

## Making the Brand Appealing: Advertising Strategies and Consumers' attitude towards UK Retail Bank Brands

### ABSTRACT

#### **Purpose**

The present state of the financial services industry suggests the need for banks to appeal to consumers' emotions with the aim of improving their reputation; this study explores how UK banks are using emotional appeals in their advertisements and how this shapes consumers' attitudes towards their brands.

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

Qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a two-stage study – Study 1 analysed the content of 1,274 UK bank advertisements to understand how the banks convey emotional appeals, while Study 2 elicited consumers' perceptions of these advertising appeals and how they influenced their attitudes through semi-structured interview with 33 UK retail bank customers in London and Luton.

#### **Findings**

UK banks are using emotional appeals in their marketing communication strategies. The qualitative findings highlight the bi-dimensional nature of feelings towards the advertisements and how this relates to the brand. There is a lacklustre attitude towards the brands; there was no sense of pride in associating with any bank, even with though there are possibilities of switching; and consumers feel there is no better offer elsewhere as all banks are the same.

#### **Practical implications**

Bank brands should present distinct values about their services to the target audience, endeavour to build relationships with existing customers and reward loyalty. Importantly, financial brands need to engage in and highlight charitable activities and any corporate social responsibility as this can help to improve consumers' attitudes as they often consider bank brands greedy and selfish.

#### **Originality/value**

Qualitative research methodology was adopted to better understand consumers' attitudes towards UK retail bank brands.

**Keywords:** UK, Banks, Brand communication, Emotional branding, Attitude to brand, Attitude to advertisement

## 1 Introduction

The unprecedented turbulence and uncertainty experienced in global economic and financial markets due to the credit crunch has had a damaging impact on consumer confidence (McKechnie, 2011). The global financial crisis of 2007–2008 has eroded the trust and credibility attached to UK banks as safe places to deposit savings (MarketLine, 2014). UK banks were badly affected by the crisis, resulting in major banks needing government bailouts. Heinonen (2014) notes that in the wake of the crisis, the banking sector have been transformed, with new regulations and competition for customers and profits. Unprecedented turmoil has been witnessed in the European banking market as it underwent a period of massive uncertainty and change during the financial crisis (Saiz and Pilorge, 2010; Jarvinen, 2014).

Banks' engagement in various activities has also put their customers at risk. Denning (2013) notes that bad profits were achieved through practices by the banks that were shady but not strictly illegal. These practices included the price fixing of the London Interbank Offered Rates, abuses in foreclosure, money laundering for drug dealers and terrorists, assisting tax evasion and misleading clients with worthless securities, all of which have further eroded consumers' trust in the banks. Barber (2014, p.243) notes: "These days, bankers are widely viewed as greedy, self-serving, amoral or actually dangerous. Estate agents, even journalists, are held in higher regard".

Moreover, Gritten (2011) notes that many of the bank customers feel let down by a system and by institutions that had promised, and often claimed to guarantee, to protect them and their assets, suggesting the need for financial services institutions to build constructive dialogue and long-term, meaningful relationships with their customers once again.

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3 The present state of financial services has suggested the need to appeal to consumers'  
4 emotions with the aim of improving their reputation. To this end, an appealing advertising  
5 strategy could work in this case: as Jones (1990) suggests, advertising aims to increase  
6 consumers' knowledge and change their perceptions of different products and services.  
7 Furthermore, the competition within the industry could suggest the need to adopt an  
8 emotionally appealing advertising strategy as emotions are known to play a role in building  
9 long-lasting brand preferences (Kenning and Plassmann, 2005). The current situation also  
10 highlights the need for advertisers to come up with a distinctive advertising strategy to set  
11 them apart from their competitors, as some studies have demonstrated that emotional  
12 differentiation in a competitive market can be achieved by using emotional advertising  
13 strategies (Hartmann *et al.*, 2005; Ghodeswar, 2008; Salander, 2010).

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28 The aim of this study is to expand on previous studies on consumers' attitudes towards the  
29 UK banking industry and enhance the understanding of the use of emotional appeals in  
30 financial services marketing communications. This is achieved by gathering and analysing  
31 qualitative and quantitative data in a two-stage study. Study 1 explored UK banks'  
32 advertisements to understand how they convey emotional appeals, while Study 2 elicited  
33 consumers' perceptions of these advertising appeals and how they influence their attitudes  
34 towards UK retail bank brands.

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45 The study is conceptualised theoretically based on the idea that a positive attitude towards an  
46 advertisement, achieved by embedding emotionally appealing features such as images and  
47 copy, will in turn lead to a positive attitude towards the brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981;  
48 Lutz *et al.*, 1983; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1983) and social judgement theory. The creative  
49 strategies in UK banks' print advertisements are explored through content analysis, while the  
50 anticipated positive attitude towards their brands is elicited through semi-structured  
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3 interviews, which allow the participants to report their attitudes towards UK bank brands  
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5 verbally.  
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8 Even though previous studies have explored attitudes towards bank brands shortly after the  
9 financial crisis (Bennett and Kottasz, 2012; Johnson and Peterson, 2014), we adopted a  
10 research methodology which seeks to understand this still unfolding phenomenon, as even  
11 after the crisis, the ripple effect is still being observed. Following a similar line of thought to  
12 Cooper (1999) and O’Cass (2004), we acknowledge that brands often meet consumers’  
13 rational, emotional, social and cultural needs, and these complexities cannot be measured  
14 simply, rather by adopting a more in-depth approach to gain a better understanding.  
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24 Spears and Singh (2004) acknowledge that even though there are bewildering arrays of  
25 choices in measuring attitude to brands, there are no standard, psychometrically validated  
26 scales, as the overwhelming majority of studies measuring this construct have used different  
27 sets of items. Batra and Ray (1986) used a four-item scale (useful/useless,  
28 important/unimportant, pleasant/unpleasant, and nice/awful), while MacKenzie, Lutz and  
29 Belch (1986) used a three-item, seven-point scale (favourable/unfavourable, good/bad, and  
30 wise/foolish). This difficulty in adopting a generally acceptable scale offers justification for a  
31 qualitative approach, engaging with the customers to gain a better understanding of this  
32 construct.  
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45 This study will provide an important theoretical contribution to the study of financial services  
46 brands, especially in the UK context, and managers will be able to consider appropriately the  
47 implications of their marketing strategies in reconnecting with their customers, enhancing  
48 their brand image and, most importantly, rebuilding consumer trust in their brands. The  
49 subsequent sections provide the theoretical background, research designs and philosophical  
50 stances for each of the studies, followed by a discussion which bridges the gap between both  
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3 studies and the conclusion, which highlights the implications, the limitations of the study and  
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5 suggestions for further research.  
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## 9 **2 Literature Review**

