well, and in turn, we like people more when they like us (Hampton et al., 2018; Sprecher et al., 2013). Sometimes it is simply more enjoyable and fun to spend time with people who are similar to us, instead of with people that are more distinct to us (Hampton et al., 2018; Sprecher et al., 2013). In storytelling, different ways of identification can be distinguished. In A Rhetoric of Motives, a book by Kenneth Burke (1950) three distinct kinds of identification in storytelling are described; by sympathy, antithesis or unawareness. Identification by sympathy refers to the use of language to emphasize with other people. Identification by antithesis refers to explicitly stating differences between groups or people, or

doing the opposite by stressing common factors. The last one is more subtle than the previous two kinds of identification. When using unawareness the storyteller invokes imaginary, symbols, ideas or people that resonate with an audience without explicitly mentioning common or uncommon factors. An example would be a politician who mentions the local football team when campaigning throughout the country. In this study the second kind of identification will be utilized. Participants will be asked to explicitly state their political preference. Further on in the study several characters will be presented and allocated into two political categories, one category shares the same political preference as the participant (high identification) and the other is of the opposing political orientation (low identification). Storytelling and identification are very much connected to one another. Identification is an important factor when effectively spreading a message through a story. In the context of storytelling identification is seen as the bond, connection, or relatedness that the audience perceives with the character of a narrative (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). In a study where participants watched several commercials, including an anti-drinking, anti-drugs and a beer commercial, the persuasive success relied heavily on identification. Participants who reported high levels of identification with the main character, returned significantly higher scores on both message evaluation and attitude (Cho, Shen, & Wilson, 2014). According to Green and Donahue (2009), identification can lead to persuasion through two ways; susceptibility to common attitudes and the implications of experienced events by characters people identity with. Green and Donahue argue that people may be more susceptible to the attitudes held by characters to the extent they identity with them. This mechanism has been replicated in a study by De Graaf, Hoeken, Sanders, and Beentjes (2012), where the same story was told from different perspectives. Readers identified more with the perspective from which the story was told and consequently displayed similar values as the

main character. The second mechanism mentioned by Green and Donahue (2009) argues people take over the goals and intentions of an identifiable character. This leads to the experiencing of certain emotions when the character succeeds or fails (Oatley, 1999). In turn emotions can play an important role in the process of persuasion (Dillard & Seo, 2013). In a study conducted on online storytelling commercials has found four significant factors that are associated with higher product evaluations; interactivity, vividness, entertainment, and self-referencing elements in the story (Ching, Tong, Chen, & Chen, 2013). In this case self-referencing regards the degree of relevance consumers perceive the story or product to be to themselves. A lot of research has already been done regarding storytelling and identification, some even combining these two subjects (Cho, Shen, & Wilson, 2014; Green & Donahue, 2009; De Graaf, Hoeken, Sanders, & Beentjes, 2012). However, a question that remains unanswered is what the effect of identification is on different story endings, and especially, the possible interaction between these two factors. With previous research in mind, certain expectations can be formed on the effects of story ending (Strick & Volbeda, 2018) and identification (Montoya et al., 2008), but the effect of these factors combined are as of yet unknown. The present research had two goals which are displayed in Figure 1. First, to investigate whether positive or negative ending stories coupled with a brand develop a conditioning in respondents over time to rate the brand more positively or more negatively, respectively. This would replicate the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study where brands associated with good ending stories were rated higher than brands following a negative story.

H1: participants will prefer brands associated with positive ending stories to brands associated with negative ending stories

The second goal was to test the moderating effect of identification respondents experience with the main character. Previous research suggests similarity predicts liking

(Montoya et al., 2008). This leads to the expectation that whenever somebody identifies highly with a main character, then tend to like the story more, and subsequently rating the corresponding brand higher.

> *H2*: participants will prefer brands associated with a story that features a high identification main character over brands associated with a story that features a low identification main character

However, as Oatley (1999) states; people are more likely to get emotionally invested in the success or failure of characters they identify with, suggesting the positive or negative emotions are amplified depending on character identification. We predicted that when the story was positive, higher brand evaluations would be awarded to brands associated with the main character people identify with than the character people do not identify with. However, when the story was negative, respondents were consequently expected to experience more negative emotions with the character they identify with, giving the associated brand a lower evaluation.

