

## THE IMPACT OF CUTENESS PERCEPTION ON BRAND RESONANCE: TAKING LIPSTICK PRODUCTS AS AN EXAMPLE

DANDAN CHEN AND TAO WEN\*

School of Economics and Management  
Dalian University

No. 10, Xuefu Street, Jinzhou New District, Dalian 116622, P. R. China  
chendandan\_abc@163.com; \*Corresponding author: wentao@dlu.edu.cn

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**ABSTRACT.** *Brand resonance is an important antecedent of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is of great significance to study the influencing factors of brand resonance. In the Internet era, cuteness perception can help brands establish a close relationship with consumers and achieve brand resonance. Therefore, this study selects cuteness perception as the antecedent variable, attempts to construct the research model of the impact of cuteness perception on brand resonance, and collects sample data by questionnaire survey to explore the impact mechanism of cuteness perception on brand resonance. Finally, this study finds that cuteness perception has significant positive impacts on four dimensions of brand resonance (behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement). Among these, cuteness perception has the most impact on attitudinal attachment.*

**Keywords:** Cuteness perception, Brand resonance, Lipstick products, Attitudinal attachment

1. **Introduction.** Due to the COVID-19, the downward pressure on the global economy has intensified, many enterprises have encountered a survival crisis, and consumers have become more rational and picky. To retain customers, not only should the daily necessities of customers be satisfied, but also the emotional satisfaction must be obtained. Existing research shows that cuteness perception has the effects on eliciting pleasant emotions resulting in feelings of entertainment [1], increasing the scores of attachment towards the product [2] and improving customer loyalty [3,4]. Therefore, cute elements enjoy great popularity in marketing practices.

The ultimate goal of meeting customers' emotional needs is to achieve brand resonance between brands and customers, which is one of the most important parts in enterprise marketing activities. Although an important role is played by brand resonance in marketing practices, few enterprises have been able to earn high resonance scores with customers. Thus, it is of great practical significance to find out how cuteness perception in the lipstick product marketing affects customers' brand resonance.

Based on the above, this study, taking lipstick users as the research object, reviews the related literature of cuteness perception and brand resonance, puts forward research hypotheses and theoretical model according to the literature about the impact of cuteness perception on brand resonance, obtains sample data by questionnaire survey, and uses the data to verify how cuteness perception affects brand resonance. Compared with other studies, this study finds the impact mechanism of cuteness perception on brand resonance, which can be enlightened for the development of the cosmetic industry.

## 2. Literature Review.

**2.1. Literature review on cuteness perception.** Cuteness (cuteness perception), which was proposed by Austrian zoologist Konrad Lorenz in 1943, was defined as visual perception to the physical or behavioral characteristics, which had ones of childishness [5]. With the passage of time, cuteness perception has gradually gotten the attention of researchers. Some researchers thought that cuteness exists independently and will not be influenced by people. For instance, cuteness is defined by Lin et al. as the extent to which the observation object is seen as innocent and attractive in an endearing way [6]. Other researchers thought of cuteness as a kind of feelings and emotions, which are attached to human. The representative's view was that cuteness includes the feelings and emotions that are caused by experiencing something that is charming, cheerful, happy, funny, or something that is very sweet, innocent, or pure, which can stimulate a feeling of adoration, sympathy, or the care response [7]. In recent years, more and more researchers have studied the impact of cuteness perception on consumer behavior, such as customer tolerance of service failure [8], consumer acceptance [9] and word-of-mouth intention [10].

**2.2. Literature review on brand resonance.** Different views were held by different researchers on the notion of brand resonance depending on where the resonance occurs. Some researchers believed that brand resonance occurs between consumers and brands. For example, Keller believed that brand resonance is the last step to establish a strong brand, which refers to the nature of the relationship customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel they are 'in sync' with the brand [11]. In addition, Chokpitakkul and Anantachart pointed out that brand resonance is the psychological and behavioral loyalty that customers have with a brand [12]. Some researchers considered that brand resonance reflects the relationship between consumers and brand owners. The representative views are as follows: Brand resonance refers to a kind of heart-to-heart communication between brand owners and customers with the brand as the medium [13]. Some researchers also pointed out that brand resonance is not only the communication, but the common reaction between different hearts produced between brand owners and brand consumers [14]. Another view is that although brand resonance refers to the close psychological connection between consumers and brands, it does not only appear between consumers and brands/brand owners, but also between consumers. Through the emotional interaction with the brands, consumers not only synchronize with the brands, but also have emotional resonance between brand consumers and brand owners/consumers [15].