### 10 **2.1 Attitude towards UK retail bank brands**

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14 With the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, the trust and credibility attached to financial  
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16 services providers has been eroded. Consumers appear to not trust the banks. The big banks  
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18 engaged in various activities that put their customers at a higher risk. There were technical  
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20 issues that affected customers' access to their money, widespread charges of market  
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22 manipulation, and a loan price-fixing scandal. Consumers' perception of the bank brands in  
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24 the wake of these issues is questionable, and the individual's internal evaluation of the brand  
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26 is a measure of their attitude towards the brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981).  
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31 Evans (2012) mentions that there was a knock-on effect on the banks' reputations and  
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33 customers' diminishing trust in banks. Citing the *Edelman Global Trust Survey* of 2013,  
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35 Denning (2013) notes that despite years of intense regulatory effort, banking is still the least-  
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37 trusted sector in the whole global economy. Denning (2013) suggests that the banks need to  
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39 improve their reputation, for example, through public relations and marketing  
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41 communications, or else they risk losing their customers to other competitors, especially the  
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43 new entrant banks. Unlike the bigger brands, the new banks, for example, Metro, Virgin  
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45 Money, Tesco and Marks & Spencers, can build upon their existing corporate reputations; the  
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47 goodwill attached to their brands can attract consumers.  
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52 Moreover, with the ever increasing need to offer a unique product in a market where most of  
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54 the products are the same, the financial industry is becoming more competitive in competing  
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56 for consumers. Although the big four banks in the UK do have an edge, over the new entrants  
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3 and with the regulations, it is important for financial services providers to create awareness  
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5 about what sets them apart and reach out to prospective customers, providing the information  
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7 consumers need to make financial choices.  
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10 This has given rise to the need for banks to communicate messages about their products and  
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12 innovations, for instance, the possibility of switching between banks within seven working  
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14 days; the ability to send money without using the branch; online and mobile bank transfers;  
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16 and the various technological advancements available to make banking easier, such as mobile  
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18 applications on smartphones and subscribing to text messages to warn consumers when they  
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20 have reached the set limits of the account. Consumers will not find out about all of these  
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22 features unless they are advertised and presented in an appealing manner.  
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26 Furthermore, Clow *et al.* (2005) note that a consumer's intention to purchase must be driven  
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28 by a positive attitude towards the advertisement as well as the brand. They state that if  
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30 consumers cannot relate to the brand, they might not patronise it, even when the  
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32 advertisement gets their attention. The authors were able to identify the need for an  
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34 advertisement to appeal to viewers' emotions for it to be effective, describing it as an  
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36 affective creative message strategy whereby the advertisement can appeal directly to viewers'  
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38 emotions. They conclude that visuals can be used to create positive feelings towards the  
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40 advertisement and that copy can be used to create a positive attitude towards the brand.  
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## 45 2.2 Strategic execution of emotional appeal

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47 As stated earlier, it is anticipated that banks will need to improve their reputation through  
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49 public relations and marketing communications. Emotional appeals in advertising strategies  
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51 have been known to help in strengthening brands as they add another distinction to the brand  
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53 (Panda *et al.*, 2013), and with the need to improve brand reputations, this could be deemed  
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55 suitable for the UK retail bank brands. Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984, p.47) argue that  
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3 “emotional, subjective impressions of intangible aspects of the product” are emphasised in  
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5 emotionally appealing advertisements. Baines *et al.* (2008) suggest that they are based upon  
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7 consumers’ feelings and emotions. Emotional appeals presented in advertisements are  
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9 directed mainly to psychological aspects of consumers’ needs and the feelings associated  
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11 with the product (Bové and Arens, 2000). According to Franke *et al.* (1999), emotional  
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13 appeals attempt to stir up either negative or positive emotions, leading to purchase  
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15 motivation.  
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19 Heath *et al.* (2009, p.2) describe emotive content as “anything in advertising that is capable of  
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21 stimulating the feelings of the viewer” while acknowledging that the creative approach in the  
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23 design and development of marketing communication materials is crucial in arousing  
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25 emotions in individuals viewing it. Heath *et al.* (2006, 2009) discuss the benefits of  
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27 emotionally appealing advertisements in building brand relationships, especially the creative  
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29 choice of employing emotional content in advertisements, suggesting that they are more  
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31 successful than rationally appealing messages in generating brand favouritism. Brader (2006,  
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33 p.68) concludes that an emotional appeal is “any communication that is intended to elicit an  
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35 emotional response from some or all who receive it”.  
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40 Advertising appeals provide the basis for attracting the attention or interest of consumers  
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42 and/or influencing their feelings towards a product or service (Kinnear *et al.*, 1995). Appeals  
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44 are incorporated into advertisements in the form of text and images to attract viewers’  
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46 attention and provide information about the brand. Mitchell (1986) observes that  
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48 advertisements containing visual elements are designed to prompt an emotional feeling.  
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50 Visual elements presented in the form of images and text in an advertisement can affect  
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52 attitudes towards brands, as individuals form their perceptions of the brands based on the  
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54 visual information that has been presented (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Mitchell, 1986).  
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3 Clow *et al.* (2005) note that choosing an image that is memorable and that matches the  
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5 written copy of the advertisement can lead to a positive attitude towards the advertisement,  
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7 which in turn directs attention to the brand and increases intention to purchase. Kisielius  
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9 (1982) states that the addition of an image to an advertisement could create either a positive  
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11 or a negative brand attitude, depending on the message transmitted by the image. Moreover,  
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13 Adir *et al.* (2012) note that images attract consumers to read through an advertisement; they  
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15 suggest that an emotional image requires simple copy and vice versa. This is consistent with  
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17 the study by Unnava and Burnkrant (1991), which demonstrates that advertisements with text  
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19 and images to demonstrate a product's attributes are more effective than those using just  
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21 images.  
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26 The textual component of an advertisement, for example, headlines, taglines and copy, can  
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28 also be used to encourage a positive attitude towards the brand. Wilmshurst and Mackay  
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30 (2010) and Decrop (2007) suggest that such text has to be clear, uncomplicated, direct,  
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32 appropriately expressed and relevant to the target audience, and must be connected with the  
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34 other components of the advertisement, while Bovée and Arens (2000) conclude that the  
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36 verbal components of an advertisement close the deal. Decrop (2007) highlights that the  
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38 textual components of an advertisement must provide customers with information regarding  
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40 the advertised product or brand, emphasising its benefits and creating an intention to buy.  
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45 The ability to hold together these seemingly inconsistent components of a print  
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47 advertisement, making a new function, is considered creativity (O'Guinn *et al.*, 2006). Yu  
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49 (2007) describes creativity in print advertisements as the combination of visuals and textual  
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51 headings in a well laid-out manner which affects how it will be perceived and read by the  
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53 target audience. Decrop (2007) found that images and text in advertisements are the  
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55 prevailing elements; this was corroborated by Yu (2007), who argues that visuals and  
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3 headlines are the most important components in print advertisements and that they interact in  
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5 different ways to present creative messages about a brand.  
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### 8 2.3 Attitude towards brand and advertisement construct 9

