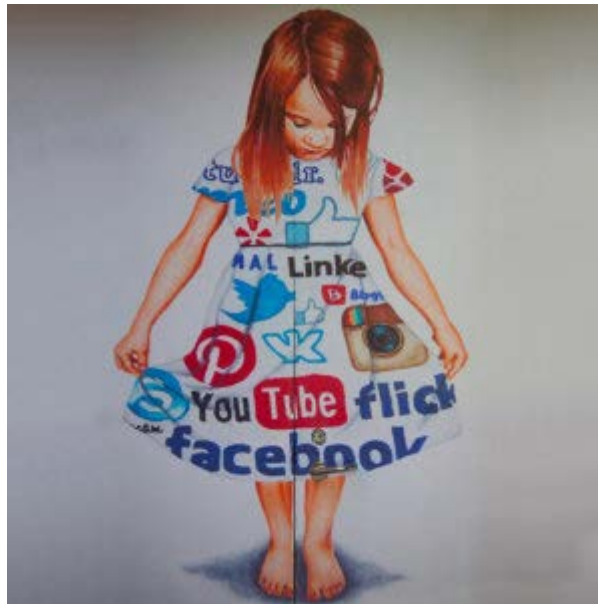


## **Brand anthropomorphism in online brand communities | How brand experience can influence perceptions of brands as human-like**



Source image: <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-risks-and-rewards-of-brand-personification-using-social-media/>

With digital technology and social media transforming human interactions, marketers are constantly searching for strategies that will differentiate them from their competitors. In addition, strategies that will foster long-lasting connections with consumers both off-line and online too, are becoming highly sought after too. The establishment of online brand communities (OBCs) is often considered one such platform. These communities are often found on social media platforms, and it is where like-minded brands enthusiasts can gather online, fostering emotional connections, shared brand experiences, and social engagement. Within OBCs, members are able to fulfil their social needs, shape their social identities, express themselves, and obtain and share useful information about respective brands.

The ability to foster emotional connections with inanimate concepts such as brands, can be explained by the phenomenon of “brand anthropomorphism”, which refers to the extent to which individuals attribute human-like qualities to a brand (i.e., perceive brands as human-like). Efforts to elicit anthropomorphism is becoming an even more popular strategy amongst marketers, in attempts to mould their own unique position

in the minds of consumers, thereby enhancing consumer-brand relationships and brand differentiation especially within a highly competitive online environment. By examining what drives brand anthropomorphism within the context of OBCs, marketers can discover ways to alleviate social withdrawal linked to community motivation in OBCs, and simultaneously retain customers, even when brands face negative publicity.

A study was conducted by Owami Mkhize, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#). The study aimed to bridge the gap in literature by exploring the antecedents of brand anthropomorphism within the context of OBCs. The study utilised the social identity theory to explore the influence of brand love, brand engagement, and brand experience on brand anthropomorphism within OBCs.

Data were collected from 248 respondents who are active members of an online brand community(s) using a self-administered online questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that only brand experience was a statistically significant predictor of brand anthropomorphism within OBCs. Therefore, to enhance perceptions of brands as human-like, and to build stronger emotional connections, marketers should aim to enhance brand experiences through OBCs. This could be done by initiating virtual event-marketing activities to nurture relationships within OBCs. These activities could include hosting interactive virtual workshops, incorporating gamification elements and live-streaming real-time virtual brand events to community members. Personalised marketing efforts that resonate with consumers' emotions, values and self-identity are also popular strategies that marketers should continue to provide. In so doing they are able to create more emotionally resonant and meaningful brand interactions in the proliferation of the digital landscape.

*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 Owami Mkhize under the supervision of [Dr Jade Verbeek](#).*