FROM PERSONIFICATION TO PURCHASE: THE CRITICAL BRIDGE OF EMOTIONAL BONDING IN CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

DA PERSONIFICAÇÃO À COMPRA: A PONTE CRUCIAL DO VÍNCULO EMOCIONAL NA TOMADA DE DECISÃO DO CONSUMIDOR

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Abstract

With the development of technology and social progress, consumers are increasingly tired of repeated advertising routines, and it is difficult for traditional marketing and promotion methods to attract their attention. In order to improve competitiveness, companies have begun to try more creative and touching marketing methods. In recent years, brand personification has become an important strategy. By giving brands distinctive personality characteristics, brand personification can stimulate consumers

Resumo

Com o desenvolvimento da tecnologia e o progresso social, os consumidores estão cada vez mais cansados das rotinas repetitivas de publicidade, e os métodos tradicionais de marketing e promoção têm dificuldade em atrair sua atenção. Para melhorar a competitividade, as empresas começaram a experimentar métodos de marketing mais criativos e envolventes. Nos últimos anos, a personificação da marca tornou-se uma estratégia importante. Ao atribuir características de personalidade

'emotions, thereby affecting their overall view of the brand and willingness to purchase. This study systematically analyzed how brand personality affects brand attitude and purchase intention, using brand personality as an independent variable and emotional attitude as an intermediate variable. Research has found that the more distinctive a brand personality, the more it strengthens the emotional connection between consumers and the brand, significantly enhances positive brand attitudes, and ultimately increases purchase willingness. Research also found that emotional attitudes are a key bridge between brand personification and purchasing choices-consumers 'emotional closeness and love for the brand drives their purchasing decisions. This research broadens our theoretical understanding of brand management and consumer behavior, and also provides ideas and practical suggestions for companies to help them create more emotionally resonant and interactive brand marketing activities in highly competitive markets.

Keywords: Brand Personification. Consumer Behaviour. Emotional Connection. Brand Attitude. Purchase Intention.

distintas às marcas, a personificação pode estimular as emoções dos consumidores, afetando assim sua visão geral da marca e sua disposição para comprar. Este estudo analisou sistematicamente como a personalidade da marca afeta a atitude em relação à marca e a intenção de compra, utilizando a personalidade da marca como variável independente e a atitude emocional como variável intermediária. A pesquisa constatou que quanto mais distinta for a personalidade da marca, mais ela fortalece a conexão emocional entre os consumidores e a marca, aumentando significativamente as atitudes positivas em relação à marca e, consequentemente, a disposição para comprar. A pesquisa também constatou que as atitudes emocionais são uma ponte fundamental entre a personificação da marca e as escolhas de compra – a proximidade emocional e o apreço dos consumidores pela marca impulsionam suas decisões de compra. Esta pesquisa amplia nossa compreensão teórica da gestão de marcas e do comportamento do consumidor, além de fornecer ideias e sugestões práticas para que as empresas criem atividades de marketing de marca mais interativas e com maior ressonância emocional em mercados altamente competitivos.

Palavras-chave: *Personificação da Marca. Comportamento do Consumidor. Conexão Emocional. Atitude em Relação à Marca. Intenção de Compra.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Brand personification is a marketing method that gives brands human characteristics. It has a long history. It has a profound cultural foundation and is also very compatible with the development of modern consumer psychology. From the deification of natural forces in ancient times to the name of the Yellow River "mother river" in literature, anthropomorphism has always been the basic way for humans to interpret the world and add emotion and meaning to objects. Nowadays, in the market, companies widely use this method for branding and promotion, giving brands unique personalities and making them easier for customers to remember and like them more. Typical examples include Uncle McDonald's and Colonel Sanders in the West, as well as Haier Brothers in China, which have successfully closed the psychological distance between brands and buyers through anthropomorphism and communication.