10 The theoretical framework for this research highlights the brands' efforts in appealing to  
11 consumers through their advertisements; this is considered in the context of the attitude  
12 advertisement construct, highlighting the possibilities of a significant correlation between  
13 favourable attitudes towards advertising and a favourable attitude towards the brand. This  
14 construct was first explored by Lutz *et al.* (1983), and it has been used in a considerable  
15 number of empirical studies (e.g. Batra and Ray, 1986; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1986; MacKenzie  
16 and Lutz, 1989) to understand consumer behaviour with regard to advertisements.  
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27 Attitude towards advertisements is defined as a "predisposition to respond in a favourable or  
28 unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure  
29 occasion" (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989, p.49). This correlates with Kotler's (2000) description  
30 of attitude as a favourable or unfavourable assessment, opinion, emotional feelings, and  
31 action towards an idea, in this case financial services brands.  
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39 Spears and Singh (2004, p.55) conceptualise attitude towards the brand as "a relatively  
40 enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes  
41 behaviour". The fact that customers have in one way or another had an encounter with the  
42 bank brands will definitely influence their attitude, as there is "imputation of some degree of  
43 goodness or badness" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p.3).  
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51 In achieving this attitude, the creative design of the advertisement is considered paramount.  
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53 Moving on from previous studies on the mechanical and executional aspects of the  
54 advertisements which enhances attitudes towards advertisements (Batra and Ray, 1986; Belch  
55 and Belch, 2015), In line with Mogaji (2016), we considered emotional appeals embedded in  
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3 the advertisements as a creative choice to arouse a positive attitude towards the  
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8 Understanding these embedded emotional appeals is also considered within the social  
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10 judgement theory context. This theory was developed by Muzafer and Hovland (1961) to  
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12 understand how individuals weigh up options based on their initial attitude; it suggests that an  
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14 individual exposed to advertisements views them in the light of what they already know or  
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16 feel and a subjective standard is developed when making judgements about the embedded  
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18 meaning (Solomon *et al.*, 2006).  
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22 A crucial aspect of the theory is the idea that there are differences in what individuals  
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24 considered acceptable or unacceptable and this forms the “latitudes of acceptance and  
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26 rejection around an attitude standard. Ideas that fall within a latitude will be favourably  
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28 received, while those falling outside this zone will not” (Solomon *et al.*, 2006, p.176). With  
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30 regard to UK retail bank brands, which is the focus of this study, we anticipate exploring the  
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32 attitude towards bank advertisements, if they have been favourably received or not and how  
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34 they enhance attitude towards the brand.  
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38 As Mogaji *et al.* (2016) note, UK banks are now making efforts to rebuild their reputation by  
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40 creating emotionally appealing advertisements, incorporating values that customers can relate  
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42 to and, in turn, will affect their perceptions about these brands. It is possible that creating a  
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44 positive attitude towards the industry is considered paramount following the global financial  
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46 crisis, as various media reports have suggested that the British public’s evaluation of the  
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48 calibre of the banking industry has declined, with both the integrity and the competence of  
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50 the banking industry being questioned (Wray, 2008; Crowley, 2010).  
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54 Advertising appeals have been found to affect both attention to the advertisement and attitude  
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56 towards the brand, which can be either positive or negative (Kinnear *et al.*, 1995). This study  
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3 is approached from two perspectives, firstly, from the brand point of view – the emotional  
4 appeals they are sending out through their advertisements to enhance a positive attitude – and  
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7 secondly from the customer perspective – to understand how these emotional appeals  
8 influence their attitudes towards the advertisements and also towards bank brands. It is  
9 possible that if they like the advertisement as it is emotionally appealing, this favourable  
10 attitude can be transferred to the bank brands.  
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17 Holbrook (1987) notes that consumers are more likely to respond to appeals that they  
18 perceive to be relevant and important to them, as these appeals are influenced by the values  
19 that are prevalent in their society. The UK retail bank brands' effort in appealing to  
20 consumers through their advertisements and how it enhances the attitude towards their brand,  
21 if at all, is the focus of this study. Though Shimp (1993, p.11) notes that advertisers aim to  
22 appeal to the “customer’s functional, symbolic and experiential needs through effective  
23 communications”, the individual preferences in decoding the emotional appeals presented in  
24 the advertisements cannot be ignored as this inadvertently influences their attitude towards  
25 the brands.  
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### 39 **3 Research Questions**

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41 To achieve the aims of this study, the following research questions are considered in the two  
42 studies, conducting content analysis in Study 1 to explore the emotional appeals in the  
43 advertisements and using semi-structured interviews in Study 2 to understand how they  
44 influence attitudes towards the brand:  
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51 *RQ 1: How are UK banks presenting emotional appeals in their advertisements?*

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54 *RQ 2: How are these presented emotional appeals influencing consumers' attitudes towards*  
55 *the brand?*  
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## 4 Study 1: Content analysis

### 4.1 Research design and methods

Content analysis is arguably one of the most suitable methods for analysing advertisements used by various other researchers (Belch and Belch, 2013; Mogaji, 2015). Krippendorff (1980) describes it as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from the data regarding their contexts.

Emotionally appealing advertisements were determined based on the visuals and the textual content of the advertisements. For example, the portrayal of a daughter relaxing in the loving arms of her father was classified as 'affiliation', 'family' and 'love'. The textual presentation of advertising messages was in the main headline and copy of the advertisement. The headline of the advertisement is the main and prominent text of the advertisement; in most cases, it is bold to grab the attention of the reader and it can also relate to the images used.

The ontological stance surrounding the content analysis is that there is one reality, it is out there, and it can be discovered with the scientific process. For the purpose of this study, that means the appeals used by banks exist and are independent of any social actor as they can be identified based on the coding framework that has been developed. As researchers, findings from the content analysis are beyond our reach and the data cannot be controlled. On this note, it was safe to adopt an objectivist ontological position and base this research within the positivist paradigm.

The scientific process of the content analysis, using the developed coding framework, suggested that a positivist philosophical stance could be adopted for this research. It is expected that coders anywhere in the country can identify the banks, the kind of financial products and the advertisement sizes, as indicated in the coding framework. The presence of coders selecting the advertising appeals they could identify from the advertisements suggests

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3 that there are differences between humans as social actors, as suggested by Saunders *et al.*  
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5 (2015).  
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8 In developing an applicable set of appeals for this study, four lists of advertising appeals were  
9 identified and considered for a comprehensive list of appeals for the content analysis. The list  
10 includes Pollay's (1983) emotional advertising appeals, Moriarty's (1991) emotional appeal  
11 list, specifically, as it contains negative emotional appeals, Fowles's (1994) 15 advertising  
12 appeals and Hetsroni's (2000) list. This led to an applicable typology of 15 appeals for the  
13 present study, which is presented in Appendix 1.  
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#### 22 4.1.1 Sampling 23

24 All UK bank advertisements bigger than a quarter of a page obtained from nine national  
25 newspapers in the UK collected between April 2013 and March 2014 were analysed. The  
26 criteria used to select the newspapers were category, popularity (circulation figures) and  
27 readership demographics (range and variety of the audience). The newspapers were divided  
28 into the frequently used categories of 'quality', 'mid-market' and 'popular' papers on the  
29 basis of their readership profile, style of presentation, and level of reporting and commentary.  
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38 The final newspaper sample for this content analysis includes three newspapers from each of  
39 these three frequently used categories – 'quality' newspapers (*Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*  
40 and *Times*), 'mid-market' newspapers (*Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Metro*) and  
41 'tabloid/popular' newspapers (*Sun*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Star*) (Mogaji, 2015). The  
42 readership characteristics of the selected newspapers show considerable differences in the  
43 readership profiles in terms of their age range as well as socioeconomic class differences.  
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52 Repeated instances of the advertisements in the same size, and in the same newspapers, were  
53 excluded, and a sample of 1,274 print advertisements was selected for the analysis.  
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#### 4.1.2 Coding

To determine the emotional appeals presented in the banks' advertisements in the collected sample, an analysis of the visual (images, colours and graphics) and verbal (headlines and copy) elements of advertising messages needed to be performed. In the first place, advertising messages were considered to be emotionally appealing if they contained any of the listed 15 appeals. Emotionally appealing advertisements were determined based on the appeals incorporated into the advertisements through the visuals and the textual content of the advertisements.

