

Brand Teasing: How Brands Build Strong Relationships by Making Fun of Their Consumers.

Demi Oba

Holly S. Howe

Gavan Fitzsimons

**ABSTRACT**

Popular brands like Wendy's, Postmates, and RyanAir have gained notoriety by making fun of their consumers, but is this an effective strategy to build strong consumer relationships? Across eleven (seven pre-registered) studies, using lab data, field data, and a variety of analytical approaches, the current research demonstrates that teasing communication increases consumer engagement with and connection to the brand compared to merely funny or neutral communication. These effects occur because consumers anthropomorphize brands more when they use teasing communication. This leads to greater engagement with brand messages and greater self-brand connection. We also leverage the interpersonal teasing literature to distinguish between prosocial and antisocial teases and highlight an important boundary condition. Specifically, we demonstrate that while prosocial teasing evokes a positive human schema, antisocial teasing, although still anthropomorphic, activates a negative human schema which reduces connection to the brand. As a result, antisocial teases lose their relational advantage over purely funny communication. This work contributes to the streams of research on brand humor, anthropomorphism, and consumer-brand relationships. It also provides actionable implications by demonstrating a novel antecedent to consumer brand connection and the boundaries within which these positive effects are expected to occur.

*Keywords:* humor, anthropomorphism, consumer-brand relationships, social media, self-brand connection

In 2018, Wendy's launched a Twitter campaign (#NationalRoastDay) designed to make fun of their followers. For 24 hours, the Wendy's Twitter account teased any consumer or brand who engaged with them. Highlights included Wendy's congratulating Planters Peanuts on being the "worst part of trail mix" and telling a young consumer to "quit trying to model for Teen Vogue." #NationalRoastDay went viral, spawning an abundance of positive media coverage and netting Wendy's 350,000 new Twitter followers (Beltis, 2018). Wendy's is not alone in teasing their consumers. Other brands, like Postmates (Postmates 2018), Roomkey (Bryan 2019), and RyanAir (Stewart 2022) have also explored teasing as a way to connect with their audience.

The success of these campaigns conflicts with extant marketing literature which suggests that teasing is an ineffective, and perhaps even counterproductive, way to engage consumers (Roehm and Roehm 2014). In most cases, consumers prefer to feel welcomed and accepted by brands (Alvarez and Fournier 2016; Gremler and Gwinner 2008), with fairly specific exceptions (e.g., being rejected by aspirational brands; Ward and Dahl 2014). In contrast, teasing, by definition, highlights the target's flaws rather than accepting them. At best, prior work has found brand teasing to be unrelated to brand attitudes (Roehm and Roehm 2014). At worst, brand teasing poses a serious risk of offending the consumer (Warren and McGraw 2016b) or making the brand seem overly aggressive (Ning et al. 2022; Thomas and Fowler 2021), resulting in negative affect and lower brand attitudes (Warren and McGraw 2016b). Yet, observations of Wendy's, Postmates', RyanAir, and Roomkey's teasing campaigns suggest a largely positive response, from both consumers (Beltis 2018) and industry experts (Bryan 2019). How might these opposing viewpoints be reconciled?

In this paper, we suggest that consumers anthropomorphize teasing brands because teasing, as a uniquely human form of communication, is most readily understood by applying a

human schema to teasing brands (Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo 2007). However, the ultimate impact of brand teasing depends on whether this anthropomorphism activates a positive or negative human schema. When brand teasing activates a positive human schema, it should lead to higher engagement with and connection to the teasing brand than merely funny communication. On the other hand, when brand teasing activates a negative human schema, the advantages of teasing over mere humor should be erased.

We posit that the content of the tease itself determines whether consumers apply a positive or negative human schema to a teasing brand. Specifically, we rely on the literature in interpersonal teasing which suggests that teasing exists on a continuum from antisocial (i.e., provoking, threatening, and offensive) to prosocial (i.e., good natured, playful, and friendly; Keltner et al. 2001). Prosocial teases are relatively common in interpersonal relationships (Gorman and Jordan 2015; Keltner et al. 1998; Kowalski 2004) and lead to positive relationship outcomes (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Butler 2007; Haugh 2011; Keltner et al. 1998). Prior successful advertising campaigns largely rely on prosocial teasing (Beltis 2018; Bryan 2019; Postmates 2018).

Conversely, antisocial teases are less likely to occur in advertising because consumers often interpret antisocial teases as offensive, insulting, or politically incorrect (Kowalski 2004; Warren and McGraw 2016b). However, the brand teases that have been studied previously were relatively antisocial (Ning et al. 2022; Roehm and Roehm 2014; Thomas and Fowler 2021; Warren and McGraw 2016b). This tendency towards studying antisociality may explain the null or negative relationships observed between teasing and brand outcomes in prior work. It may also explain the discrepancy between the positive results evidenced by contemporary brands and the negative effects observed in prior research.

In summary, we argue that regardless of the content of the tease, teasing is a uniquely human form of communication and, as a result, brand teasing causes consumers to anthropomorphize a teasing brand. However, we suggest that the effect of anthropomorphism on engagement with and connection to the brand is not uniform among pro- and antisocial teases. While prosocial teases evoke a positive human schema and thus increase engagement and self-brand connection, antisocial teases evoke a negative human schema which decreases engagement and self-brand connection.

Because teases are a subset of humorous communication, teases are often perceived as funny by teasers, targets, and observers (Kowalski 2004). Given the demonstrably positive effects of humorous advertising on brand attitudes (Eisend 2009) and other brand relationship variables (Howe et al. 2022), we compare teasing communication not only to a neutral control communication but also to equivalent communications that are merely but equally funny. Where an equivalent but merely funny comparison is impossible, we measure funniness to ensure that our results hold controlling for the effect of funniness. This helps us ensure any observed effects of teasing were not merely caused by the teasing ads being funnier than the control advertisements and provides us with a more conservative test of our effects.

This paper makes three key contributions. First, we contribute to brand humor literature by bridging the gap between the success of real-world teasing campaigns and the negative effects observed in prior work (Ning et al. 2022; Roehm and Roehm 2014; Thomas and Fowler 2021; Warren and McGraw 2016b). Second, we contribute to the growing stream of research on brand anthropomorphism by advancing the idea of anthropomorphic brand voice (Barcelos, Dantas and Sénécal 2018; Epley 2018; MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Specifically, we demonstrate that in addition to product shape, branded mascots, and other visual determinants of anthropomorphism

(Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Yang, Aggarwal and McGill 2020), how a brand communicates is a reliable route to anthropomorphism and its positive downstream consequences. Additionally, we build on prior work (e.g., Aggarwal & McGill, 2007) exploring the double-edged nature of anthropomorphism by demonstrating that the degree to which anthropomorphism increases positive brand outcomes depends on the type of human schema evoked. Lastly, we contribute to the practice of marketing by demonstrating that teasing is a uniquely human way to cut through today's crowded advertising landscape and highlighting the boundary beyond which teasing no longer strengthens consumer brand relationships.

To develop these contributions, we begin with a brief review of relevant prior work, providing an operational definition of teasing (both pro- and antisocial) and highlighting the previously studied effects of interpersonal and brand teasing as well as the differences between teasing and mere humor. Next, we focus on anthropomorphism, considering both why it should be predicted by teasing and how it is expected to influence consumer-brand relationships depending on whether it evokes a positive or a negative human schema.

## **TEASING**

Teasing is a common aspect of human interaction observed in friendships, romantic relationships and even in the workplace (Keltner et al. 1998). Teasing is a humorous form of communication that, when done correctly, results in amusement for the teaser, target, and audience (Kowalski 2004). However, teasing has distinct features that differentiate it from merely funny communication.

Warren & McGraw (2016a) explain that humor arises from a benign violation: “something that threatens a person’s well-being, identity, or normative belief structure but that simultaneously seems okay.” In this paper, we draw on Keltner et al.’s (2001) definition of teasing: “an intentional provocation accompanied by playful markers that together comment on something of relevance to the target.” By this definition, it is clear that teases (i.e., playful provocations focused on a target) are a subset of humorous communication; the provocation serves as a threat (i.e., a violation) while the play markers allow for this threat to “seem okay” (i.e., benign). As a result, most well-executed teases should be judged as humorous. What separates teases from other forms of humorous communication is that the threat or provocation is targeted *at someone*. In other words, teases are jokes *at someone’s expense*. For example, while a pun (“This juice is constantly refreshing, like an Instagram feed”) relies on dual meanings to violate linguistic norms about the word “refreshing,” a tease makes the target of the violation a person (“This juice is constantly refreshing, like you with your crush’s Instagram feed”). While all teases include a targeted provocation, what differentiates a tease from more aggressive forms of communication (e.g., an insult) is the presence of play markers—which make it clear that the tease is not meant to be taken literally (Abrahams 1962; Keltner et al. 2001). In advertisements, play markers might include exaggeration, metaphor, or accompaniment by non-serious images (Keltner et al. 2001).

In their seminal work on different types and functions of humor Martin et al. (2003) distinguish between affiliative and aggressive uses of humor. While the authors explicitly classify teasing as *aggressive* humor, they also assert in this and later works that *affiliative* humor may involve “gentle teasing” (Martin, 2007; Martin et al., 2003, pg. 53). In line with this,

we assert that whether brand teasing serves an aggressive or an affiliative function depends on the nature of the tease: specifically, if the tease is prosocial or antisocial.

### Pro- and Antisocial Teasing

In the words of Martin et al. (2003) “the distinction between benign and deleterious uses of humor is one of degree, rather than a dichotomy” (p. 52). As teasing is a form of humor, it follows that the difference between benign (i.e., prosocial) and deleterious (i.e., antisocial) teasing is also a matter of degree (Butler 2007; Keltner et al. 1998; Kowalski 2004). As such, teases fall on a continuum between (but not including) entirely playful and entirely provocative statements. While a statement that is all play without a provocation targeted at an entity is merely a joke and one that is provocation without play would just be an insult, teases contain *both* play and provocation. Teases that are more heavily balanced towards play are relatively prosocial while teases that are more heavily balanced towards provocation are relatively antisocial. This is how teasing can be seen sometimes as derision and disparagement and yet at other times as gentle and playful (Martin et al. 2003). Similarly, using the language of benign violation, prosocial teases can be understood to contain a mild violation while antisocial teases contain a more severe violation (Warren and McGraw 2016a).

Prosocial teasing is common in close interpersonal relationships and can have affiliative functions. Prosocial teases provoke in pleasurable ways (e.g., comments on excessive but laudable acts) and are accompanied by numerous play markers like emphasis, exaggeration, a friendly tone, metaphor, or laughter (Alberts 1992; Keltner et al. 2001). These teases enhance social bonds with both the target of the tease (Butler 2007; Haugh 2011) and third-party observers (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997). In new relationships, prosocial teasing can be used to



establish a shared connection (Haugh 2011) and generally engender liking (Keltner et al. 1998). Prosocial teasing is also common in established relationships (Abrahams 1962; Bippus 2000; Butler 2007; Keltner et al. 2001; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006). In these contexts, teasing is affiliative because it (1) signals that individuals feel close enough to tease (Butler 2007), and (2) demonstrates the teaser knows enough about the target to construct an accurate tease (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997). Being the object of a tease might also make consumers feel special, which has positive interpersonal consequences (Anik and Hauser 2020). We hypothesize that when brands use prosocial teases, consumers will form a stronger connection to the brand.

**H1:** Consumers will report more self-brand connection to brands who use prosocial teasing (vs. mere humor) in their brand communications.

Antisocial teases, conversely, provoke the target in stronger, painful, or humiliating ways and are followed by fewer or weaker play markers (Alberts 1992; Keltner et al. 2001). In other words, teasing becomes antisocial when the balance of play and provocation tilts in the direction of provocation. In advertising, this might include teases that disparage a stereotyped group (Warren and McGraw 2016b), aggressively insult a competitor's business (Thomas and Fowler 2021), or disparage something identity-salient to the consumer (Bryan 2019).

There are many other ways that teasing can shift from prosocial to antisocial. For example, prior work suggests that anything that reduces psychological distance or increases the severity of a violation moderates the extent to which a comedic stimulus (e.g., a tease) is seen as threatening and therefore no longer humorous (McGraw et al. 2012). Drawing on this prior work, we suggest that the difference between pro- and antisocial teasing is a matter of "relative provocation" or how provoking a tease is compared to how playful it is. In this work, we examine three ways in which teasing increases in relative provocation and thus shifts from

prosocial to antisocial: when teases (1) provoke in a domain that is sensitive to the target, (2) harshly provoke a psychologically close rather than distant target (McGraw et al. 2012), or (3) provoke using language indicating strong negative emotions like disgust or anger (Web Appendix I). In each of these examples, the strength of the provocation component of the tease has been increased and the balance of play and provocation tilts towards provocation. Said differently, compared to prosocial teases, these antisocial teases are relatively more provoking than they are playful. We hypothesize that these antisocial teases will lead consumers to apply a negative human schema (e.g., bully, aggressor) to the brand, and thus will not encourage the heightened self-brand connection expected for prosocial teases. In these cases, even if the advertisement is amusing, it is unlikely that the consumer will be highly motivated to engage, or form a connection, with the brand (Warren, Carter and McGraw 2019).

**H2:** Consumers will report lower self-brand connection to brands who use antisocial (vs. prosocial) teasing in their brand communications.

To summarize, (1) teases are a subset of humorous communication where the violation is a provocation targeted at an entity (e.g., a person or a brand); (2) Because teases must contain both play and provocation, teases exist on a continuum between, but not including, entirely playful and entirely provoking; (3) All else held constant, increasing (decreasing) the number or strength of the play markers in a tease will increase the prosociality (antisociality) of a tease; (4) All else held constant, increasing (decreasing) the number or strength of the violations in a tease will increase the antisociality (prosociality) of a tease; (5) Combining (3) and (4), teases become antisocial when they are relatively more provoking than they are playful.

In this work we advance the idea of teasing as a social catalyst for brands. This framing drives the confluence of constructs examined throughout the paper. We expect the social nature

of teasing to affect self-brand connection because it is a more social measure of brand affiliation than other constructs like brand attitudes or liking. Likewise, our exploration of teasing as a social catalyst for brands explains the importance of examining differences between pro- and antisocial teasing and the human schemas they evoke. Lastly, we mediate the effects of teasing on self-brand connection through anthropomorphism because anthropomorphism explores the extent to which brands are perceived as social agents and interacted with as such.

## **ANTHROPOMORPHISM**

Anthropomorphism, as defined by Epley et al. (2007), is the attribution of uniquely human characteristics and features to nonhuman entities. In recent years, brand anthropomorphism has been of particular interest to marketing researchers and practitioners alike (Albert and Thomson 2018; Chen, Sengupta and Zheng 2023; Hur, Koo and Hofmann 2015; Yang et al. 2020). On the industry side, marketers anthropomorphize their brands in a variety of ways. The iconic Mac vs. PC ad campaign anthropomorphized the Mac as a cool, laid back, attractive young man, while brands like Wendy's and Mr. Clean rely heavily on anthropomorphic mascots for both their brand names and recognition. Today, even brands like Netflix and MoonPie, with no visible anthropomorphic components, have started engaging in anthropomorphic behavior by communicating increasingly in the first person (Bereznak 2019).

Previous research has demonstrated that approximating a human face or body, speaking in the first person, using a handwritten typeface, or interacting with other objects in a "human" way is often enough to cause consumers to anthropomorphize the brand and increase product evaluations (Schroll, Schnurr and Grewal 2018), elicit positive word of mouth (Chen et al. 2023),

and fundamentally change consumer-brand interactions (Mourey, Olson and Yoon 2017; Puzakova and Aggarwal 2018; Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto 2013).

### Why Does Brand Teasing Lead to Anthropomorphism?

Teasing is one route to anthropomorphism that remains relatively unstudied in the marketing literature despite being successfully practiced by popular brands like Wendy's and Postmates (Beltis 2018; Postmates 2018). This is particularly notable as Epley (2018) argues that "factors that contribute most to the perception of a humanlike mind (such as voice and statements related to mental states) are most essential [for fostering anthropomorphism]." Teasing anthropomorphizes a brand by approximating a human mind (rather than a human body) and, as such, represents a potentially compelling route to developing consumer-brand relationships. To develop this proposition, we first review prior work that explains why brand teasing is likely to lead to anthropomorphism and then consider the expected consequences of teasing-based anthropomorphism for the consumer-brand relationship.

In their foundational paper on the causes of anthropomorphism, Epley et al. (2007) identified three antecedents of anthropomorphism, two of which help to explain the anthropomorphic effects of brand teasing.

*Elicited Agent Knowledge.* People are more likely to anthropomorphize an entity when it looks or behaves like a human (Epley et al. 2007). For example, anthropomorphizing a cookie with a face drawn on it or a gadget that speaks in the first person (Hur et al. 2015). In a similar way, we expect brand teasing to lead to anthropomorphism because teasing is a common aspect of human interactions (Abrahams 1962; Bippus 2000; Butler 2007; Keltner et al. 2001; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006). Consequently, when a brand teases a consumer, it is likely to elicit knowledge about human beings, which encourages anthropomorphism.