> *H3*: high identification with the main character will result in higher brand evaluation when the story ends positively, but in lower brand evaluation when the story ends negatively
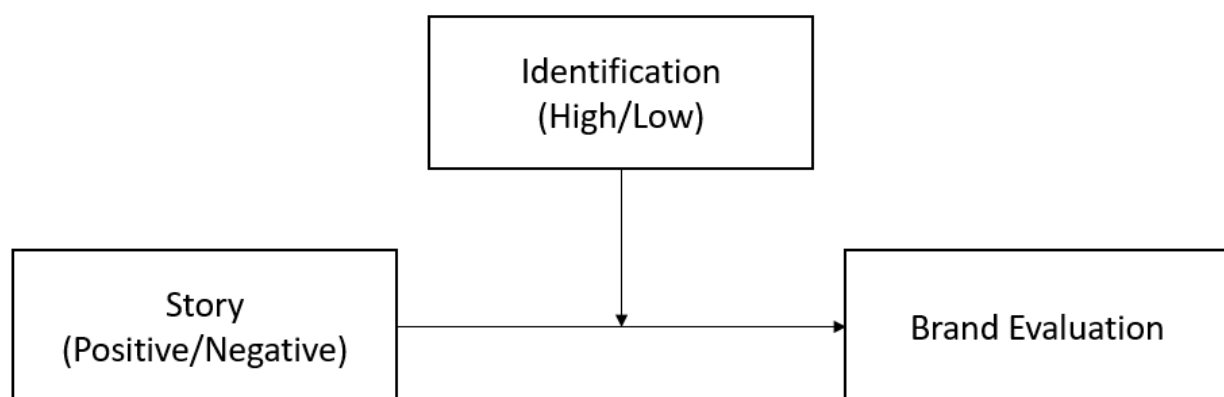
Figure 1. *Research model of the effect of story ending on brand evaluation and identification as a moderator.*

Method

Participants and design

With the help of *G*Power* software an estimation of the required amount of participants was made. Similar mean values were expected as in the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study, with a brand timing factor instead of identification (positive ending with high identification, $M = 4.9$; positive ending with low identification, $M = 4.3$; negative ending with high identification, $M = 3.8$; negative ending with low identification, $M = 4.2$). With these predicted mean values a minimum of 123 participants were required for 80% power. One-hundred-and-forty-six M-Turk workers initially participated in the study. Twenty respondents were screened out during the survey screened out because they did not have a clear left-wing or right-wing political orientation. Three participants did not sufficiently pass the manipulation check (more information follows), resulting in 123 English-speaking respondents (72 females), with the age groups respectively 21-29 (11.4%), 30-39 (27.6%), 40-49 (28.5%), 50-59 (22.8%), and 60 years and older (9.8%). No significant results were found to be non-significant before the removal of the three participants due to the manipulation check. The study used a 2(story ending: positive vs. negative) x 2(identification: high vs. low) within-subject design. Of all participants 46 identified as republican and 77 as democrat. Surveys were constructed with *Qualtrics* software and distributed online using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Respondents received a small fee (3$) to participate in the survey.

Materials

Starting questions. At the beginning of the survey several demographic questions were asked (age, gender) as well as political preference (see appendix for exact measures and questions). When respondents did not indicate a clear democratic or republican preference they were screened out of the survey. Subsequently, the degree to which participants identify with their political orientation and perceived importance of politics to them was asked. These questions were asked to assess to which degree participants would identify with their ingroup, which could have had an effect on the study later on. No participants were removed as a result of these questions.

Characters. Four main story characters were introduced at the start of the survey. The characters were called *John*, *James*, *Robert*, and *Michael* and had a similar age and some generic hobbies. However, two of them were democrats and two of them republican. An example of one the introductions is: *John is a 32-year-old hardworking republican. He is married and has two kids. In his spare time John likes to watch basketball and play video games*. The characters were accompanied by a picture to stimulate identification with the characters. On these pictures a small political logo, republican or democrat, was displayed to remind respondents of the political preference of the characters. A small pilot test ($N = 30$) was run to test the evaluation of the characters. Respondents were asked to rate how much they liked the character on a scale from -3 (*Very Negative*) to 3 (*Very Positive*). The mean scores were respectively for John: $M = 1.30$, $SD = 0.75$; James: $M = 1.07$, $SD = 0.83$; Robert: $M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.87$; and Michael: $M = 1.20$, $SD = 0.81$. The only two characters who differed significantly where first and second, $t(29) = 2.041$, $p = 0.050$. A part of the character description has been interchanged between the characters to restore a similar character appreciation. The interchanged elements consisted of one hobby and the age of John and James.