Recently, the rise of social platforms and digital technology has given brands more ways to anthropomorize. New expressions such as virtual idols and intelligent voice assistants continue to emerge. By interacting with the audience, the brand creates a "brand personality" with thoughts, emotions and stories, which greatly enhances its sense of closeness and influence. Brand personification can not only stimulate people's good feelings for the brand, but also significantly strengthen emotional dependence, thereby improving brand attitudes and increasing purchasing possibilities.(Han, Cui, & Jin, 2021; Jianfeng, Tu, Zhou, & Niu, 2021) . Emotional connection plays a pivotal mediating role in this process. By evoking empathy and a sense of belonging through personification, brands foster greater willingness among consumers to establish long-term relationships(Bhalla & Pathak, 2023) .

As brand personification becomes increasingly popular in China, many domestic companies are creating their own personified brand images. This is done to shorten the psychological distance with young consumers and make the brand appear more dynamic and competitive. For example, the veteran washing powder brand Diao Pai has launched a personified image of "Diao Brother" and linked it to the Weixin Official Account "Diao Pai Brother Diao Speaks" to utilize artificial intelligence and interact with users, making the brand appear humorous and cordial. Brand personification has become an important strategy for China companies to pursue rejuvenation and differentiation. Take a look at Milk Snow Ice City's "Snow King": By designing cartoon anthropomorphic characters and interacting on social platforms, they give "Snow King" a unique personality and emotional charm, becoming a bridge connecting brands and customers. Research has shown that brand personification can significantly enhance consumers 'sense of warmth and trust in the brand, thereby improving brand attitudes and purchase intentions(Jeong & Kim, 2021; M. Zhang, Li, Ye, Qin, & Zhong, 2020) .Emotional connection is particularly critical here. By personifying images, brands can stimulate consumers 'emotional reactions, allowing them to regard the brand as a "friend" or "partner" and establish deeper emotional bonds(Jeong & Kim, 2021; M. Zhang et al., 2020) .These emotional connections not only increase goodwill and loyalty but also more easily translate into actual purchasing behavior(Nguyen, Bui, & Ha, 2024). However, anthropomorphism is not everything; sometimes poor character design can disgust consumers and damage a brand's reputation.

However, personifying brands is no panacea. Some companies fell apart-for example, Jin Fang's rag doll character was criticized as "scary", but was boycotted by consumers and damaged the brand image. This shows that successful brand personification requires the team

to truly understand the psychology, cultural preferences and communication methods of the target user, and must also continue to invest and innovate(Han et al., 2021) .

Obviously, like all marketing strategies, anthropomorphic marketing requires long-term careful planning and supervision by the operations team. Although there are already many anthropomorphic brands on Weibo and WeChat, the question still remains: Which form of anthropomorphism is suitable for enterprises and consumers? What are the elements of success? Because brand personification has only recently attracted the attention of managers and scholars, it is still a new concept, and there is not much actual management experience. Therefore, this study wants to explore how anthropomorphism affects purchase intention.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand personification

In modern marketing, attaching human characteristics to the brand is an important strategy. It can influence consumers 'feelings, views and connections on the brand from all aspects. By giving brands human-like personalities and emotions, brand anthropomorphism makes them appear more cordial and more like real people on digital platforms such as Social networks, enhancing the brand's social presence and credibility(Kim, Sung, & Moon, 2020) . In addition, anthropomorphic brands can also make consumers happier and have a greater sense of belonging when shopping. When the brand image and consumer self-perception are well matched, this sense of closeness and warmth will further increase purchase willingness and brand loyalty(Jeong & Kim, 2021) .

On social media, brand personification not only strengthens consumers 'recognition of the brand, but also increases willingness to interact and recommend-people are more willing to share and promote brands that feel like real people. The key to the success of anthropomorphic marketing is a sense of social presence and the emotional bond between consumers and brands (Y. Zhang & Choi, 2023) .From a cognitive perspective, anthropomorphic brands can help people understand and accept brand information more easily, and improve the ease and memory of processing information. In an information-exploding market, consumers tend to prefer brands with likable, easy-to-understand, and empathic personalities. In addition, brand personification fosters emotional connections and

brand identity, encouraging continued participation and interaction(Lourenço, Ferreira, & Santos, 2024) .