*Effectance Motivation.* Humans are more likely to anthropomorphize a non-human agent that “acts” unpredictably and violates their expectations (Epley et al. 2007). Waytz et al. (2010) provide evidence of the effectance motivation by demonstrating that participants were more likely to anthropomorphize unpredictable gadgets and computers than predictable ones. While humor appeals are common and expected from brands (Beard 2005), brand teasing is a relatively infrequent occurrence in consumer-brand interactions. Put simply, brands are not expected to make fun of people. As a result, brands that engage in teasing behavior, where they make their consumers or other brands the butt of their jokes, should seem more erratic, volatile, and unpredictable as their behavior does not fit within the established brand schema. This lack of predictability should trigger the effectance motivation and encourage heightened anthropomorphism of teasing brands relative to brands using a neutral or merely funny tone, which consumers experience on a more regular basis.

Following this logic, one might argue that increases in instances of brand teasing might eventually eliminate the predicted effect on anthropomorphism. We argue that this is unlikely because, as we demonstrate in Study 4, humorous communication (though used frequently by brands) is perceived as more anthropomorphic than neutral communication (though less anthropomorphic than teasing). Due to the fact that mere humor remains anthropomorphic despite its frequent use, increased instances of brand teasing in the contemporary marketplace should not erase, the predicted effect—a point we return to in the general discussion. Additionally, we argue that teasing is more *uniquely* human than mere humor. Said differently, while many things (e.g., a pet making a funny face, an ironic turn of events, a large object falling but making a small sound) are funny, the balance of play and targeted provocation that makes up teasing is form of communication that is particular to humans. As a result, we argue that teasing

brands benefit from both the anthropomorphism that comes from a humor appeal and the *additional* anthropomorphism that comes from teasing.

**H3:** Brands who use (prosocial or antisocial) teasing in their brand communications will be perceived as more anthropomorphic than those that merely use humor.

#### When Does Brand Anthropomorphism Lead to Engagement and Self-Brand Connection?

Previous research on consumer brand interactions highlights that while anthropomorphism may be necessary for consumers to form relationships with brands (Fournier 1998) and attribute personalities to brands (Aaker 1997), simply viewing a brand as more human does not guarantee a positive reaction (Aggarwal and McGill 2007). As such, we argue that while teasing-caused anthropomorphism enables consumers to more readily connect with a brand, whether this teasing results in higher self-brand connection compared to mere humor is determined by the nature of the human schema activated which itself will be determined by the nature of the tease (prosocial vs. antisocial).

Aggarwal and McGill (2007) demonstrated that when two bottles elicited a positive human schema (human twins who make their parents proud), participants not only anthropomorphized the product but also evaluated it more favorably. Follow-up work has found that anthropomorphism leads to increased brand liking, positive emotions, and positive attributions of brand personality when positive traits are attributed to the target (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Delbaere, Mcquarrie and Phillips 2011). Similarly, because prosocial teasing is perceived positively in interpersonal contexts (Butler 2007; Haugh 2011; Keltner et al. 1998), we expect prosocial teasing to evoke a positive human schema. This should lead to positive effects of anthropomorphism on consumer engagement and self-brand connection.

**H4:** The positive effect of prosocial teasing compared to mere humor on self-brand connection will be mediated by anthropomorphism.

However, Aggarwal and McGill's (2007) initial study of brand anthropomorphism also provides an excellent roadmap for the potential negative side effects of antisocial teasing. In investigating the effects of brand anthropomorphism, they show that the favorable evaluations caused by the activation of a human schema were reduced when the human schema was negative ("we are the evil twins" and "begin our reign of terror") instead of positive ("we are the beverage twins who will do any parents proud" and "we are both equally good"). Interestingly, the authors found that the negative (vs. positive) human schema reduced consumer evaluations *despite* equal anthropomorphism. This finding highlights that while anthropomorphism encourages connections between consumers and brands (Fournier 1998) it does not guarantee them. Moreover, it highlights how the very conditions that can encourage consumers to anthropomorphize and connect with a brand can also, when negative, cause the activation of a negative human schema that detracts from the positive effects of anthropomorphism on consumer engagement. Consequently, we predict that, though still highly anthropomorphic, antisocial brand teasing will activate a negative, rather than a positive, human schema that negatively impacts engagement and self-brand connection. Said differently, positive and negative schema are the extent to which humanizing behavior is interpreted in a positive or negative light respectively. While teasing will enable brands to be perceived as having more human characteristics, antisocial teasing will valence these perceptions negatively (e.g., cocky) as opposed to positively (e.g., confident) which will reduce consumers' desire to connect with the brand.

**H5:** The relationship between anthropomorphism and self-brand connection will be weakened for antisocial teasing.

**H6:** The effects of pro- and antisocial teasing on self-brand connection will be explained by the fact that prosocial (antisocial) teasing activates a positive (negative) human schema which is positively (negatively) related to self-brand connection.

In summary, we argue that while teasing enables self-brand connection by enabling anthropomorphism of teasing brands, the nature of the tease (prosocial vs. antisocial) will determine the nature of the human schema activated (positive vs. negative) which will determine whether teasing increases self-brand connection.

In this work, we aim to explore the behavioral, cognitive, and affective effects of brand teasing. Examining social media engagement allowed us to assess consumers' behavioral responses. When demonstrating teasing's cognitive and affective effects, we selected consumer-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2005), over other constructs like brand attitude and emotional brand attachments (Park et al. 2010; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005) to leverage our organizing framework of "brand teasing as a social catalyst." Moreover, a relational construct like self-brand connection is conceptualized as a downstream consequence of anthropomorphism (Fournier 1998; MacInnis and Folkes 2017); consumers are more likely to form relationships with human-like brands. On the other hand, anthropomorphism is neither a necessary nor sufficient predictor of brand attitudes or valenced cognitions about the brand (Aggarwal and McGill 2007).

## **OVERVIEW**



In this paper, we suggest that prosocial teasing should have a positive effect on engagement and self-brand connection. Contrary to prior literature suggesting a negative effect of teasing (Warren and McGraw 2016b), we suggest that prosocial teasing causes consumers to anthropomorphize the teasing brand with a positive human schema, thus strengthening their connection to the brand. As explained previously, we compare teasing advertisements to merely funny advertisements, as funny advertisements represent a conservative control condition.

We also demonstrate the negative effects of antisocial (compared to prosocial) teases. These antisocial teases activate a negative human schema. This schema activation should weaken the anthropomorphic advantages that prosocial teasing has over mere humor for consumer-brand relationships (Warren et al. 2019).

We demonstrate our effects across eleven studies. In Studies 1A and 1B we motivate this research by exploring the phenomenon in the field. Specifically, we demonstrate that Wendy's receives more engagement on Twitter when it teases and that this relationship holds controlling for the funniness of the tweet. In Study 2, we validate the definition of teases as playful provocation and show that the perception of *both* playfulness and provocation *together* predict the perception of teasing and that teasing once again increases engagement with branded content on social media (TikTok in this case). In Study 3, we generalize this effect using a larger sample of television advertisements and provide preliminary evidence that the effect is mediated by anthropomorphism. In Study 4, we experimentally demonstrate the positive effects of prosocial brand teasing on self-brand connection and verify that these effects are mediated by anthropomorphism. After demonstrating the positive effects of prosocial teasing in a variety of contexts, we then explore the boundary condition of antisocial teases. In studies 5, 6A, 6B, and 6C, we experimentally demonstrate that, compared to prosocial teases, antisocial teases reduce

self-brand connection. Specifically, we demonstrate that antisocial teases, although anthropomorphic, are not more effective than mere humor attempts at eliciting self-brand connection (Study 5). In studies 6A-C we show that this is because antisocial teasing activates a negative rather than a positive human schema which decreases self-brand connection. Finally, in studies 7A and 7B, we demonstrate the negative effect of antisocial teasing in the field data from Study 1A as well as a new sample of tweets. Demographic characteristics for all studies are included in Web Appendix B. All materials, data, and analysis code are available at <https://osf.io/se3rx>.

### **STUDY 1A: DOES TEASING AFFECT SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT? WENDY'S ON #NATIONALROASTDAY**

The purpose of Study 1A is to demonstrate the consequences of prosocial teasing in an ecologically valid context. To do so, we explore consumer engagement with tweets from the Wendy's Twitter<sup>1</sup> account—a brand known for its humor and teasing (Beltis 2018). Specifically, we test whether teasing tweets garner higher levels of favorable consumer response measured by replies, retweets, and favorites. To ensure variation in the teasing content of the sampled tweets, we explore this relationship on #NationalRoastDay. On this day, Wendy's teased their consumers to a much greater extent while also engaging in a variety of normal brand communications. By sampling from this day, we ensured a robust sample of tweets that range across the entirety of the teasing spectrum. This study was pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=pe78cb>).

---

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the study, Twitter had not yet re-branded to X

## Methods

We collected all the tweets posted by Wendy's on January 4, 2019 ( $N = 354$  tweets). On this date, Wendy's used the hashtag #NationalRoastDay to "roast" (i.e., tease) anyone who tweeted at them by replying directly to the tweet. Wendy's also continued their normal Twitter activity on this day, including responding to customer complaints and running a sales promotion. This variation in tweet content within one day provides us with a rich data set of teasing and non-teasing tweets. We excluded tweets where the original tweet @Wendy's (where the user was asking to be roasted) was unavailable ( $n = 33$ ). This usually occurred because the consumer had deleted the tweet or had a private account. We also excluded tweets that were replies to tweet chains longer than one back-and-forth between Wendy's and another entity ( $n = 6$ ). We did so because Twitter does not allow the embedding of tweet chains longer than one back-and-forth, so we could not embed them in Qualtrics. Finally, we excluded tweets that were not replies ( $n = 4$ ). These tweets were announcements of the beginning and end of #NationalRoastDay and were outliers in terms of engagement. For the remaining tweets ( $n = 311$  tweets), we collected tweet text as well as tweet engagement (i.e., replies, retweets and follows) as of March 22, 2020. We also collected the number of users following the roasted user as of April 6, 2020.

To assess how funny and teasing the tweets were, we posted a survey on Amazon's Mechanical Turk for 1600 workers and received 1604 responses. As pre-registered, we excluded participants who wrote nonsense answers in response to the prompt "Please describe one question you answered" ( $n = 56$ ), participants who were unable to answer a multiple-choice question asking which brand posted the tweet they saw ( $n = 10$ ), and participants who self-reported difficulty seeing the tweet ( $n = 5$ ). This left us with a final sample of 1533 participants.

Participants rated the tweet that they saw according to how funny (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and teasing (i.e., teasing, ribbing, poking fun) it was using two scales from 1 (*not at all*) - 7 (*extremely*).

Our unit of analysis was the tweet (not the participant). As such, we took the mean of the funniness and teasing variables for each tweet and regressed those (along with the tweet-level followers variable on each of our measures of engagement.

## Results

First, we tested for normality within all the twitter metrics: replies, retweets and favorites. All of these metrics were positively skewed, all  $W \geq .13$ , all  $ps < .001$ . As pre-registered, we log transformed all Twitter metrics data. For each of replies, retweets, and favorites, we ran a regression on the log-transformed engagement metric controlling for tweet funniness and the number of followers the original poster (i.e., the entity asking to be roasted) had.

Teasing explained additional variance in replies,  $\beta = .39$ ,  $t(307) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , retweets,  $\beta = .47$ ,  $t(307) = 5.27$ ,  $p < .001$  and favorites,  $\beta = .55$ ,  $t(307) = 6.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , above the control variables. See Table 1 for complete regression results.

**TABLE 1**  
REGRESSION RESULTS ( $\beta$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 1

	<i>Replies</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Favorites</i>	
Teasing	<b>0.28***</b> (0.05)	<b>0.39***</b> (0.01)	<b>0.45***</b> (0.07)	<b>0.47***</b> (0.13)	<b>0.57***</b> (0.06)	<b>0.55***</b> (0.13)
Funniness		-0.12 (0.10)		-0.02 (0.15)		0.02 (0.13)
Followers		0.14**		0.11*		0.13**

		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Observations	311	311	311	311	311	311
$R^2$	0.08***	0.10***	0.20***	0.22***	0.33***	0.34***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Discussion

In Study 1A, we demonstrate that on #NationalRoastDay, Wendy’s garnered more favorable consumer responses (i.e., replies, retweets, favorites) from tweets that were perceived as more teasing. This relationship holds controlling for how funny the tweet was and the number of followers of the teasing target. Based on these results, we suspect that teasing has a unique effect on consumer engagement over and above purely being funny.

However, by selecting tweets from #NationalRoastDay we may have identified a context where Twitter users were expecting and thus especially responsive to tweets containing teasing content. We wanted to determine if our original findings would replicate in other contexts. Therefore, we attempted to replicate the findings of Study 1A on a normal business day. Wendy’s did not do #NationalRoastDay in 2020. To roughly match Study 1A, we pulled a sample of tweets from a time period that would have included National Roast Day (January 2 - January 6, 2020).

## **STUDY 1B: REPLICATING THE EFFECTS OF TEASING ON NON-ROAST DAY**

This study was pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=in2rg5>).

## Methods

We collected all the tweets posted by the brand Wendy's from January 2, 2020 to January 6, 2020 ( $N = 306$  tweets). Wendy's did not do #NationalRoastDay in 2020. However, they did continue their regular Twitter activity, which includes teases, responding to customer complaints, and promotions. We pulled tweets from four days in order to roughly match the number of tweets posted on #NationalRoastDay 2019.

As in Study 1A, we excluded tweets where the original tweet @Wendy's was unavailable ( $n = 24$ ), tweets that were not directed at another user ( $n = 5$ ), and tweet chains longer than one back-and-forth ( $n = 107$ ). For the remaining tweets ( $n = 170$  tweets), we collected tweet text as well as tweet engagement (i.e., replies, retweets, and follows) as of April 10, 2020. We also collected the number of users following the original poster as of April 15, 2020.

As in Study 1A, we recruited Mechanical Turk workers ( $N = 900$ ) to assess how funny and teasing the tweets were. As pre-registered, we excluded participants who wrote nonsense answers in response to the prompt "Please describe one question you answered" ( $n = 27$ ), participants who experienced difficulty viewing the tweet ( $n = 4$ ), and participants who were unable to answer a multiple-choice question asking which brand posted the tweet they saw ( $n = 7$ ). This left us with a final sample of 862 participants.

Participants rated the tweet that they saw according to how funny (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and teasing (i.e., teasing, ribbing, poking fun) it was using two scales from 1 (*not at all*) - 7 (*extremely*).

As in Study 1A, our unit of analysis was the tweet (not the participant). As such, we took the mean of the funniness and teasing variables for each tweet and regressed those (along with the original posters' followers variable) on each of our measures of engagement.

## Results

We tested for normality within all the Twitter metrics: replies, retweets and favorites. All of these metrics were positively skewed, all  $W \geq .050$ , all  $ps < .001$ . As pre-registered, we log transformed all twitter metrics data. Again, we controlled for the funniness of the tweet and the number of followers the original poster had.

As in Study 1A, for each of replies, retweets, and favorites, we ran a regression on the long-transformed engagement metric controlling for tweet funniness and the number of followers the original poster had in the first step.

Teasing explained additional variance in replies above the control variables,  $\beta = .39$ ,  $t(166) = 1.87$ ,  $p = .063$ , although this effect does not reach conventional levels of significance. Teasing also explained additional variance in retweets,  $\beta = .43$ ,  $t(166) = 3.30$ ,  $p = .001$ , and favorites ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $t(166) = 3.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ) above the control variables. Complete regression results can be found in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
REGRESSION RESULTS ( $\beta$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 1B

	<i>Replies</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Favorites</i>	
Teasing	<b>0.30***</b> (0.05)	<b>0.26</b> (0.09)	<b>0.42***</b> (0.05)	<b>0.43**</b> (0.09)	<b>0.55***</b> (0.07)	<b>0.42***</b> (0.13)
Funniness		0.06 (0.08)		-0.01 (0.08)		0.17 (0.12)
Followers		0.05 (0.00)		0.05 (0.00)		0.16* (0.00)
Observations	170	170	170	170	170	170
$R^2$	0.09***	0.10***	0.18***	0.18***	0.31***	0.34***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Discussion

Together, Studies 1A and 1B suggest that brand teasing garners a positive consumer response on Twitter. In Study 2, we continue examining the effect of teasing on engagement in the field. We expand beyond the findings of studies 1A and 1B in two ways. First, we examine a different brand (RyanAir) on a different social media platform (TikTok) allowing us to support the generalizability of the observed effects. Second, we use this field data to empirically confirm our definition of teases as playful provocations.

## **STUDY 2: DOES TEASING AFFECT SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT ON TIKTOK?**

### Methods

We scraped the RyanAir TikTok (@ryanair) account on October 3, 2023. Specifically, we scraped the video, caption, and engagement metrics (likes, shares, plays, comments) from every TikTok on the RyanAir account beginning with their first post on November 16, 2020 ( $N = 234$  posts). The brand RyanAir was selected because it engages in frequent and repeated teasing behavior (Stewart 2022) such that we are able to observe the effects of teasing on engagement. Of note, we did not expect to see a high number of antisocial teases within this dataset. In interviews, the head of social media at RyanAir has noted purposefully avoiding topics likely to elicit high levels of provocation (i.e., airline safety, race, religion, identity; Stewart, 2022). As such, this sample should be considered largely prosocial in nature.

