



## **Impact of Anthropomorphism & Advertisement Effectiveness on Purchase Intention: A Study of Familiar Brand Vs Unfamiliar Brand under different levels of Product Involvement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The relationship between anthropomorphic appeals and consumer product evaluations has been examined in prior studies, which oddly, have produced disparate verdicts. The paper aims to examine this relationship with specific variables – product involvement and brand familiarity. Prior studies have established the dependency of outcomes of anthropomorphism on several situational factors like brand preference, loneliness. The study adds yet another factor (i.e. brand familiarity) to the list. . The 2 (Product Involvement: high versus low) × 2 (Brand Name: familiar versus unfamiliar) between-subjects experimental design was conducted and ANOVA was used for testing the hypotheses under the four exploratory circumstances. The study establishes that the anthropomorphic advertising of an unfamiliar brand is far more effective than anthropomorphic advertising of a familiar brand implying that marketers using anthropomorphic advertising in launching a new product or re-establishing a long forgotten product, are more likely to create greater acceptance than those who use non-anthropomorphic advertising for the same.

**Keywords:** *Anthropomorphism, Product Involvement, Brand Familiarity, Entertainment; Information; Memory; Brand Recall; Purchase Intention*



## INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary (Soanes and Stevenson 2006) defines anthropomorphism as the attribution of human characteristics or behaviours to a god, animal, or inanimate object. It is a cognitive bias in which individuals ascribe human characteristics to non-human entities (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). Businesses have been using it extensively, as it is an effective marketing strategy for sustained success (Aggarwal and McGill 2007). Brand anthropomorphism has been shown to reduce the psychological distance between consumers and brands (Stinnett, Hardy, and Waters 2012), enhance the connection between consumers and brands (Delbaere, McQuarrie, and Phillips 2011), and facilitate more effective communication with consumers (Puzakova and Aggarwal 2018). Earlier studies have probed the implications of anthropomorphism spanning different product categories, including high and low safety products (Liu et al. 2022); hedonic and utilitarian products (Jeong and Kim 2021); and search and experience products (Velasco, Yang, and Janakiraman 2021).

Anthropomorphism, as a psychological model, is a intricate phenomenon that can effectuate impressive ramifications, potentially hampering the often suppositional connection between attitude and purchase intention. The authors believe research on the potency of anthropomorphism as a marketing approach is still in its native stage. Given that any psychological thing hardly ever produces same results, stakeholders assert that a widely acknowledged psychological association between anthropomorphism and consumer behaviour must be effectuated. To achieve this longstanding need, the relationship between the two constructs must be investigated from various perspectives, which can be secured only by incorporating more constructs into the investigation. In this context, we assess the influence of Brand Anthropomorphism and Advertising Effectiveness on Consumer Purchase Intention, specifically on familiar versus unfamiliar brands, at varying levels of product involvement. We specifically investigate whether the use of anthropomorphic appeal in advertisements enhances active information processing by positively influencing entertainment, information retention, memory, brand recall, attitude, and purchase intention. The versatility of anthropomorphism merits examination, to comprehend its influence on consumers and potential enhancements, as



individuals tend to assess anthropomorphised brands according to distinct criteria compared to those applied to non-anthropomorphized brands and products (Puzakova and Aggarwal, 2018).

The post-pandemic era has witnessed an increase in research on brand familiarity (Ladeira et al. 2022). Brand familiarity often improves customer views (Zhu, Kim, and Choi 2021), although it may also exhibit inconsistent effects (Higgins & Thompson, 2002). Under particular advertising tactics (online) and product categories (hedonistic and mature items), brand familiarity has already demonstrated positive influences on attitude formation (Ladeira et al. 2022). Thus, we proceeded to invigorate its impact in relation to anthropomorphism. Involvement, conceptually defined as a motivational situation that encourages greater allocation of cognitive resources (Başfirinci and Çilingir, 2015) has been shown to significantly affect consumers' responses to advertisements, product attitudes, and purchase intentions. For similar reasons, the study also incorporates involvement as a moderating variable.