Other creative features of the emotionally appealing advertisements, such as number of words, colours and images used in the advertisements, were also considered during the analysis. Text length in the advertisements was coded as either '50 words or less' or 'more than 50 words', as Starch (1966) found that advertisements with 50 words or less were more than twice as likely to be read than those with more than 50 words. Colours were coded as 'full colours', 'two colours' and 'black and white'. Images were coded as cartoon, celebrities, cats and/or dogs, customers and colleagues. Furthermore, the banks and the products (high and low involvement financial products) were included in the coding framework.

A web application for the content analysis was developed to help in the recording of the content analysis of the advertisements. The web application replicated the paper content analysis but included radio buttons and dropdown menus to allow selections within the categories. This was to ensure that the coding sheet was user-friendly, as it resembles an online form that most Internet users are used to. Data was extracted from the backend database, exported into Microsoft Excel 2013 (v15.0), and then used for further analysis in SPSS Version 23.

Two individuals coded all the advertisements independently of each other and were not involved in the research or familiar with the design of the study or its purposes. They received eight hours of training, which started with an explanation of the content analysis method and the processes involved. They were given the code books and meetings were scheduled regularly where the coding team reviewed each code and definition in the code book to ensure they were being used consistently.

#### 4.1.3 *Validity*

To ensure validity, a pilot test was conducted to test the coding framework. Useful comments were obtained to develop the coding sheet further and include more detailed information in the coding book, which included clarifications about the bank groups (for instance, though First Direct is a subsidiary of HSBC, it is classified as a 'new entrant' while the parent company is an 'established brand'), and better descriptions of the emotional appeals (with examples) were provided.

Three hundred advertisements were randomly selected to test the intercoder reliability between the two coders, each coder coded the advertisement and their findings were compared. An intercoder reliability check was assessed using both Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha level of agreement, which ranged from 0.993 to 1.00. Neuendorf (2002), who reviewed rules of thumb set out by several methodologists, concluded that coefficients of 0.90 or greater would be acceptable to all. After initial coding, the differences were discussed and resolved collectively with the authors, and the adjusted scores were analysed. None of the authors were involved in the final coding process unless needed to settle a disagreement about identifying the codes. Finally, the independent coders were British, born and raised in Britain with an understanding of the cultural values within the country.

## 4.2 Results

From the sample of 1,274 print advertisements, NatWest Bank had the highest number of distinct advertisement for the analysis (205, 16.1 percent) while Allied Irish Bank had the least number of advertisement (8, 0.6 percent). The distribution in the advertisements across different bank groups was also noted. With a frequency of 938 advertisements (73.6 percent), the High Street banks like Lloyds, Barclays and HSBC had the highest number of advertisements, while the non-High Street banks like First Direct, Sainsbury and Post Office had 336 advertisements (26.4 percent). It appeared that the non-High Street banks may not be using the newspapers to reach out to prospective customers. The high number of High Street banks can also be suggested as a cause for this difference, as well as their larger marketing budgets. For example, M&S Bank was just starting with current accounts, so they did not have as many advertisements. Also, most of the advertisements for Sainsbury were for loans, and not current accounts like the more established brands.

Advertisements that do not contain any of the 15 emotional appeals, which in most cases are referred to as rationally appealing advertisements, were not considered for the rest of the analysis. In addition, Mogaji (2016b) proposed that “rational appeals” is not the exact opposite of “emotional appeals” in advertisements; some advertisements may be predominantly emotionally appealing and yet still contain some rationally appealing messages. From the content analysis, emotional appeals were present in 832 (of 1,274) advertisements (64.6 percent).

The dominant appeal was “relief and relaxation” (554 advertisements, 66.5 percent). It was followed by “excitement” (411 advertisements, 49.3 percent), “secure” (278 advertisements, 33.4 percent), and “adventure” (265 advertisements, 31.8 percent). “Sorrow” (6 advertisements, 0.7 percent) and “sex” (4 advertisements, 0.4 percent) were the least used appeals in this sample.



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2  
3 Images used in advertisements are considered basic graphic elements to incorporate in  
4 appeals designed to arouse consumers' emotions. Visuals in the most prominent position  
5 within the advertisements were considered in the analysis. The images used in these  
6 advertisements were coded as "Cartoon, Animals" (cats and/or dogs), "Celebrities",  
7 "Children and Parent", "Colleagues", "Couples" and "Customers". Of the 1,274  
8 advertisements, 633 (49.7 percent) did not have any visual or illustration, which is almost  
9 half of the entire sample. Regarding the images of models used in the advertisements, 297  
10 (23.3 percent) featured images of customers; this excludes images that were coded as that of  
11 colleagues (seen in uniform with name badges), couples, or children with their parents.  
12 Cartoons and other illustrations featured in 118 of the advertisements (9.3 percent). This was  
13 most often used in the Lloyds TSB Bank advertisements.  
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28 Images of colleagues were used in 50 advertisements (3.9 percent). Halifax and NatWest  
29 banks featured some of their staff in their marketing communications. Animals, in particular  
30 cats and dogs, were used in 22 (1.7 percent) of the advertisements. Santander Bank used the  
31 presence of celebrities in their advertisements to present emotional appeals. These are  
32 individuals whose status within the country are easily recognised. Jessica Ennis-Hill, Jenson  
33 Button, and Rory McIlroy with some of the bank's customers were used prominently in the  
34 bank's print media. Santander is the only bank that used celebrities for their advertisement  
35 campaign in the sample.  
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47 It was also observed that Halifax personalised some of their advertisement models. The  
48 names of models were incorporated within the copy and whenever photographs were used. In  
49 addition, staff members were sometimes grouped together to form alphabet letters in Halifax  
50 advertisements. As a part of the "visualisation of services" advertising strategy, this seems to  
51 be a good idea, but it would have been better if the staff could be identified (in twos or  
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3 threes), because without a closer look, it might not be easy to recognise them as staff  
4  
5 members.  
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## 9 **5 Study 2: Semi-structured interview**