Next, we randomly assigned workers from Prolific Academic to watch one of the scraped TikToks (including the caption). Participants who passed an initial English check ( $n = 1168$ )



were randomized to watch one of the videos. We excluded 29 participants who indicated that they had technical difficulty watching or hearing the video, leaving a final sample of 1139 participants. Participants rated the TikTok they saw on the extent to which it was funny (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and teasing (i.e., teasing, ribbing, poking fun). We also asked participants to rate the TikTok on how sensitive (i.e., To what extent did this TikTok concern a topic that someone might find sensitive or painful to talk about?), provoking (i.e., How provoking was this TikTok?) and playful (i.e., How playful was this TikTok?) it was. All measures were rated on scales from 1(*not at all*) to 7(*extremely*). The sensitive and provoke measures were highly correlated ( $r = .69, p < .001$ ), affirming our suggestion that increasing the sensitivity of a teased domain increases the strength of a provocation. We combined these two items into a single measure of provocation. The unit of analysis for this study was the TikTok. As such, we averaged participants ratings for each video to create a mean score on the variables listed above. Participants were randomly assigned to video, meaning that not all videos received the same number of ratings. Two videos did not receive ratings and are not included in the final sample. Of those that were rated, the median video received five ratings (min = 1, max = 6).

## Results

***Does teasing lead to more engagement?*** Controlling for funniness, the more a TikTok teased, the more likes ( $b = .18, SE = .08, p = .02$ ) and plays ( $b = .13, SE = .06, p = .03$ ) it garnered (Table 3). We also observed a directional effect of teasing on shares; this effect was significant not controlling for funniness ( $b = .18, SE = .08, p = .02$ ), but did not reach conventional levels of significance once funniness was included in the model ( $b = .14, SE = .09, p = .10$ ). Complete regression results can be found in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
REGRESSION RESULTS (*b*, *SE*, *R*<sup>2</sup>) FOR STUDY 2

Predictor	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )							
	Likes		Shares		Plays		Comments	
Funny	—	-.09	—	.09	—	-.02	—	-.07
	—	(.10)	—	(.11)	—	(.08)	—	(.09)
Tease	.14*	.18*	.18*	.14 <sup>φ</sup>	.12*	.13*	.01	.03
	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)
Observations	232	232	232	232	232	232	232	232
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.02*	.02 <sup>φ</sup>	.02*	.03*	.02*	.02 <sup>φ</sup>	.00	.00

NOTE. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>φ</sup>  $p < .10$

***Confirming the definition of a tease.*** We also used this study to empirically confirm our definition of teasing, specifically that a tease is a playful provocation. To do so, we ran a regression predicting ratings of teasing from the mean-centered ratings of playfulness and provocation for each video. Teasing was predicted similarly by playfulness ( $b = .74$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and provocation ( $b = .62$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Superseding both of these, teasing was predicted by the interaction of playfulness and provocation ( $b = .21$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .03$ ). A Johnson Neyman analysis indicates provocation ratings had a positive effect on teasing when mean-centered play ratings were greater than -1.43. In other words, once playfulness reaches a moderate level, adding provocation lead the TikTok to seem like more of a tease.

Conversely, funniness was predicted primarily by playfulness ( $b = .79$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and moderately by provocation ( $b = .15$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .02$ ). The playfulness by provocation interaction ( $b = -.04$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .61$ ) was not significant.

## Discussion

This study affirms the provided definition of a tease: a playful provocation directed at an entity by showing that the interaction between perceptions of playfulness and provocation predict

the perception of teasing. Funniness, conversely, was largely driven by perceptions of playfulness. Although we also observed a smaller effect of provocation, we did not observe the significant playfulness by provocation interaction that predicted ratings of teasing<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, this study once again shows that (prosocial) teasing, over and above merely humorous communication predicts increased engagement with brands on social media and generalizes these effects to a new brand and a new social media platform. Although social media engagement is an important metric for advertisers, we have yet to demonstrate why this teasing strategy leads to such a positive response. Furthermore, we have thus far shown that teasing leads to positive effects for consumers who follow brands who are known for this strategy. That is, the populations we sampled may have self-selected to be followers of Wendy's and RyanAir because they enjoy this style of humor. Therefore, in Study 3 we aimed to replicate the observed effect (1) using a different form of advertising (i.e., television ads), (2) with a sample of consumers who have not self-selected to consume the brand's content and (3) including our measured mediator, anthropomorphism.

### **STUDY 3: THE IMPACT OF TEASING ON ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND SELF-BRAND CONNECTION IN TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS**

This study was pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=cf7f9g>).

#### **Methods**

We recruited participants ( $N = 946$ ) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants were excluded if they provided nonsensical answers to the question "Please briefly (5-10 words)

---

<sup>2</sup> We suggest the effect of provocation in predicting funniness is due to participants detecting a "violation" which is a necessary component of the benign violations that comprise humor.

describe one question you answered” ( $n = 118$ ), indicated difficulty watching the video ( $n = 6$ ), or did not correctly identify “Postmates” as the advertised brand in a multiple-choice question ( $n = 3$ ). The final sample was 819 participants.

Participants were introduced to the brand Postmates, a personal delivery service for food, groceries, and liquor. Then, participants viewed one of twelve commercials pulled from the official Postmates YouTube channel. These videos (available here: <https://osf.io/45bwf>) varied on the extent to which they teased the consumer.

After watching the advertisement, participants evaluated how anthropomorphized Postmates seemed on a six-item scale (i.e., based on this ad, to what extent does Postmates seem... alive, like a person, like it has a mind of its own, almost as if it has intentions, almost as if it has emotions, as if it has beliefs) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) (Guido and Peluso 2015). Then, participants completed the Escalas and Bettman (2005) measure of self-brand connection. Next, participants completed a one-item measure of brand liking and a three-item measure of intent to engage with the brand (reported in the Web Appendix C). Finally, participants assessed how much the ad was teasing (i.e., teasing, poking fun, ribbing) and how funny the ad was (i.e., funny, humorous, comical).

## Results

Complete regression results can be found in Table 4. We note one deviation from the pre-registered analysis plan. The pre-registered plan did not include controlling for ad in any way. To increase the validity of the results, we control for ad as a random factor in our analyses. The effect of teasing without controlling for ad as a random factor can be found in Table 4.

*Anthropomorphism.* First, to analyze the effect of teasing on anthropomorphism, we ran a regression controlling for funniness and including ad as a random factor. In line with H3, teasing was a positive predictor of anthropomorphism,  $b[95\%CI] = .11 [.03, .19]$ .

*Self-Brand Connection.* Using similar regressions, we tested the effect of teasing, controlling for funniness and ad as a random factor, on self-brand connection. As predicted in H1, teasing was a positive predictor of self-brand connection,  $b[95\%CI] = .10 [.03, .17]$

*Mediation.* In line with H4, in a mediation model controlling for funniness and a random factor for advertisement at every step, anthropomorphism mediated the effect of teasing on self-brand connection ( $ab[95\% CI] = .06 [.02, .10]$ ).

**TABLE 4**  
REGRESSION RESULTS ( $b$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 3

	<i>Anthropomorphism</i>		<i>Self-Brand Connection</i>	
Teasing	<b>0.24***</b> (0.04)	<b>0.11**</b> (0.04)	<b>0.24***</b> (0.03)	<b>0.10**</b> (0.03)
Funniness		0.41*** (0.04)		0.47*** (0.03)
Ad as a random factor	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	819	819	819	819
$R^2$	0.05***	0.21***	0.07***	0.32***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Discussion

In Study 3, we demonstrated that prosocial teasing leads consumers to form stronger connections with the teasing brand and that this effect is mediated by anthropomorphism. Importantly, while funniness does predict engagement, teasing explains additional variance over and above that explained by funniness. Therefore, while teases, as humor appeals, are funny their effect on engagement is not solely due to their funniness.

However, results from studies 1A-3 have been purely correlational in nature. In study 4, we move to experimental procedures to demonstrate the causal effect of (prosocial) teasing on anthropomorphism and self-brand connection.

#### **STUDY 4: IMPACT OF TEASING ON ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND SELF-BRAND CONNECTION IN A CONTROLLED EXPERIMENT**

##### Methods

We recruited 494 participants from Prolific. Because the ad concerned social media use, we restricted participants to those under 25 years old. No participants failed an attention check asking which brand was advertised, but nine participants were excluded for failing to correctly describe one question they answered in the survey. The final sample was 485 participants.

Participants were introduced to the Canadian smoothie brand Booster Juice and were told the brand was considering options for a new advertisement. Participants then viewed one of three advertisements. The control advertisement read: “Booster Juice: Constantly refreshing, like you’re tasting a new fruit in every sip.” The funny advertisement read: “Booster Juice: Constantly refreshing, like your Instagram feed.” The teasing advertisement read: “Booster Juice: Constantly refreshing, like you with your crush’s Instagram feed.”

These advertisements had been pre-tested in a separate sample to ensure the following: (1) that the tease and funny advertisement were rated as equally funny, and funnier than the control advertisement; (2) that the teasing ad was rated as more teasing than either of the other two ads; and (3) that the novelty of the ads did not differ across conditions. Full results of this pre-test can be found in Web Appendix D.

After viewing the ad, participants were asked to rate how anthropomorphic Booster Juice felt to them using a six-item scale (i.e., based on this ad, to what extent does Booster Juice seem... alive, like a person, like it has a mind of its own, almost as if it has intentions, almost as if it has emotions, as if it has beliefs) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) (Guido and Peluso 2015). Participants then completed the Escalas and Bettman (2005) self-brand connection measure (e.g., Booster Juice reflects who I am; I feel a personal connection to Booster Juice).

## Results

*Anthropomorphism.* There was a significant effect of condition on anthropomorphism,  $F(2, 482) = 12.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .049$ . In support of H3, follow-up contrasts revealed that when Booster Juice used a teasing ad, it was significantly more anthropomorphized ( $M = 3.24, SD = 1.61$ ) than when it used a funny ad ( $M = 2.75, SD = 1.34; t(482) = 3.03, p = .003$ ) or a control ad ( $M = 2.45, SD = 1.34; t(482) = 4.93, p < .001$ ).

*Self-Brand Connection.* We also observed an effect of condition on self-brand connection,  $F(2, 482) = 5.41, p = .005, \eta^2 = .022$ . In support of H1, participants reported higher self-brand connection following a teasing ad ( $M = 2.53, SD = 1.43$ ) than following a funny ad ( $M = 2.27, SD = 1.23; t(482) = 1.85, p = .065$ ) or a control ad ( $M = 2.07, SD = 1.11; t(482) = 3.28, p = .001$ ), although the funny vs. tease contrast did not reach conventional levels of significance.

In support of H4, anthropomorphism mediated the effect of teasing on self-brand connection both when the reference condition was the funny ad ( $ab[95\% \text{ CI}] = .27[.09, .45]$ ) and when it was the control ad ( $ab[95\% \text{ CI}] = .43[.24, .63]$ ).

## Discussion

In this study, we found that teasing led to increased anthropomorphism of the Booster Juice brand. We also demonstrated that the increased anthropomorphism from teasing leads to improved self-brand connection. Of note, we found this effect relative to both a control (i.e., neutral) advertisement and a funny advertisement. Funny advertisements are generally effective at engendering positive consumer sentiment (Eisend 2009), so it is notable that the teasing advertisement outperformed an equally funny advertisement on all measured metrics. Lastly, we observe these results despite the fact that all three ads revealed no significant difference in perceived novelty in the pretest.

Thus far, teasing has appeared to be a universally positive communication strategy that increases self-brand connection through anthropomorphism, but, thus far, we have only examined prosocial teases. In the remainder of the paper, we explore whether making the tease more antisocial diminishes the positive response observed in Studies 1A–4. Specifically, in Study 5 we experimentally examine pro and antisocial teasing and highlight that unlike prosocial teasing, antisocial teasing does not increase self-brand connection.

## **STUDY 5: ANTISOCIAL TEASES AS A BOUNDARY CONDITION**

This study was pre-registered: [https://aspredicted.org/JCV\\_D1T](https://aspredicted.org/JCV_D1T)

## Methods

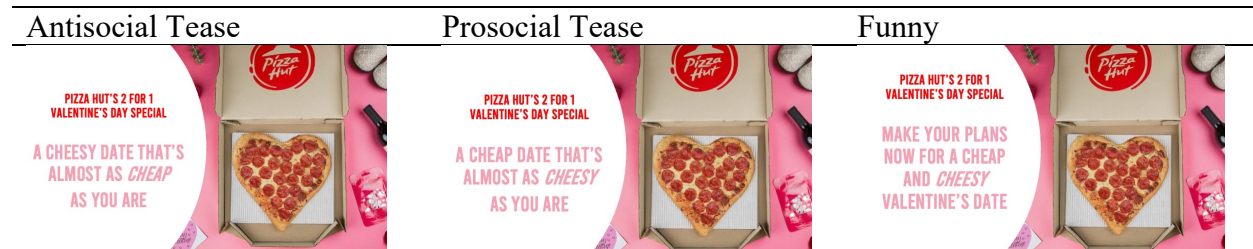


We posted a study for 1500 respondents and received 1490 complete responses (i.e., a response on all dependent variable measures). As pre-registered, participants were excluded if they failed an attention check asking them to select a particular answer ( $n = 20$ ) and participants who, when asked, could not correctly describe one question they answered in the survey ( $n = 78$ ). The final sample was 1392 respondents.

Participants imagined that they saw a print advertisement in early February advertising a 2-for-1 Valentine's Day special at Pizza Hut. All ad copy showed text beside a picture of a heart-shaped pizza, but the text varied depending on randomly assigned condition. In the prosocial tease condition, participants read: "A cheap date that's almost as *cheesy* as you are." In the antisocial tease condition participants read: "A *cheesy* date that's almost as *cheap* as you are." In the purely funny condition, participants read: "Make your plans now for a cheap and *cheesy* Valentine's date." See Fig. 1.

**FIGURE 1**

**STIMULI USED IN STUDY 5**



In this way, we were able to construct three closely matched experimental stimuli that varied only along the conceptual lines separating mere humor, prosocial teasing, and antisocial teasing. In the mere humor condition, the joke relies on the double meaning of the word *cheesy* being used to describe both the pizza (i.e., made of cheese) and the date (i.e., sappy, romantic, cliché). In the prosocial tease condition, the play marker remains the same (i.e., a word that can be used to describe both the consumer and the pizza date: *cheesy*) but the violation is directed at

the consumer (i.e., calling the *consumer* sappy, romantic, cliché). In the antisocial tease condition, the play marker remains the same (i.e., a pun that can be used to describe both the consumer and the pizza date) but the statement is more provocative because instead of calling the consumer cheesy, the ad has swapped the pun word and now calls them cheap.

In a pre-test, MTurk workers ( $N = 50$ ) reported how sensitive they would be to being perceived as cheap and as cheesy on a scale from 1 (*not at all sensitive*) to 7 (*very sensitive*). A paired-sample t-test revealed that participants are more sensitive about being “cheap” ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) than being “cheesy” ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(49) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .04$ . In this way, the antisocial tease is more relatively provoking (and therefore more antisocial) because the play marker has been left the same but the provocation has been increased (by poking at consumers in a more sensitive domain). This difference in relative provocation between the teases was confirmed in a separate pre-test where participants indicated how playful and how provoking each tease was (see Web Appendix E1).

After viewing the ad, participants rated anthropomorphism and self-brand connection to Pizza Hut using the same scales as prior experimental studies. Then, they read a brief description on the distinction between funniness and teasing (see materials at <https://osf.io/ztwka>), before rating the extent to which the ad was funny (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and teasing (i.e., teasing, poking-fun) using scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Finally, participants completed an attention check question asking them to select purple as the color of the ocean and an open-ended attention check asking them to “briefly describe one question [they] answered in this survey.”

## Results

*Manipulation Checks.* The prosocial tease ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ), antisocial tease ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) and funny advertisement ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) were all rated as similarly funny,  $F(2, 1389) = 1.74$ ,  $p = .177$ ,  $\eta^2 = .002$ . We observed a significant effect on ratings of teasing,  $F(2, 1389) = 148.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ . Follow-up contrast tests revealed that both the prosocial tease ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ;  $t(1389) = 10.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and antisocial tease ( $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ;  $t(1389) = 17.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were perceived as more teasing than the funny advertisement ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). The antisocial tease was also rated as more teasing than the prosocial tease,  $t(1389) = 6.38$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Anthropomorphism.* There was a significant effect of ad condition on anthropomorphism of the Pizza Hut brand,  $F(2, 1389) = 6.60$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . In support of H3, participants who saw the funny advertisement anthropomorphized Pizza Hut less ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ) than participants who saw either the prosocial tease ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ;  $t(1389) = 2.10$ ,  $p = .036$ ) or antisocial tease ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ;  $t(1389) = 3.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The pro- and anti-social teases did not differ,  $t(1389) = 1.50$ ,  $p = .133$ .

*Self-Brand Connection.* There was a significant effect of ad condition on self-brand connection with Pizza Hut,  $F(2, 1389) = 4.75$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . In support of H1 and H2, respectively, participants who viewed the prosocial tease reported higher self-brand connection with Pizza Hut ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) than participants who viewed the funny advertisement ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ;  $t(1389) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .021$ ) or the antisocial tease ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ;  $t(1389) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The funny and antisocial tease conditions did not differ,  $t(1389) = .63$ ,  $p = .528$ .

