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## The Elements of Brand Anthropomorphism: Qualitative Investigation Into Local Brands Amongst Young Adult Consumers

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# THE ELEMENTS OF BRAND ANTHROPOMORPHISM: QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO LOCAL BRANDS AMONGST YOUNG ADULT CONSUMERS

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## Abstract

**Manuscript type:** *Research Article*

**Research Aims:** *This study aimed to describe the elements of brand anthropomorphism and self-brand congruity based on the review of Guido and Peluso's conceptualization.*

**Design/methodology/approach:** *This study collected the data from generation Y respondents through semi-structured depth interviewing.*

**Research Findings:** *The critical finding provides the context of Asian consumers related to local brands. Emerging local brands can grow if the organization can manage them well.*

**Theoretical Contribution/Originality:** *It describes the elements of brand anthropomorphism associated with the domain of consumer-brand relationships among Asian consumers.*

**Practitioner/Policy Implication:** *The local brands should be perceived that all brands are not similar in the same category.*

**Research limitation/Implications:** *The elements of brand anthropomorphism can create brand personality.*

**Keywords:** Brand anthropomorphism, brand congruity, brand personality.

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization provides more openness among societies around the world. Consumers worldwide increasingly share similar tastes in clothing, music, food, and lifestyles (Dogerlioglu-Demir and Tansuhaj,

2011). Local marketers aim to fulfill the consumer's needs and wants by offering goods and services. In the meantime, many local products are already improved (Cui and Liu, 2000). The social prestige associated with a foreign product has declined, and more consumers tend toward local brands over

foreign brands (Laforet and Chen, 2012). This study is important to provide the managerial thinking that local brands are developed based on unique needs and local wisdom and strengthening the local brands by creating a unique brand character.

Local brands must build specific characteristics and should be pervasive widely in the young adult market. The strong character of brands can attract consumers and build a strong awareness of local brands. Niedrich and Garretson (2005) opined that it could create a strong identity. A trustworthy character has led to a positive brand association. A marketer should communicate product benefits and all related attributes. The related concept of character is anthropomorphism, which is about endowing inanimate objects with human attributes and human motivation (Epley *et al.*, 2009). Guido and Peluso (2014) argued that marketers also attempt to favor anthropomorphism, so consumers tend to associate the character in mind. Previous studies have analysed brand anthropomorphism in marketing strategy such as psychological process to perceive products with human-like appearance (Kervyn *et al.*, 2012; Kiesler, 2006; Puzakova *et al.*, 2009; Puzakova *et al.* 2013; Puzakova and Aggarwal, 2018; Ma *et al.*

2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2020), anthropomorphism and risk perception (Kim and McGill, 2011), anthropomorphic brand characters (Hosany *et al.*, 2013), the consumer response toward anthropomorphic animal images (Connell, 2013), anthropomorphism and risk perception (Rauschnable and Ahuvia, 2014), interactive spokes-characters (Letheren and Kuhn, 2014), anthropomorphized brand roles and materialism (Kim and Kramer, 2015), anthropomorphism and human schema (Kwak *et al.*, 2015), the influence of brand on customers' switching intention (Fan *et al.*, 2016), anthropomorphic product and lonely people (Feng, 2016), the anthropomorphized brand and brand integration (Delgado-Ballester, *et al.*, 2017) the influence of anthropomorphism on brand-consumer relationship (Baksi and Panda, 2018). No research in brand anthropomorphism has yet discussed such a possible implementation of measurement of Guido and Paluso (2015) with local brands in the Asian context.

This study conducts qualitative research in the Asian market and chooses Indonesia as the emerging market. This research does not use the scale developed by Golossenko *et al.* (2020) because this scale only measures the perception of a brand that has analogical

human-like and metal emotional states, while Guido and Paluso (2015) estimate that brand anthropomorphism addresses <sup>14</sup>three dimensions, including human body lineaments, human facial physiognomy, and self-brand congruity.

After reviewing the previous empirical research, this research aims to analyze anthropomorphism research by using the measurement <sup>24</sup>of brand anthropomorphism in the context of local brands in Indonesia and analyzing the implementation of each measurement dimension. This paper also describes informants' perceptions of local brands in Indonesia based on the measurement. Guido and Paluso (2015) <sup>7</sup>have developed a scale to measure brand anthropomorphism. The scale consists of three dimensions. It captures the extent to which a branded product's external appearance is like <sup>1</sup>the lineaments of a human body, the physiognomy of a human face, and the reflection of how consumers perceive themselves. The scale is already empirically validated scale. By doing [qualitative research](#), this study aims at learning about consumers' perceptions as the study can capture a mental image of someone through their experiences concerning local brands. The measurement elements can be explored

to understand the character of local brands.