### 10 **5.1 Research design and methods**

11  
12 To understand consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards these emotionally appealing  
13 advertisements, we based our qualitative study on semi-structured interviews, as this is an  
14 effective method to explore respondents' feelings and perceptions (Crouch and McKenzie,  
15 2006).  
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24 Using semi-structured interviews to collect data suggests that there are multiple realities out  
25 there which are socially constructed based on individuals' background and social class. This  
26 correlates with the explanation provided by Bryman and Bell (2015), which is that social  
27 actors which often , provide insights into phenomena. These perceptions of advertisements  
28 are not produced and set only by social interaction, but rather they change continually. Unlike  
29 the content analysis in Study 1, the perceptions of advertisements may not be the same when  
30 research is carried out in another part of the country. Since it is an interaction which is not  
31 constant and can change based on these conditions, the ontological position for this part of  
32 the research is constructivism.  
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45 Furthermore, the participants' perceptions with regard to the advertisements solicited through  
46 interviews could vary. This is not a scientific process, but an interaction with humans with  
47 different experiences and exposures. Saunders *et al.* (2015) argue that interpretivism believes  
48 in the need for researchers to acknowledge the differences between humans as research  
49 subjects. Considering these suggestions, an interpretivist epistemological stance has been  
50 adopted to conduct this study. Saunders *et al.* (2015) also advise that it is crucial to adopt an  
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3 emphatic stance by engaging with participants and constructing perceptions about emotional  
4 advertisements of UK banks from their own point of view.  
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7  
8 Using a semi-structured interviewing method, the discussion was guided from an introduction  
9 to advertising and the role it plays in decision-making. Then, using varying topics,  
10 participants were asked about their understanding of advertising, asked them for examples of  
11 any advertisements they could remember, and asked them about the role of advertising in  
12 decision-making. Six advertisements from different banks which were chosen systematically  
13 from the content analysis in Study 1 were then shown to the participants to elicit further  
14 details and gain a better understanding of emotions in financial services advertisements.  
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### 23 24 *5.1.1 Sampling* 25

26 The study was conducted in London and Luton between April 2015 and June 2015. Efforts  
27 were made to reach a diverse range of participants, and leaflets were sent out to various  
28 religious, youth and community centres and morning coffee centres. Electronic copies of the  
29 leaflet were also shared on social media networks to attract a demographic variety of  
30 participants. A telephone number and email address were provided as contact details. In all,  
31 57 participants contacted the researcher through various means. Of that original number, 33  
32 attended the semi-structured interviews. The time constraints, location and technical nature of  
33 the semi-structured interviews, along with the homogeneous sampling techniques, prevented  
34 some of the contacts from participating.  
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46 Seventeen females (51 percent) and 16 males (49 percent) took part in the semi-structured  
47 interviews. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 72 years. The majority of the  
48 participants were of the white ethnic group (54.6 percent). This was followed by Africans,  
49 which includes Black Caribbean and Black African (24.2 percent), and Asians, which  
50 includes Asian/Asian-British, Indian and Pakistani (21.2 percent). Twenty-one (63.6 percent)  
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3 of the participants were employed, while two had retired, two were self-employed, and the  
4  
5 remainder were students, including postgraduate students. Thirteen (39.3 percent) of the  
6  
7 participants had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, while one had a PhD; two participants  
8  
9 had never attended university.  
10

11  
12 Measures were taken to ensure that informed consent was given for participation. Prior to the  
13  
14 interviews, an information sheet giving a clear idea of the focus of the research and a consent  
15  
16 form were sent to participants via email and, in some cases, through the post for those who  
17  
18 were not able to access the Internet. The participants were notified that the interview would  
19  
20 be audio recorded and were reminded that the information collected would be kept  
21  
22 confidential. They were assured that the information would be disguised so that it would not  
23  
24 be possible to identify them.  
25  
26  
27

### 28 29 *5.1.2 Data analysis*

30  
31 The collected data was analysed using a model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990)  
32  
33 known as grounded theory. The extracted comments were coded following a three-part  
34  
35 process that is integral to developing a grounded theory: (1) open coding – breaking down,  
36  
37 comparing, conceptualising and categorising data; (2) axial coding – reassembling data into  
38  
39 groupings or families; and (3) selective coding – developing core themes and relating them to  
40  
41 one central concept, i.e. attitude towards UK bank brands through exposure to advertisements  
42  
43 (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; 1998; Mogaji *et al.*, 2016).  
44  
45  
46

47  
48 The three main themes that emerged from the analysis illustrate how creative features in the  
49  
50 advertisements prompt participants to develop an attitude towards the brand, highlighting  
51  
52 factors that influence these attitudes and how the attitudes towards the bank brands are  
53  
54 expressed.  
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### 5.1.3 *Validity and reliability*

Considerable efforts were made to ensure the validity and reliability of this study, one of which was ensuring that participants were given opportunities to stop the interview and would not need to provide any reason for doing so. This was to prevent participants feeling obliged to take part, and it was emphasised that it was entirely their decision to participate. This ensured that those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely were interviewed.

Each transcribed interview was sent back to the participant to check that it had recorded accurately their thoughts and perceptions about the advertisements shown. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe this as respondent validation. It is considered the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study's credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As suggested by Shenton (2004), the emphasis is on whether the participants consider that their words match what they intended.

In addition, detailed account of the methods, procedures and decision points in carrying out this study was documented in the form of an audit trail, as advised by Shenton (2004). The assurance of analytic rigour to ensure that data was not used selectively and that the researcher's own position did not overpower the participants' voices can be evidenced from the audit trail.

## 5.2 *Results*

This section provides a thematic analysis of findings from the semi-structured qualitative interviews exploring consumers' attitudes towards UK retail bank brands. The content analysis of the advertisements presented in Study 1 indicates that UK banks are using emotional appeals in their advertisements. These are considered creative decisions in order to appeal to customers' emotions and enhance the brand image.

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2  
3 Participants were shown the six advertisements in a booklet, and a verbal (semi-structured  
4  
5 interview) self-reporting method was used as the medium to explore their attitudes towards  
6  
7 the brands. Three key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis highlight how  
8  
9 consumers form their attitudes towards the brands.  
10

11  
12 Consumers were exposed to the advertisements, and the creative features prompted their  
13  
14 attitudes towards the brands. Following that, these attitudes were influenced by individual  
15  
16 perceptions, and finally, their attitudes towards the brands were expressed verbally. These  
17  
18 verbal self-reports are presented as selected verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts,  
19  
20 although minor changes have been made to enhance readability. An overview of each theme  
21  
22 developed in the template analysis is provided as well, followed by a presentation of the main  
23  
24 points, supported by extracts from participants' quotes.  
25  
26  
27

### 28 29 *5.2.1 Prompting the attitude*

30  
31 Participants acknowledged the creative elements in the advertisements, and this initiated the  
32  
33 process of expressing an attitude towards the bank brands. They identified the embedded  
34  
35 messages in the images, colours and general design of the advertisements as they engaged  
36  
37 with the advertisements. The assurance of relief and excitement presented by the banks in  
38  
39 their advertisements was acknowledged by the participants, and the embedded meanings of  
40  
41 security were transferred through the images and the copy of the advertisements.  
42  
43  
44

45  
46 *Whoa, they are actually touching the emotions, I am feeling happy, they are actually*  
47  
48 *touching the sentiments, it's a good advert and I like it. I like the picture, the*  
49  
50 *background and the joy on the face of the child; I can see the life in it. Someone is*  
*caring for me, I don't have worries. (SW, Female, 24)*

51  
52 *Young girl running through the sand, probably not a care in the world, running over a*  
53  
54 *sand castle, looks lovely, it's an ideal picture of childhood, I suppose she is very*  
55  
56 *happy and I think perhaps, this is what Nationwide are trying to say, banking*  
*shouldn't be stressful, it should be carefree and easy (JMa, Male, 31)*

57  
58 *The message from the images show that you can trust the bank, so I don't think I*  
59  
60 *should read the text, what this is telling you is trust, it's love, between mother and*