In support of H4, anthropomorphism mediated the effect of both teasing conditions on self-brand connection. Specifically, anthropomorphism mediated the effect of condition on self-

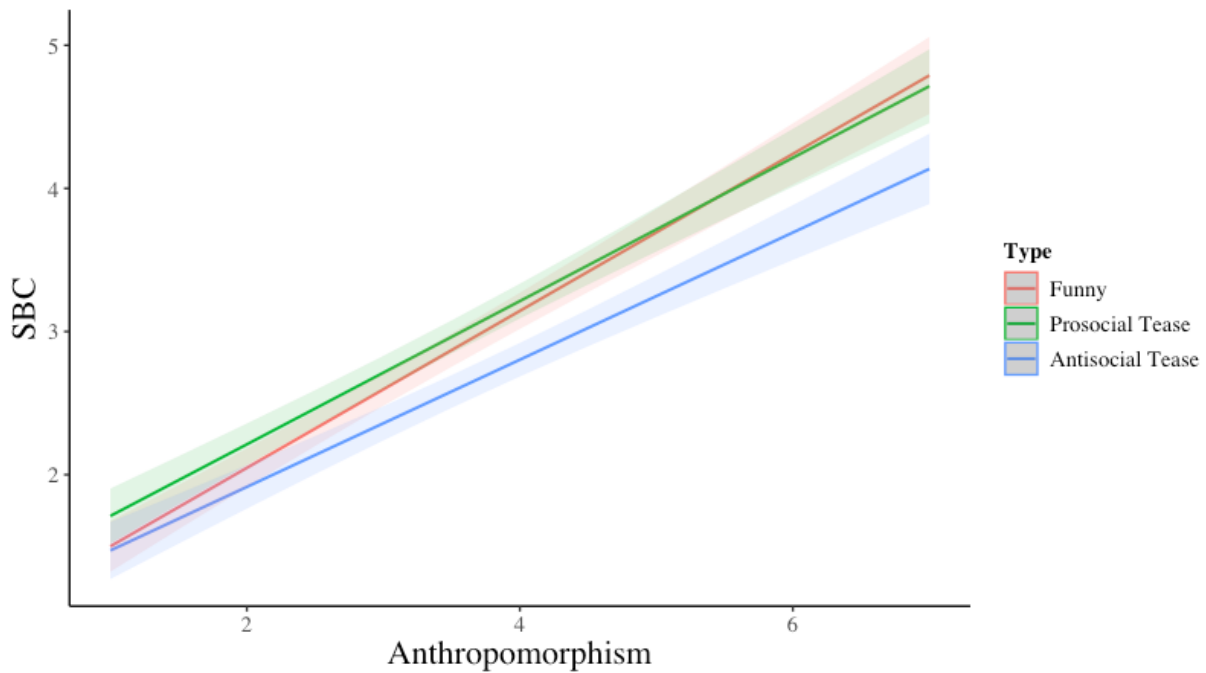
brand connection for prosocial vs. funny comparison,  $ab[95\%CI] = .123[.008, .240]$ .

Anthropomorphism also mediated the antisocial vs. funny comparison,  $ab[95\%CI] = .212[.099, .323]$  though, as discussed, there was no main effect of antisocial teasing compared to funny on self-brand connection.

To better understand this finding, we ran a regression predicting SBC from the interaction between anthropomorphism and condition. This analysis was exploratory and not pre-registered. We find a significant interaction between anthropomorphism and the funny (vs. antisocial) condition ( $b = .10, p = .023$ ). In support of H5, a simple slopes analysis revealed that the relationship between anthropomorphism and SBC was weaker (although still significant), in the antisocial condition,  $b = .44, p < .001$ , compared to the funny condition,  $b = .55, p < .001$ . The relationship between anthropomorphism and SBC in the prosocial condition was,  $b = .50, p < .001$ , which did not significantly differ from the slopes in the antisocial condition ( $b = -.06, p = .221$ ) or the prosocial condition ( $b = .05, p = .296$ ). Figure 2 plots the simple slopes.

## FIGURE 2

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND SBC MODERATED  
BY TEASING CONDITION IN STUDY 5



## Discussion

In Study 5 we demonstrate that—although both prosocial and antisocial teases lead to increased anthropomorphism—only prosocial teases ultimately increase self-brand connection compared to mere humor. This is because the relationship between anthropomorphism and self-brand connection appears weaker for antisocial teases. While anthropomorphism has a positive and significant effect on self-brand connection across all three conditions, this positive relationship is significantly weaker for antisocial teases compared to mere humor. Prosocial teases however, see no such reduction. In short, prosocial teases lead to more self-brand connection than *mere humor* because prosocial teases lead to more anthropomorphism. On the other hand, prosocial teases lead to more self-brand connection than *antisocial* teases because, despite being equally anthropomorphic, the relationship between anthropomorphism and self-brand connection is weakened for antisocial teasing.

To explain this pattern of results, we now examine how the nature of the tease affects the nature of the human schema activated by anthropomorphism and how these schemas influence self-brand connection. In our next set of studies (6A-6C), we again experimentally vary how provoking the tease is. Across all three studies, we show that when the tease is antisocial, the brand is still anthropomorphized, but it is anthropomorphized according to a negative human schema. Conversely, when the brand uses a prosocial tease, it is anthropomorphized according to a positive human schema. Moreover, we show that the activation of a negative human schema reduces self-brand connection while the activation of a positive human schema increases self-brand connection—a pattern of results which explains the findings of Study 5.

### **STUDY 6A-C: EXPLORING THE HUMAN SCHEMAS ACTIVATED BY PRO AND ANTI-SOCIAL TEASING**

#### Methods

In Studies 6A-C we explore the human schemas activated by pro- and antisocial teasing. The studies follow a similar methodology but use different brands and advertisements to demonstrate the generalizability of the effect. Advertisements used in each study can be found in Figure 3. In Study 6A, participants are shown the Pizza Hut pro- and antisocial stimuli from Study 5.

In Study 6B, we replicate the results of Study 6A with a new brand, new tease, and new domains of varying sensitivity. Participants are shown a teasing ad for either a tall shop (specializing in clothing for tall customers) or a plus size shop (specializing in clothing for plus-sized customers). The tease is the same in both conditions (“savings as big as you are”). The play marker in both conditions is the pun on the word “*big*” describing both the customer and the





savings at the shop. The provocation strengthens between the pro and antisocial teases because *big* goes from referring to the customer's height to referring to the customer's weight (a more socially sensitive trait). As such, the antisocial tease is more relatively provoking and therefore more antisocial.

In Study 6C, we repeat the process with a new brand, a new tease, and a new way of increasing the relative provocation of a tease. Participants are shown a teasing ad for the budgeting app You Need A Budget. We construct a tease by combining the provoking statement "you're financially illiterate" with the playful exaggeration "you're illiterate." We reduce psychological distance from the tease target (i.e., "you" vs. "college you") to render the tease more provoking and thus more antisocial. Psychological distance has previously been demonstrated to render violations less severe and more humorous (McGraw et al. 2012). All stimuli used in Study 6A-6C were constructed such that in each set (1) both the pro and antisocial tease used the same play marker and (2) the level of provocation was higher for the antisocial tease. Pretests in which participants rated how playful and how provoking each ad was allowed us to verify that the antisocial teases in each set were, in fact, more relatively provoking and therefore more antisocial than the prosocial teases (Web Appendix E). Additional analysis on the standardized measures show that in each study, the prosocial tease is rated as more playful than provoking while the antisocial tease is rated as more provoking than playful (Web Appendix E). Each of Study 6A ([https://aspredicted.org/QG8\\_RWL](https://aspredicted.org/QG8_RWL)), 6B ([https://aspredicted.org/TK9\\_D9T](https://aspredicted.org/TK9_D9T)) and 6C ([https://aspredicted.org/LYY\\_89X](https://aspredicted.org/LYY_89X)) was pre-registered.

### FIGURE 3

STIMULI USED IN STUDIES 6A-6C

---

Study	Brand	Antisocial Tease	Prosocial Tease
6A	Pizza Hut		
6B	Stretch		
6C	You Need a Budget	<p><b>YOU'RE FINANCIALLY ILLITERATE</b> (AND MAYBE REGULAR ILLITERATE TOO)</p> <p><b>...BUT YOU STILL DESERVE TO RETIRE COMFORTABLY</b></p> <p>You Need <b>YNAB</b>. A Budget.</p>	<p><b>COLLEGE YOU WAS FINANCIALLY ILLITERATE</b> (AND MAYBE REGULAR ILLITERATE TOO)</p> <p><b>...BUT YOU STILL DESERVE TO RETIRE COMFORTABLY</b></p> <p>You Need <b>YNAB</b>. A Budget.</p>

In each study, participants were exposed to either the pro- or antisocial tease from the focal brand. Then, we measured what human schema was applied to that brand. Specifically, we measured whether the advertisement led participants to see the brand as a bad person (negative human schema), a good person (positive human schema) or not a person (no human schema). To do so, we asked them to check-off adjectives they associated with the brand. Specifically, participants were presented with five groups of three adjectives each (see Table 5). Within each set of three, they were asked to select which adjective they most associated with the brand. We



designed each of these groups to contain words that were roughly synonymous and natural consequences of humor production. Based on multiple rounds of pre-testing (see Web Appendix F), we knew that each set of three contained one word that pretested to be not highly anthropomorphic (i.e., useful for describing human and non-human entities) and two words that pretested as particularly apt for describing humans over non-human entities (one of which pretested to be positively valenced and the other which pretested to be negatively valenced—see Table 5).

**TABLE 5**

*ANTHROPOMORPHISM MEASURE USED IN STUDIES 6A-6C*

Set	Non-Anthropomorphic	Positive Human Schema	Negative Human Schema
1	Compelling	Charismatic	Slick
2	Customer-Centric	Approachable	Overly-Familiar
3	Funny	Charming	Snarky
4	Clever	Witty	Cunning
5	Direct	Confident	Cocky

Finally, participants completed the Escalas & Bettman (2005) measure of self-brand connection, attention checks and demographics.

*Study 6A Participants.* We released a survey to 900 participants on Prolific and received 893 complete responses. No participants failed the attention check.

*Study 6B Participants.* We released a survey to 500 participants on Prolific and received 497 complete responses. We excluded participants who failed to correctly indicate a specified option in a multiple-choice question ( $n = 28$ ) or who wrote gibberish when asked to describe one question they answered in the survey ( $n = 10$ ). The final sample was 459 participants.

*Study 6C Participants.* We released a survey to 900 participants on Prolific and received 886 complete responses. No participants failed the attention check. We excluded participants

who failed to correctly indicate a specified option in a multiple-choice question ( $n = 10$ ) or who wrote gibberish when asked to describe one question they answered in the survey ( $n = 17$ ). The final sample was 859 participants.

## Results

Descriptive and inferential statistics can be found in Table 6 and Figure 4.

*Anthropomorphism.* We summed all the positive anthropomorphism words together and all the negative anthropomorphism words together to create indices of how much participants attributed positive and negative human traits to the brand. Confirming H6, prosocial (vs. antisocial) teasing led participants to endorse more positive schema words across all studies: 6A:  $t(886.21) = 7.16, p < .001$ ; 6B:  $t(435.91) = 8.24, p < .001$ ; 6C:  $t(831.10) = 4.99, p < .001$ . Further confirming H6, participants endorsed fewer negative schema words following prosocial (vs. antisocial) teasing across all studies: 6A:  $t(857.43) = 9.15, p < .001$ ; 6B:  $t(434.65) = 10.78, p < .001$ ; 6C:  $t(856.25) = 6.55, p < .001$ .

*Self-brand Connection.* In line with H5, participants reported lower self-brand connection for the brand following an anti- (vs. prosocial) advertisement across all studies: 6A:  $t(888.49) = 4.11, p < .001$ ; 6B:  $t(452.22) = 3.43, p < .001$ ; 6C:  $t(849.54) = 2.83, p = .005$ .

**TABLE 6**

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND T-TESTS FOR STUDIES 6A-6C												
	Negative human schema				Positive Human Schema				Self-Brand Connection			
	$M(SD)$		$t$	$d$	$M(SD)$		$t$	$d$	$M(SD)$		$t$	$d$
	Anti	Pro			Anti	Pro			Anti	Pro		
6A	2.01 (1.61)	1.11 (1.31)	9.15***	.61	1.64 (1.20)	2.23 (1.28)	7.16***	.48	2.70 (1.52)	3.13 (1.60)	4.11***	.28
6B	2.36 (1.58)	.96 (1.18)	10.78***	1.00	1.10 (1.05)	1.99 (1.24)	8.24***	.77	2.00 (1.51)	2.49 (1.57)	3.43***	.32
6C	2.48 (1.71)	1.74 (1.60)	6.55***	.45	1.20 (1.10)	1.59 (1.19)	4.99***	.34	2.93 (1.66)	3.25 (1.66)	2.83**	.19

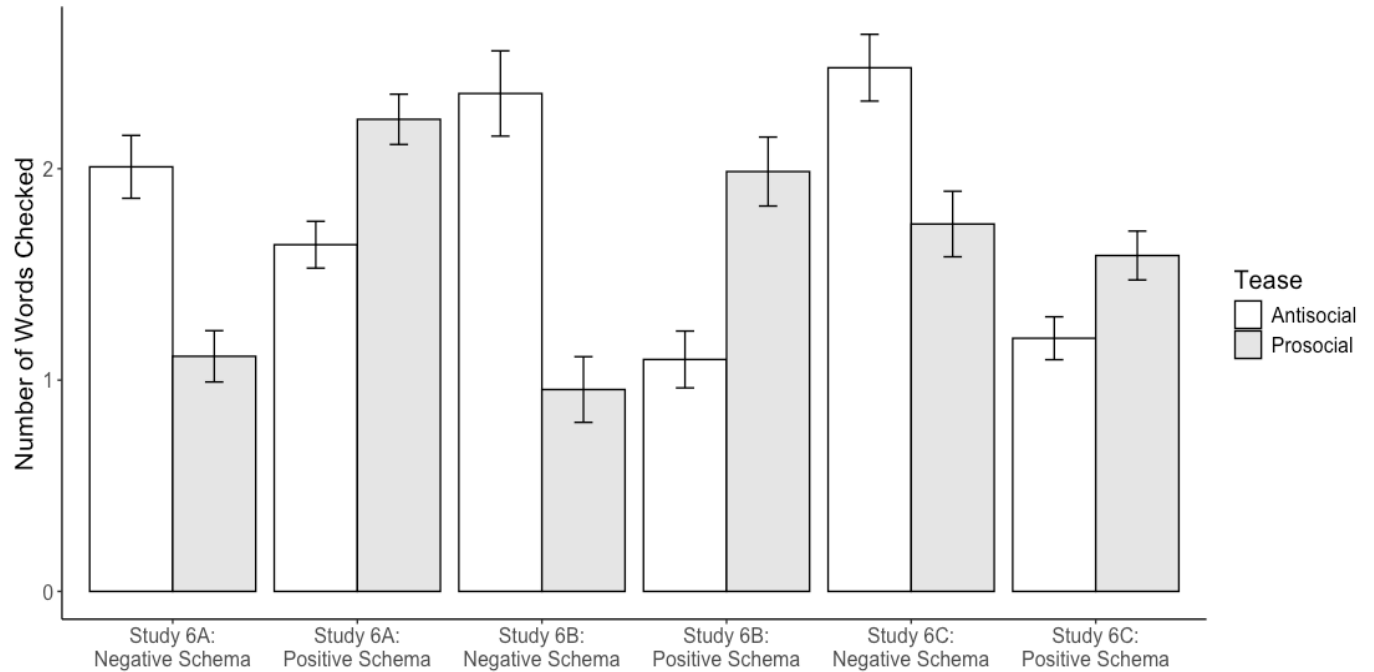
NOTE. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

*Mediation.* Due to the high correlation between positive and negative human schema (across all samples:  $r = -.68$ ;  $VIF = 1.88$ ; 7A:  $r = -.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 7B:  $r = -.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 7C:  $r = -.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), when both were entered simultaneously in a model (as in the b-path of the regression), multicollinearity affects the results. Following guidance from (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013) on dealing with multicollinearity, we conduct principal components analysis on the negative and positive schema words resulting in a one-factor solution. We save the factor score, giving us one variable representing both positive and negative schema (higher scores are more antisocial). This form of analysis was not pre-registered for Study 6A, but was pre-registered for 6B and 6C. Supporting H6, the overall mediation model using this factor score is significant in studies 6A ( $ab[95\%CI] = .42[.32, .53]$ ), 6B ( $ab[95\%CI] = .73[.55, .92]$ ), and 6C ( $ab[95\%CI] = .52[.36, .68]$ ) such that antisocial teasing increases perceptions of a negative human schema, which reduces consumer-brand connection.

For robustness, we also ran two separate mediation models such that positive and negative schema are not entered into the model simultaneously. In this case, and in line with H6, we find that both positive (6A:  $ab[95\%CI] = .22[.15, .30]$ ; 6B:  $ab[95\%CI] = .39[.25, .54]$ ; 6C:  $ab[95\%CI] = .27[.16, .38]$ ) and negative (6A:  $ab[95\%CI] = .39[.30, .49]$ ; 6B:  $ab[95\%CI] = .64[.49, .81]$ ; 6C:  $ab[95\%CI] = .49[.33, .64]$ ) human schema mediate the results of pro vs. anti-social teasing on self-brand connection.

#### FIGURE 4

NUMBER OF POSITIVE, AND NEGATIVE HUMAN SCHEMA WORDS ENDORSED BY PARTICIPANTS ACROSS CONDITIONS IN STUDIES 6A-6C



## Discussion

Building on Study 5 which demonstrated that while all teases are anthropomorphic, only prosocial teases lead consumers to increased self-brand connection, Studies 6A-6C explain that this is because prosocial teases activate a positive human schema (which increases SBC) while antisocial teases activate a negative human schema (which decreases SBC). In Studies 7A & 7B, we leverage Google's Gemini large language model to demonstrate that similar effects can also be observed in the field. Specifically, as teases get more relatively provocative (i.e., more antisocial), they engender less consumer engagement.

