

*decode Science Update 2\_2014*

## Liking vs. Wanting

Do brands and advertising have to be liked in order to sell?

December 2014

# Welcome to the decode Science Update

Whether it be a new ad campaign or redesigned packaging, a key question for Marketing is whether consumers *like* the new materials, which elements they like best, what they don't like and what, therefore, should be changed. The perfectly plausible assumption behind this is that consumers choose to buy the products and brands that they like best.

**But: How important is “liking” in establishing the desired impact on buying behaviour?** Is customers' buying behaviour really governed by their “liking” of the product, the brand or the commercial? If we observe our own behaviour then doubts are raised about this. For example, plenty of readers love their local bookshop but choose not to buy from it, instead making their purchases online. And we can all recognise the typical situation at Christmas: you have already eaten too many sweets and really would like to stop, but you reach for another one.

Research findings from neuroscience and psychology reveal why such liking does not necessarily result in corresponding behaviour: What we like (“liking”) and what we do, or what we want to have (“wanting”), is controlled by different neural networks in the brain. We can like things without wanting them. And we may want to own or consume things, without necessarily actually liking them or their advertising.

In this Science Update we look at these new findings and show what can be deduced for marketing practice.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

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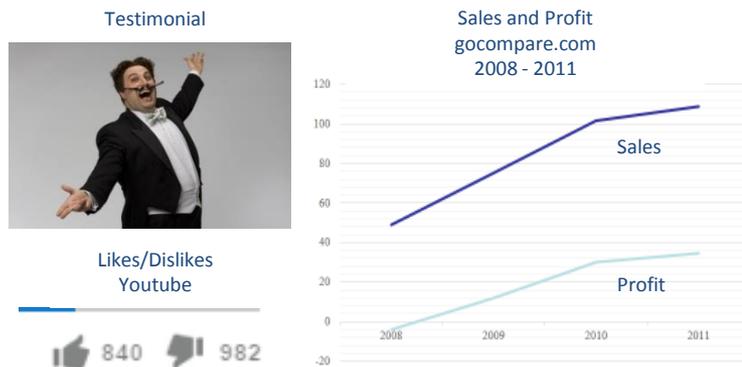
Juliane Matussek

# Liking and Wanting in Marketing: Examples

Some of the best-liked Super Bowl ads (e.g. Doritos by PepsiCo) have repeatedly produced [no sales-uplift](#), in contrast to other less well-liked ads that have sold very well (e.g. [Sapphire Spot](#) by Beck's). **The liking of offers or brands does not always therefore seem to be the decisive sales driver.** The following examples show that liking is not necessarily accompanied by (buying) behaviour.



An example of an ad, which was initially dropped due to (low) liking in focus groups, and then succeeded in spite of this is [“Laundromat” by Cheetos](#). This showed a small act of revenge: The protagonist fills her ‘rival’s’ washing machine with crisps following a tip-off from the brand protagonist (tiger wearing sunglasses). **Respondents in the focus groups reported such behaviour as being socially unacceptable and, as a result, deemed the brand to be less “likeable”.** The campaign was nevertheless very successful and led to a 30 percent increase in sales figures – so the campaign produced “wanting” for the brand.



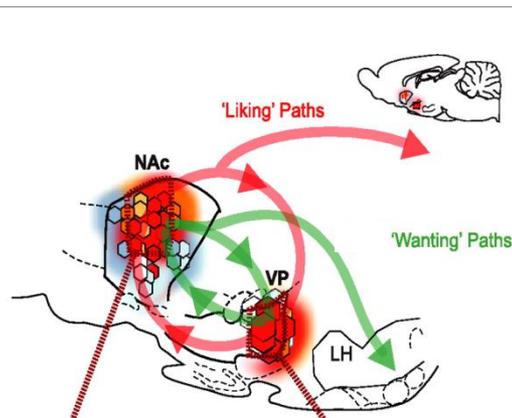
Another example that shows that liking is not the reason for behaviour, is the price comparison website [gocompare.com in UK](#) (see [Example](#)). This was not rated very positively by the British public to put it mildly, and was absolutely loathed in parts (chosen as [Britain’s “most annoying” campaign](#) amongst other things). The heart of the campaign is an eccentric man dressed in 1930s style with an oversized moustache, who promotes the website in a very unique way. **The campaign was not at all liked, though the sales and profit of the portal increased significantly during this time** (see diagram).

