

From Sweetheart to Scapegoat: Brand Selfie-Taking Shapes Consumer Behavior

Increasingly, consumers are taking self-photos and marketers, eager to capitalize on this trend, have been asking consumers to take self-photos with brands (i.e., brand selfies). We suggest that consumer compliance with such requests sparks a self-inferential process that leads the consumer to feel connected to the brand (e.g., “If I took the brand selfie, I must feel connected to this brand”), increasing brand preference. Eight studies support this account. In a dataset of 283,140 user reviews from Yelp, study 1 documented a positive association between a reviewer’s propensity to take a brand selfie and the star rating he gives the restaurant. Seven experiments point to causality: participants randomized to take brand selfies felt greater self-brand connection and exhibited heightened brand preference, relative to those randomized to take: no photo at all (study 2a), a selfie (without the brand; studies 2b-6), or a photo of the brand (without the self; study 3). Two studies point to process in convergent ways, via serial mediation (study 4) and moderated mediation (study 5). A final study documented a crucial moderator: dissatisfaction with one’s appearance in the selfie triggers defensive processing, reducing self-inference and thereby, the capacity for brand selfie-taking to increase brand preference.

Keywords: brand selfie, photo-taking, self-perception, self-inferences, self-brand connection.