## **STUDIES 7A & 7B: THE EFFECT OF ANTISOCIALITY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF TEASES IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNICATION**

### Methods

Studies 7A and 7B apply a similar procedure of quantifying the relative provocativeness (and therefore antisociality) in teases posted by brands on Twitter. We then demonstrate that higher levels of antisociality lead to lower engagement with the teases.

Study 7A uses the sample of Wendy's #NationalRoastDay tweets used in Study 1A.

Study 7B uses a separate sample of brands not known for teasing. These brands range in industry and presumed brand personality. Specifically, we collected tweets posted by Microsoft, IBM, Jeep, Ford Trucks, Jimmy Choo and Kate Spade beginning January 1, 2021. Full details on the collection and rating of these tweets can be found in Web Appendix G.

In both Studies 7A and 7B we limited the sample to tweets that teased (i.e., tweets which Mturkers rated above the midpoint—3.5—on a 7-point teasing scale). This left us with 255 tweets in Study 7A and 46 tweets (3 Ford, 4 IBM, 11 Jeep, 3 Jimmy Choo, 8 Kate Spade, 17 Microsoft) in Study 7B.

In both studies, we were interested in classifying the relative antisociality of the tweets. To do so, we used the gemini.R package (Kim 2024) This package sends a text prompt to Google's Gemini generative AI server and returns the end result. We created prompts asking Gemini to rank each tweet on the extent to which it was playful and provoking, using a 7-point scale from 1(*not at all*) to 7(*extremely*). We defined the terms using the definitions provided in the paper and gave Gemini examples using stimuli and ratings of playfulness and provocation from Studies 6A and 6C (note that in Study 6B the wording of both the pro- and antisocial teases are the same so we did not include it in the training for the large language model). Full prompts are included in Web Appendix H.

To create a measure of antisociality, we wanted to measure the extent to which the tweet was more provoking than playful. To do so, we took the z-score of both the play and provoke

measure and subtracted the standardized play score from the standardized provoke score. In some cases, Gemini was unable to provide a rating for either (or both) the provoke and play scale. This happened for 29 tweets in Study 7A and one tweet in Study 7B. These tweets are thus excluded from the analysis.

## Results

We predicted log-transformed Twitter users' engagement (replies, retweets, likes) from the relative provocation measure.

*Study 7A.* All results are presented in Table 7. As tweets became more relatively provocative (i.e., antisocial), engagement decreased as measured by favorites,  $b = -.30$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ , retweets,  $b = -.33$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .001$ , and replies,  $b = -.19$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .006$ .

**TABLE 7**

REGRESSION RESULTS ( $b$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 7A

	<i>Favorites</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Replies</i>	
Funniness	—	-.08 (.13)	—	-.08 (.17)	—	.15 (.11)
Teasing	—	.43* (.17)	—	.49* (.22)	—	.30 <sup>ψ</sup> (.15)
OP Followers	—	.00* (.00)	—	.00* (.00)	—	.00* (.00)
Relative Provocation	-.26*** (.08)	-.30*** (.08)	-.28** (.10)	-.33** (.10)	-.17* (.07)	-.19** (.07)
Observations	226	226	226	226	226	226
$R^2$	.05***	.11***	.03**	.08***	.03*	.08**

NOTE. <sup>ψ</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Study 7B.* All results are presented in Table 8. As tweets became more relatively provocative (i.e., antisocial), engagement decreased as measured by favorites,  $b = -.36$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .044$ , retweets,  $b = -.31$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .049$ , and replies,  $b = -.31$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .069$ . Replies

did not reach conventional levels of significance. Brand is included as a random factor in all analyses.

**TABLE 8**

REGRESSION RESULTS (*b*, *SE*, *R*<sup>2</sup>) FOR STUDY 7B

	<i>Favorites</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Replies</i>	
Funniness	—	.00 (.16)	—	.00 (.14)		.18 (.15)
Teasing	—	.15 (.29)	—	.14 (.25)		.18 (.27)
Relative Provocation	-.39* (.16)	-.36* (.17)	-.33* (.14)	-.31* (.15)	-.34* (.16)	-.31 <sup>ψ</sup> (.17)
Brand	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.
Observations	45	45	45	45	45	45
Marginal <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.072	.075	.061	.063	.051	.082
[95%CI]	[.003, .246]	[.018, .301]	[.003, .222]	[.013, .292]	[.001, .230]	[0.019, 0.301]

NOTE. <sup>ψ</sup> *p*<.10, \**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01, \*\*\**p*<.001

## Discussion

In Studies 7A and 7B, we use field data to demonstrate that for teases, antisociality is associated with lower consumer engagement. In two sets of tweets, the more antisocial a tease became—that is, the more provoking it was relative to how playful it was—the less engagement the teased garnered. This study demonstrates promising evidence for an ecologically valid phenomenon. Note that we do not replicate these analyses on the Wendy’s data from Study 1B because we did not observe enough teases in that data (*N* = 24).

In Web Appendix I1, we demonstrate that the results are robust to an alternative analysis. Specifically, we control for playfulness and observe a negative and significant effect of provocation on all engagement measures. In another robustness check (Web Appendix I2) we replicate the findings of Study 7B using natural language processing to detect the presence of strong negative emotions (i.e., harsh provocations) in teases. We find that teases that provoke

using words that indicate strong negative emotions (e.g., anger or disgust) engender less consumer engagement. Together, these studies lend support to the proposed negative effects of antisocial compared to prosocial teasing.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

In a media market saturated with humor appeals (Ace Metrix 2020), brands like Wendy's, RyanAir, Postmates, and RoomKey have used teasing communication to cut through the noise and connect with their consumers (Beltis 2018; Bryan 2019; Postmates 2018; Stewart 2022). Previous explorations of teasing as an advertising strategy suggest that teasing is an unproductive approach to building consumer-brand relationships (Roehm and Roehm 2014; Warren and McGraw 2016b). However, these studies focused exclusively on antisocial teases. In this paper we replicate the effects of antisocial teasing while also highlighting prosocial teasing as a uniquely effective advertising strategy. Prosocial teasing causes consumers to anthropomorphize the advertised brand more than purely funny advertising and facilitates the development of self-brand connection and online engagement.

We first show that consumers engage more with teasing content even when funniness of the content is controlled for (Studies 1A, 1B, and 2). Next, we find that prosocial teasing reliably leads to increased self-brand connection through brand anthropomorphism when compared to a purely humorous baseline (Studies 3 and 4). In Studies 5, 6A-C, 7A, and 7B we demonstrate that this effect is limited to prosocial teases and that antisocial teases—because they activate a negative, rather than positive, human schema—do not garner the same positive effects.

Our research makes several contributions to the humor and brand communication literatures. We provide a framework for understanding when brand teasing leads to positive



consumer responses. Despite the rising popularity of teasing campaigns, there was no existing theoretical framework to explain when and why this strategy should be effective. Prior studies had largely focused on antisocial teases in brand-to-brand communication (Ning et al. 2022; Roehm and Roehm 2014; Thomas and Fowler 2021) and had not identified the possibility that prosocial teases lead to positive brand outcomes, even when the target of the tease is the consumer.

We build on extant literature from relationship psychology (Keltner et al. 2001) to distinguish between pro- and antisocial teases and to suggest that prosocial brand teases may indeed improve consumer-brand relationships. Based on the anthropomorphism model developed by Epley et al. (2007), we have argued that brand teasing leads to increased anthropomorphism because (1) teasing is a common human behavior that activates human schemas and (2) *brand* teasing is a behavior that consumers do not have many distinct representations to draw from to make sense of a brand teasing experience. These two factors together create ideal conditions for anthropomorphism: brands who tease are simultaneously perceived as being like humans and unlike typical brands.

One potential question raised by our findings is whether the observed effects of teasing on anthropomorphism are solely due to novelty. Teasing should, in part, lead to anthropomorphism because consumers do not experience brand teasing frequently and thus are more likely to fall back on a human schema to interpret the behavior. It is our belief that while the novelty of brand teasing may be enhancing the observed effect, increased exposure to brand teasing may reduce but should not eliminate this effect. Study 4 helps to ameliorate these concerns in two ways. First, the pretest for Study 4 finds that, due to the tightly controlled nature of the humorous ad and the teasing ad, consumers found both to be equally novel. As a result, it

is unlikely that novelty is driving the observed effects. Second, Study 4 demonstrates that although consumers are well acquainted with humor appeals from brands, these appeals can still lead to a greater degree of anthropomorphism than neutral control ads. This is likely because humor production is also a primarily (though not uniquely) human behavior<sup>3</sup>. Even after experiencing many instances of brand humor, humor production continues to draw on a human schema and, consequently, continues to elicit anthropomorphism. In the same way, we expect consumers to continue to anthropomorphize teasing brands to an even higher extent, even after increased exposure to brand teasing, because teasing is even more uniquely human than mere humor and, as a result, is best understood through a human schema.

In concurrence with the extant anthropomorphism literature, we demonstrate once again that increased anthropomorphism leads to positive brand outcomes (i.e., self-brand connection) when the anthropomorphism is rooted in a positive human schema (prosocial teasing; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Additionally, while prior work has primarily explored the consequences of anthropomorphism, this work documents a novel antecedent. Lastly, we highlight an important boundary condition under which the observed positive effects of teasing on self-brand connection are negated. If the level of antisociality in a tease is increased, then the tease evokes a negative human schema which reduces self-brand connection and eliminates the relational benefits observed for prosocial teases over mere humor.

### Marketing Implications and Future Research

Our findings may be especially useful to marketers who design creative advertisements or social media campaigns. Brand managers may wish to consider using teasing in their

---

<sup>3</sup> While human beings are the primary producers of humor, many non-human entities can produce humor. A pet making a funny face, an ironic twist of fate, or a large object falling but making a dainty sound can all be perceived as humorous. Teasing, however, is more uniquely human.

advertisements to increase engagement and design a more human brand that connects with consumers. Our findings suggest that prosocial teasing is an effective way to engage and connect with consumers. Marketers who are looking to encourage consumer-brand connections should consider pre-testing their advertisements to ensure that their teases are not perceived as antisocial. That is, they should not tilt the balance of play and provocation exceedingly towards provocation. Though antisocial teases are equally effective at fostering self-brand connection compared to merely funny advertisements, they are less effective than their prosocial counterparts.

While our results show the differing effects of pro- and antisocial teasing, they also raise other questions that the present research does not investigate. We identify facets of brand *content* that lead to the perception of antisociality. Specifically, we test three ways in which teases become more relatively provoking and therefore more antisocial. Teases that (1) tease consumers in sensitive domains (e.g., weight vs. height), (2) that levy strong provocations against a psychologically close (rather than distant target), and (3) that exhibit linguistic cues to strong negative emotions (e.g., disgust or anger). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all other factors that increase the relative provocation (and therefore the antisociality) of a tease as identified by the literature on interpersonal teases (Keltner et al. 2001; Kowalski 2004). For example, prior literature has also examined features of the target (e.g., does the consumer have prior negative experiences with teasing? Is the consumer emotionally loyal to the brand), the teaser (e.g., is this entity usually humorous?), and the relationship between the teaser and the target (e.g., Is teasing common in the relationship?; Kowalski, 2004) as predictors of antisociality perceptions.

Another area left for future research is the ideal balance of play and provocation. Teases exist on a continuum between, but not including, entirely playful and entirely provocative communication. In the present work, we demonstrate the dangers of increasing the provocation of a tease relative to its playfulness but future research may reveal the ideal balance teases should strike. For example, once teasing contains the necessary targeted provocation is it in a brand's interest to make that provocation as mild as possible while increasing the strength and number play markers to the greatest extent viable? Or, on the other hand, would these exceedingly playful teases function like mere humor such that their impact would be increased if the brand struck a more even balance between play and provocation? In Web Appendix E, we analyze the standardized playful and provoking ratings of the pro- and antisocial teases in studies 6A-C we find that each of the prosocial teases is significantly more playful than provoking while each of the antisocial teases is significantly more provoking than playful. While this does not fully solve for the ideal balance of play and provocation a tease should strike, it does suggest a rudimentary test brand managers can use to assess whether their teases are pro- or antisocial. Lastly, one might wonder if a tease that is both mildly playful and mildly provoking function the same as a tease that is extremely playful and extremely provoking? While these teases may be matched in their relative provocation, they may have different effects on consumer-brand relationships. These questions are left for future research.

Future research could also investigate the extent to which other content and context factors influence the levels of provocation perceived in teasing communication. We discuss three such questions below.

First, do the effects of teasing vary across brand personalities? While we demonstrate that teasing can lead to the attribution of *human* personality traits (e.g., charismatic) to brands, one

might wonder if *brand* personalities moderate this effect. For example, teasing may be inappropriate for sincere brands as a given tease might be seen as a stronger provocation (i.e., more antisocial) coming from a typically sincere brand. On the other hand, one might hypothesize that the fact that teasing is even more unexpected and unpredictable when coming from a sincere brand might increase the effectance motivation to anthropomorphize the brand thus increasing self-brand connection.

Second, are teases more provoking when directed at the consumer (e.g., Nike saying “Nike Training Club: Because you think a Russian Twist is a dance move”) versus at the general public (e.g., “Nike Training Club: Because some people think a Russian Twist is a dance move”) or another brand? As was the case for brand sincerity, it is possible that directing the tease at the consumer rather than having the consumer merely observe the tease may increase the strength of the provocation and ultimately the antisociality of the tease. However, directing the tease at the consumer themselves may increase both effectance motivation (as consumers do not expect to find themselves at the butt of a brand’s joke) as well as elicited agent knowledge (by reminding the consumer of prior instances of interpersonal teasing directed at them). As a result, whether direct or indirect teases increase self-brand connection remains an interesting question for future research.

Third, are antisocial teases more effective in established consumer-brand relationships? The answers to these and related questions could further define the conditions under which we expect teasing to aid in the development of consumer-brand relationships and when teases might have a null or negative effect on these relationships. We provide initial evidence for this question in our Web Appendix but deeper investigations are left for future research. Specifically, we highlight that, unlike in interpersonal relationships (Gorman and Jordan 2015), familiarity with

the teaser does not seem to increase the positive effects of prosocial brand teasing (Appendix J). Replicating the experimental results of Study 6A, we find that prosocial teasing increases self-brand connection compared to mere humor and that this effect is mediated by anthropomorphism. Extending these results, we find that these effects do not differ between an established brand (Pizza Hut) and a new brand the consumers were unfamiliar with (a fictional brand called Slices).

Lastly, future research may examine the factors that influence consumers' receptivity to brand teasing. Interpersonal research suggests that the personality and experiences of each individual consumer may affect whether they interpret teases as offensive. For example, consumers with certain personality characteristics, like introversion, neuroticism, and self-presentational concerns, are likely to react more negatively to teasing than consumers without these traits (Kowalski 2004). This is likely because consumers with these traits may view teases as highly provoking (increasing the tease's relative provocation and therefore antisociality) while consumers without these traits only perceive a mild provocation. Explorations of these questions could provide evidence that consumer traits may be as important as brand characteristics in determining the success or failure of brand teasing. In this case, advertisers could target teasing advertisements to consumers who are more apt to respond positively.

## Conclusion

Brands are increasingly turning to teasing to engage their consumers. Until now, it was unclear if or why this strategy is effective. In this paper, we explore the benefits of prosocial brand teasing, while also identifying an important boundary condition for the effect. This paper shows that (prosocial) teasing is a potentially effective way to cut through a crowded advertising

landscape and create a human-feeling brand that consumers want to engage and connect with.

Teasing however, is not a panacea—when brand teases over-provoke the consumer, they activate a negative, rather than a positive, human schema. In these instances, the relational lift from teasing disappears and teasing is only as effective as other humor appeals.

As for the question “can brands build effective relationships by making fun of their consumers?”, it seems the answer is yes, as long as they don’t take it too far.

## DATA COLLECTION STATEMENT

Stimuli for studies 1A (March-April 2020), 1B (April 2020), Study 7A (November 2021), and Study 7B (March-April 2020) were scraped from Twitter and presented to a sample of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers for ratings of funniness and teasing. Data for study 2 (Fall 2023) was scraped from TikTok and presented to a sample of Prolific panelists for ratings of funniness and teasing. Participants for Study 3 were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk in April 2020. Data for Study 4 was collected from Prolific panelists in Fall 2023. Participants for Study 5 were recruited from Prolific in April 2023. Participants for study 6A were recruited from Prolific in Fall 2023. Participants for studies 6B and 6C were recruited from Prolific in Spring 2024.

Data for studies 1A, 1B, 2, 3, 7A, and 7B was collected by Holly Howe. Data for studies 4, 5, 6A, 6B, and 6C was collected by Demi Oba. Holly Howe and Demi Oba jointly analyzed the data for all studies.