1  
2  
3 *daughter, so it says a lot, the design is to get this picture to the audience and that's*  
4 *why it's not worded, the message is the image, with covers more than half, this thing*  
5 *now is just trust. (JS, Male, 35)*  
6

7 One of the advertisements by TSB Bank informed the readers boldly in a blue font that they  
8 have been in existence for 200 years. Participants recognised these messages of security, and  
9 this influenced their attitudes positively towards the advertisement and the brand, as they  
10 were able to relate to the guarantees of security from the advertisement.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15

16  
17 *The only talking about security is the one talking about being there for 200 years, so*  
18 *you think – this bank can rely secures me for years, all things being equal. (AW,*  
19 *Male, 66)*  
20

21 *Seems straight to the point, celebrating their old tradition, they have been in existence*  
22 *for years and meaning you can trust them and be rest assured that your money is safe.*  
23 *(MR, Female, 56)*  
24

25  
26 *Welcome to your new bank, its local, it's part of you, that one thing I like about TSB,*  
27 *this advert is telling the reader that ok, the bank has been around for 200 years, there*  
28 *is guarantee, its long years of existence is a guarantee of quality. (JS, Male, 35)*  
29

30 In building trust in their brands, the banks used images embedded with an associated  
31 meanings of love, security and companionship, such as in a family. Participants' emotions  
32 were aroused through these images, and a positive attitude towards the advertisements was  
33 presented. An example was from NatWest where there was a mother hugging her daughter,  
34 and a Nationwide advertisement featuring a young girl apparently having a good time at the  
35 seaside; participants felt they would be in good company and looked forward to being treated  
36 well as part of the banks' family.  
37  
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45  
46 *The NatWest advert is nice, looking homely and welcoming. You feel you are in the*  
47 *good company of the bank, with the mum and daughter, it shows a bit of love you will*  
48 *expect from the bank. (MR, Female, 56)*  
49

50  
51 *This is more like it, a sense of belonging, cosy in the arm of those we love - mother*  
52 *and daughter, this is beautiful. You expect the Banks to treat you with love and care*  
53 *but the way they are treating themselves, you doubt if they have your interest at heart.*  
54 *(YU, Female, 47)*  
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56  
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### 5.2.2 Shaping the attitude

After exposure to the advertisements, participants often took their time to explore the creative features of the advertisements, perhaps filtering it through their individual differences and experiences. It is acknowledged that there are many reasons and factors that can influence an attitude towards advertisements; however, specifically, this study revealed three key themes which influenced these attitudes subtly.

Individuals with strong political views and ideologies about banks are more likely to have a negative attitude towards banks' advertisements and may not be interested in the emotional appeals embedded therein. For example, an individual who believes that houses should be made socially available by the government may have a negative attitude towards any mortgage advertisements they are exposed to. Apparently, this also resonates with young adults who find it difficult to save enough money to buy their own house. They may see an advertisement for a mortgage and decide to ignore it, based on their understanding of banks not doing enough to help them get on the first rung of the property ladder.

*I have this view - you should be able to have social housing, some sort of part buy part you own house for you, there is nothing radical about this banks for you. We have all got to buy into this idea, it's not a fairy tale, we should all be able to afford place to live. This makes me a bit angry, its cosy but in a horrible way, am being construed into owing the bank £200,000 for the rest of my life. (AC, Female, 30)*

Similarly, another issue observed was the ethical stance of individuals regarding how banks operate. In most cases, although they acknowledged that they have to use banks, they stated that they would prefer to use a more ethically appealing bank.

*With what the banks have done, mismanaging the money and those unethical things they keep doing, paying themselves huge bonuses, I don't really care about their advertisement, I have the feeling they all wanted our money, am a pensioner, I don't have much to spare, so I stick to one bank and manage my money there, no need to switch around, they are all the same bank and nothing really different (CL, Female, 72).*



1  
2  
3 *I want someone, a bank to speak to me, ethics is quite important here, something to*  
4 *deal with ethics (RC, Female, 32).*  
5

6 Religious affiliation was also found to influence attitude and brand loyalty. Even though the  
7 interview guide did not set out to explore this area, two Muslim participants were willing to  
8 share their thoughts. They considered interest as unfair and therefore responded negatively to  
9 UK bank brands as they were more inclined to use banks that offer Islamic accounts which  
10 are Shariah-compliant.  
11  
12  
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16  
17  
18 *When I came to UK, as a practising Muslim all I was looking for was a bank that can*  
19 *offer me an Amana account which I didn't see on newspaper or billboard*  
20 *advertisement. HSBC is using Amana account which is Muslim sort of banking system*  
21 *where there is no interest. (HA, Male, 37)*  
22

23 Another Muslim participant, though acknowledging the requirements of Islam, mentioned  
24 that his perspective is not based on religious requirements.  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 *Well, in a way, it's Islamic, but my perspective is not from the Islamic point of view,*  
30 *my perspective is you are getting something for free; you should get money for what*  
31 *you do. To get my own house, I will save up without having interest. (EG, Male, 24)*  
32

33 For those relocating to the UK, their pre-existing knowledge about global financial brands  
34 also influenced their attitudes towards the brand. There was evidence of brand loyalty,  
35 particularly looking for banks they know despite seeing advertisements from other brands.  
36 They appeared more interested as they wanted to associate with the brand, as they saw it  
37 before coming to the UK. There was no evidence of a negative attitude, only willingness to  
38 do business with the bank.  
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46  
47 *When Barclays was in Nigeria, my dad was with them and there was time in the 80s*  
48 *when he was in UK, he opened an account with Barclays so we have always grown up*  
49 *with Barclays in our house, so I felt it's more of a family thing. My dad liked Barclays*  
50 *so I thought why not. (JS, Male, 35)*  
51

52 *HSBC in China have high requirement if you want to have a current bank account*  
53 *and seeing same HSBC in UK, I was pleased and wanted to open an account. (SW,*  
54 *Female, 24)*  
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### 5.2.3 Expressing the attitude

Irrespective of factors that might have influenced their attitude, participants were able to express their attitude towards the UK brands after being exposed to their print advertisements, especially with regard to the images and copy that were used by the banks to convey the emotional appeals. Participants were able to relate to the images and felt excited about the promise of good customer services from the bank.

*This is beautiful, lovely and attractive, the innocent child playing and enjoying herself, now they have actually indicated that they are the number one financial brand, I don't mind opening a savings accounts for my grandchild here, the choice of an image of a child is quite good, it attracts you to the advert and they have added some verifiable fact. I like the advert and may surely consider the bank. I have watched Nationwide from afar, I think they are quite different, ethically, they seem fine and with this advert, I might actually consider them now. (YU, Female, 47)*

*I like this, the child looks happy so probably the bank will offer something that is very satisfying, the image of this child help me to think like that because she looks happy. (MG, Female, 25)*

*The NatWest advert is nice, looking homely and welcoming. You feel you are in the good company of the bank, with the mum and daughter, it shows a bit of love you will expect from the bank. (MR, Female, 56)*

Despite the creative features in the advertisements, which should arouse a positive emotion, some participants were displeased by the advertisements and confused by the message and felt that it was irrelevant or inappropriate for them. The lack of trust in banks appeared to be the main hindrance in ensuring a positive attitude towards the advertisement and the brand. Trust in the bank brands formed a core of the customers' attitudes, and while engaging with the advertisements, they considered whether they could trust the claims of the banks, especially whether the bank can meet their expectations. They acknowledged the text and images as they transferred the emotional appeals, but they could not simply believe what the banks were saying in the advertisements. This can be tied to the financial crisis, bad experiences with the banks and media coverage, which influenced participants' attitudes towards bank brands and inadvertently influenced their attitudes towards the advertisements.