<sup>26</sup>The research questions of this study are as follows: 1) What are human body lineaments of local brands perceived by consumers?; 2) What are human facial physiognomy of local brands perceived by consumers?; and 3) <sup>10</sup>What is the consumer's perception of local brands related to self-brand congruity?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Brand anthropomorphism*

According to Brown (2011), anthropomorphism is relevant <sup>7</sup>in contemporary consumer culture and deeply embedded in the human psyche. <sup>1</sup>Epley *et al.* (2007) explained this phenomenon as the inference process of attributing external characteristics, motivations, behaviors, and underlying states typical of humans to objects and non-human entities. Related to the brand, Epley *et al.* (2007) opined that brand anthropomorphism has <sup>1</sup>a perceived similarity between products' external appearance and some human physical attributes-resembling the human body. Fournier (1998) argued that brand anthropomorphism has human-like characteristics. It can connect with customers emotionally. A marketer can gain mindshare <sup>7</sup>by ascribing human characters to non-human entities

## *The measurement of brand anthropomorphism*

Guido and Paluso (2015)<sup>1</sup> conceptualized brand anthropomorphism as a property of branded products regarding the extent to which these objects are perceived as if they were actual human beings. Guido and Paluso (2015)<sup>7</sup> have developed a scale to measure brand anthropomorphism. Past studies have not shown the robustness of brand anthropomorphism measurement in dimensionality, reliability, and validity tests. There are two significant dimensions underlying brand anthropomorphism based on the measurement: one dimension is related to branded products' external appearance, and the other is regarding the self-brand congruity.

The first dimension is related to anthropomorphic entities, which have a human-like morphology. Epley *et al.* (2007)<sup>33</sup> opined that there is a tendency for consumers to attribute human-like characteristics to non-human objects, including personalities, intentions, and motives. Brown *et al.* (2003)<sup>16</sup> have found that the Beetle automobile had anthropomorphized dimension as something "huggable." Anthropomorphic entities such as human-like morphology and spokes characters can offer information closely

related to the brand and reduce perceived risks in purchasing the brand.

Guido and Paluso (2015) used Epley *et al.* (2007)<sup>1</sup> 's research to develop items such as: 'This branded product behaves as humans' and 'I can establish a social connection with this branded product. Guido and Paluso (2015) also based on the work of Chandler and Schwarz (2010)<sup>2</sup> regarding the extent to which consumers perceive human physical features in branded products, such as: 'This branded product seems to have a human face, 'This branded product appears to have a human neck, and trunk, so forth using additional body parts such as a nose, hair, a mouth, hands, arms, legs, feet, eye, and ears. These human physical features are the first and second dimensions related to human body lineament and facial physiognomy.<sup>2</sup>

Human body lineament is relevant to the context of *anthropomorphic structural forms* (Disalvo *et al.*, n.d.).<sup>5</sup> Structural anthropomorphic form imitates the construction and operation of the human body, emphasizing materiality. The shapes, volumes, mechanisms, or arrangements that resemble the human body's appearance or functioning are visible in structural anthropomorphic form. It takes knowledge of

human anatomy and physiology and represents the thing-ness of the human body. Several products are the object of anthropomorphism through their design: WRP Losing Weight by WRP, the advertising (whose curves match a perfect shape body), and the feminine curves of the perfume bottle that reminds consumers of the brand's promise of sensuality. The objective is to encourage brand anthropomorphism.

Some aspects of it, namely, is there a body or body parts? Does it work like a human body? are the parts universal to all human bodies? and does it have to be anthropomorphic? Guido and Paluso (2015) developed the measurement of human body lineament. There are some indicators of Human Body Lineaments. They are 1) This branded product looks like a person, 2) This branded product seems to have a human neck dan 3) This branded product seems to have a human trunk.

The third dimension is human facial physiognomy. Physiognomy is a theory that describes the temperament, morals, and other personality trait characteristics of human beings from an individual's facial features. Physiognomy creates the identity or character of a specific aspect. In this particular context,

physiognomy emphasizes the aesthetic visual perception studied with interest in learning human nature, emotional expressions, and human facial characteristics (Parker, 2018). Brickson (2000) argued that physiognomy becomes the saliency and can create group members' collective identity.