All data are available on the open science repository for the project: <https://osf.io/se3rx/>



## REFERENCES

- Aaker, Jennifer L (1997), "Dimensions of Brand Personality," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 347–56.
- Abrahams, Roger D (1962), "Playing the Dozens," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 75(297), 209–20.
- Ace Metrix (2020), "Super Bowl LIV Post-Game Ad Wrap-Up," <https://www.acemetrix.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Ace-Metrix-Super-Bowl-54-Post-Game-Ad-Wrap.pdf>.
- Aggarwal, Pankaj and Ann L. McGill (2007), "Is That Car Smiling at Me? Schema Congruity as a Basis for Evaluating Anthropomorphized Products," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 468–79.
- Albert, Noel and Matthew Thomson (2018), "A Synthesis of the Consumer-Brand Relationship Domain: Using Text Mining to Track Research Streams, Describe Their Emotional Associations, and Identify Future Research Priorities," *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 3(2), 130–46.
- Alberts, J. K. (1992), "An Inferential/Strategic Explanation for the Social Organization of Teases," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 11(3), 153–77.
- Alvarez, Claudio and Susan Fournier (2016), "Consumers' Relationships with Brands," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, 129–35.
- Anik, Lalin and Ryan Hauser (2020), "One of a Kind: The Strong and Complex Preference for Unique Treatment from Romantic Partners," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 86, 103899.
- Barcelos, Renato Hübner, Danilo C. Dantas, and Sylvain Sénécal (2018), "Watch Your Tone: How a Brand's Tone of Voice on Social Media Influences Consumer Responses," *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 41, 60–80.
- Beard, Fred K. (2005), "One Hundred Years of Humor in American Advertising," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 25(1), 54–65.
- Beltis, AJ (2018), "How Wendy's Twitter Gained 300,000+ Followers by Roasting Users," *Toast*, <https://pos.toasttab.com/blog/wendys-twitter>.

- Bereznak, Alyssa (2019), "Brands Who Stan: How Entertainment Companies Started Tweeting in the First Person," *The Ringer*, <https://www.theringer.com/2019/1/16/18184386/netflix-mtv-hbo-tweeting-first-person>.
- Bippus, Amy M. (2000), "Making Sense of Humor in Young Romantic Relationships: Understanding Partners' Perceptions," *Humor*, 13(4), 395–417.
- Boxer, Diana and Florencia Cortés-Conde (1997), "From Bonding to Biting: Conversational Joking and Identity Display," *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27(3), 275–94.
- Bryan, Sarah O (2019), "Roomkey," <https://www.sarahwritesthings.com/roomkey>.
- Butler, C (2007), "From Bite to Nip: The Dialogic Construction of Teases," *Texas Linguistic Forum*, 50, 22–34.
- Chen, Fangyuan, Jaideep Sengupta, and Jianqing (Frank) Zheng (2023), "When Products Come Alive: Interpersonal Communication Norms Induce Positive Word of Mouth for Anthropomorphized Products," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 49(6), 1032–52.
- Delbaere, Marjorie, Edward F. Mcquarrie, and Barbara J Phillips (2011), "Personification in Advertising :Using a Visual Metaphor to Trigger Anthropomorphism," *Journal of Advertising*, 40(1), 121–30.
- Eisend, Martin (2009), "A Meta-Analysis of Humor in Advertising," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(2), 191–203.
- Epley, Nicholas (2018), "A Mind like Mine: The Exceptionally Ordinary Underpinnings of Anthropomorphism," *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 3(4), 591–98.
- Epley, Nicholas, Adam Waytz, and John T. Cacioppo (2007), "On Seeing Human: A Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism," *Psychological Review*, 114(4), 864–86.
- Escalas, Jennifer Edson and James R. Bettman (2005), "Self-construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Meaning," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 378–89.
- Fournier, Susan (1998), "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research," *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343–73.

- Gorman, Glen and Christian H. Jordan (2015), "'I Know You're Kidding': Relationship Closeness Enhances Positive Perceptions of Teasing," *Personal Relationships*, 22(2), 173–87.
- Gremler, Dwayne D. and Kevin P. Gwinner (2008), "Rapport-Building Behaviors Used by Retail Employees," *Journal of Retailing*, 84(3), 308–24.
- Haugh, Michael (2011), "Humour, Face and Im/Politeness in Getting Acquainted," in *Situated Politeness*, ed. Bethan L. Davies, Michael Haugh, and Andrew John Merrison, New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 165–84.
- Howe, Holly S, Lingrui Zhou, Rodrigo S Dias, and Gavan J Fitzsimons (2022), "Aha versus Haha: Brands Benefit More from Being Clever than from Being Funny," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 33(1), 107–14.
- Hur, Julia D., Minjung Koo, and Wilhelm Hofmann (2015), "When Temptations Come Alive: How Anthropomorphism Undermines Self-Control," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(2), 340–58.
- Keltner, Dacher, Lisa Capps, Ann M. Kring, Randall C. Young, and Erin A. Heerey (2001), "Just Teasing: A Conceptual Analysis and Empirical Review," *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 229–48.
- Keltner, Dacher, Randall C Young, Erin A. Heerey, and Carmen Oeming (1998), "Teasing in Hierarchical and Intimate Relations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 309(5), 1231–47.
- Kim, Jinhwan (2024), "Gemini.R."
- Kowalski, Robin M. (2004), "Proneness to, Perceptions of, and Responses to Teasing: The Influence of Both Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Factors," *European Journal of Personality*, 18(4), 331–49.
- Lampert, Martin D. and Susan M. Ervin-Tripp (2006), "Risky Laughter: Teasing and Self-Directed Joking among Male and Female Friends," *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(1 SPEC. ISS.), 51–72.
- MacInnis, Deborah J. and Valerie S. Folkes (2017), "Humanizing Brands: When Brands Seem to Be like Me, Part of Me, and in a Relationship with Me," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(3), 355–74.

Martin, Rod A (2007), "The Social Psychology of Humor," *The Psychology of Humor*, 113–52.

Martin, Rod A, Patricia Puhlik-Doris, Gwen Larsen, Jeanette Gray, and Kelly Weir (2003), "Individual Differences in Uses of Humor and Their Relation to Psychological Well-Being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire," *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48–75.

McGraw, A. Peter, Caleb Warren, Lawrence E. Williams, and Bridget Leonard (2012), "Too Close for Comfort, or Too Far to Care? Finding Humor in Distant Tragedies and Close Mishaps," *Psychological Science*, 23(10), 1215–23.

Mourey, James A., Jenny G. Olson, and Carolyn Yoon (2017), "Products as Pals: Engaging with Anthropomorphic Products Mitigates the Effects of Social Exclusion," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(2), 414–31.

Ning, Yu Mei, Chuan Hu, Ting Ting Tu, and Dan Li (2022), "Offensive or Amusing? The Study on the Influence of Brand-to-Brand Teasing on Consumer Engagement Behavioral Intention Based on Social Media," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13(August), 1–17.

Park, C. Whan, Deborah J. MacInnis, Joseph Priester, Andreas B. Eisingerich, and Dawn Lacobucci (2010), "Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers," *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1–17.

Postmates (2018), "Los Angeles — We Get You," <https://blog.postmates.com/los-angeles-we-get-you-eeed16b5a30a>.

Puzakova, Marina and Pankaj Aggarwal (2018), "Brands as Rivals: Consumer Pursuit of Distinctiveness and the Role of Brand Anthropomorphism," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45(4), 869–88.

Puzakova, Marina, Hyokjin Kwak, and Joseph F. Rocereto (2013), "When Humanizing Brands Goes Wrong: The Detrimental Effect of Brand Anthropomorphization amid Product Wrongdoings," *Journal of Marketing*, 77(3), 81–100.

Roehm, Michelle L. and Harper A. Roehm (2014), "Consumer Responses to Parodic Ads," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(1), 18–33.

- Schroll, Roland, Benedikt Schnurr, and Dhruv Grewal (2018), "Humanizing Products with Handwritten Typefaces," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45, 648–72.
- Stewart, Rebecca (2022), "Ryanair's Michael Corcoran on 'savage' Social Strategy," *Ad Week*, <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/the-truth-about-ryanairs-savage-social-media-strategy/>.
- Tabachnick, Barbara G and Linda S Fidell (2013), *Using Multivariate Statistics*, 6th ed., Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Thomas, Veronica L. and Kendra Fowler (2021), "Turn the Other Cheek or an Eye for an Eye: Exploring Brand-to-Brand Dialogue on Social Media," *Journal of Advertising*, 0(0), 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1867262>.
- Thomson, Matthew, Deborah J. MacInnis, and C. Whan Park (2005), "The Ties That Bind: Measuring the Strength of Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(1), 77–91.
- Ward, Morgan K. and Darren W. Dahl (2014), "Should the Devil Sell Prada? Retail Rejection Increases Aspiring Consumers' Desire for the Brand," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(3), 590–609.
- Warren, Caleb, Erin Percival Carter, and Peter A. McGraw (2019), "Being Funny Is Not Enough: The Influence of Perceived Humor and Negative Emotional Reactions on Brand Attitudes," *International Journal of Advertising*, 38(7), 1025–45.
- Warren, Caleb and A. Peter McGraw (2016a), "Differentiating What Is Humorous from What Is Not," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 110(3), 407–30.
- (2016b), "When Does Humorous Marketing Hurt Brands?," *Journal of Marketing Behavior*, 2(1), 39–67.
- Waytz, Adam, Carey K. Morewedge, Nicholas Epley, George Monteleone, Jia Hong Gao, and John T. Cacioppo (2010), "Making Sense by Making Sentient: Effectance Motivation Increases Anthropomorphism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(3), 410–35.
- Yang, Linyun W., Pankaj Aggarwal, and Ann L. McGill (2020), "The 3 C's of Anthropomorphism: Connection, Comprehension, and Competition," *Consumer Psychology Review*, 3(1), 3–19.

## Web Appendix

Appendix A: Sample Size Determination for All Studies .....	2
Appendix B: Demographic Characteristics of All Samples .....	3
Appendix C: Additional Results for Study 3 .....	4
Appendix D: Pre-test for the Booster Juice Stimuli in Study 4 .....	5
Appendix E: Playfulness and Provocation tests for Studies 6A-6C .....	6
Appendix E1: Pizza Hut.....	6
Appendix E2: Stretch clothing.....	7
Appendix E3: YNAB.....	8
Appendix F: Pre-testing the word stimuli used in Studies 6A-6C.....	9
Appendix F1: Pre-tests on Humanness .....	9
Appendix F2: Pre-tests on Valence.....	10
Appendix G: Additional details on the collection of tweets used in Study 7B.....	11
Appendix H: Google Gemini prompts used in Studies 7A and 7B .....	12
Appendix I: Robustness Checks for Studies 7A and 7B.....	13
Appendix I1: Different Analysis on the LLM data.....	13
Appendix I2: Alternate Analysis for Study 7B.....	13
Appendix J (Study A1): Familiarity with the Brand Does Not Moderate the Effect .....	15
Appendix K: Robustness of Study Results to using a 1-item measure of teasing .....	17
Study 1A .....	17
Study 1B .....	17
Study 2 .....	18
Study 3 .....	18
Study 4 .....	18
Study 5 .....	19
Study 7A .....	19
Study 7B .....	19

## Appendix A: Sample Size Determination for All Studies

*Studies 1A & 1B & 5A:* Sample size for Study 1A/5A (final  $N = 311$ ) and Study 1B (final  $N = 170$ ) was determined by the number of posts the brand Wendy's made on Twitter during our period of interest. Posts were limited to those that could be embedded in Qualtrics to be rated by participants.

*Study 2:* Sample size for Study 2 was limited by the number of posts made by the brand RyanAir on the TikTok platform ( $N = 234$ ).

*Study 3:* We based our sample size on the expected effect size for self-brand connection. We expected a small-to-medium effect of  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Based on g-power calculations, this leads to a desired sample size of 504. We released the study to 500 participants and received 485 valid responses.

*Study 4:* We based our sample size calculations on a small-to-medium effect size on self-brand connection ( $\Delta R^2 = .015$ ), with 13 predictors (11 ad dummies, funniness, ad teasing)<sup>1</sup>. Based on g-power calculations, this leads to a desired sample size of 856. We released the study to 946 participants and received 819 valid responses.

*Study 5:* As in study 4, we based our sample size calculations on a small-to-medium effect size on self-brand connection ( $\eta^2 = .015$ ). Based on g-power calculations, this leads to a desired sample size of 1225. We released the study to 1500 participants and received 1383 valid responses.

*Study 6A:* In study 6A, we based our sample size calculations on a small-to-medium effect size on self-brand connection ( $d = .25$ ). Based on g-power calculations, this leads to a desired sample size of 834. We released the study to 900 participants and received 893 valid responses.

*Study 6B:* We aimed to recruit at least 200 participants per cell after exclusions. We released the study to 500 participants and received 459 valid responses.

*Study 6C:* In study 6C, we based our sample size calculations on a small-to-medium effect size on self-brand connection ( $d = .25$ ). Based on g-power calculations, this leads to a desired sample size of 834. We released the study to 900 participants and received 859 valid responses.

*Study 7B:* The sample used in Study 7B was collected for another project on the influence of brand personalities on humor perceptions. As such, sample size calculations were performed based on those planned analyses.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that this analysis no longer reflects what is in the paper.

## Appendix B: Demographic Characteristics of All Samples

Study	N	Gender			M	Age (SD)	Ethnicity							
		Men	Women	NB or Other			White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Arab	Indigenous	MR	Other
1A/7A	1533	829	696	8	37.56	(12.37)	1146	106	161	76	N/A	6	34	4
1B	862	421	434	7	35.36	(11.56)	611	62	107	56	N/A	1	22	3
2	1139	505	620	14	40.92	(18.54)	961	35	79	14	8	0	32	10
3	485	191	228	6	22.65	(1.84)	332	38	63	6	N/A	0	18	28
4	819	465	350	4	39.05	(12.84)	604	51	90	49	N/A	5	16	4
5	1392	744	629	19	42.78	(13.73)	999	103	123	79	N/A	5	79	4
6A	893	396	480	17	40.14	(13.11)	624	67	80	63	1	5	47	6
6B	459	193	258	8	38.33	(12.60)	296	45	62	34	1	3	17	3
6C	859	398	449	12	41.64	(13.02)	590	100	80	51	5	3	28	2
7B	2786	1255	1494	37	39.97	(12.40)	2098	238	221	143	N/A	5	64	16



### Appendix C: Additional Results for Study 3

**Additional Methods.** In addition to the anthropomorphism and SBC measures, participants completed a one-item measure of brand liking (“After viewing this ad, how much do you like the brand Postmates”) and a 3-item measure of intent to engage with the brand (“I am interested in learning more about Postmates”; “I would like to try the Postmates service”; “I’d be interested in interacting with this brand in the future”)

**Results & Discussion.** Teasing did not predict brand liking,  $b[95\%CI] = -.02 [-.08, .03]$ , or engagement intentions,  $b[95\%CI] = .02 [-.05, .08]$ .

**TABLE A1**

REGRESSION RESULTS ( $b$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 4

	<i>Liking</i>		<i>Engagement</i>	
Teasing	<b>0.15***</b> (0.03)	<b>-.02</b> (0.02)	<b>0.27***</b> (0.03)	<b>0.02</b> (0.04)
Funniness		<b>0.52***</b> (0.03)		<b>0.52***</b> (0.03)
Ad as a random factor	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	819	819	819	819
$R^2$	<b>0.04***</b>	<b>.39***</b>	<b>0.07***</b>	<b>0.02***</b>

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses.  $R^2$  value is marginal  $R^2$  for regressions with ad as a random factor

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

We failed to observe an effect on our dependent variables related to attitudinal and behavioral intent, liking and willingness to engage with the brand in the future. This demonstrates that teasing primarily affects a brand’s ability to form a relationship with consumers (as we might expect from anthropomorphism) and may not affect other measures. The lack of an effect on behavioral intent in this study should also be contrasted with the effects of Studies 1A, 1B and 2 showing that teasing does actually lead to more engagement with the brand. It is possible that consumers do not cognitively

recognize an increased desire to interact with the brand as an effect of prosocial teasing, but actually do engage in more interactions when they see the brand as more human-like.

## **Appendix D: Pre-test for the Booster Juice Stimuli in Study 4**

### **Methods**

We recruited 189 participants from Prolific. One participant failed an attention check asking which brand was advertised and was excluded from the analyses. The final sample thus comprised 188 participants (116 women, 65 men, 8 non-binary;  $M_{age}^2 = 34.98$ ,  $SD = 12.85$ ; 126 White, 19 Hispanic or Latino, 14 Black, 15 Asian, 2 Indigenous and 13 self-described).

Participants viewed the Booster Juice ads presented in Study 3 and rated them in terms of novelty (i.e., novel, new, unfamiliar). Next, they read a description of the difference between funniness and teasing, before rating the ad on both funniness (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and teasing (i.e., teasing, poking fun). All items were measured on 7-point scales from 1(*not at all*) to 7(*extremely*).

### **Results**

**Novelty.** The funny ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ), teasing ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) and control ad ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) did not differ on ratings of novelty,  $F(2, 186) = 1.38$ ,  $p = .26$ .

**Funniness.** We observed an overall effect of advertisement on ratings of funniness,  $F(2, 186) = 34.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . The control advertisement was rated as less funny ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) than either the funny advertisement ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ;  $t(186) = 6.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or the teasing advertisement ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ;  $t(186) = 7.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The funny and the teasing advertisements did not differ,  $t(186) = 1.59$ ,  $p = .25$ .

**Teasing.** We observed an overall effect of advertisement on ratings of teasing,  $F(2, 186) = 62.22$ ,  $p < .001$ . The teasing ad was rated significantly higher on teasing ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) than either the funny ( $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = .92$ ;  $t(186) = 3.29$ ,  $p = .003$ ) or control ad ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = .77$ ;  $t(186) = 10.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The funny ad was also rated as more teasing than the control ad,  $t(186) = 7.53$ ,  $p < .001$ .