In new areas such as virtual idols and AI experiences, adding some personality to the brand, and then through multi-faceted role building, you can shorten the psychological distance between the brand and consumers, which can also improve the brand's market performance(Patrizi, Šerić, & Vernuccio, 2024) . However, whether brand personification can be successful depends on several factors. For example, consumers 'psychological tendencies (such as needing a sense of belonging or pursuing uniqueness), brand positioning (such as whether they want to be friends or provide services), and the surrounding social environment (such as when there are many people or when they are alone) will all affect the anthropomorphic effect(Chen & Lin, 2021). However, if it is done too far or the method is wrong, it will make consumers disgusted and reduce their love for the brand. Therefore, when companies use anthropomorphic strategies, they must carefully design their image and promotional content, and constantly adjust them to meet the psychological needs of consumers and match the brand positioning. In general, brand personification can significantly enhance consumers 'attitude towards the brand and purchase willingness by enhancing their goodwill, cognitive fluency and social connections, making it an important tool in brand management and digital marketing (Y. Zhang & Choi, 2023) .

2.2 Emotional connection

In brand management and consumer behavior research, it is generally believed that emotional dependence is the core driving force behind brand loyalty and sustained purchasing behavior. This connection is not just a mere liking for a certain brand, but a deep psychological bond and even becomes part of self-identification. Brand experience fosters emotional connections by stimulating brand passion, self-brand cohesion, and brand sentiment, thereby enhancing loyalty(Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). The formation of these emotional bonds is usually accompanied by a good brand experience and emotional resonance. Consumers feel happiness, confidence and belonging through brand interaction, and these emotions are often transformed into repeated purchases, positive word-of-mouth and higher investment in the brand(Handique & Sarkar, 2024). Emotional connections mediate between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. In other words, even if consumers

are satisfied, they can only truly show loyalty when emotional bonds are stimulated(Tijjang, Junaidi, Nurfadhilah, & Putra, 2023) .

Moreover, concepts like brand affection, trust, and self-brand linkage have proven to be important factors influencing brand loyalty(Loh, Gaur, & Sharma, 2021). In digital and social media environments, brands can more effectively cultivate consumers 'emotional connections through emotional information, story marketing and interactive experiences, thereby expanding the brand's social influence and consumer engagement(Handique & Sarkar, 2024).It should be noted that the strength and effectiveness of these emotional connections depends on many factors, such as brand type, consumer personal characteristics, and the surrounding social environment. For example, functional brands and emotional brands have big differences in how emotions translate into loyalty, while the impact of emotional brands is usually more direct and obvious(Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020) . Therefore, emotional bonds are not only a key factor in promoting brand loyalty and continuous purchasing behavior, but also an important tool for companies when formulating brand strategies and optimizing customer relationship management.

2.3 Brand attitude

Brand attitude is a core concept in consumer behavior and marketing management research. It represents consumers 'overall evaluation of a brand, including rational judgment, emotional response and willingness to act. Early researchers believed that attitudes were people's emotional reactions to things. As the theory developed, scholars like Aberg and Shahmehri (2001) added cognitive factors, arguing that attitude is actually a mixture of thinking, feeling, and behavior(Aberg & Shahmehri, 2001) . In brand research, brand attitudes reflect how consumers evaluate a brand's appeal. This evaluation comes from direct or indirect brand experience, emotional resonance, and information processing, which ultimately affect purchase intentions and choices(Urbane, Plotka, Blumenau, & Igonin, 2021)

In terms of dimensional structure, researchers have proposed single-dimensional, two-dimensional or three-dimensional models. The current mainstream view is a cognitive-emotional dual-dimensional framework, which believes that brand attitudes include both rational evaluations of brand functions and practicality, as well as emotional responses to personal experience and emotional triggers(Foroudi, Palazzo, & Sultana, 2021). Some

scholars further divide brand attitudes into two parts: hedonic (emotional) and practical (cognitive), or support a three-dimensional model composed of brand trust, brand emotion and purchase willingness. However, many shoppers seem to feel that their buying decisions are influenced by their impression of the brand, not why they have that impression. A recent study by Serralvo (2024) said that factors such as marketing activities, direct interaction with the brand, the level of trust in the brand, and the characteristics of the brand can greatly change how consumers view the brand and may even change their thinking(Serralvo, 2024) .The combination of emotional and rational information in advertisements, brand symbols that do not conform to consumers 'self-image, and unique brand characteristics will all shape brand impressions by influencing consumers' cognition and emotional reactions. Brand impression not only affects purchase intention and loyalty, but also promotes word-of-mouth communication and repeat purchasing behavior (Foroudi et al., 2021).In general, brand attitude-consumers 'overall evaluation of the brand, including rational judgment and emotional experience-is an important basis for brand management and marketing strategy formulation. Based on the background and theoretical premise of previous research and this study, the study evaluate brand attitudes from two dimensions: cognitive and emotional.