A literature review highlighted the facial physiognomic attributes of a message endorser and how these may be a consideration for advertising campaigns (Parker, 2018). Parker (2018) argued that physiognomic attributes would help promotion and marketing professionals identify and select endorsers to optimize messages' uptake. It could also improve the effectiveness of promotional materials utilized for social media campaigns

Meanwhile, Guido and Paluso (2015) also developed the indicators of Human Facial Physiognomy as follows: 1) This branded product seems to have a human face, 2) This branded product seems to have a nose, 3) This branded product seems to have eyes, 4) This branded product seems to have a mouth, 5) This branded product seems to have ears (Guido and Paluso, 2015).



The other part of brand anthropomorphism is self-brand congruity. Sirgy (1982) has evaluated and analyzed the product choice based on the extent to which these products are perceived as congruent with their self-concepts. Consumers tend to choose branded products to express their actual, ideal, or social self-perspective (Sirgy, 1982). Sirgy (1986) has suggested that consumers have a positive attitude towards brands perceived to have strong favorable human characteristics that are linear with their self-concept.

Guido and Peluso also (2015) developed items. They are 1) This branded product is congruent with the image I hold of me, 2) This branded product is congruent with the image I would like to hold of myself, 3) This branded product is congruent with the image others hold of myself; 4) This branded product is congruent with the image I would like others to hold of myself.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed the qualitative approach with the descriptive study. This study used the existing instrument of Guido and Paluso (2015) to have an interview with the respondents. An in-depth interview gives the research more insight based on the respondent's point of view.

## Respondent's Profile

The sample size was 20. The age of the respondents ranged from 20-25 years old. They are undergraduate students in Jakarta. The respondents were recruited based on a snowballing system considering their experience buying local brands. Fifteen respondents were females; meanwhile, the rest was males. They have medium to high incomes. They are significant consumers of local brand products and will dominate the target market of the marketing strategy of big companies. Mayasari and Iyus (2018) opined that they also target specific purchasing power. Their decision will be necessary for understanding the future prevalence of marketing strategy. The product choice, including fashion and accessories, is essential to show that they have achieved a particular position.

## Sampling and data collection process

This study used purposive sampling. The resources were selected purposively (Babbie, 2013). The purposive sampling for 20 young adult respondents to be interviewed would be most appropriate in this study. The respondent was recruited based on the fashion community from various local brands. This study carried out a qualitative collecting method by having an interview.



### ***Data coding process and reliability & validity test***

8 Strauss and Corbin (1999) argued that data coding could use open, axial, and selective methodologies. In this study, 9 the researcher discovered the relationship between the data's concepts and deductively related to the existing literature. In the end, coding was applied to integrate the existing relationships among concepts.

This study also adopted 6 the reliability test. It used the member check by referring to each respondent while coding to confirm that the researcher's interpretation of data matched the respondents' answers.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data analysis, the elements of brand anthropomorphism are identified. The findings are described and explained below. The most relevant statements of the respondents are embedded within the results.

### ***The most preferred brand***

The descriptions given by the respondents show that they prefer some local brands. These brands have a connection in their life to fulfilling their need. Local brands usually go through an extraordinary time that

demands a change in every aspect of the business cycle.

The new and old local brands have inspiration. They are affordable and suitable for all consumers. They are made proudly made by Indonesian marketers. For example, one informant (R1) described:

*Choosing local brands can protect the economy by purchasing domestic products.*

### ***Product categories of the local brand***

The product categories of local brands chosen include make-up or cosmetic products, accessories, clothing, bag, perfume, footwear, bicycle, and coffee. 80% of the respondent has chosen fashion or clothing products. In Indonesia, the fashion industry has evolved remarkably. Indonesian designers have confidently sold their products. The emerging designers in Indonesia come up with creative and new collections. Loureiro et al. (2017) argued that the consumers who 4 consider themselves physically attractive and, indeed, judged by others to be physically attractive might also influence their passion for fashion. The respondent also supports this.

*Local brands in fashion can impress others. They are also good. (R4)*

*The social aspect is essential for my fashion consumption. (R6)*

In Indonesia, consumers enjoy a high level of satisfaction while shopping in boutiques that offer very considerate service. These international brands are thriving and easily recognized in Indonesia's society. Wearing fashion can show social status and recognition. This is also in line with the study of Hung (2006).