---

<sup>2</sup> Excluding one participant who wrote their age as “30-35”

## Appendix E: Playfulness and Provocation tests for Studies 6A-6C

### Appendix E1: Pizza Hut

#### Method

We recruited 150 participants from Prolific. Seven participants were excluded for failing to indicate a specified answer in an attention check. Five additional participants were excluded for providing a nonsensical answer when asked to describe one question in the survey. The final sample was 138 participants (49 male, 85 female, 4 non-binary;  $M_{age} = 38.37$ ,  $SD = 13.29$ ; 87 White, 21 Black, 12 Asian, 12 Hispanic, 6 multi-racial).

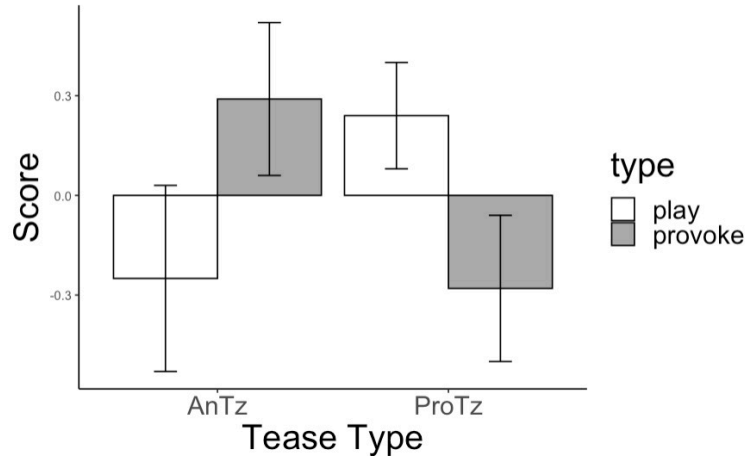
Participants imagined that it was February and they saw the antisocial or prosocial Pizza Hut ad used in Study 7A. Then, we provided them with instructions to rate the ad on playfulness and provocation; “*Next, we will ask you some questions about the extent to which the ad: Was provoking -- that is, the extent to which the ad is aggressive, demeaning or critical; Was playful -- that is, the extent to which the ad was not meant to be taken literally and was in the spirit of fun. Note, that is it possible for an ad to score highly on both of these dimensions. Sometimes, the things we say can be provoking or sensitive but said in a playful way, like in stand-up comedy or teases between good friends.*” Participants completed a one-item measure of both provocation (i.e., How provoking is this advertisement?) and play (i.e., How playful is this advertisement?) rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all provoking/playful*) to 7 (*extremely provoking/playful*). Finally, participants completed attention checks and demographics.

We created a relative provocation measure by subtracting the z-scored playfulness scores from the z-score provocation scores.

#### Results

The antisocial ad was rated as more provoking ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) than the prosocial ad ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $F(1, 136) = 12.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . The antisocial tease ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) was also rated as less playful than the prosocial tease ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .99$ ),  $F(1, 136) = 8.54$ ,  $p = .004$ . The prosocial ad was rated as less relatively provoking ( $M = -.52$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) than the antisocial ad ( $M = .53$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ),  $F(1, 136) = 17.84$ ,  $p < .001$ .

We also ran the analyses a different way: predicting z-scored metrics of playfulness and provocation in a 2(measure: play, provoke; within subjects) x 2 (advertisement: pro- vs. antisocial; between subjects) mixed ANOVA. We observed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 136) = 17.84$ ,  $p < .001$  (See Figure below). For the antisocial tease, the provoke score ( $M = .29$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) was significantly higher than the play score ( $M = -.25$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ),  $t(136) = 3.01$ ,  $p = .003$ . For the prosocial tease, the opposite was true: The play score ( $M = .24$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) was significantly higher than the provoke score ( $M = -.28$ ,  $SD = .95$ ),  $t(136) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .004$ .



## Appendix E2: Stretch clothing

### Method

We recruited 150 participants from Prolific. Seven participants were excluded for failing to indicate a specified answer in an attention check. One additional participant was excluded for providing a nonsensical answer when asked to describe one question in the survey. The final sample was 142 participants (77 male, 64 female, 1 non-binary;  $M_{age} = 34.48$ ,  $SD = 11.33$ ; 83 White, 21 Black, 18 Asian, 9 Hispanic, 11 multi-racial).

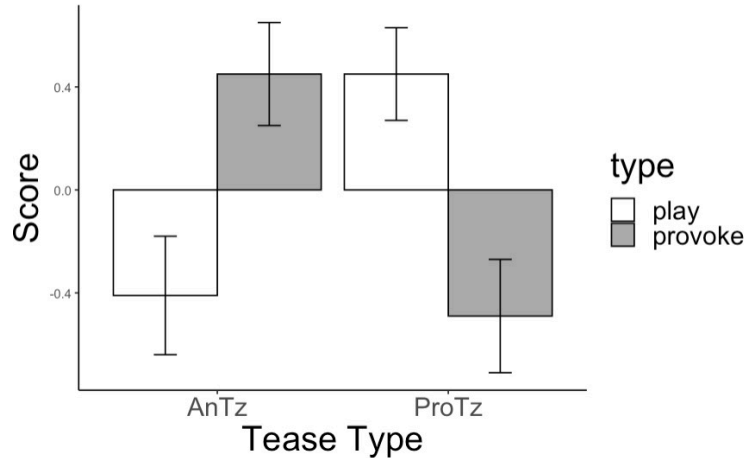
Next, participants were presented either the prosocial or antisocial advertisement for Stretch used in Study 6B. Using the same scales described above, they rated the ad on playfulness and provocation. Finally, participants completed attention checks and demographics.

We created a relative provocation measure by subtracting the z-scored playfulness scores from the z-scored provocation scores.

### Results

The antisocial tease was rated as more provoking ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) than the prosocial ad ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ),  $F(1, 140) = 39.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . The antisocial tease ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ) was also rated as less playful than the prosocial tease ( $M = 5.57$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $F(1, 140) = 32.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . The prosocial ad was rated as less relatively provoking ( $M = -.94$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) than the antisocial ad ( $M = .86$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ),  $F(1, 140) = 57.20$ ,  $p < .001$ .

We also ran the analyses a different way: predicting z-scored metrics of playfulness and provocation in a 2(measure: play, provoke; within subjects) x 2 (advertisement: pro- vs. antisocial; between subjects) mixed ANOVA. We observed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 140) = 57.2$ ,  $p < .001$  (See Figure below). For the antisocial tease, the provoke score ( $M = .45$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) was significantly higher than the play score ( $M = -.41$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $t(140) = 5.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . For the prosocial tease, the opposite was true: The play score ( $M = .45$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) was significantly higher than the provoke score ( $M = -.49$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $t(140) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .001$ .



## Appendix E3: YNAB

### Method

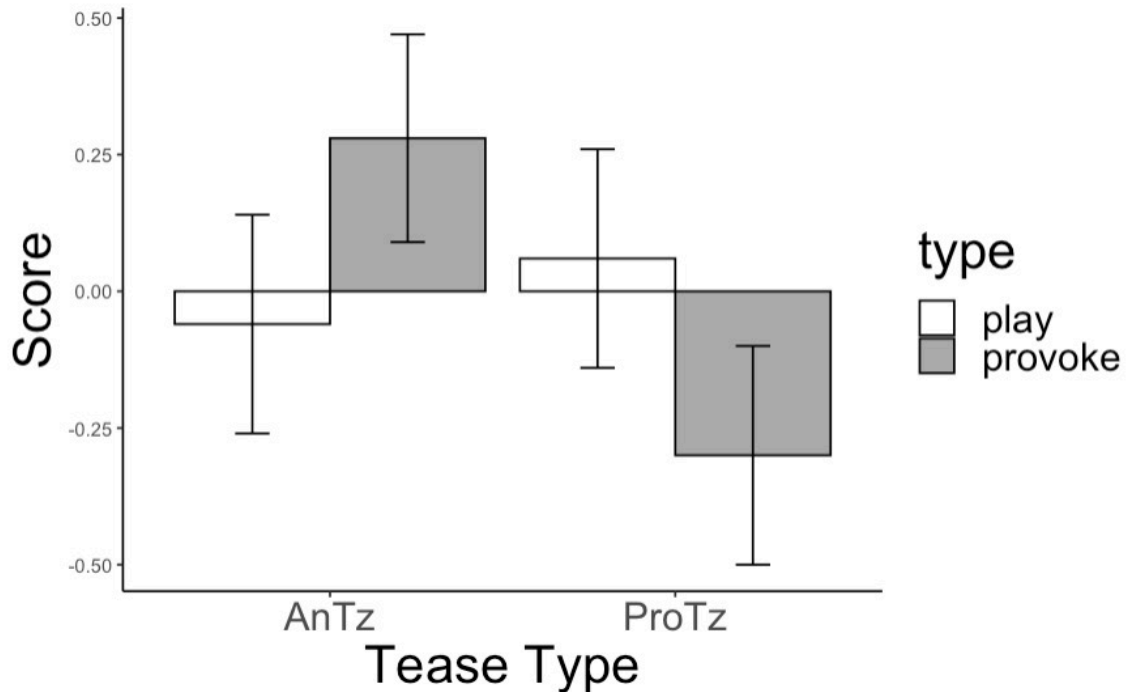
We recruited 200 participants from Prolific. Four participants were excluded for failing to indicate a specified answer in an attention check. Nine additional participants were excluded for providing a nonsensical answer when asked to describe one question in the survey. The final sample was 187 participants (89 male, 94 female, 4 non-binary;  $M_{age} = 34.54$ ,  $SD = 11.05$ ; 135 White, 13 Black, 17 Asian, 12 Hispanic, 1 Middle Eastern, 8 multi-racial, 1 self-described).

Next, participants were presented either the prosocial or antisocial advertisement for YNAB used in Study 6C. Using the same scales described above, they rated the ad on playfulness and provocation. Finally, participants completed attention checks and demographics. We created a relative provocation measure by subtracting the z-scored playfulness scores from the z-scored provocation scores.

### Results

The antisocial tease was rated as more provoking ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) than the prosocial ad ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ),  $F(1, 185) = 17.17$ ,  $p < .001$ . The antisocial tease ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) was rated as equally playful as the prosocial tease ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ),  $F(1, 185) = .66$ ,  $p = .42$ . The prosocial ad was rated as less relatively provoking ( $M = -.36$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) than the antisocial ad ( $M = .34$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ),  $F(1, 185) = 10.78$ ,  $p = .001$ .

We also ran the analyses a different way: predicting z-scored metrics of playfulness and provocation in a 2(measure: play, provoke; within subjects) x 2 (advertisement: pro- vs. antisocial; between subjects) mixed ANOVA. We observed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 185) = 10.78$ ,  $p = .001$  (See Figure below). For the antisocial tease, the provoke score ( $M = .28$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) was significantly higher than the play score ( $M = -.06$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $t(185) = 2.29$ ,  $p = .023$ . For the prosocial tease, the opposite was true: The play score ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) was significantly higher than the provoke score ( $M = -.30$ ,  $SD = .97$ ),  $t(185) = 2.35$ ,  $p = .020$ .



## Appendix F: Pre-testing the word stimuli used in Studies 6A-6C.

### Appendix F1: Pre-tests on Humanness

The purpose of this pre-test was to find sets of three similar adjectives where two adjectives would be more human than the third.

#### Methods

Participants ( $N = 99$ ; 36 men, 61 women, 2 non-binary or self-described;  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.30$ ,  $SD = 14.41$ ; 88 White, 1 Hispanic, 1 Black, 6 Asian, 1 multiracial and 2 other) were recruited from Prolific. Participants were shown 55 adjectives presented in sets of three or four (see Table A1). They were asked to rate each of the adjectives on the extent to which it was a uniquely human (i.e., “That is, to what extent is each of these words more suitable for describing human beings compared to non-human entities like brands, pets, ads, movies, or ideas?”) from 1 (*less uniquely human descriptor*) to 7 (*more uniquely human descriptor*).

#### Results

Descriptive and inferential statistics are presented in Table A2. We were looking for sets that contained two adjectives that were rated as more uniquely human than the third. We also hoped that the human adjectives could be split into a positive or negative human schema (we confirmed valance in the subsequent pre-test).

Based on this criteria, we moved forward to the next pre-test with seven sets: (1) compelling, charismatic, slick; (2) user-friendly, approachable, overly-familiar; (3) funny, charming, snarky; (4) witty, clever, cunning; (5) direct, confident, cocky; (6) normal, kind, mean; (7) good, good-natured, ill-tempered.

Table A2. Descriptive and inferential statistics for the humanness pre-test

	M (SD)				F
Set 1	Dynamic 3.68 (1.74) <sup>a</sup>	Playful 3.69 (1.64) <sup>a</sup>	Immature 5.28 (1.65) <sup>b</sup>	—	37.55 <sup>***</sup>
Set 2	Compelling 3.57 (1.62) <sup>a</sup>	Charismatic 5.84 (1.31) <sup>b</sup>	Slick 4.07 (1.84) <sup>c</sup>	—	73.75 <sup>***</sup>
Set 3	Pointed 3.43 (1.71) <sup>a</sup>	Insightful 4.83 (1.75) <sup>b</sup>	Intrusive 3.86 (1.70) <sup>c</sup>	—	36.55 <sup>***</sup>
Set 4	User-friendly 2.58 (2.21) <sup>a</sup>	Approachable 5.13 (1.58) <sup>b</sup>	Overly-familiar 4.70 (1.83) <sup>b</sup>	—	51.90 <sup>***</sup>
Set 5	Customer-centric 3.94 (2.38)	Friendly 4.33 (1.82)	Smarmy 5.34 (1.80)	—	11.93 <sup>***</sup>
Set 6	Purposeful 3.85 (1.76) <sup>a</sup>	Deliberate 4.17 (1.64) <sup>a</sup>	Thoughtful 5.52 (1.39) <sup>b</sup>	Calculating 4.81 (1.78) <sup>c</sup>	34.54 <sup>***</sup>
Set 7	Funny 4.19 (1.81) <sup>a</sup>	Charming 5.33 (1.5) <sup>b</sup>	Snarky 5.83 (1.13) <sup>c</sup>	—	42.72 <sup>***</sup>
Set 8	Amusing 3.48 (1.68) <sup>a</sup>	Whimsical 4.29 (1.77) <sup>b</sup>	Derisive 4.31 (1.67) <sup>b</sup>	—	12.04 <sup>***</sup>
Set 9	Joking 5.42 (1.66) <sup>a</sup>	Teasing 5.01 (1.54) <sup>b</sup>	Mocking 5.24 (1.68) <sup>ab</sup>	—	4.41 <sup>*</sup>
Set 10	Witty 5.80 (1.47) <sup>a</sup>	Clever 4.22 (1.66) <sup>b</sup>	Cunning 4.89 (1.75) <sup>c</sup>	—	32.57 <sup>***</sup>
Set 11	Smart 4.16 (1.74) <sup>a</sup>	Sharp 3.65 (1.70) <sup>b</sup>	Shrewd 5.21 (1.48) <sup>c</sup>	—	32.01 <sup>***</sup>
Set 12	Normal 3.09 (1.72) <sup>a</sup>	Kind 5.34 (1.55) <sup>b</sup>	Mean 5.05 (1.62) <sup>b</sup>	—	95.63 <sup>***</sup>
Set 13	Direct 4.17 (1.81) <sup>a</sup>	Confident 5.07 (1.53) <sup>b</sup>	Cocky 5.88 (1.29) <sup>c</sup>	—	37.60 <sup>***</sup>
Set 14	Pleasing 3.38 (1.52) <sup>a</sup>	Endearing 4.39 (1.67) <sup>b</sup>	Cloying 3.90 (1.62) <sup>c</sup>	—	16.79 <sup>***</sup>
Set 15	High-quality 2.39 (1.82) <sup>a</sup>	Elevated 3.15 (1.85) <sup>b</sup>	Contemptuous 5.10 (1.53) <sup>c</sup>	—	111.80 <sup>***</sup>
Set 16	Engaging 3.96 (1.77) <sup>a</sup>	Lively 3.92 (1.75) <sup>ab</sup>	Chaotic 3.47 (1.41) <sup>b</sup>	—	3.93 <sup>*</sup>
Set 17	Good 3.03 (1.76) <sup>a</sup>	Good-natured 4.87 (1.84) <sup>b</sup>	Ill-tempered 5.02 (1.68) <sup>b</sup>	—	64.75 <sup>***</sup>

Notes. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Means that share a superscript are not significantly different from one another

## Appendix F2: Pre-tests on Valence

The purpose of this pre-test was to determine whether the human-sounding words from the sets chosen in Appendix B1 were significantly different on valence (i.e., representing a positive and negative human schema).

### Methods

Participants ( $N = 100$ ; 44 men, 53, women, 3 non-binary;  $M_{age} = 37.95$ ,  $SD = 11.61$ , 69 White, 12 Black, 10 Asian, 6 Hispanic, 3 multi-racial) were recruited from Prolific. Participants were shown seven sets with two adjectives each. On each set, they rated the extent which each adjectives was a “good or desirable” trait for a person to have on a scale from 1 (*bad or undesirable*) to 7 (*good or desirable*). After rating all the adjectives, participants completed demographics.

### Results

We ran a 2 (valence: positive or negative adjective; within subjects) x 7(set number; within subjects) ANOVA. The overall set by valence interaction was significant,  $F(6, 594) = 105.30$ ,  $p < .001$ . Results of the simple effects tests can be found in Table A3.