Of course we often buy those brands and products that we also like (liking) – so therefore there is often a correlation between liking and sales. But these examples show that you must not make the mistake of regarding liking as the *reason* for buying behaviour. We can only successfully manage marketing campaigns, if we analyse and address the causal basis for buying behaviour. **Liking cannot be this causal basis, as the following research findings show.**

# Liking and Wanting: Neuroscience findings

For some time a **difference** has been established in the Neurosciences between **so-called “Wanting” and “Liking”**, because both these aspects of assessment are regulated by overlapping but separate networks in the brain (see diagram bottom left). **Liking** describes subjective liking, a positive attitude or an affinity. It describes the affective, emotional assessment of a product, a brand or an ad. **Wanting** on the other hand refers to the motivation to do or own something, i.e. to actually buy something as well. Wanting is based on the expectation of a reward and is regulated by dopamine. Liking is the enjoyment of the achieved or anticipated reward and is regulated by opioids.

**The Wanting-System is primarily responsible for buying behaviour, because it directly influences behaviour.** If we want something, this then motivates our behaviour – irrespective of whether we also like it or not. Indeed we often want what we like, but liking something does not mean you want (to buy) it as well – and vice versa. An example of this is addictive behaviour: for example, the smoker who actually wants to give up (the majority) does not like cigarettes, but he wants them and therefore cannot quit. Merely the anticipation of enjoying the cigarette activates the dopaminergic system – the reward system – and influences behaviour like a **“motivational magnet”** – irrespective of liking. This mechanism explains essential aspects of addictive behaviour, in particular that the enjoyment can often be lacking, while the wanting increases all the more.



Source: Smith, K.S. and Berridge, K.C. (2007). Opioid Limbic Circuit for Reward: Interaction between Hedonic Hotspots of Nucleus Accumbens and Ventral Pallidum. The Journal of Neuroscience, 14 February 2007, 27(7): 1594-1605;

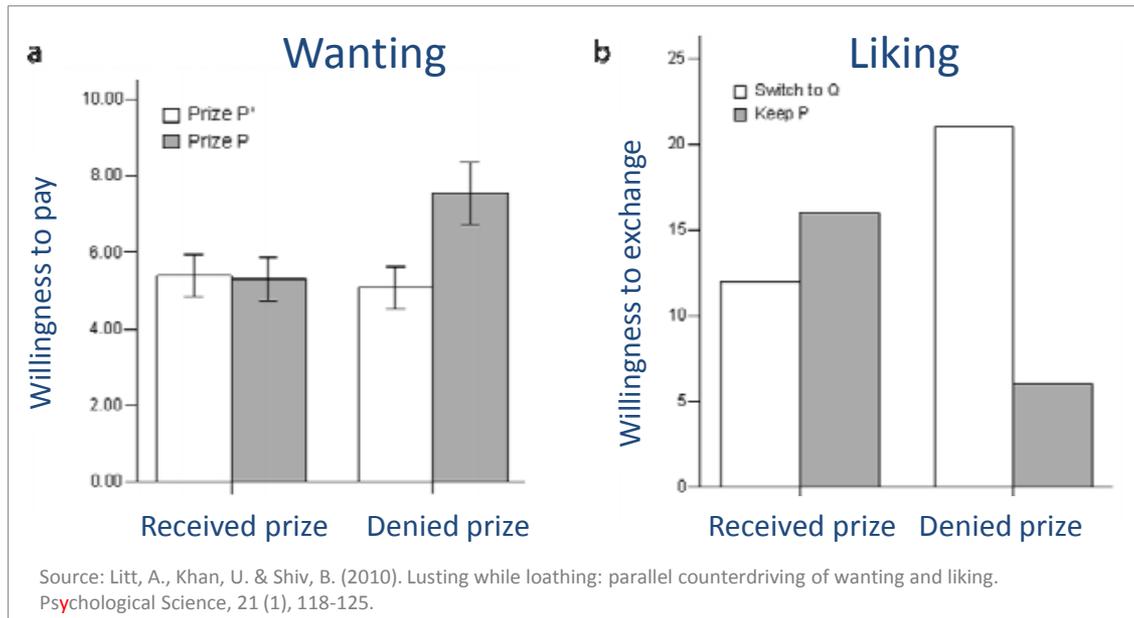


Wanting is the aspiration to gain a reward. Liking appears if the goal is achieved (enjoyment of reward). **Wanting is therefore essential for buying behaviour** and liking results from the subsequent emotional assessment.

# If wanting and liking diverge

If wanting and liking are based on different neural networks, it should be possible to influence these systems differently. Another [study](#) published in the *Psychological Science* journal by scientists from Harvard University showed exactly that.

In an experiment some of the participants were prevented from winning a prize, while others received a prize without any hindrances. In a follow-up test this showed the following (see diagram): participants who were denied the prize were willing to pay more for it (higher wanting). However, they were also more willing to exchange it again (less liking).