### ***The feeling of choosing the local brand***

Global brands are perceived to be having higher quality (Pappu et al., 2007). Rao and Monroe (1998) also showed that the worldwide brand name has a crucial quality indicator. However, Roy and Chau (2011) showed that global brand favoritism might be varied over a local brand in terms of purchase activity. The investigation revealed that there is no difference between international brands and local brands. The informant of this study described the feeling.

*I feel proud of the quality of a local product compared with foreign products or brands.*

*It can be seen by their material, design patterns, and how they sell the products.*  
(R3c)

Another informant explained:

*I feel proud when I purchase the product because they have fantastic quality and are reputable on the international market.* (R11b)

Forsythe et al. (1999) showed no differences between the global brand and local brand in consumer's evaluation of variables examined physical quality, design, overall quality, price, value, or purchase intentions.

*I feel happy and satisfied because I cannot believe that there is such a local brand with a product that has the same quality as the other Branded Makeup.* (R1a)

### ***The brand looks vivid as if it has a soul***

Brands have human beings' character to build good relationships with their target audiences.

*Yes, I do think so. This brand looks vivid in my eyes, and I feel like I have found my soulmate. I can't imagine myself wearing bright colors.*  
(R1b)

*If Visval is a person, he will be a simple person but elegant and classy. He is eye-catching and highly attractive, making people want to look at him.* (R8b)

### ***This brand looks to have something like a human body like***

Branded products might have a perceived similarity between the external appearance of products and some human physical attributes.

*Yes, it represents women's bodies in many types, such as; fat, skinny, etc.* (R6b)

*They don't have looks like a human neck or trunks, but they made some universal products for anyone. In fashion, sometimes we have limited options due to our needs. If I'm too thin, the clothes will look not good or will not fit us. But DUMA helps people who have a specific need for their fashion by making any general size and cutting models. (R15a)*

### ***The brand looks vivid in terms of the physical body***

This research showed that the purchased product has a physical body or human features.

*The image in their packaging is a heart with a face, eye, nose, and mouth. Smiling confidently. (R13a)*

*If I should imagine it as a human body? Well, maybe, like, legs? because I use this bike as I "walk" with it. (R14c)*

### ***The chosen local brand is congruent with ideal self-image***

The research showed that the consumer wears unique cloth that has eye-catching and can attract everyone to look at her. The product has a brand personality that matches the ideal self-image. Some products can help consumers achieve the need for being the ideal-self image. The local product also has a quality that can reflect the perfect self-image and follow the trend. An anthropomorphic

perception of branded products might perceive congruity between products and some aspects of consumers' self-concept (Fournier, 1998; Aaker et al., 2004).

*She prefers to wear something ordinary and minimalist in her everyday life. She also feels she dares to use eye-catching or unique clothes that attract everyone to look at her. They don't have it, or maybe they are still developing on it. This way, this brand does not satisfy her ideal self-image (R4a)*

*Visval performs the needs of my ideal self-image. One of the reasons is because of the model. The bag that I bought is the bag that is in trend at that moment. The other reason is their quality and the product's function suits. So it reflects my ideal self-image to follow the trend. (R8b)*

### ***The chosen local brand is congruent with actual self-image***

The local brand has self-brand congruity because it reflects consumers' perceptions of themselves.

*As a person who likes to exercise, he feels the brand talks about competence, toughness, and independence, 'this is me.' (R2b)*

*UNKL347's products are congruent with my self-image because most of my clothes and fashion are like any designer's. (R4b)*

## Discussion

This study has identified two essential elements of brand anthropomorphism. First, it is related to the external appearance of branded products. Second, it is associated with the dimension of self-brand congruity.

The attribute of the work becomes an aspect of the value proposition. The physical features in branded products related to human body lineament and facial physiognomy become the products' attributes. The value proposition consists of the whole cluster of the benefits the local brand promises to deliver. The local company can focus on the core business processes that help create distinctive consumer values.

First, the brand looks vivid, as if it has a soul. The research showed that the local brand chosen has a soul. It is related to the concept of anthropomorphism. Soni and Jain (2017) argued that anthropomorphized brands should be perceived as having human-like souls & emotions. Second, this research showed that the purchased product has physical body or human features such as white skin, legs, face, eyes, and lips. This is related to Chandler and Schwarz's research (2010). Third, branded products might have a perceived similarity between the external

appearance of products and some human physical attributes. Fourth, the chosen local brand is congruent with the actual self-image.