2.4 Purchase intention

Intention to purchase refers to a consumer's personal possibility and tendency to select and purchase a product or service through specific channels (such as online marketplaces or livestream platforms) in the future.As a mental state that connects information processing, attitude formation and actual purchasing behavior, it represents a consumer's readiness before receiving information, building trust, and making purchasing choices. This willingness is not only shaped by the practical value of the product (such as usefulness, ease of use, reliability and safety), but also influenced by a combination of factors such as entertainment, social expectations, brand perception and interactive experience (Q. Zhang, Wang, & Ariffin, 2024) .In the context of Live streaming eCommerce and virtual environments, new factors such as interactivity, credibility of anchors or KOL, real-time dialogue and social impact have become the key to predicting purchase intentions(J. Li & Hamid, 2025) . Razak et al (2024) found that repurchase intention is significantly impacted by greenwashing of brands' green messaging and image.

Consumers 'trust and love for anchors are important factors affecting purchasing decisions(Y. Wu & Huang, 2023) .In addition, the authenticity, interest and instant interaction of live broadcasts can make consumers more engaged and happy, and thus want to buy things more(Y.-Y. Wu, Batool, & Yang, 2024).The platform's service quality, information quality and system reliability will indirectly affect purchase intentions by improving "usefulness","ease of use" and "perceived value"(Qing & Jin, 2022).Social factors such as user interactions, promotions, and friend recommendations can also promote consumption by enhancing consumers 'sense of "social identity" and "belonging"(Aulianur & Purwanegara, 2024). In addition, psychological factors such as emotional connection, smooth experience and "social presence" have also been shown to effectively increase the desire to purchase(Ji, Chen, & Wei, 2024). In short, purchase intention is the result of the combined action of multiple factors, including rational value judgments, emotional and social influences. Especially in the new scenario of live streaming, interactivity, trust and emotional connection have become key channels to enhance the willingness to purchase.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used emotional bond as an intermediate factor to observe how brand personalization affects brand attitude and consumers 'willingness to purchase, and also used quantitative methods for a comprehensive analysis. Figure 1 below shows the proposed hypothetical model:

Figure 1

Research Framework Diagram
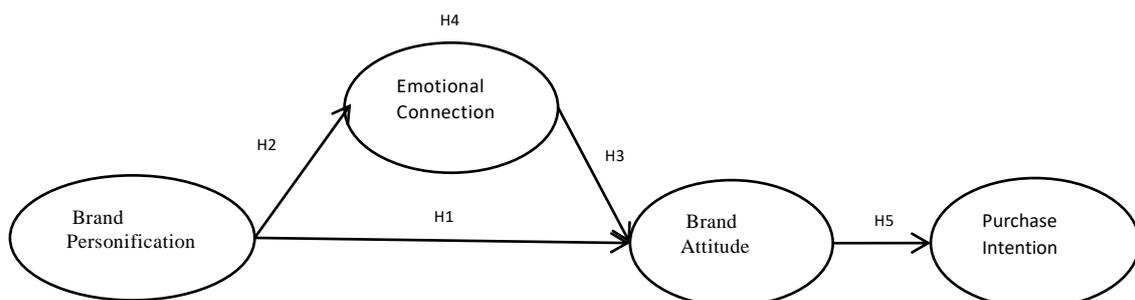
Brand personification is an important means of modern brand management and marketing. Research has found that it can significantly improve consumers 'attitudes towards brands and deepen emotional connections. By giving the characteristics of brand people, anthropomorphism makes the brand image more specific, vivid and cordial, which usually triggers positive emotional reactions and consumer resonance, making people feel that the brand is warmer and more attractive. There is evidence that this positive impact on brand attitudes is particularly evident among mass-market brands, with "warmth" being a key factor (M. Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, when a brand's personification method is highly matched with product information, consumers will also rate the product higher(He, Zhou, Guo, & Xiong, 2020).