This will be perhaps a unique study to empirically explore the role of involvement level and brand familiarity simultaneously in boosting advertising effectiveness by influencing variables used to assess the same. The findings of this paper will educate businesses if the anthropomorphic ad is suitable depending upon the quadrant their product fits within the 2 (Product Involvement: *Low Vs High*) \* 2 (Brand Familiarity: *Known Vs Obscure*) matrix. It endows the burgeoning literature on anthropomorphism with additional maturity, particularly in the context of it being an advertising strategy.

Moreover, authors assert that research examining the impact of anthropomorphism on consumer purchase intentions is predominantly contextual, encompassing various domains such as In-store Retail Cues (Londoño and Ruiz De Maya 2022), Pet Fashion Clothing (Apaolaza et al. 2022), Shopper-facing Retail Technology (SFRT) (Barney et al. 2022), beef consumption (Choueiki, Geuens, and Vermeir 2021), and chatbots (Crolc et al. 2021). Previous studies investigating the correlation between anthropomorphism and purchase intention in advertising are notably circumstantial, as emphasised in italics in Table 1.



STUDY	FOCUS OR SCOPE OF STUDY
Hart and Royne (2017)	To implore the effectiveness of anthropomorphism appeals on purchase intention, under the <i>moderating influence of loneliness and product knowledge</i> .
Laksmidewi, Susianto, and Afiff (2017)	To examine the effect of <i>a specific type of anthropomorphism (viz., hero and warrior archetype)</i> in an ad on perceived product efficacy and purchase intention.
Gupta and Jain (2019)	To explore the role of anthropomorphism in influencing consumers' purchase intentions <i>in case of smartphones</i> .
Agrawal, Khandelwal, and Bajpai (2020)	To investigate the effectiveness of anthropomorphic advertising in case of <i>single medium vs use of cross-media</i> , under different levels of product involvement.
Shao et al. (2020) Shao, Jeong, and Jang (2021)	To investigate the effectiveness of using anthropomorphic advertising in <i>promotion of ugly food</i> .
Lu et al. (2021)	To examine the impact of <i>very specific types of anthropomorphism (cute vs cool)</i> of <i>green products</i> under <i>different advertising appeals (Self-interest Vs Altruism)</i>
Fazli-Salehi et al. (2021)	To examine the impact of <i>specified personality traits</i> on brand connection (self and communal) with anthropomorphized brands vis-à-vis the objectified brands.
Our Study	To contrast the impact of brand anthropomorphism and advertising effectiveness on consumer purchase intention, <i>in case of familiar vs unfamiliar brands</i> , under different levels of product involvement.

**Table 1:** Previous Studies and Ours: A Comparison



Thus, studies have proven there's some relationship between the two, albeit differing under distinct circumstances, but to the best of the knowledge of the authors, hardly any study is available to show the impact of anthropomorphic advertisement on the specified variables of advertising effectiveness, that too with brand familiarity and product involvement as the comparing variables. The current study comprised of both, a well-known and an obscure brand, in order to gauge this effect. The inclusion of both well-known and unfamiliar brands was thought to not only improve the experimental design's robustness, but also consolidate the findings across circumstances.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we establish our conceptual framework by reviewing the prior research. Section 3 comprises of the methodology, followed by a description of the findings in Section 4. Section 5 of the paper provides the discussions, limitations and recommendations for further investigation.

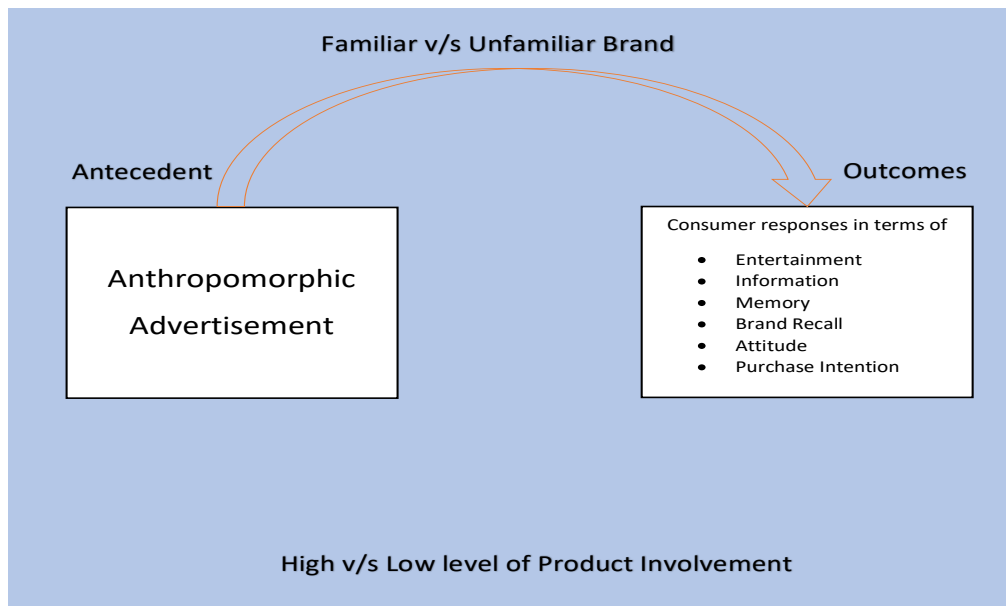
## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