In summary these studies show: **If people are denied a reward, they want this reward all the more (higher wanting). After receiving it the liking falls slightly or rather less than without hindrances.**

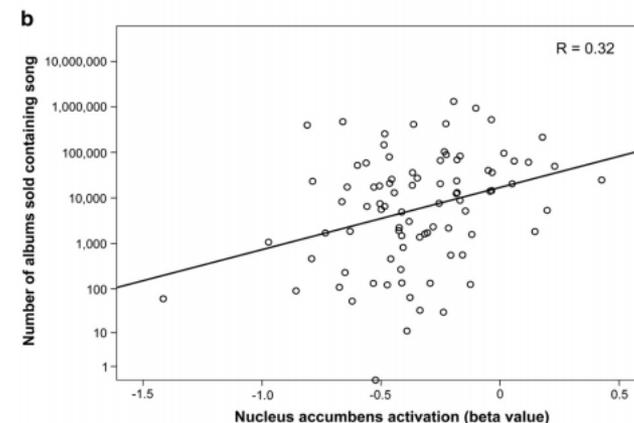
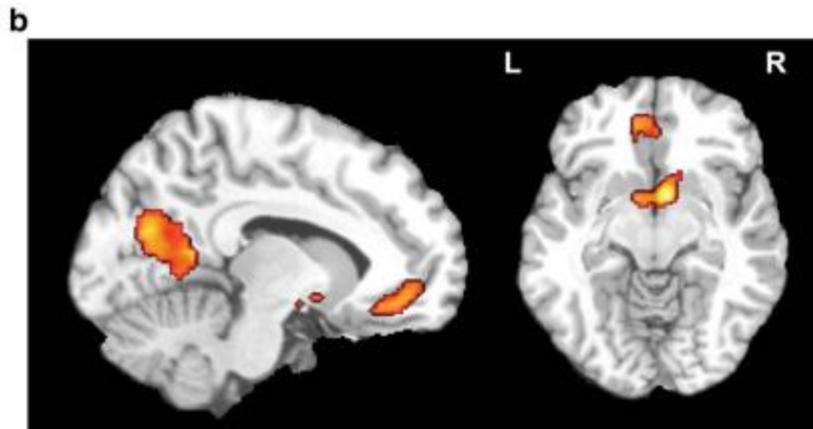
The scientists sum it up like this: *These results demonstrate how dissociable psychological subsystems for wanting and liking can be driven in opposite directions* (Litt et al., 2010, S. 118).

The wanting and the liking systems are therefore not only regulated differently neurophysiologically, but both systems also react differently. So, which system is relevant or decisive for buying behaviour? We will now look at an insightful study.

# Wanting predicts buying behaviour, not liking

The point that wanting, and not liking, determines buying behaviour, was demonstrated in an [exciting study](#) by scientists from Emory University (USA) entitled “*A neural predictor of cultural popularity*”: They researched whether the wanting system (motivation) or the liking system (liking) **better predicted the success of pieces of music**. In this research young respondents were played pieces of music by unknown artists at that time. At the same time, the brain activation of these respondents was recorded whilst in a brain scanner (fMRT). Then they were asked to assess each song with regard to liking, as is the common practice in traditional market research studies. The sales of each song were monitored over the next three years and these were then compared with the measurements of neuronal activities and the assessments of liking.

The results demonstrate very clearly that **the reward or wanting system not only explained and predicted individual buying decisions, but also predicted the overall sales success of each piece of music**. Pieces of music which induced a high activation of the reward or wanting system (particularly the ventral striatum), subsequently sold much better than songs with no corresponding neural reward activation. The sales figures on the other hand could not be predicted from the respondents’ assessments of liking. The conclusion of the researchers: “*Although subjective likability of the songs was not predictive of sales, activity within the ventral striatum was significantly correlated with the number of units sold.*” (Berns & Moore, 2012). According to this study, wanting predicts buying behaviour, whilst liking does not.