Stories. Forty short two-sentence stories have been created to fit the four conditions. These stories, as well as the brand evaluation questions, were slightly modified versions of the short stories and questions used in Strick & Volbeda (2018). Half of the stories ended positively and the other half negatively. Of the twenty positive stories, ten were about a republican character, and ten about a democratic character, and the same was true for the twenty negative stories. We varied the political orientation of the story characters in order to experimentally manipulate identification. For participants who identified as republican, the brands associated with stories about the republican character were coded as the high-identification brand, and the brands associated with the stories about the democratic character were coded as the low-identification brand. The opposite was true for democratic participants. The themes in the stories were the same in both identification conditions (high vs. low) to prevent undue influence of topical preference. An example of a positive story was: *As a result of a natural disaster, John's roof was heavily damaged but John did not have any friends to ask for help. One morning, people from the entire neighborhood gathered to help make the house liveable again.* An example of a negative story was: *Robert always got greeted by his dog Max when he got home and this cheered him up, even on the worst days. Last year Max died and Robert still misses him every time he comes home to a silent house.* A small pilot test of a subsample of the target group ($N = 30$) was conducted with M-turk workers to check for story group preference. Participants were asked: *"You will be presented with 40 short stories. We would like to know how positive or negative you would rate them"*. The stories have been tested for preference on the same scale as the character introductions, -3 (*Very Negative*) to 3 (*Very Positive*). Firstly, the positive stories had to be perceived as positive and the negative stories had to be perceived as negative. Secondly, the two positive story groups had to be somewhat equally positive to avoid intrinsic

preference for one group, this also applied to the negative stories. To avoid preference by political orientation, no indicators of political preference in the stories or characters were used during the pilot. The set of positive groups reported $M = 1.68$, $SD = .69$ and $M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.84$, while the set of negative groups reported $M = -1.91$, $SD = 0.70$ and $M = -1.84$, $SD = 0.80$ respectively. Paired sample t-tests indicated no significant difference between the paired groups $t(29) = 0.109$, $p = .914$ for the positive groups and $t(29) = -1.265$, $p = .216$ for the negative groups.

Conditioned stimuli (CSi) / Brands. Four pictures of existing foreign water brands were used. These pictures were previously used and validated in the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study.

Procedure.

The survey took around 23 minutes on average from start to completion. Participants were first explicitly asked for consent to partake in the study. They were informed that they participation was anonymous and confidential, and no identifying information will be asked in the survey.

Conditioning phase. Participants were informed that they would be presented with stories alongside pictures of brands. The stories, brands and in-between empty screens would be presented at a fixed pace outside the control of the participants. Participants were asked to focus on the stories and brands attentively because they would receive questions about them at the end of the survey. The participants were then presented with 40 stories, 10 in each of the different conditions of the 2 x 2 design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four different counterbalance conditions for which the brand-story combinations differed, to prevent any interference of brand preference. Every story trial consisted of three stages; firstly the story along with a picture of the character was presented for 15000 milliseconds (ms), secondly the

corresponding brand was shown for 3000 ms and thirdly, a white screen was presented for 3000 ms before moving on to the next story trial. The order in which the stories were presented was randomized for all participants. In the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study stories were split up in a beginning (8000 ms) and ending (8000 ms) with the brand (3000 ms) appearing either before the beginning, before the end or after the end. Transitions between the elements took 1000 ms.

Explicit attitude measure. Participants were asked to rate the four brands on three questions: "*How attractive do you find this brand?*", "*Does this brand appeal to you?*" and "*How much do you like this brand?*". Answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). This measure is identical to the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study.

Manipulation check. At the end of the survey, to check whether the identification manipulation was successful, we asked participants to recall the political preferences of the main characters. Questions were formulated: *What was the political orientation of [Name]?* Participants could then select either democrat or republican. When participants could not successfully recollect at least two of the four political orientations, their answers would be excluded from the analysis. Three participants were screened out due to not successfully passing the manipulation check.