There is a widespread inclination among men to conceive of all entities as being like themselves (Hume et al. 2018). People anthropomorphize for a variety of reasons –first, it is the most straightforward thing for them to do; secondly, it facilitates understanding of their environment; and finally, it allows people to perceive their surroundings through a human-centric perspective (Aggarwal and McGill 2007). With customers' unrivalled proclivity to anthropomorphize, businesses and marketers frequently embrace it. Products are routinely attributed with human-like emotions, beliefs, desires, knowledge, and intentions (Severson and Woodard, 2018). Marketers too enthusiastically embrace anthropomorphism. Research indicates that anthropomorphism enhances consumers' brand appraisal (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007); elevates product attractiveness (Labroo, Dhar, and Schwarz, 2008); amplifies brand love (Delbaere, McQuarrie, and Phillips, 2011); and stimulates impulsive purchasing behaviour (Zhang et al., 2020).

Advertising and promotions incur substantial expenses for marketers. They are always keen to know the outcomes of their efforts. There are multitude ways of assessing the advertising effectiveness (Wisker, Kadirov, and Bone, 2019). Due to the challenges of encompassing all



aspects in a study, we selected five metrics from review of literature. *Information* - the principal objective of any advertising campaign. Consumers initiate an information search when they want to make a purchase (Park 2020). Informative advertisements enhance brand appraisal and significantly increase purchase intention (Janssens and Pelsmacker 2005). *Entertainment* - the capacity to evoke aesthetic enjoyment (Oh and Xu 2003), serves as a significant precursor to attitudes towards advertising, as well as a reliable predictor of advertising efficacy (Taylor, Lewin, and Strutton 2011). *Ad Recall* - Recognising the ultimate goal of every brand of being at the forefront of consumers' minds when they think of a particular product category, this construct measures how spontaneously customers recall the brand when they come across that product category. An individual's retention of an advertisement correlates positively with its likelihood of being recalled during shopping (Bushman and Bonacci, 2002). *Memory* - unlike recall, is independent of any cues, making it a difficult thing to do. Nonetheless, the power of memory to gauge the effectiveness of an ad need not be underestimated. *Attitude* - a theoretical construct employed to assess the extent of a consumer's preference or aversion towards an object. In studies on advertising effectiveness, consumer attitude encompasses both attitude towards the advertisement ( $A_{ad}$ ) and attitude towards the brand ( $A_b$ ). Various research indicate that  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  may exert differing levels of influence on purchasing intentions (Lee, Lee, and Yang 2017). *Consumer Purchase Intention* - The literature on advertising efficacy has consistently highlighted customer purchasing intention (Ajzen 2002). To affect consumers, advertisements must navigate them through cognitive, emotional, and conative adoption processes (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Consumers make selections depending on their desires and responses to advertisements, which marketers, many a times, strategically curate through anthropomorphism. Notwithstanding its popularity, the authors contend that there is limited evidence linking it to advertising effectiveness. The conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates the comprehensive link among the constructs.



