



Image: Corna, H. n.d. How humanizing a brand can make it successful. Available from: <https://hilarycorn.com/how-humanizing-a-brand-can-make-it-successful/>.

Brand BFFS: Unpacking the Magic of Brand Anthropomorphism in Online Communities

“Find your greatness” said Nike - millions of people listened. Connected and united and that is how they remain a leading force in the sports industry. Creating emotional connections with consumers in 2023 is vital for brands as it leads to increased loyalty, trust, and advocacy. Brands that prioritise and work towards these connections can build long-lasting relationships with their customers and in the long run, reap the fruits of their labour through their bottom line and reputation. Building relationships with consumers can evoke feelings of psychological ownership, further strengthening their connection and commitment to the brand.

Given that we are in the digital era and past literature has examined brand engagement, brand experience and brand anthropomorphism in isolation, this study sought to close the research gap by exploring these elements in the digital context. This study contributes to the literature on brand anthropomorphism and online brand communities using the Social Identity Theory to ground consumer behaviour. This area of study is under-explored and additionally, this study contributes to the development of theoretical frameworks/models of brand anthropomorphism.

This study has been conducted by Judith Phiri, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), with the purpose of determining the influence of brand experience and brand engagement on brand anthropomorphism in online brand communities (OBCs). An online-based self-administered questionnaire was distributed during July and August 2023, and 248 responses were obtained using non-probability sampling from a sample of consumers (18+) who were part of online brand communities.

The majority of the participants were female and between the ages of 18 - 25 years old. The study indicated that OBC members interact with their OBC two to three times per week. Instagram was found to be the most popular platform used to access online brand communities. The findings indicated that brand experience and brand engagement are predictors of brand anthropomorphism, with brand experience being the strongest influencer.

These findings imply that brands should invest in creating meaningful and memorable brand experiences with their customers. Therefore, brands should prioritise evoking positive emotions in their target audience, through multiple strategies such as defining the brand personality, investing in user-generated content (video content of consumer personal stories), being intentional about engaging with consumers on their social media platforms and implementing human-like communication strategies (human tone and messaging). Additionally, marketers could benefit from hosting online discussions (twitter spaces, Instagram lives etc.), product activations, and brand festivals that bring community members together, this will create a sense of belonging among online brand community members.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2023 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Judith Ntombiyethu Phiri under the supervision of [Dr Van Heerden](#).