Exit questions. Participants were asked what they thought the study was about as well as given the opportunity to leave a remark to the researcher.

Results

The mean scores of the four conditions are displayed in figure 2. The extent to which people identified with their political orientation and importance of politics to them were both relatively high, respectively $M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.50$ and $M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.50$. A 2 x 2 two-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to investigate the impact of story ending and of identification on the

evaluation of the corresponding brand. The Shapiro-Wilk statistic was used to test for the assumption of normality. Three of the four variables proved significant, suggesting non-normally distributed data, however, the Q-Q plots looked roughly normally distributed. Given the high number of participants and relative robustness towards the normality assumption of the ANOVA (Allen & Bennet, 2010), it was decided to use ANOVA instead of opting for a non-parametric alternative.
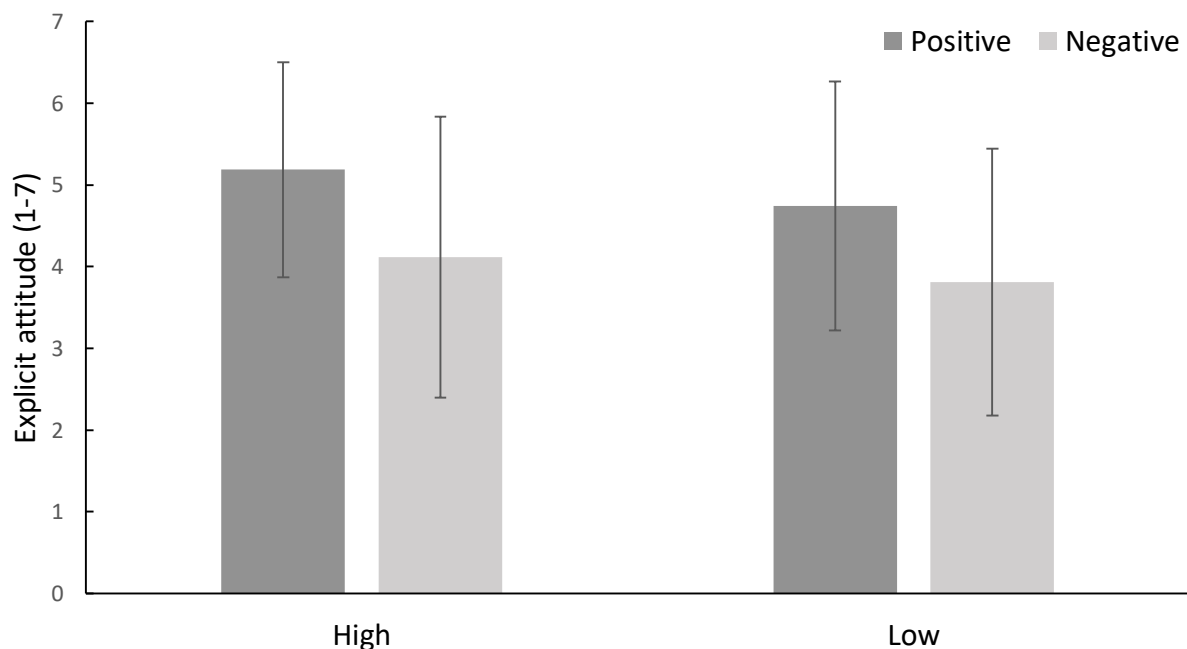

Figure 2. *Explicit attitude for positive and negative ending stories in both the high and low identification conditions. Error bars denote one standard deviation around the mean.*

A significant main effect for story ending was obtained, $F(1, 122) = 41.70$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .255$ with brand evaluation after association with positive stories ($M = 4.97$, $SD = .10$) being significantly higher than after association with negative stories ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .13$). This confirmed the first hypothesis. Furthermore, regarding the second hypothesis, a significant main

effect for identification was found, $F(1, 122) = 10.09$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .076$ with high

identification leading to significantly more positive brand evaluation scores ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .10$)

than low identification ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .10$). These results also confirmed the second hypothesis.

No significant interaction was found between ending and identification, $F(1, 122) = 0.35$, $p =$

.555, partial $\eta^2 = .003$, refuting the third and last hypothesis.