**Figure-1: Conceptual Model**

It was postulated that anthropomorphic advertisement of unfamiliar brand is more effective than the anthropomorphic advertisement of familiar brand and that audience that viewed an anthropomorphic advertisement of unfamiliar brand will have high entertainment, information, memory, brand recall, more positive attitude and higher purchase intention than the anthropomorphic advertisement of familiar brand under different levels of product involvement (*high vs. low*)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study replicates the research approach utilised by Chen (2015). The research employs a factorial design comprising 2 (Product Involvement: high vs. low) × 2 (Brand Name: familiar vs. unfamiliar) groups to examine the effects of product involvement and brand familiarity on anthropomorphism, advertisement efficacy (information, entertainment, memory, and brand recall), attitude and purchase intention. Product categories indicative of varying levels of involvement were selected using the framework established by Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan (1991). High and low engagement were operationalised using the product categories of mobile



phones and antacids, respectively. Nokia and Eno encompasses the familiar brand names while the unfamiliar brand names Talky and Zest were posited for the appropriate categories.

Considering the complicity of the investigated variables, sample size of 304 respondents was deemed acceptable in concordance with Nunnally's (1978) suggestion. The study made use of student sample with just one intent – to ensure uniformity in demographic characteristics (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout, 1981) including age, educational background, and media consumption patterns, something that’s pivotal for quarantining the fallouts of experimental manoeuvrings.

Before initiating the experiment, a pre-test using a seven-point Likert scale, from "Extremely unfamiliar" to "Extremely familiar” was performed on 60 students (30 in each product category – low and high involvement) to gauge their brand familiarity, with a view to corroborate the effectiveness of the brand familiarity manipulation. The results affirmed the manipulation effectiveness (Table 2).

	HIGH INVOLVEMENT		LOW INVOLVEMENT	
	<i>Familiar Brand</i>	<i>Unfamiliar Brand</i>	<i>Familiar Brand</i>	<i>Unfamiliar Brand</i>
	<i>Nokia</i>	<i>Talky</i>	<i>Eno</i>	<i>Zest</i>
<b>Mean (Standard Deviation)</b>	5.60 (0.82)	1.10 (0.63)	4.63 (0.62)	2.12 (0.53)
<b>t-statistic (p-value)</b>	25.80, p<0.001		23.64, p<0.001	

**TABLE 2:** Pre-Test Results

In order to ensure conception of a high-quality stimuli, the study made use of a professional graphic designer who was commissioned to create anthropomorphic commercials while regulating extraneous variables, such as product characteristics and prior advertising exposure. Additionally, an e-magazine was curated that included the commercials created by the graphic designer as well as few filler ads, which would be needed for the assessing memory and brand



recall at a later stage. The inclusion of filler ads also facilitated the augmentation of the authenticity of the media environment, giving participants the feel of real-world.

The research employed a randomised 2\*2 experimental design, carried out in classroom environments to reduce distractions. Participants were randomly earmarked to one of the four conditions. Participants in the unfamiliar brand conditions were informed of their role in evaluating the advertisements for a novel product all set to venture into the market, whereas their counterparts in the familiar brand conditions were apprised of their task to assess the new advertising strategy for one of the popular brand. They were assured of confidentiality and were informed of the freedom to withdraw at any moment without penalties.

Participants were made to complete a questionnaire measuring variables anthropomorphism, entertainment, information, attitude and purchase intention, immediately after viewing the commercial relevant to their allocated quadrant. Subsequently, they were showed the e-magazine. Thereafter, they were requested to return three days later for a follow-up session on the experiment, during which their recollection of the advertisements and brand recognition was evaluated i.e. brand recall and memory were assessed.

The questionnaire used in the study was formed using established scales (all with seven-point Likert scales) from prior research (Table 3). However, where necessary, slight variations in the scales were made to reflect the anthropomorphic context of the study.

Construct	Statements	Adapted from
<i>Anthropomorphism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The product is like a person.</li><li>• The product has a mind of its own.</li><li>• The product has intentions.</li></ul>	Aggarwal and McGill (2007)
<i>Entertainment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I feel that advertisements are enjoyable and entertaining.</li><li>• Anthropomorphic advertisements are more entertaining than other types of advertisement.</li><li>• I find anthropomorphic advertisements attractive and fun.</li></ul>	Blanco, Blasco, and Azorín (2010)