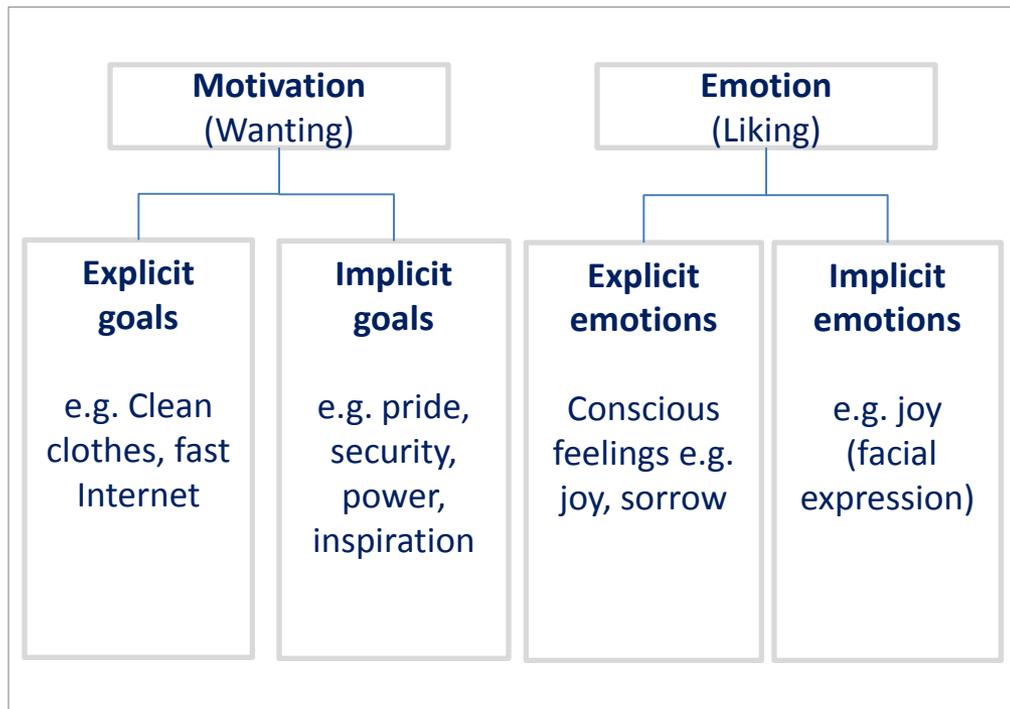


Source: Berns, G.S. und Moore, S.E. (2012). A neural predictor of cultural popularity. Journal of Consumer Psychology, Vol. 22, Issue 1, pp. 154 – 160.

# Liking & Wanting: Conclusions

**What activates our wanting system?** Wanting is the motivational basis of our actions and evolves from the **motivation to achieve goals** (see Diagram) – whether these are explicit goals such as clean clothes, beautiful hair or a fast internet connection, or implicit goals such as pride, inspiration or security.

**Products and brands are a means to an end in this respect: They help to achieve customers' goals.** The well-known Dutch psychologist Art Dijksterhuis put it like this: “Goals are *mental representations of behaviour or behavioural results which reward.*” That is why neuroscientists also talk about “Goal value” – the perceived value of an offer or a brand is determined by the relevance of the goals which the product/brand helps us to achieve.



In a [review article](#) (in the journal *Trends in Neuroscience*) by well-known expert neuro-scientists on the subject of Liking/Wanting, Kent Berridge differentiates between “Motivation” (Wanting) and “Emotion” (Liking) - see diagram on the left.

Motivation is goal-orientated, it is a matter of doing, having, being or becoming something. If we want to achieve something, it is not enough to like it, we have to really want it. Many in fact like the thought of being successful, but actually prefer to relax. Liking is not enough for us to become really successful, we have to really want it. Let us take a closer look now at what this all means for our marketing practice.

# Implications for Marketing Practice

The first, and undoubtedly most important, finding is this: **In marketing we should not only pay heed to liking or likeability, but also specifically to wanting.** What goals do our customers pursue (both explicitly and implicitly) and whether or how our brand and product helps to achieve these customers' goals? Liking will occur if a goal is achieved (explicit or implicit) – however this does not reveal WHY the behaviour happens, in other words why the brand/product/ad is liked.

Users of a brand often say that they like the brand and trust it. Non-users say that they don't like the brand or like it significantly less and so on. These comments refer to the liking of the brand and reflect the resultant behaviour and are not the actual reason for purchase or non-purchase! **If a non-customer says that he or she does not like the brand, then the problem is not simply the lack of affinity for the brand.** This lack of affinity generally results from the fact that these people do not see the brand as a means to an end of achieving certain goals. **It is therefore a question of understanding why these customers do not link the brand with the achievement of these goals and/or which goals are relevant for these customers.** And so it is not simply a question of making the brand more likeable. Without the reference point of customer goals there is a real danger that communication degenerates into pure entertainment, and any influence on buying behaviour is merely coincidental.

The Cheetos ad (crisps in the washing machine) shows how the product and brand help to fight against adulthood and, at the same time, allows you to embrace your "inner child". The success of this campaign is based on the fact that relevant goals are addressed and the TVC shows how the brand helps to achieve these goals. The goal of the much-hated gocompare.com campaign in the UK is to get the best for yourself, outwit others and to feel clever. All these are clearly widespread goals – even if they are not very desirable socially (low liking).