Table A3: Valence of human adjective pairs

	$M$ ( $SD$ )	$F$ -value
Charismatic	Slick	18.13***
6.01 (0.99)	3.16 (1.57)	
Approachable	Overly-Familiar	19.28***
6.34 (0.74)	3.31 (1.32)	
Charming	Snarky	25.07***
6.18 (0.83)	2.24 (1.21)	
Witty	Cunning	12.41***
5.96 (1.15)	4.01 (1.75)	
Confident	Cocky	27.17***
6.22 (0.88)	1.95 (1.13)	
Kind	Mean	34.93***
6.75 (0.56)	1.26 (0.56)	
Good-Natured	Ill-Tempered	34.16***
6.66 (0.61)	1.29 (0.59)	

### Appendix G: Additional details on the collection of tweets used in Study 7B

We collected the first 200 tweets posted by Microsoft, IBM, Jeep, Ford Trucks, Jimmy Choo and Kate Spade beginning January 1, 2021. On the date of data collection (November 16, 2021), Ford Trucks ( $n = 110$ ) and IBM ( $n = 175$ ) had not yet posted 200 tweets, so all their tweets in this time-period were included. Consumers’ response to each tweet—likes, retweets, and replies—were scraped alongside the data on November 16, 2021.



We recruited MTurk participants ( $N = 2985$ ) to rate the tweets on funniness (i.e., funny, humorous, comical) and humor style, which included teasing (i.e., teasing, ribbing), irony (i.e., ironic, making use of dry humor), clever (i.e., making use of puns, making use of dad jokes) and dirty (i.e., vulgar, raunchy). All items were rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Only the funny and teasing items are discussed further.

MTurk participants were quasi-randomly assigned to rate one tweet. The goal was to have each tweet rated twice. We ran an initial sample where MTurkers ( $N = 1941$  complete responses) were truly randomly assigned to tweet. After this initial study, any tweet that had not received 2 or more ratings (after participants were excluded for failing the attention check) was re-released to a second ( $N = 745$ ) or third ( $N = 300$ ) set of MTurk workers who were randomly assigned to one of the remaining tweets. After excluding participants who did not correctly identify the brand who wrote the tweet they saw ( $n = 198$ ) we were left with a final sample of 2786 respondents.

Each tweet was rated at least once; the average was  $M = 2.57$  times ( $SD = 1.26$ ). Going forward, the unit of analysis is the tweet. The average funniness and teasing rating across all MTurk raters are used in all analyses.

## Appendix H: Google Gemini prompts used in Studies 7A and 7B

The prompt for *playfulness* was as follows:

Please rate the extent to which this text is playful. By playful, we mean to what extent the text was not meant to be taken literally and was in the spirit of fun.

Answer only with a number: 1 if not at all playful, 2 if slightly playful, 4 if somewhat playful, 5 if moderately playful, 6 if very playful, and 7 if extremely playful.

Here are some examples:

Text: a cheesy date thats almost as cheap as you are

Rating: 5.3

Text: a cheap date thats almost as cheesy as you are

Rating: 6.0

Text: college you was financially illiterate (and maybe regular illiterate too)

Rating: 5.0

Text: youre financially illiterate (and maybe regular illiterate too)

Rating: 4.8

[the focal tweet is piped in here]

Your rating:

The prompt for *provocation* was as follows:

Please rate the extent to which this text is provoking. By provoking we mean to what extent is the text about a sensitive topic -- that is, the topic of the text is something that might be painful or uncomfortable. OR to what extent is the text aggressive, demeaning or critical.

Answer only with a number: 1 if not at all provoking, 2 if slightly provoking, 4 if somewhat provoking, 5 if moderately provoking, 6 if very provoking, and 7 if extremely provoking.

Here are some examples:

Text: a cheesy date thats almost as cheap as you are  
 Rating: 4.2  
 Text: a cheap date thats almost as cheesy as you are  
 Rating: 3.1  
 Text: college you was financially illiterate (and maybe regular illiterate too)  
 Rating: 4.1  
 Text: youre financially illiterate (and maybe regular illiterate too)  
 Rating: 5.1  
 [the focal tweet is piped in here]  
 Your rating:

### Appendix I: Robustness Checks for Studies 7A and 7B

#### Appendix I1: Different Analysis on the LLM data

As a robustness check, we ran the analyses for studies 7A and 7B using the play and provocation scores separately, rather than combining them into relative provocation. Full regression results are presented in the tables below.

**TABLE A4**

	REGRESSION RESULTS ( <i>b</i> , <i>SE</i> , <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> ) FOR STUDY 7A and 7B					
	<i>Favorites</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Replies</i>	
	7A	7B	7A	7B	7A	7B
Funniness	-.075 (.130)	.001 (.153)	-.081 (.166)	.003 (.130)	-.166 (.117)	.180 (.148)
Teasing	.398* (.170)	.254 (.278)	.427 <sup>ψ</sup> (.218)	.240 (.235)	.313* (.154)	.270 (.268)
Provocation	-.316*** (.087)	-1.91** (.638)	-.321** (.111)	-1.74** (.540)	-.237** (.078)	-1.62* (.617)
Playfulness	.162** (.055)	.035 (.120)	.205** (.071)	.004 (.102)	.085 <sup>ψ</sup> (.050)	.033 (.116)
Brand	N/A	Inc	N/A	Inc	N/A	Inc
Observations	227	45	227	45	227	45
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> [95%CI] <sup>a</sup>	.084 [.017, .151]	.12 [.04, .36]	.066 [.001, .127]	.12 [.04, .36]	.053 [-.002, .108]	.11 [.04, .36]

NOTE. <sup>ψ</sup> *p*<.10, \**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01, \*\*\**p*<.001; <sup>a</sup> Marginal *R*<sup>2</sup> are reported for study 7b.

#### Appendix I2: Alternate Analysis for Study 7B

In this section, we run a robustness check on the results from Study 7B, using a different text analysis technique: bag-of-words. The procedure of collecting the tweets and getting

MTurkers to rate them on funniness and teasing remains the same. However, the method of classifying the tweets as pro- vs. antisocial differs, as described below.

## Methods

In this sample, we were interested in categorizing tweets as “prosocial teases”, “antisocial teases” or “non-teases.” To do so, we used natural language processing to quantify the emotionality of the tweets. To pre-process the data, we use the `textclean`, `tidytext`, and `corpus` packages in R to replace contractions (e.g., “I’m” becomes “I am”), stem words, and remove stop-words. Then, we used the NRC dictionary (Mohammad & Turney, 2010) to analyze the emotions of the tweets. Specifically, the NRC dictionary detects the presence of words indicating variety of discrete emotions, including anger and disgust.

We classified tweets as teases if they were rated above the median on teasing ( $n = 542$ ). The remaining tweets ( $n = 543$ ) were classified as non-teases. From the set of teases, we used the NRC dictionary to identify tweets with at least one word indicating anger or disgust, these were classified as antisocial teases ( $n = 69$ ). The remainder of the teases were classified as prosocial ( $n = 473$ ). Note that the relatively large proportion of prosocial (compared to antisocial) teases likely reflects an inherent knowledge by brands that they should avoid insulting or overly aggressive tweets. Additionally, we are only able to scrape tweets that exist and more importantly, persist on Twitter. As a result, even though brands likely deploy antisocial teases, we argue that they are also likely to delete these posts if and when consumers identify them to be antisocial/inappropriate.

## Results

We predicted log-transformed Twitter users’ engagement (replies, retweets, likes) from dummy variables reflecting prosocial and antisocial teasing (with non-teasing as the referent) Brand is included as a random factor in all models. Tweet funniness is controlled for in all models.

All results are presented in Table A5. Prosocial teasing was a positive predictor of favorites,  $b = .19, p = .042$ , and replies,  $b = .14, p = .063$ , although the coefficient predicting replies did not reach conventional levels of significance. Conversely, antisocial teasing tweets did not outperform funny tweets on any of the measured metrics.

**TABLE A5**

REGRESSION RESULTS ( $b, SE, R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 7B			
	<i>Favorites</i>	<i>Retweets</i>	<i>Replies</i>
Antisocial Teasing	.08 (.17)	.05 (.15)	.00 (.14)
Prosocial Teasing	.19* (.09)	.09 (.08)	.14 <sup>ψ</sup> (.07)
Funniness	.13** (.04)	.06 (.04)	.14*** (.03)
Brand	Included	Included	Included
Observations	1085	1085	1085
Marginal $R^2$ [95%CI]	.012 [.004, .031]	.004 [.000, .015]	.016 [.007, .037]

---

NOTE.  $\psi p = .06$ ,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$

## **Appendix J (Study A1): Familiarity with the Brand Does Not Moderate the Effect**

The purpose of this study is to test whether familiarity with the advertising brand moderates the effect of teasing on anthropomorphism or self-brand connection. In interpersonal relationships, teasing occurs more frequently (Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001) and is received more positively (Gorman & Jordan, 2015) when the target has a close relationship with the teaser. Gorman & Jordan (2015) suggest that targets are more apt to interpret teases as prosocial (vs. antisocial) when they have an established positive relationship with the teaser. We hypothesized (but ultimately did not find) that the same would be true for brands.

### **Methods**

Participants ( $N = 1155$  complete responses) were recruited from Prolific. Participants were excluded if they failed an attention check asking them to select a particular answer ( $n = 51$ ) or if they did not accurately describe one question they answered in the survey in an open-ended response box ( $n = 40$ ). The final sample was 1064 participants (468 male, 565 female, 26 non-binary, 5 self-described;  $M_{age} = 36.37$ ,  $SD = 13.59$ ; 698 White, 77 Hispanic, 116 Black, 90 Asian, 3 Native American, 74 multi-racial, 6 other).

Participants viewed an advertisement for a pizza restaurant's Valentine's day special under a 2(restaurant: familiar, unfamiliar) x 2 (ad copy: funny, prosocial teasing) design. To manipulate familiarity, participants saw an ad from Pizza Hut or a fictional brand "Slices." To reinforce the familiarity manipulation, participants were introduced to the familiar brand ("*You will be answering questions about Pizza Hut, a familiar pizza chain with restaurants all over the world*") or unfamiliar brand ("*You will be answering questions about Slices, a relatively new pizza chain you are unfamiliar with*"). Next, participants saw ads using the same copy as manuscript studies 5A and 5B (i.e., funny: "*Make your plans now for a cheap and cheesy Valentine's date*"; prosocial teasing: "*A cheap date that's almost as cheesy as you are*").

Next, participants completed the same measures of anthropomorphism and self-brand connection used in other studies. We did not include a manipulation check of funniness or teasing, as this had already been completed in manuscript Study 5A. We did include a manipulation check of familiarity (i.e., "Before taking this survey, how familiar were you with [Pizza Hut/Slices]" on a scale from 1(*not familiar at all*) to 7(*very familiar*)). Then, participants completed our attention check measure and were asked to describe one question they answered in the survey (in an open-ended response box). Finally, they reported demographic information and were debriefed regarding the fact that Slices is a fictional brand.

### **Results**

**Familiarity.** Participants reported being far more familiar with Pizza Hut ( $M = 6.27$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) than Slices ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = .85$ ),  $F(1,1060) = 6924.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .87$ . We also observed an unexpected effect of ad such that people reported being more familiar with the advertised brand after seeing the funny ad ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 2.73$ ) than the teasing ad ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 2.71$ ),  $F(1,1060) = 12.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ . As expected,

there was no interaction between advertisement and brand on familiarity,  $F(1,1060) = .07$ ,  $p = .80$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ .

**Anthropomorphism.** As expected, consumers reported higher anthropomorphism when the brand teased ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) vs. was merely funny ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ),  $F(1,1060) = 10.10$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ . Neither the effect of familiarity,  $F(1,1060) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ , nor the interaction,  $F(1,1060) = .002$ ,  $p = .97$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ , was significant.

**Self-Brand Connection.** Consumers reported higher self-brand connection to the advertising brand following a teasing ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) vs. funny ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) advertisement,  $F(1,1060) = 4.12$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ . Neither the effect of familiar brand,  $F(1,1060) = .72$ ,  $p = .40$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .001$ , nor the interaction,  $F(1,1060) = .14$ ,  $p = .70$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ , was significant. Anthropomorphism mediated the effect of ad type on self-brand connection,  $b[95\%CI] = .17[.06, .27]$ . Neither entering familiarity as a moderator on the a-path,  $IMM[95\%CI] = .00[-.21, .20]$ , nor b-path,  $IMM[95\%CI] = .01[-.02, .04]$ , provides evidence for a pattern of moderation.

## Appendix K: Robustness of Study Results to using a 1-item measure of teasing

### Study 1A

No changes in direction or significance of variables

**TABLE A6**

REGRESSION RESULTS ( $\beta$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 1A USING JUST THE ONE-ITEM TEASING MEASURE

	<i>Replies</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Favorites</i>	
One-item Teasing	<b>0.27***</b> (0.05)	<b>0.35***</b> (0.09)	<b>0.44***</b> (0.08)	<b>0.45***</b> (0.13)	<b>0.57***</b> (0.06)	<b>0.54***</b> (0.12)
Funniness		-0.09 (0.10)		0.00 (0.15)		0.04 (0.13)
Followers		0.14** (0.00)		0.11* (0.00)		0.13** (0.00)
Observations	311	311	311	311	311	311
$R^2$	0.07***	0.09***	0.19***	0.21***	0.32***	0.33***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

### Study 1B

No changes in direction or significance of the primary results. The effect of followers becomes significant in the retweets analysis

**TABLE A7**

REGRESSION RESULTS ( $\beta$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 1B USING JUST THE ONE-ITEM TEASING MEASURE

	<i>Replies</i>		<i>Retweets</i>		<i>Favorites</i>	
	<b>0.29***</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.40***</b>	<b>0.32**</b>	<b>0.52***</b>	<b>0.31**</b>

One-item Teasing	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.11)
Funniness		.11		.09		0.27*
		(0.10)		(0.07)		(0.11)
Followers		0.04		0.15*		0.15*
		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Observations	170	170	170	170	170	170
$R^2$	0.08***	0.09**	0.16***	0.16***	0.27***	0.33***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Study 2

Direction of the results is consistent, but many effects become marginal ( $p < .08$ ).

**TABLE A8**  
REGRESSION RESULTS ( $\beta$ ,  $SE$ ,  $R^2$ ) FOR STUDY 2

Predictor	$b(SE)$							
	Likes		Shares		Plays		Comments	
Funny	—	-.07	—	.11	—	.00	—	-.04
	—	(.01)	—	(.11)	—	(.08)	—	(.09)
One-item Tease	.11 <sup>o</sup>	.14 <sup>o</sup>	.15*	.11	.11*	.11 <sup>o</sup>	-.02	.00
	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)
Observations	232	232	232	232	232	232	232	232
$R^2$	.01 <sup>o</sup>	.02	.02*	.02 <sup>o</sup>	.02*	.02	.00	.00

NOTE. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>o</sup>  $p < .08$

## Study 3

Using the one-item measure of teasing, we observed an overall effect of advertisement on ratings of teasing,  $F(2, 186) = 29.97, p < .001$ . The teasing ad was rated significantly higher on teasing ( $M = 4.22, SD = 1.84$ ) than either the funny ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.69$ ;  $t(186) = 2.33, p = .05$ ) or control ad ( $M = 2.00, SD = 1.41$ ;  $t(186) = 7.56, p < .001$ ). The funny ad was also rated as more teasing than the control ad,  $t(186) = 5.19, p < .001$ .

## Study 4

**TABLE A9**REGRESSION RESULTS (*b*, *SE*, *R*<sup>2</sup>) FOR STUDY 4 USING A 1-ITEM TEASING MEASURE

	<i>Anthropomorphism</i>		<i>Self-Brand Connection</i>	
Teasing	<b>0.23***</b>	<b>0.11**</b>	<b>0.24***</b>	<b>0.11***</b>
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Funniness		0.41***		0.46***
		(0.04)		(0.03)
Ad as a Random Factor	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	819	819	819	819
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05***	0.21***	0.08***	0.32***

NOTE. Standard errors in parentheses. *R*<sup>2</sup> value is marginal *R*<sup>2</sup> for regressions with ad as a random factor

\*\*\* *p*<0.001, \*\* *p*<0.01, \* *p*<0.05

### Study 5

We observed a significant effect on ratings of teasing,  $F(2, 1389) = 123, p < .001$ . Follow-up contrast tests revealed that both the prosocial tease ( $M = 4.57, SD = 1.61; t(1389) = 10.16, p < .001$ ) and antisocial tease ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.56; t(1389) = 15.42, p < .001$ ) were perceived as more teasing than the funny advertisement ( $M = 3.46, SD = 1.77$ ). The antisocial tease was also rated as more teasing than the prosocial tease,  $t(1389) = 5.19, p < .001$ .

### Study 7A

When using the one-item measure of teasing to classify tweets, we have one additional tweet that counts as a tease for the sample ( $N = 227$ ). In regressions controlling for followers, funniness, and the one-item teasing measure (vs. the two-item) relative provocation remains a significant predictor of log-transformed likes,  $b = -.32, SE = .08, p < .001$ , retweets,  $b = -.36, SE = .10, p < .001$ , and replies,  $b = -.21, SE = .07, p = .003$

### Study 7B

When using the one-item measure of teasing to classify tweets, we have 34 additional tweets that count as a tease for the sample ( $N = 79$ ). In regressions controlling for



funny, and the one-item teasing measure (vs. the two-item) relative provocation is a marginal predictor of log-transformed likes,  $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .10$ , retweets,  $b = -.16$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .09$ , and replies  $b = -.17$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .08$