<b>Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anthropomorphic advertisements provide the information I need.</li><li>• Anthropomorphic advertisements offer the data required to make purchase decisions.</li><li>• I feel that anthropomorphic advertisements are helpful.</li></ul>	Blanco, Blasco, and Azorín (2010)
<b>Attitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I find anthropomorphic advertisements impressive.</li><li>• Anthropomorphic advertisements are eye-catching</li><li>• Overall, I like the anthropomorphic advertisements.</li></ul>	Donthu (1998)
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The likelihood of purchasing the product from this brand is...</li><li>• The probability that I would consider buying the product of this brand is...</li><li>• My willingness to buy the product from this brand is...</li></ul>	Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991)

**Table 3:** Scales Used for Measuring Constructs

Following a 3-day interval, memory was assessed with the word-fragment completion test, a method devised by Yoo (2007). Participants were given a list with few fragmented brand names under different product categories, which they were requested to complete, on the basis of the e-magazine they were made to view 3 days prior. The target brand name was encoded as a binary variable (Yes = 1, No = 0), offering an objective assessment of memory for the advertised brand.

Similarly, brand recall was checked by a retrospective thought-listing technique, also propounded by Yoo (2007). In this, participants were requested to enlist all brands they could remember from the e-magazine, with the existence of the target brand name, again entered as a binary variable (Yes = 1, No = 0).

Data were analyzed by performing a one-way ANOVA using SPSS Software.



## RESULTS

At the outset, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and independence were checked prior to one-way ANOVA analysis. Errors were normally distributed as showcased by Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > .05$ ), homogeneity of variances was confirmed via Levene's test [ $F(1,302) = 1.84, p > 0.05$ ]. Furthermore, since participants were randomly assigned, observations were independent.

The findings, illustrated in Table 4, demonstrate notable variations between familiar and unfamiliar brands in both high and low engagement product categories.

CONSTRUCT	HIGH INVOLVEMENT					LOW INVOLVEMENT				
	Familiar Brand		Unfamiliar Brand		F <sub>1,302</sub>	Familiar Brand		Unfamiliar Brand		F <sub>1,302</sub>
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Anthropomorphism	5.236	0.872	5.678	0.916	6.494*	5.141	0.772	5.728	0.824	9.035***
Entertainment	4.125	1.051	5.001	1.124	11.392***	3.221	1.001	5.641	1.112	13.191***
Information	4.274	0.891	5.172	0.920	7.617***	4.374	0.881	5.004	0.898	7.945***
Memory	4.016	0.841	4.941	0.974	21.311***	4.001	0.612	4.114	0.742	12.517***
Brand Recall	5.221	1.112	5.997	1.567	9.238***	5.125	1.221	5.847	1.324	30.533***
Attitude	4.841	0.864	4.945	0.991	3.862*	4.129	0.842	5.645	1.252	48.754***
Purchase Intention	5.221	1.195	5.912	1.314	32.572***	4.644	0.895	5.004	0.945	18.383***

**TABLE 4:** Results of One-Way Anova

\* = 10% Level of Significance \*\*\* = 1% Level of Significance

The results indicate that anthropomorphic advertisements substantially influence all dependent variables, but with variations in intensity between familiar and unfamiliar brands, as well as between high and low involvement products. The mean values for unfamiliar brands were consistently higher than those for familiar brands across all dependent variables, demonstrating that anthropomorphising marketing has a more pronounced effect when the brand is unfamiliar.



The impact of anthropomorphic aspects in advertising on consumer perception was substantial across varying levels of involvement and brand familiarity conditions. The most significant effect in entertainment was observed in the low involvement product-unfamiliar brand quadrant ( $M=5.641$ ,  $F$ -Statistic= $13.191$ ), whereas in information, the most dramatic influence was evident in the high involvement-unfamiliar brand quadrant. Memory and brand recall were markedly affected by anthropomorphism, with the most pronounced impacts noted for unfamiliar brands in high-involvement categories. However, for memory the  $F$ -statistic for high involvement was much more than it was for low involvement whereas for brand recall the  $F$ -statistic of low involvement significantly outweighed its high involvement counterpart. It can be concluded that anthropomorphism may assist unfamiliar brands in distinguishing themselves in consumers' perceptions. The results indicated substantial variations in attitudes towards the advertisement contingent upon brand familiarity and product involvement. The effect was particularly significant in low involvement products, where unfamiliar brands ( $M = 5.645$ ,  $SD = 1.252$ ) greatly surpassed familiar brands ( $M = 4.129$ ,  $SD = 8.842$ ), yielding an  $F$ -statistic of  $48.754$  at the 1% significance level. The impact of anthropomorphism on purchase intention was substantial across all conditions, yielding the highest intention for unfamiliar products in the high involvement category ( $M = 5.912$ ,  $SD = 1.314$ ).