**3. Research Hypotheses and Model Construction.** As for the impact of cuteness perception on brand resonance, this study explores its impact mechanism by studying the impact of cuteness perception on the related dimensions of brand resonance. Brand resonance was divided by Keller into four dimensions, which are behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement [11].

### 3.1. Research hypotheses.

**3.1.1. *The impact of cuteness perception on behavioral loyalty.*** Behavioral loyalty refers to the fact that consumers continuously purchase products of a certain brand [16]. For more than half a century, different opinions were held on the causes of behavioral loyalty. In fact, from the perspective of psychology, consumers' purchase behavior is not only to meet their subconscious instinctive desire, release psychological pressure and obtain some psychological compensation, but also to try to be consistent with their self-concept for a long time.

With the accelerating pace of life, people are subject to social pressure and yearn for freedom, but they are unable to do so. In contrast, children and animals do not need to follow the social norms and are relatively free, which often makes people involuntarily

miss and look forward to the lifestyle of children or animals [17]. Therefore, the child or animal elements, including cute traits, can help people release psychological pressure and bring comfort to people [17,18]. In addition, Gerbasi et al. also confirmed that consumers will find perceived similarities to themselves in cute things and cause behavior assimilation [17]. These are undoubtedly consistent with the motivation of consumers' purchase behavior. Based on the above analysis, this study believes that cuteness perception (CP) positively affects behavioral loyalty (BL). The following hypothesis is developed:

H1. CP has a significant positive impact on BL.

3.1.2. *The impact of cuteness perception on attitudinal attachment.* Attitudinal attachment refers to consumers' emotional attitude, recognition and attachment towards a certain brand [19]. Many papers mentioned that cuteness induces motivation for caretaking in adults, so as to change their attitudes towards products or brands. For instance, Karkun et al. also pointed out that cuteness is helpful to increase the market acceptance of the product, because baby-like personality traits like cheerful, cute, honest, and modest, influence positive emotions [2]. The conclusion was drawn by some researchers that the more obvious the cute characteristics are, the easier it is to get a positive response from consumers [20]. Moreover, from the perspective of sociology, cuteness not only symbolizes youthfulness and vitality [21], but also innocence, ignorance and vulnerability [22,23], which can stimulate others' caretaking behavior [24]. For example, Wang mentioned that when a brand crisis occurred, the technique "acting cute" was proved to be effective in diminishing the negative effect of a brand crisis and winning public sympathy and support [25]. Based on the above analysis, this study considers that cuteness perception (CP) positively affects attitudinal attachment (AA). The following hypothesis is developed:

H2. CP has a significant positive impact on AA.

3.1.3. *The impact of cuteness perception on sense of community.* Cuteness perception plays an important role in the interaction between consumers and brands. Some researchers indicated that a baby-faced spokesman is perceived as more honest than the mature-faced, in other words, the content stated by a cute spokesman is more reliable [26]. Another study further demonstrated that the reliability of the content stated by the spokesman is conducive to creating a good community atmosphere and improving consumers' sense of community [27]. Based on the above analysis, this study considers that cuteness perception (CP) positively affects sense of community (SC). The following hypothesis is developed:

H3. CP has a significant positive impact on SC.

3.1.4. *The impact of cuteness perception on active engagement.* Active engagement means that customers are willing to invest personal resources on the brand – time, energy, money, etc. – beyond those resources expended during purchase or consumption of the brand [11]. Some researchers pointed out that cuteness can project a favourable social image to consumers that facilitates playfulness in social interaction and enhances brand engagement in self-concept [28]. In addition, cuteness is closely related to consumption and cute elements have been adopted to attract consumers of all genders and ages [29], which causes social engagement [30]. Finally, Bellfield et al. found that the cute stimulus dramatically increased the response rate to the survey [18,31]. Based on the above analysis, this study considers that cuteness perception (CP) positively affects active engagement (AE). The following hypothesis is developed:

H4. CP has a significant positive impact on AE.

3.2. **Model construction.** On the basis of the above research hypotheses, this study constructs a theoretical model of the impact of cuteness perception on brand resonance. This model is shown in Figure 1.