In advertising and social media, anthropomorphic brand images can help build consumer-brand relationships and enhance identity and loyalty. Brand personification not only improves attitudes, but also stimulates emotional responses and makes people more attached to the brand(Kim et al., 2020) . Research has shown that anthropomorphic brands can activate positive emotions, increase attractiveness and emotional engagement, thereby promoting the formation of emotional bonds. In industries such as hotels and beverages, anthropomorphism has been found to significantly enhance consumers 'emotional attachment and sense of belonging(Nguyen et al., 2024) . On social platforms, anthropomorphic brands can also further deepen emotional connections by enhancing "social presence" and interactive participation (Kim et al., 2020) .

Simply put, adding human-like characteristics to a brand can make people feel that it is more cordial and favorable, thereby making people like the brand more and having a deeper emotional connection with it. This approach is particularly useful in brand management and marketing. So the study propose assumptions H1 and H2:

H1: Brand personification has a positive and significant impact on brand attitudes

H2:Brand personification has a positive and significant impact on emotional connections

Emotional connection is a deep relationship between consumers and brands, and research has shown that it can make people like a brand more. Brands that use anthropomorphic strategies-such as letting brand owners express their personality and emotions-are often more likely to impress consumers and deepen those emotions. This emotion can not only increase consumers 'goodwill and trust in the brand, but also make their attitude towards the brand more positive and lasting. When a brand uses

anthropomorphic images in advertising or social platforms, it will close the psychological distance from consumers, make the brand appear more friendly and attractive, and thus gain a higher overall rating(Putranto & Nirmala, 2024) .

In addition, emotional connection is a bridge between brand personification and brand attitude. Personalizing a brand first triggers positive emotions and strengthens emotional bonds before improving brand attitudes(Y. Li, Liu, & Zhou, 2024) .Factors such as brand personality and emotion often indirectly change purchase intentions by influencing brand attitudes(Junejo et al., 2022) .Therefore, brand personification can not only directly enhance everyone's attitude towards the brand, but more importantly, it can also indirectly make everyone have a more favorable impression of the brand by stimulating emotional connections. Based on this, the study propose hypotheses H3 and H4:

H3: Emotional connections have a positive impact on brand attitudes

H4: Emotional connection is the bridge between brand personification and brand attitude

From the perspective of consumer behavior, brand attitude is generally considered to be the key to determining purchase intentions. Many studies have proved that the better a brand attitude, the stronger consumers are willing to buy. Brand attitude represents consumers 'overall evaluation and emotional tendencies of a brand, and directly affects what they choose or not. The positive effect of brand attitudes on purchase intentions has been verified in a variety of products (such as electronics, automobiles, food, luxury goods) and consumption scenarios (such as social media, online promotions, retail environments)(Dimuthu, Arachchi, & Samarasinghe, 2023)

Research has found that factors like physical distance and emotional distance can affect how consumers view and feel about a brand, and thus how likely they are to buy something. When physical and emotional distances become smaller, people tend to trust the brand more, have a better impression of the brand, and are more willing to buy its products(Liu, Zhang, Huang, Zhang, & Zhao, 2020). In social media and digital word-of-mouth contexts, brand attitude is a crucial mediator of purchase intention. A positive attitude strengthens brand identification and loyalty, ultimately leading to actual purchases (Hmoud, Nofal, Yaseen, Al-Masaeed, & AlFawwa, 2022).Therefore, cultivating positive brand emotions can not only increase consumers 'interest in purchasing, but also be the basic method for companies to formulate effective marketing strategies and ensure long-term success of brands. Therefore, this study proposes the following assumptions:

H5: Brand attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.