The local brand has self-brand congruity because it reflects consumers' perceptions of themselves. Self-congruity refers to the likeliness of comparing oneself with other objects and stimuli (Sirgy et al., 1997). In this study, the respondents choose some local brands because they think they are consistent with their actual selves.

This research also shows that the choice of local brands is influenced by sub-culture as a reference group. In this case, the reference groups that become the influencing factors are family, friends, specific cultural values, trends, and religion. It is interesting to analyze that local brands that have anthropomorphism are recognized as something that has attractiveness. This attraction can be advantageous for market managers to strengthen it as an identity attached to the brand. This advantage can be a strong belief from consumers to realize that local brands also have good quality. The constant interaction between the consumer and his reference group reinforces a sense of affection for the local brand. They observe on an ongoing basis to feel attracted to try local brands. In the end, they took action to buy

local brands. The strength of this local brand to be accepted by consumers is also in addition to the sources' perceptions and beliefs. The reference group also strengthens them.

## CONCLUSION

Related to brand equity, the elements of brand anthropomorphism can be a part of the brand equity concept. The local brand can create <sup>29</sup> brand awareness. Building brand awareness as the first dimension of brand equity for a local brand with brand anthropomorphism elements means increasing the brand's familiarity through repeated exposure to create brand recognition.

For the theoretical implication, the elements of brand anthropomorphism can create brand personality. Delbaere et al. (2011) argued that marketing communication could create anthropomorphism leading to more positive emotions. Anthropomorphism becomes the unique element of brand personality (Puzakova *et al.*, 2009).

For the managerial implication, the local company must also convince consumers of meaningful differences among existing local brands. The local brands should be perceived

as all brands are not similar in the same category. Establishing a positive brand image of local brands with anthropomorphism elements in consumer memory should be favorable and unique.

The local brand can become strong as it has a strong point of difference, for example, Vanilla Hijab, Brand Voyej, and Cotton Ink. The brand's attributes or benefits can make consumers associate the product with local brands. Consumers cannot find the same characteristics as other local even foreign brands.

Through marketing communication programs, local brands can provide any activities that cause consumers to experience local brand elements, including the anthropomorphism elements. These programs are expected to increase familiarity and awareness of the local brand elements. A local brand can use repetition to improve recognizability. The brand elements like characters can also aid recall.

## <sup>28</sup> Limitations and future research directions

Based on the research results described, this study has several limitations, namely in the form of control variables that can provide more in-depth analysis results, such as

subject demographics, length of use of products and product function categories, and the pyramid of consumer needs. The range of work used will provide different perceptions of the product for both a beginner and an old consumer. This is inseparable, one related to how well consumers know the outcome. Another limitation of this study is that there is no grouping of products based on product function or the pyramid of consumer needs. This may provide a comprehensive analysis of classifying aspects of the brand anthropomorphism based on product function. The consumer needs to provide a

more precise local brand-strengthening effect based on the supposed market.

Based on these limitations, for further research, it is possible to add interview questions that target reinforcing variables such as the length of time using the product to perceive a local brand product related to the anthropomorphism brand. Besides, trying to do more in-depth research by making the product function and the pyramid of consumers needs additional variables in seeing aspects of the brand anthropomorphism.

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## Appendices

6 The researchers selected the respondents who were willing to describe their feelings toward the questions such as 1) What local brand do you like the most? 2) What product categories do you choose of the local brand? 3) Can you describe the feeling of selecting the local brand? 4) Can you describe further related to the local brand?

The guideline for giving an interview is based on the indicators developed by Guido and Paluso (2015).

1. What are human body lineaments of local brands perceived by consumer's?

Do you think that this brand looks vivid as if it has a soul? Why?

Do you believe that this brand seems to have something like the human body, like a human neck or human trunk? 23

2. What are human facial physiognomy of local brands perceived by consumers?

Do you think this brand looks vivid in terms of the physical body, including the human face, nose, eyes, mouth, or ears?

3. What is the consumer's perception of local brands related to self-brand congruity? Is the chosen local brand is congruent with your ideal self-image? 10

The research problems in this study were to describe the perception of informants related to local brands in Indonesia based on Guido and Paluso's measurement. All interviews were recorded and coded.

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