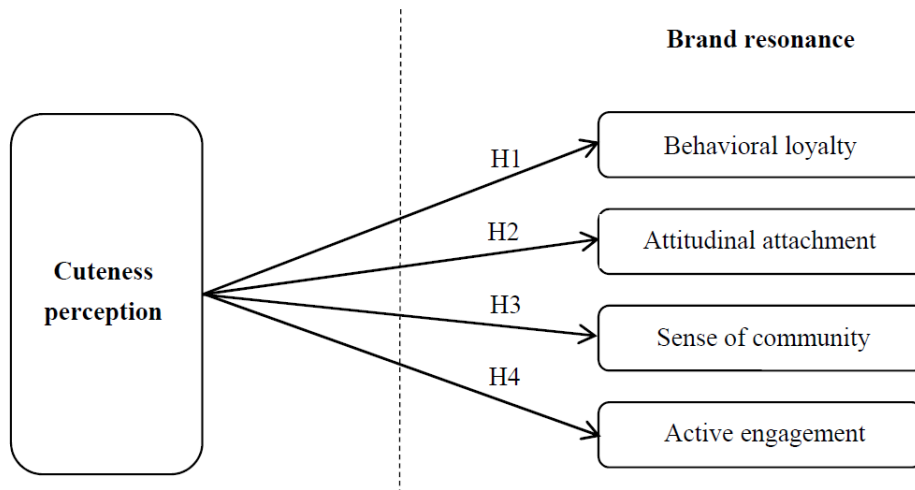


FIGURE 1. The theoretical model

#### 4. Research Design.

4.1. **Scale design.** Five variables are involved in this model (Figure 1), which are an independent variable (cuteness perception) and four dependent variables (four dimensions of brand resonance). Before the formal survey, the measurement scales of these variables were drawn up through literature review, and the questionnaire was adjusted and confirmed according to the situation of the cosmetics industry. The questionnaire mainly includes two parts. One part is the basic information of the respondents, such as age, gender, occupation, and monthly income. The other part, as demonstrated in Table 1, measures cuteness perception and the four dimensions of brand resonance.

TABLE 1. Measurement items of cuteness perception and brand resonance

Research variable	Items coding	Source
Cuteness perception (CP)	Q1. This lipstick brand is cute.	Nenkov and Scott [32]
	Q2. This lipstick brand is adorable.	
	Q3. This lipstick brand is endearing.	
Behavioral loyalty (BL)	Q4. I would be happy to buy the brand's new lipstick.	Zhao [33] Keller [11] Wang et al. [34]
	Q5. I will choose the brand first the next time.	
	Q6. I will recommend the lipstick brand to others.	
Attitudinal attachment (AA)	Q7. I love the lipstick brand.	
	Q8. I will describe my love for the lipstick brand to others.	
	Q9. The lipstick brand can bring me happiness that I expect.	
Sense of community (SC)	Q10. I will interact with other brand users or employees of the brand.	
	Q11. I think that I interact with the lipstick brand frequently.	
	Q12. This interaction between me and brand will occur online or offline.	
Active engagement (AE)	Q13. I will visit brand-related websites.	
	Q14. I am willing to take the time to pay attention to the activities related to the lipstick brand.	

4.2. **Questionnaire survey.** The questionnaires were distributed to users of lipstick products randomly online (Chinese mainland) and offline (Dalian in China). A total of 655 questionnaires were distributed, of which 500 questionnaires were valid. The descriptive statistical analysis results of the samples show females account for 89%, which indicates that females, at present, are still the main force in the consumption of lipstick products; 55% of the respondents aged 20 to 30 and 25% aged 31 to 40, which shows the young characteristics of lipstick users; the respondents involve all walks of life, including universities and private enterprises, accounting for 79%; most respondents' monthly income is less than CNY 4,000, with a rate of 85.2%.

5. **Data Analysis.**

5.1. **Reliability analysis.** Researchers usually use Cronbach's  $\alpha$  to verify the reliability of a measurement scale. If the value of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is greater than 0.7, the reliability will be considered as good. In addition, in the reliability analysis (Table 2), CITC (corrected item-total correlation) is usually used to measure the correlation between one item and others. When the CITC value is greater than 0.4, it means that there is high correlation [35]. Using the questionnaire data to analyze the reliability of the initial scale, all the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  are greater than 0.7 and the CITC values are greater than 0.4. According to the reliability standard proposed by Wu [35], the reliability of these scales is good.