The brand personalization scale used in this study had 5 questions and was first designed by Guido and Peluso (2015) and M Delbaere et al.(2011). The assessment of emotional connections refers to the mature models of Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro, and Petrides (2016) and Bender, Berg, Miller, Evans, and Holmes (2021), with a total of 4 measures. Brand attitude is divided into two parts: recognition and confirmation, and is mainly evaluated according to the method of Lafferty, Goldsmith and Hult (2004), and includes 6 questions. The Intention to Buy Scale was derived from four questions designed by Dodds et al.(1991), and all questions were scored using a five-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)(Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro, & Petrides, 2016; Bender, Berg, Miller, Evans, & Holmes, 2021; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011; Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Guido & Peluso, 2015; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Hult, 2004).

The study chose Mixue Ice & Tea as the survey brand. As a leader in China's fast-growing tea and beverage industry, Mixue has achieved rapid expansion in the face of fierce competition through innovative products, people-friendly prices and effective promotions. Brand image and brand awareness have a great impact on consumers 'purchasing choices, and research has shown that both of these factors can positively increase purchasing (Rosmayanti, 2023). In addition, Milk Snow Ice City's experience in social media operations, brand differentiation and store expansion provides a practical reference for industry practitioners and scholars.In-depth research on the Milk Snow Ice City brand can help emerging milk tea companies find new marketing methods, and can also provide companies with theoretical basis to help them enhance brand competitiveness and improve customer satisfaction(Lu, 2024).

The questionnaire was distributed to all consumers by the author and their acquaintances over the weekend. Wenshu Xing was used for this online survey. It was spread through personal Social networks from August to September 2025, and a total of 508 responses were received. Screening criteria include: (1) questionnaires with obvious logical errors;(2) online filling time is less than 60 seconds;(3) all options have the same answer;(4) surveys that do not meet the criteria at the beginning.

4 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

This study used Questionnaire Star to send questionnaires and forwarded them through WeChat circle of friends and family and friends. Of the total questionnaires sent out, 40 (7.9%) were invalid and were eliminated, leaving 468 valid answers. The questionnaire used the brand Moxue Bingcheng as an example, and divided the respondents into two groups-those who had come into contact with this anthropomorphic brand and those who had not. This could make the research more realistic and the method more rigorous.

The gender ratio of the sample was similar (49.8% male, 50.2% female). The age is relatively young, with the largest number of people aged 18-25 accounting for 51.3%, 26-30 accounting for 19.0%, and 31-40 accounting for 14.5%. In terms of academic qualifications, the overall level of this group of people is quite high: 54.9% have at least bachelor's degree (48.3% bachelor's degree, 6.6% master's degree or above). Occupations, students account for the largest proportion (38.0%), followed by marketing/sales/business professionals (16.5%) and technology developers/engineers (10.7%). In general, the people who responded to the questionnaire were mainly young people with high academic qualifications, and most of them were students, business or technical workers.

Table 1

Basic Data Distribution of the Sample

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	233	49.8
	Female	235	50.2
Age	Under 18	34	7.3
	18–25	240	51.3
	26–30	89	19
	31–40	68	14.5
	41–50	14	3
	51–60	14	3
	Over 60	9	1.9
Educational Attainment	Junior secondary school or below	22	4.7
	Secondary school/vocational school	76	16.2
	College Diploma	113	24.1
	Undergraduate degree	226	48.3

		Frequency	Percentage
	Postgraduate and above	31	6.6
	Marketing/Sales/Business Development	77	16.5
	Self-employed	28	6
	Corporate Manager	31	6.6
	Technical Development/Engineers	50	10.7
Occupation	Freelance	37	7.9
	Retired	17	3.6
	Student	178	38
	Teachers	15	3.2
	Medical staff	23	4.9
	Party and government officials	12	2.6

4.2 Measurement model

When examining measurement models, researchers must pay attention to their convergent validity. The term is mainly based on how closely related several projects representing the same concept are. According to Hair et al.(2014), measuring convergence validity requires careful look at factor load, combination reliability (CR), and average extraction of variation (AVE). It is best to use this method to evaluate. Ideally, the factor load and CR should exceed 0.7, and the AVE should be greater than 0.5.

