

Influencers of brand anthropomorphism in online brand communities | Is it the rabbit from the hat?



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Anthropomorphism, first uncovered in the 6th century BC by Greek philosopher Xenophanes, was used to describe how non-human supernatural beings resembled human believers. In its most simplistic definition, anthropomorphism to date refers to the perception of inanimate objects or concepts, being human-like. In the last decade, this psychological phenomenon has particularly captured the interests of marketers and marketing scholars, and is being encouraged through establishing emotional connections between brands and consumers. Yet, establishing such meaningful brand connections have become rather challenging especially as the marketplace becomes more competitive, and more technologically savvy. Marketers are therefore having to find new and innovative ways to connect and communicate with their consumers. One such effective brand communication platform, has been the emergence of online brand communities (OBCs). These communities refer to groups of like-minded consumers of particular brands who virtually come together, to engage not just with the respective brand, but with other consumers or community members.

Considering the importance of building connections with consumers in an online context, using the lens of brand anthropomorphism, it is important to understand what could possibly drive this psychological tendency.

A research study was conducted by Tarah Ferreira, [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#). Based on the premise of the social identity theory, the study aimed to determine whether brand engagement and brand experience respectively, have a significant influence on brand anthropomorphism within OBCs.

Data from 248 respondents was collected from active social media users who belonged to at least one OBC. The findings revealed that only brand experience had a significant influence on brand anthropomorphism within OBCs. The findings of this study can assist marketing scholars by providing a deeper understanding of brand anthropomorphism within an online context, especially with the absence a stimulus that has human-like resemblances. Furthermore, the study also confirms the prevalence of the 'experience economy' by emphasising the importance of brands enhancing and creating meaningful brand experiences for its consumers, in order to drive emotional and personal brand connections and interactions.

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 Tarah Ferreira under the supervision of [Dr Jade Verbeek](#).