Discussion

Results from the study show that the ending of a short story can significantly change the

appreciation of the brand associated with it. When participants are conditioned to associate the

story with the brand, the liking of the story is transferred over to a higher evaluation of the brand

and results in participants liking brands associated with positive stories, rather than negative

ones. This conclusion is mainly predicted by Strick and Volbeda (2018) and further confirms

these results. Furthermore, identification with the main character predicts liking of a story,

subsequently resulting in a higher evaluation of the brand associated with the story. These results

are very much in line with previous research into the link between identification and liking

(Hampton et al., 2018; Montoya et al., 2008; Sprecher et al., 2013). Contradictory to

expectations, the effect of the story endings is not dependent on whether the identification is high

or low. It appears people like a story with an identifiable character, regardless of the outcome.

Even if the story ends in misery, people still prefer the stories wherein they feel more similar to

the character. This study bears some practical implications for advertising agencies, as well as

expanding knowledge about the factors relevant to storytelling. Results imply that positive

stories, or at least positive-ending stories work better when storytelling is used as a part of

advertising. There are several cases of commercials that end negatively or sad, for example a lot

of commercials regarding charity foundations show a sad commercial to make people aware of

the depraved conditions of animals or people around the world. It is however questionable whether these commercials share the same goal as commercial organizations, whereas charity commercials are generally designed to encourage people to donate or take action and commercial organizations try to build a positive brand image. Another example includes the use of a negative ending in the context of a humorous situation. The classic slapstick example of someone slipping over a banana peel would be considered a negative ending, would it appear at the end of a story. However many people would regard it as humorous nonetheless, leaving this example in a bit of a grey area in regard to whether it actually would be perceived as a negative ending. In conclusion, there are some exceptions to the implication that stories should ideally end positively, but in general one could consider a positive ending to a story to be more successful than a negative ending. Secondly, identification with the main character in a commercial is important for both appreciation of the story and consequently the brand attached. When companies intend to use storytelling as a part of their marketing presence, it is important to know your target group and what defines them to design a more effective message. Only then can you construct a fitting narrative that resonates with your customers. A possible better construction would be to pair the commercial with a struggle or dilemma. People generally root for underdogs (Kim et al., 2008). Scientific findings regarding the ending of stories (Strick & Volbeda, 2018) have been replicated to further confirm their reliability. The gap in knowledge between the Strick and Volbeda (2018) study and several studies concerning identification in narratives (Cho, Shen, & Wilson, 2014; Green & Donahue, 2009; De Graaf, Hoeken, Sanders, & Beentjes, 2012) has been slightly covered, as this study paves the way for further research into the subject. One limitation of this study is the transition from the first part of the story to the second (*positive/negative*) part. Some stories started neutral, while others started negatively. Even

though this was balanced between the four conditions, it would be interesting to see whether the effect of a change in the story, or lack thereof, in combination with identification would deliver different results. It would be very likely that the change in beginning would yield different results. For example one could argue that when a negative situation turns positive, it would be perceived as more rewarding and therefore liked than a story that starts positive and ends positively as nothing is really gained in terms of valence. An additional aspect to study would be tweaking the negative ending stories to play more into the identification aspect. When the negative ending stories would be perceived as an attack on the identifying group, a possible interaction effect could be present. An example would be a story where the main character in the story gets humiliated or challenged on the basis of the identifying factor, in this case political preference. This would confront the reader directly with consequences related to their own political preference in a story. Even though this is purely speculation at this point, one could imagine that identification would play a more significant role on the effect of good- or bad-ending stories. Another small point to discover would be an implicit measure. Results would likely be similar to the explicit results and further strengthen the findings of this topic in research. In short, this study found further confirmation of the increase in liking of an object, following a positive story, rather than a negative one. In addition, higher identification with the main character of the story also yields a more positive attitude towards the object, even if the story is negative.

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Appendix A

Survey questions and scales

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an

Independent, or something else?

- Republican

- Democrat

- Independent

- Something else

To what extent do you identify with your political orientation?

    1 (Very Weakly) – 7 (Very Strongly)

How important is politics to you?

    1 (Not so Important) – 7 (Very Important)

Which category below includes your age?

- 17 or younger

- 18-20

- 21-29

- 30-39

- 40-49

- 50-59

- 60 or older

What is your gender?

- Male

- Female

- Other: [*text box*]

Please rate the brand pictured above.