Of course there are positive correlations between liking and sales – liking and wanting often don't contradict each other. **But it is important to know what triggers buying behaviour (wanting) and what does not (liking).**

# Implications for Marketing Practice

The results presented thus far for wanting and liking suggest that the correlation between the likeability (of a brand or its communication) and the resulting desire to buy is not linear and clear, as is often assumed. In many discussions with practitioners (marketing, agencies) we have learned another point, which is both important and relevant to practice: **You do not always have to be nice and friendly in order to be successful - this can help in the creation of campaigns.**

Some typical statements that we have heard on this:

- *“Personally speaking, I find the potential liberation from the need, as a given, to be likeable at all times to be really exciting, as I think **it frees us up to operate a lot more in tonal areas and moods.***
- *If the ad does not need to be likeable (or the brand likeable through the ad) in order to sell, then **we can create with more confidence and write for the 'reptilian brain' more often.***
- *Among some clients this will be well received, as it's been a long-standing gripe of many that agencies are more pre-occupied with producing entertaining, popular advertising than with 'selling stuff'”*

In practice we find many examples where affinity to the brand/communication is not a prerequisite for success. It is not uncommon for some market leaders to be regarded less sympathetically due to their size and market power than smaller or niche brands. This is not a problem, as long as they address relevant customer goals and hence activate the wanting system.

# Further reading

- This [article](#) gives a general and comprehensible introduction to the topic.
- This [video-interview with Kent Berridge](#), a leading neuroscientist in this field, gives further insight into the neuroscientific basis of wanting vs. liking.
- This [Paper by the well-known neuro-economist George Loewenstein](#) highlights the difference between wanting and liking on the subject of sex.

## Lectures

- **Neuromarketing Science & Business Association ‘Smart Marketing’ conference**  
**Phil Barden**  
Topic: *Subconscious drivers of consumer decision-making.*  
London, 3 December 2014
- **Revolutionise Annual Lectures. The Royal Institution.**  
**Phil Barden**  
Topic: *Insights into individuals and the way that the commercial sector thinks.*  
London, 4 December 2014
- **Stimulating Marketing. International Marketing Congress**  
**Phil Barden**  
Topic: *Leveraging Decision Science to win the battle for the consumer’s mind*  
Ghent, 5 December 2014
- **13th Cologne Symposium on Brand and Competition Law**  
**Dr. Christian Scheier**  
Topic: *Comments on the Physiology and Psychology of brand perception.*  
Cologne, 26 February 2015
- **Marques Vienna 2015**  
**Dr. Christian Scheier**  
Topic: *The psychology of brands and its application to trademark law.*  
Vienna, 16 September 2015

## Press Reports

- **Verpackungs-Rundschau**

Article by **Dr. Christian Scheier**

***TV ads on the shelf. How packaging influences the sales and experiences of products.***

[http://scienceupdate.decode-online.de/system/files/Verpackungsrundschau\\_TV\\_Spots\\_im\\_Regal\\_Christian%20Scheier.PDF](http://scienceupdate.decode-online.de/system/files/Verpackungsrundschau_TV_Spots_im_Regal_Christian%20Scheier.PDF)

(Verpackung & Marketing October 2014 Edition)

- **MarkenR**

Article by **Dr. Christian Scheier** and Dr. Andreas Lubberger

***The psychology of brands and its application to trademark law.***

(December 2014 Edition)

## Professional Publications

- **PD Dr. Martin Scarabis, Dr. Christian Scheier, Dirk Held:**

***Brand Code Management: How we position brands in the consumer's autopilot.***

In: Alexander Schimansky (Hg.), *The value of the brand: Brand evaluation for successful brand management.*

(2nd Edition, *in preparation*)

- **Dr. Christian Scheier, PD Dr. Martin Scarabis, Dirk Held:**

***Mental Integration of multisensory perception.***

In: Karsten Kilian (Hg.), *Multisensory Brand communication.*

(*Anticipated date of publication May 2015*)

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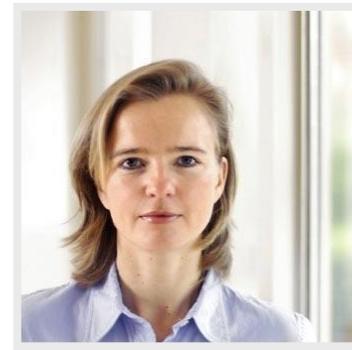
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