In addition, to assess discriminative validity-that is, the ability of a project to distinguish between different concepts (or different measures)-it is examined as recommended by Ghozali (2021) and Hair et al.(2014)(Ghozali, 2021; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Looking at Table 2, the study find that Cronbach's alpha and CR both exceed 0.7. The average factor load for all projects is steadily above 0.7, with only a few close to 0.7, and the AVE for each concept is greater than 0.5. These results demonstrate that our study has strong convergent validity.

Table 2

Result of measurement model.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Adapted from
	1. This brand (product) appears to be a person	0.925	0.921	0.923	0.761	Guido and Peluso

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Adapted from
Brand personification	2. This brand (product) appears to feature a human face	0.869				(2015), M Delbaere et al. (2011)
	3. This brand (product) displays human-like expressions	0.861				
	4. This brand (product) appears to have a human-like form	0.840				
	5. This brand (product) has produced human-like movements	0.865				
Emotional Connection	1. I have a strong emotional attachment to this brand.	0.928				Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro and Petrides (2016); Bender, Berg, Miller, Evans and Holmes (2021)
	2. When I see this brand, I feel warmth or familiarity.	0.857				
	3. This brand holds significant sentimental value for me.	0.866	0.898	0.900	0.766	
	4. I would choose this brand because of my emotional attachment to it, rather than solely for the product itself.	0.849				
Brand Attitude	1. I consider the brand's personification to be well executed.	0.690				Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult (2004)
	2. I find the personification of this brand satisfactory	0.746				
	3. I find the personification of this brand valuable	0.729	0.816	0.822	0.521	
	4. I would prefer this personified brand	0.683				
	5. I would place greater trust in this personified brand	0.755				
	6. Amongst similar brands, I would be more interested in this personified brand	0.72				
Purchase Intention	1. I am more likely to order products from this brand as a result	0.922				
	2. When ordering similar products, I would consider this brand first	0.849				
	3. I am willing to pay a higher price to order products from this brand	0.873	0.904	0.913	0.777	
	4. I would be willing to recommend this product to friends	0.880				

To test discrimination validity, the study compared each construct to the square root of its AVE (Mean Variance Extraction). This method can see if different constructs are really different. According to routine standards(Ghozali, 2021; Hair et al., 2014). if the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlation with other constructs, then the discrimination validity is OK. Table 3 shows that our results meet this criterion- the square root of AVE is always more correlated than the constructs, indicating good discrimination validity.

Table 3

Discriminant validity of constructs

	Brand Attitude	**Brand Personification**	**Emotional connection**	**Purchase intention**
Brand Attitude	**0.722**			
Brand Personification	0.446	**0.873**		
Emotional Connection	0.411	0.391	**0.875**	
Purchase Intent	0.384	0.382	0.335	**0.881**

Study also examined multicollinearity and looked at the VIF (variance expansion factor) and tolerance values for all predictor variables. According to commonly used standards (Ghozali, 2021; Hair et al., 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), if the VIF is less than 10 or the tolerance is greater than 0.1, then multicollinearity can be ignored. The VIF values in Table 4 are between 2.263 and 4.678, which is well within the acceptable range, so multicollinearity should not affect our results.
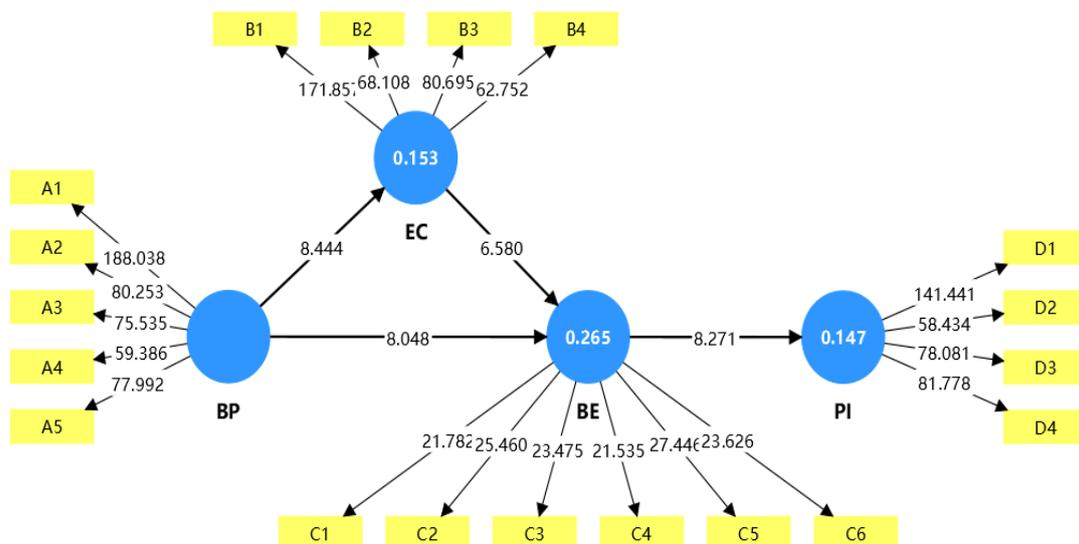
Table 4