- *How ATTRACTIVE do you find this brand?*

  1 (Not at all) – 7 (Very Much)

- *Does this brand APPEAL to you?*

  1 (Not at all) – 7 (Very Much)

- *How much do you LIKE this brand?*

  1 (Not at all) – 7 (Very Much)

What was the political orientation of [Character name]?

- Democrat

- Republican

Appendix B

Character Introductions

- *John is a 32-year-old hardworking republican. He is married and has two kids. In his spare time John likes to watch basketball and play video games.*

- *James is a 31-year-old ambitious democrat. He is married and has two kids. In his spare time James likes to watch American football and go fishing.*

- *Robert is a 28-year-old driven republican. He is married and has one kid. In his spare time Robert likes to watch baseball and paint.*

- *Michael is a 29-year-old loyal democrat. He is married and has two kids. In his spare time Michael likes to watch ice hockey and play guitar.*

Appendix C

Character pictures

Appendix C

Brand pictures

ISKILDE

KAROO

FERRARELLE

OXYGIZER

Appendix D

Stories

Positive ending, republican:

1. *As a result of a natural disaster, John's roof was heavily damaged but John did not have any friends to ask for help. One morning, people from the entire neighborhood gathered to help make the house liveable again.*

2. *In college, John's basketball knee injury had lasted for more than a year and he had undergone multiple surgeries. On the last day of the season, he was brought on as a substitute and scored the winning goal.*

3. *John and Harry used to be close friends, but they lost sight of each other when Harry got a job on the other side of the world. Unexpectedly, they stood next to each other on a camping site in Yellowstone National Park and fell happily in each other's arms.*

4. *Last week John's grandma ran some tests in the hospital for early signs of cancer since the symptoms were pointing to the worst. Today John's grandma received a call from the hospital that she was all clear and surprisingly healthy for her age.*

5. *John has been addicted to painkiller prescriptions for most of his twenties. At John's 30th birthday he celebrates his 2 years of sobriety with his family and friends.*

6. *Everything went wrong when John took his little sister to the zoo. It was raining, they missed the train, and the zoo was closed. At the end of the day, she thanked John with a big hug and told him she had an awesome day.*

7. *John had been in the trenches for weeks and was suffering from loneliness and depression. Today John is starting a new job and is feeling happy for the first time in weeks.*

8. *John found a suspicious lump on his dog's cheek and took him to the vet immediately. It turns out John's dog got stung by a bee and will be completely fine.*

9. *John's company went bankrupt ten years ago. He had to sell his house and car. Today, he is celebrating the five-year anniversary of his new profitable enterprise.*

10. *John has had a crush on Mary for a while but does not have the courage to ask her out because he thinks she will not feel the same. To John's surprise, she asks him on a date to the movies together next week.*

Positive ending, democrat:

1. *James lost his house in the hurricane and his insurance claim was rejected. To his surprise James' close friend had started a successful fundraiser on the internet and it already collected enough money for a new house.*

2. *As a result of a very heavy car accident at 28 years old, the doctor said James will likely never walk again. To everyone's surprise, three months later, James takes his first unassisted steps.*

3. *James used to have a lot of arguments with his older brother and that is why they do not see each other very often. When James got into a fight with a group of guys last week in the cafe, his older brother instantly ran over to defend him.*

4. *At the birth of James' first son the doctor expected irreparable brain damage due to the baby being entangled with the umbilical cord for too long. Against the odds his son came into the world completely healthy and James gets to hold his son for the first time.*

5. *James has been overweight during his entire childhood. At his 24th birthday, James is in good shape and finishes his first marathon having worked towards it for three years.*

6. *On the way to a family camping trip James had to swerve to the side for a crossing deer, resulting in a flat tire and three hours of waiting for a road mechanic in the cold. The family roasted marshmallows at the side of the road and the kids told James they had an awesome day nonetheless.*

7. *Following a rough breakup in college, James locked himself in his house for weeks. He barely ate from heartbreak and depression. After a couple of months, James is doing much better and is leaving the house to grab a coffee with a nice girl he met in the gym.*

8. *James' cat disappeared. He was afraid that his cat had an accident and he decided to distribute some 'missing' posters. Today, James receives a phone call from a man telling him that his cat is safe and has been staying in his house for a few days.*