## **DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Humanised stimuli are typically employed in advertising and marketing communications for many purposes. Previous research has frequently demonstrated beneficial impacts of anthropomorphism on customer reactions. Nonetheless, contradictory evidence has surfaced over time. Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2013) cautioned against the use of anthropomorphic advertising, however Yuan and Dennis (2017) shown minimal to no impact of anthropomorphic appeals on product assessments. The varied outcomes of these research have presented considerable difficulties for marketers. The findings of this research contribute meaningfully to the ongoing debate.

Effectiveness of anthropomorphism, as past research shows, is contingent upon factors like brand preference (Aggarwal and McGill 2012), desire for dominance (H. Kim and Kramer



2015), social factors like loneliness (Feng 2016) and feelings of social power (S. Kim and McGill 2011). This study further substantiates this assertion and adds another element to the constructs influencing the relationship between anthropomorphism and consumer behaviour. It enhances the comprehension of anthropomorphism in advertising by investigating the effect of brand familiarity on the efficacy of anthropomorphic advertisements. The influence of anthropomorphised advertisements is more pronounced when the brand is novel to the consumer, regardless of the extent of product involvement. This finding corresponds with the notion of effectance motivation, which posits that humans are compelled to anthropomorphise stimuli to enhance their comprehension of intricate or unfamiliar phenomena (Epley et al. 2007). When consumers see unfamiliar brands, anthropomorphism acts as a cognitive heuristic, facilitating comprehension. This increased engagement results in more favourable outcomes with regard to entertainment, information retention, memory, brand recall, attitude, and purchase intention, prompting consumers to react positively to anthropomorphic advertising for unfamiliar brands, in contrast to familiar brands, where consumers possess pre-existing perceptions and experiences.

The study further elucidates the influence of product involvement on enhancing the effectiveness of anthropomorphic advertising. The findings demonstrate that anthropomorphism amplifies customer reactions for both high and low involvement items, with more significant effects observed in low involvement products, particularly in terms of entertainment and attitude. For high-involvement products, memory and purchase intention are significantly elevated. A plausible argument could be that buyers of low participation items may be influenced by emotional appeals and peripheral cues. In high involvement products, where consumers are already highly engaged, anthropomorphism may only exert a nuanced influence. The intensified emphasis on details may enhance brand memorability, hence augmenting consumer intent. Consumers engaging with high-involvement items may necessitate more than mere anthropomorphic signals to alter their attitudes or perceptions.

This study offers practical insights for marketers. Anthropomorphic advertising has been shown to be particularly effective for unfamiliar brands. When aiming to launch a new product or revive an overlooked brand, anthropomorphic aspects can enhance consumer engagement by simplifying product complexity and encouraging trial sales. In today's era of information



overload, customers need emotional connections and experiences. Anthropomorphism satisfies this requirement by endowing products with personality, exemplified by successful advertising campaigns such as “Brook Bond Red Label Tea,” which highlights the “taste of togetherness.” Marketers should concentrate on creating innovative and imaginative anthropomorphic ads that consistently astound and delight consumers, keeping the emotional appeal fresh and engaging.

The study has certain limitations that open up avenues for future research. Foremost is the narrow scope of product categories examined. The Rossiter-Percy Grid provides a broader classification of products- such as informational versus transformational products, which could be leveraged in future studies. Future research could also investigate the comparative effects of anthropomorphic versus non-anthropomorphic appeals, and different advertising variables such as creativity and emotional appeal. As digital marketing and social media advertising continue to grow, researchers could examine whether the benefits of anthropomorphic advertising extend to online platforms. Mutum et al. (2018) highlighted the increasing consumer hostility toward online advertisements, and it remains unclear whether anthropomorphic appeals would mitigate such negative reactions. Such studies in totality would help refine our understanding of when anthropomorphism is most effective, and under what conditions alternative advertising strategies may prove more beneficial.

**Note: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.**



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