TABLE 2. Reliability analysis results of research variables

Research variable	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Items coding	CITC (corrected item-total correlation)
CP	0.795	Q1	0.536
		Q2	0.717
		Q3	0.676
BL	0.898	Q4	0.759
		Q5	0.810
		Q6	0.827
AA	0.872	Q7	0.713
		Q8	0.787
		Q9	0.770
SC	0.881	Q10	0.744
		Q11	0.825
		Q12	0.740
AE	0.869	Q13	0.768
		Q14	0.768

5.2. **Exploratory factor analysis.** The analysis results in Table 3 show that the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value is 0.864 with a significance probability of 0.000. The cumulative variance explanation rate is 82.755%, and the factor loading values are between 0.797 and 0.875, which are all greater than the standard value of 0.5, and there is no cross-loading. Therefore, brand resonance should be divided into four dimensions: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement.

5.3. **Confirmatory factor analysis.** Each research variable includes several items. This study draws on the data processing method used by many researchers, which combines the items of each research variable into fewer sub-indicators according to the mean values. The revised sub-indicators are generally the two sub-indicators [36,37]. According to Table 4, it is clear that the mean values of all sub-indicators are between 3.08 and 3.73, indicating that the respondents tend to agree with sub-indicators. The values of standard deviation

TABLE 3. Exploratory factor analysis results of brand resonance

Research variable	Items coding	Factor loading			
		1	2	3	4
BL	Q4	<b>0.826</b>	0.133	0.229	0.203
	Q5	<b>0.866</b>	0.146	0.253	0.113
	Q6	<b>0.846</b>	0.216	0.238	0.194
AA	Q7	0.210	0.163	<b>0.797</b>	0.235
	Q8	0.253	0.195	<b>0.843</b>	0.147
	Q9	0.280	0.242	<b>0.805</b>	0.147
SC	Q10	0.149	<b>0.845</b>	0.230	0.088
	Q11	0.195	<b>0.875</b>	0.170	0.169
	Q12	0.125	<b>0.827</b>	0.155	0.244
AE	Q13	0.198	0.220	0.232	<b>0.858</b>
	Q14	0.215	0.206	0.192	<b>0.871</b>
Initial eigenvalues		5.625	1.456	1.015	1.008
% of extraction variance (82.755)		51.134	13.234	9.227	9.160
% of rotation variance		22.694	22.397	21.478	16.187
Number of items		3	3	3	2
Cronbach's $\alpha$		0.898	0.881	0.872	0.869
KMO		0.864 (Significance probability = 0.000)			

TABLE 4. Mean and standard deviation of sub-indicators

Research variable	Sub-indicator	Including items	Mean	Standard deviation
CP	CPa	Q1	3.56	1.045
	CPb	Q2, Q3	3.73	0.883
BL	BLa	Q4	3.64	0.969
	BLb	Q5, Q6	3.48	0.969
AA	AAa	Q7	3.55	1.009
	AAb	Q8, Q9	3.55	0.972
SC	SCa	Q10	3.30	1.142
	SCb	Q11, Q12	3.08	1.058
AE	AEd	Q13	3.35	1.113
	AEd	Q14	3.23	1.124

are between 0.883 and 1.142, which are higher than the standard value of 0.5. Therefore, the research variables are suitable for modeling analysis.

5.3.1. *The degree of fit between the data and the model.* Combining the analysis results in Figure 2 and Table 5, it can be seen that the factor loading values are between 0.73 and 0.93, which are greater than the standard values of 0.6. According to the fit index standard of Hair et al. [38] and Hu and Bentler [39], all fit indices meet the standard values, indicating that the data and the model fit well.

5.3.2. *Convergent validity analysis.* It is designed to measure the correlation between different sub-indicators which belong to the same variable. It is mainly tested by the two indicators: standardized factor loading and average variance extraction (AVE). According to the results of convergent validity analysis, the standardized factor loading values of the sub-indicators are all between 0.73 and 0.93 (Table 6), which are greater than the standard value of 0.6. The AVE's value of each research variable is between 0.603 and 0.820 (Table

6), which is greater than 0.5. It is obvious that the convergent validity of the research variables is good.