9. *James feared to get fired on his first working day after his burn-out, which had left him unable to work for months. When James arrived at the office, his colleagues welcomed him with a cake that was decorated with the line 'we missed you'.*

10. *James had always been unpopular boy of the class and had admired the beautiful Lizzy all his life. When he's 25, he marries her and they get two children together.*

Negative ending, republican:

1. *Robert loved his college girlfriend very much but she was acting distant at some point. At a party of the study association, he finds her kissing with an older student.*

2. *Robert's laptop had suddenly crashed while downloading data, just a few hours before an important deadline. When he turns on his laptop, his hard drive appears to be irreparably damaged and all his data are lost.*

3. *Robert was studying hard for the last exam of the academic year but one day before the exam he got very sick. After the last exam of the year, he comes five study points short to be able to study medicine next year.*

4. *Robert decides to invest a large part of his savings with a promising investing firm. The company appeared to be fraudulent and they took all his money with no returns.*

5. *Robert's sister went to the hospital for a medical check-up after feeling weird for a few weeks. At the hospital they find a brain tumor and the prognosis does not look favorable.*

6. *Robert has been struggling with depression for his entire life since his teen years. Despite trying multiple therapists, Robert still feels unhappy most of the time.*

7. *Robert always got greeted by his dog Max when he got home and this cheered him up even on the worst days. Last year Max died and Robert still misses him every time he comes home to a silent house.*

8. *After somebody broke into Robert's house last week, several items of jewelry Robert received from his late grandmother have been taken. The police find no leads and tell Robert unfortunately there is nothing more they can do.*

9. *Robert and Jack have been friends ever since they were in middle school but lost touch with each other when they went to different universities. When Robert runs into Jack in their hometown, they barely have anything in common anymore and the conversation is rather awkward.*

10. *Robert has had a terrible day, his car broke down and when he came to work his boss screamed at him for being late. When he finally comes home, one of the pipes sprung a leak and all his furniture is damaged beyond recovery.*

Negative ending, democrat:

1. *Michael had a secret crush on Emma for over a year in middle school. At the end of the year he found her making out with Michael's best friend.*

2. *Michael has been working hard towards a promotion and seems to be the most qualified candidate. When he came to the office today, Michael's close colleague appeared to have gotten the promotion instead of him.*

3. *Michael has spent the last 6 months organizing a music festival. On the festival day, a thunderstorm is predicted and the festival needs to be canceled due to safety measures.*

4. *Michael gets convinced to lend a large sum of money to a friend who has a new business idea. The company never takes off and his friend had spend all the money without any intention to pay Michael back.*

5. *Michael's little brother got hit by an intoxicated driver. The accident resulted in various complex fractures and Michael's little brother will likely spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.*

6. *Michael started smoking in his teen years because of peer pressure. Multiple attempts to quit have failed already and Michael still smokes a package a day.*

7. *Michael's cat has been missing for over a week after he ran away when somebody left the back door open. Michael gets a call from the local veterinarian office that his cat was hit by a car and unfortunately did not survive.*

8. *Michael saved up for over a year to buy a brand new car. In the first week, Michael find glass shards on the ground where he parked his car and it appears to be stolen.*

9. *In high school Michael used to be very good friends with Alex. In the final year Michael found out that Alex was making fun of him behind his back to impress the girl Michael had a crush on.*

10. Michael has had an exhausting 11-hour workday and finally arrives home. When he tries to open his front door his key breaks in the lock and he has to wait two hours on his porch for a repairman.

Appendix E

Counterbalancing table

		PosHigh	PosLow	NegHigh	NegLow
Condition 1	**Republican**	Iskilde	Karoo	Oxygizer	Ferrarel
	Democrat	Karoo	Iskilde	Ferrarel	Oxygizer
Condition 2	**Republican**	Ferrarel	Iskilde	Karoo	Oxygizer
	Democrat	Iskilde	Ferrarel	Oxygizer	Karoo
Condition 3	**Republican**	Oxygizer	Ferrarel	Iskilde	Karoo
	Democrat	Ferrarel	Oxygizer	Karoo	Iskilde
Condition 4	**Republican**	Karoo	Oxygizer	Ferrarel	Iskilde
	Democrat	Oxygizer	Karoo	Iskilde	Ferrarel