1  
2  
3 *My dream is different and this doesn't come across to me, people don't trust banks*  
4 *now, they are not ethical, they you use our money to do whatever they want. (AC,*  
5 *Female, 30)*  
6

7 *Well, they are trying to convince you that they are the number one financial brands by*  
8 *using the picture of a girl smiling but to me, that doesn't attracts me, to me it's just a*  
9 *picture, this doesn't make me trust them still. I don't trust banks at all. (EG, Male, 24)*  
10

11 *I don't really trust the advert, maybe that's a general thing, am not so sure how much*  
12 *I trust advertisement in general, with regards to the banks, with the credit crunch,*  
13 *doing something enormous which is a global damage, bleeding countries of their*  
14 *money and get cuts from welfare which would have being used and if they have being*  
15 *responsible and caring like their adverts, maybe that wouldn't have been a problem.*  
16 *(JY, Female, 25)*  
17

18  
19 In addition to the evidence that customers have not been able to trust the banks fully to meet  
20 their expectations, participants were of the opinion that banks cannot be their friends and  
21 should not present themselves in this way. They wanted banks to provide a good service  
22 instead of trying to be friendly, suggesting the need to consider the kind of emotional appeal  
23 to embed in a bank advertisement, and there were no indications of any brand affiliation;  
24 participants did not feel drawn to use a particular bank brand or feel good about being  
25 associated with the bank.  
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35  
36 *With this playfulness in their advertisements, you expect me to treat my bank as a*  
37 *friend? No, I don't, they are enemies you can't avoid, you just have to use them as*  
38 *there are no alternative. (CB, Male, 20)*  
39

40 *I think banks should not portray themselves as friends in their advertisements unless*  
41 *they do actually mean it and be more responsible in the way they spend money and*  
42 *lend people money (TA, Female, 28)*  
43

44 *I can see they are trying to show they are somehow caring and some kind of family*  
45 *scene on the front, I don't really trust them, there are enormous cooperation which*  
46 *has potentially do a lot of damage and when they tell you we are friendly, we are*  
47 *going to look after you. (TD, Male, 45)*  
48

49 There was a general lacklustre attitude towards the brand. Even though participants  
50 acknowledged how important the banks are, it that appeared that participants were not really  
51 concerned about their choice of bank. There was no sense of pride in their choice as they  
52 revealed that they have different accounts for different purposes, and in some cases, there was  
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3 no sense of loyalty as they can switch their bank accounts from one bank to another. This did  
4  
5 not seem popular with the older adults, however, who had been using the same account for  
6  
7 over 20 years.  
8  
9

10 *I am quite comfortable with Barclays, they have offered me good services over the*  
11 *years, I can get a loan for whatever I want and I don't really want to explore another*  
12 *bank. (JA, Female, 62)*  
13

14 *I have switched my bank from Santander to Halifax to get their money and now even*  
15 *to First Direct, I do my banking online, I cannot be bothered to stay forever with a*  
16 *bank. (EM, Male, 26)*  
17

18 *My present bank is not offering me anything special and I have been seeing offers to*  
19 *switch, I am really planning to do so, I just need to take me my time, this bank might*  
20 *not even miss me. (SH, Female, 32)*  
21  
22

23 Overall, the attitude towards the UK bank brands was not very negative. It appeared that the  
24  
25 consumers have recovered from the effects of the financial crisis and are looking forward to  
26  
27 more competitive products and customer service, a bank that will offer something different  
28  
29 which will appeal to the consumers.  
30  
31  
32

## 33 34 **6 Discussion**

35  
36 The study sought to extend understanding of the attitude towards UK retail bank brands'  
37  
38 advertising strategies and how they influence consumers' attitudes towards their brands. It  
39  
40 makes an important contribution by adopting a qualitative research approach to explore in  
41  
42 particular emotional appeals in financial services advertisements, which are often considered  
43  
44 only utilitarian.  
45  
46

47  
48 Two studies were carried out to determine what the banks are communicating and how these  
49  
50 communications influence the consumers' attitudes towards the brand. The content analysis  
51  
52 in Study 1 provided empirical findings which showed that emotional appeals are used for  
53  
54 advertising services in the UK. The choices of images and colours are creative decisions  
55  
56 made by the advertisers to make the advertisements more appealing. This was found to be  
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1  
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3 effective, as participants in Study 2 were able to engage with these creative features and  
4  
5 report their attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand.  
6  
7

8 The theoretical framework for the research highlighted the conscious creative decisions of the  
9  
10 brands to embed their advertisements with emotional appeals and encourage a positive  
11  
12 attitude towards their brands. The messages presented in the advertisements shown to the  
13  
14 participants were considered meaningful and significant to them as customers, who  
15  
16 acknowledged the meanings embedded in the advertisements and received the message  
17  
18 intended by the banks, so they were closer to making a decision to bank with a particular  
19  
20 bank.  
21  
22

23  
24 Social judgement theory has also be used in a branding and advertisement context to offer  
25  
26 insight into how an individual's ideologies and affiliations shape attitudes towards UK retail  
27  
28 bank brands: in some cases for individuals who hold banking ethics highly, the marketing  
29  
30 communication fell within the latitude of rejection as it did not match their position and  
31  
32 expectations, while in other cases, the images used in the advertisement made the messages  
33  
34 fall within the latitude of acceptance, when closely matching the individual's position, which  
35  
36 therefore leads to an assimilation effect (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1993).  
37  
38