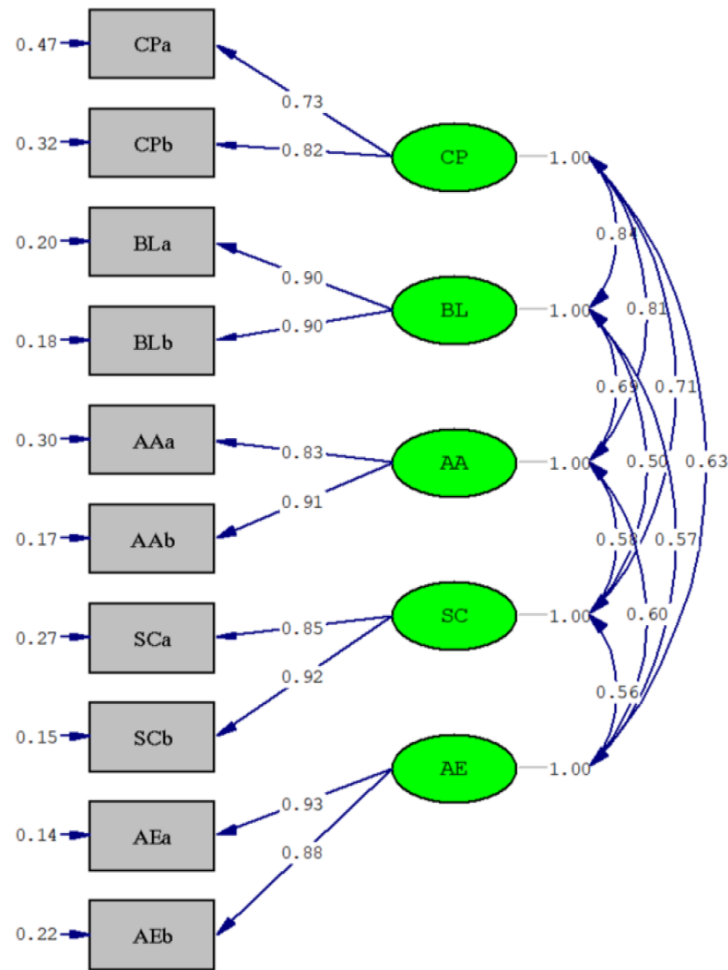


FIGURE 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results of research variables

TABLE 5. Model fit index of research variables' confirmatory factor analysis

Index	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	AGFI	IFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	SRMR	NNFI	RFI
Value	3.29	0.97	0.93	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.068	0.019	0.98	0.98
Standard	< 5	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	< 0.08	< 0.08	> 0.9	> 0.9

TABLE 6. Convergent validity analysis results

Research variable	Coding	Standardized factor loading	T-value	Composite reliability	AVE
CP	CPa	0.73	17.77	0.751	0.603
	CPb	0.82	20.70		
BL	BLa	0.90	24.46	0.895	0.810
	BLb	0.90	24.70		
AA	AAa	0.83	21.65	0.862	0.759
	AAb	0.91	24.48		
SC	SCa	0.85	21.75	0.879	0.785
	SCb	0.92	24.18		
AE	AEa	0.93	24.80	0.901	0.820
	AEb	0.88	23.12		

5.3.3. *Discriminant validity analysis.* It is designed to test the distinction between different research variables, which is judged by comparing the square root of AVE with the correlation coefficients between variables. In Table 7, the value on the diagonal is the square root of each AVE, and the others are the correlation coefficients. The square root of AVE of each research variable is greater than the correlation coefficients. Therefore, discriminant validity of the research variables is good.

TABLE 7. Discriminant validity analysis results

Research variable	CP	BL	AA	SC	AE
CP	0.777				
BL	0.655	0.900			
AA	0.633	0.576	0.871		
SC	0.554	0.423	0.484	0.886	
AE	0.479	0.475	0.497	0.469	0.906

5.4. **Hypothesis testing and modeling analysis.** In this step, LISREL 8.70 is used to analyze the structural equation model to test whether cuteness perception (CP) significantly affects the four dimensions of brand resonance, namely BL, AA, SC and AE.

From the analysis results in Figure 3 and Table 8, it can be seen that the fit indices all meet the reference standards, which indicate that the model is found to have a good degree of fit according to Hair et al. [38] and Hu and Bentler [39]. The following results are obtained that CP has a significant positive impact on BL; CP has a significant positive impact on AA; CP has a significant positive impact on SC; CP has a significant positive impact on AE. Therefore, the hypotheses of H1, H2, H3 and H4 are supported.