39  
40 Despite the embedded emotional appeals in the advertisements, persuasion occurs on an  
41  
42 individual basis, which is often shaped by different factors as individuals explore the message  
43  
44 within their frame of understanding and beliefs; however, this does not remove the  
45  
46 importance of images and text which are generally acceptable as appealing, such as a mother  
47  
48 hugging her daughter or a child playing by the seaside. These findings provide further  
49  
50 evidence that creative features embedded in an advertisement are known to enhance a  
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52 positive attitude towards the advertisements, which in turn leads to a positive attitude towards  
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54 the brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Lutz *et al.*, 1983).  
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3 While previous research has focused quantitatively on attitudes towards advertisements and  
4 brands, the contribution made by this paper is to explore customers' individual perceptions  
5 and ideologies qualitatively, as these influence their attitudes towards bank brands. We were  
6 able to identify a relationship and an association between emotional appeals in  
7 advertisements which enhance the attitude towards the advertisement and the brand; this  
8 offers implications which influence how best to reach out to prospective customers.  
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17 The qualitative results helped in developing a better understanding of the thought process  
18 between exposure to advertisements and the formation of attitudes, which is personal and  
19 individualistic and beneficial in developing a better understanding of attitudes towards brands  
20 and advertisements. Our findings also indicated some distinct factors that serve as filters in  
21 consumers' minds when exposed to a financial services advertisement – political and  
22 religious affiliations and previous brand knowledge in their home country. This presents  
23 opportunities for brands to target individuals based on these ideologies.  
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33 Consumers' attitudes towards these brands are considered worthy of research as they can  
34 predict their purchase intention and behaviour (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1979, p.88; Liu *et al.*, 2012,  
35 p.998), which, in turn, affect brand loyalty. Though attitude can be considered relative, it is  
36 the overall evaluation of how the brands are meeting the customers' needs, and it highlights  
37 the challenges for managers regarding how they can improve their reputation by offering  
38 valuable and customer-focused services.  
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47 The study has made theoretical and managerial contributions by focusing on the UK banking  
48 context, which is an under-researched market that is a crucial player in the financial services  
49 market globally. Moreover, the study explored creative features in the advertisements, and  
50 emotional appeals presented in the advertisements were explored to understand how  
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3 consumers react to bank advertisements and whether the embedded meanings in the  
4 advertisements are transferred.  
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8 The findings from this study support previous findings that an emotional attachment is often  
9 considered to enhance attitudinal loyalty to the brand and is considered to be a progression  
10 beyond a positive attitude (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011). In most cases, when  
11 participants can relate to the advertisements, they develop an emotional connection with the  
12 advertisements, so they want to engage and see what the bank has to offer that is different  
13 from others.  
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22 Furthermore, our qualitative findings support the bi-dimensional nature of feelings towards  
23 the advertisements and how it relates to the brand (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Ito and Cacioppo,  
24 2001; Spears and Singh, 2004). The positive and negative feelings towards the  
25 advertisements constitute separate constructs; even though participants were exposed to the  
26 same advertisements, some displayed a negative attitude towards the advertisements which  
27 influences their attitudes towards the brands, while others displayed a positive attitude  
28 towards the advertisements and a positive attitude towards the brands. This illustrates the  
29 relationship between the emotional reaction towards the advertisements customers are  
30 exposed to and their attitudes towards the brands.  
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43 The present research has highlighted the possibilities of adopting a semi-structured interview  
44 to gain a better understanding of emotional appeals and their relevance to advertisement  
45 effectiveness, as it permits some in-depth exploration of consumers' emotional responses to  
46 these advertisements (Broderick *et al.*, 2003). The research put into practice the suggestion  
47 by Zinchiak (2014) regarding adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods in  
48 marketing research and providing reasons not to ignore the qualitative component in the  
49 research plan.  
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3 Some of the main outcomes of a positive attitude towards bank brands are opening more  
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5 accounts, obtaining more financial products or perhaps switching to a new bank. From the  
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7 findings, there are indications that consumers are aware of the possibilities of switching to a  
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9 brand they may consider to offer a better deal; however, the desire to switch seems not to be  
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11 there, highlighting the challenge for the banks to make switching appealing. As noted by  
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13 Stewart (1998), who suggested that the reasons for the longevity of a relationship between  
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15 banks and their customers are ignorance, inertia and dependence, customers feel indifferent  
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17 towards the bank brands, as it appeared that they are not interested or might not be willing to  
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19 take action even when they acknowledge that they are not receiving a good service. This  
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21 lacklustre attitude offers the brands an opportunity to present values and give reasons to  
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23 consumers.  
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28 Four main managerial implications are provided in this study. Firstly, there is a need for  
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30 managers to present distinct values about their brands to the target audience through their  
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32 marketing communications. Mann and Kaur (2013) corroborate this as they suggest that  
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34 selecting an appropriate branding strategy is key in enhancing the equity of a brand as it  
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36 would support the desired positioning and thus influence consumers' intention to bank. In  
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38 developing their strategies, retail bank brands need to provide reasons why customers should  
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40 decide to switch to and/or bank with them, highlighting that special thing about their brands  
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42 which sets them apart from other brands, as customers look for reasons to switch. In addition  
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44 to offering this information, banks should not only offer a monetary reward for switching, but  
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46 also present values that will convince the customers to stay.  
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51 Secondly, as trust is considered fundamental to trade and development in the financial sector  
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53 (Gillespie and Hurley, 2013), managers will have to work continually to regain the trust lost.  
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55 The customers want to believe that what they see in the advertisements is what they will get  
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57 from the banks. Customers do not want to be spoon-fed trust; instead, they want to develop  
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3 the trust themselves. Therefore, it is important that managers offer information that allows  
4 trust to be built over time, for example, a subtle presentation of ratings, recent awards,  
5 industry recognitions and verifiable facts, complementing this information with the services  
6 and experience of the banking hall.  
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12 Thirdly, managers should endeavour to build relationships with existing customers due to the  
13 importance of word-of-mouth testimony. It is also important for managers to consider how  
14 they reward customer loyalty. Customers remain with banks as they have been with them  
15 since they were young or they are anticipating a better deal. Customers consider how well  
16 they are treated, and if the treatment they receive is not good enough, they can be motivated  
17 to switch to another bank and may even get paid for doing so.  
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27 Finally, Bravo *et al.* (2012) explain how the corporate brand image of financial institutions is  
28 developed, and we propose that there is a need for banks to engage in and highlight charitable  
29 activities and any corporate social responsibility, which presents their social or environmental  
30 benefits to their community. Lloyds Bank is in partnership with BBC Children in Need and  
31 Barclays Digital Eagles hold Tea and Teach sessions across the UK, teaching how to use  
32 computers and the Internet. This can help to improve the consumers' attitudes towards the  
33 brands as they often consider bank brands greedy and selfish.  
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## 44 **7 Conclusion**

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46 The study presents the result of the content analysis of UK banks' print advertisements,  
47 which indicates that emotional appeals are incorporated into their advertisement strategies;  
48 these emotional appeals are acknowledged by the customers and the embedded meanings are  
49 transferred, which influences their attitudes towards the bank brands.  
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3 The present study contributes to an ongoing trend in research on understanding consumers'  
4 attitudes towards bank brands and their advertising strategies as they rebuild the trust and  
5 their reputations. It offers theoretical and marketing practice implications for academics,  
6 advertisers, brand managers and social media marketing practitioners. As the intensity and  
7 frequency of communication have been found to increase mutual trust, helping to solve  
8 disputes and misunderstandings (Smith and Barclay, 1997; Mukherjee and Nath, 2003), this  
9 study highlights the importance of trust in building a relationship with consumers, suggesting  
10 multi-strand trust development strategies which should be complemented with marketing  
11 communication strategies.  
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24 The fact that this study is based on real-life advertisements and real-life responses from social  
25 media network users can be considered as one of its strengths; nonetheless, several  
26 limitations must be addressed. The research is exploratory in nature and intended to suggest  
27 more research into attitudes towards service brands. The limitations and potential bias in the  
28 self-selected interviewees are also acknowledged.  
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36 The number of advertisements shown to the participants and the bias are acknowledged and  
37 considered limitations of this study. We also recognise that the convenience sample may  
38 create issues with generalisability and therefore may not be representative of the population,  
39 and our findings may be suggestive rather than conclusive. The study examined attitudes  
40 towards the banking industry in a single country. Future research should explore bank brands  
41 in other countries and use different media, as the disparate media landscapes in these  
42 countries may provide different insights.  
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