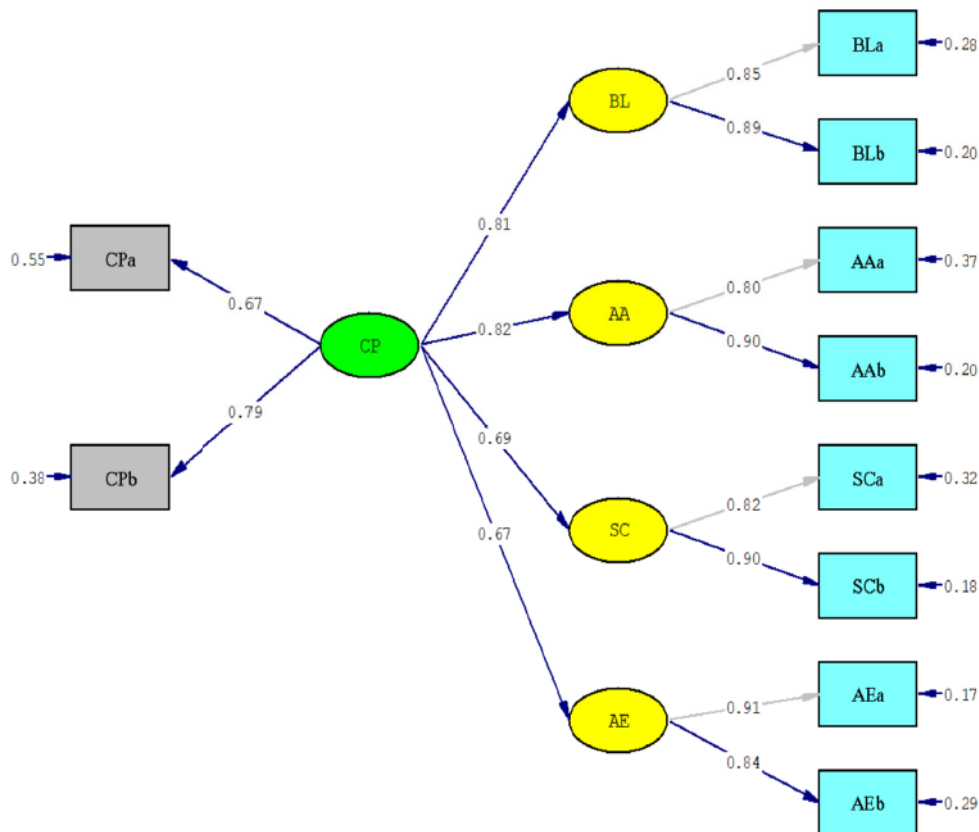


FIGURE 3. The results of structural equation modeling analysis



TABLE 8. Model fit index of structural equation modeling analysis

Index	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	AGFI	IFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	SRMR	NNFI	RFI
Value	2.48	0.97	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.054	0.031	0.99	0.98
Standard	< 5	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	< 0.08	< 0.08	> 0.9	> 0.9

6. Conclusions.

6.1. **Research finding.** According to related literature, this study constructs the research model of the impact of cuteness perception on brand resonance, and takes lipstick users as the research object to collect sample data to analyze and verify the impact mechanism of cuteness perception on brand resonance. Finally, this study finds that cuteness perception has significant positive impacts on four dimensions of brand resonance (behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement). In addition, this study finds that cuteness perception has the most impact on attitudinal attachment, followed by behavioral loyalty, sense of community and active engagement, because their standardized path coefficients are 0.82, 0.81, 0.69 and 0.67, respectively (Figure 3).

6.2. **Management implication.** When making purchase decisions, consumers will not only compare the efficacy and price of products, but also be affected by the relationship between them and brands. Brand resonance, as the essence of the ultimate relationship between customers and brands, and the degree to which customers feel in sync with the brands, can greatly help companies gain an advantage in the competition. Therefore, it is increasingly important to find the antecedents of brand resonance. The final results show that cuteness perception has significant positive impacts on four dimensions of brand resonance. In other words, cuteness perception can significantly increase the resonance scores between consumers and brands. Today, with the homogenization of lipstick products, cosmetics companies must fully recognize the importance of cuteness perception, flexibly use cuteness elements, enhance cuteness perception of lipstick brands, and then improve the resonance between consumers and brands.

6.3. **Research limitation.** This study takes lipstick products as an example. Thinking that lipstick products have their own characteristics, the final results that are obtained here may be limited to this specific industry (cosmetics industry). It requires further research to test whether these results apply to other industries.

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