Variance inflation factor (VIF)

Constructs	**Items**	**VIF**
	A1	4.678
	A2	2.646
Brand personification	A3	2.638
	A4	2.414
	A5	2.763
Emotional Connection	B1	4.430
	B2	2.461

Constructs	Items	VIF
Brand Attitude	B3	2.373
	B4	2.419
	C1	3.571
	C2	2.806
	C3	2.440
	C4	3.295
	C5	2.613
	C6	2.585
Purchase Intention	D1	4.343
	D2	2.263
	D3	2.610
	D4	2.651

Figure 2 shows that the independent variable brand personality has a statistically significant impact on emotional connection, brand attitude, and purchase intention, as demonstrated by t-statistics data.

Figura 2

t-statistics data

The path coefficient results in Table 5 show that each path coefficient (β) is statistically significant (p=0.000), indicating that there is indeed a correlation between the

variables. Specifically, brand personality (BP) has a direct impact on brand attitude (BE)(β=0.336, p=0.000), which supports Hypothesis 1; at the same time, BP also indirectly affects BE through emotional connection (EC)(BP→EC→BE, β=0.109). Bootstrap analysis proved the mediating role of EC (T-stats=4.751) and fully supported Hypothesis 4, indicating that EC is an important intermediate link for BP to affect BE. BP had a strong direct impact on EC (β=0.391, p=0.000), which verified Hypothesis 2, indicating that anthropomorphism strategies can indeed successfully elicit consumer emotional responses. Hypothesis 3 is also true because EC has a positive effect on BE (β=0.279, p=0.000). Finally, BE had a significant positive effect on purchase intention (PI)(β=0.384, p=0.000), supporting Hypothesis 5, indicating that positive brand attitudes brought by anthropomorphism and emotional connection can increase the likelihood of purchasing.

Table 5

Path coefficients among latent variables.

No	Path	β	T-stat	P-values
1	BP → BE	0.336	8.048	0.000
2	BP → EC	0.391	8.444	0.000
3	EC → BE	0.279	6.580	0.000
4	BP → EC → BE	0.109	4.751	0.000
5	BE → PI	0.384	8.271	0.000

5 DISCUSSION

This paper conducted empirical research on brand personification, emotional connection, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Through data analysis, all hypotheses were validated, as detailed in Table 6:

Table 6

Verification of Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis	Conclusion
H1 Brand personification exerts a positive influence on brand attitude	Confirmed
H2 Brand personification exerts a positive influence on emotional connection	Confirmed
H3 Emotional connection positively influences brand attitude	Established

| H4 Emotional connections bridge the gap between brand personification and brand attitude | Established |
| H5 Brand Attitude Exerts a Positive Influence on Purchase Intent | Established |

H1: Brand personification exerts a positive influence on brand attitude

There is evidence that adding human-like characteristics to a brand can significantly improve consumers 'perception of the brand. In this analysis, the standardized impact of brand personification on brand attitudes was 0.336 (p<0.000), indicating that brands that are more human-like make buyers feel better. Putranto and Nirmala (2024) found that anthropomorphic designs such as mascots can increase consumer attitudes by stimulating positive emotions, thereby increasing willingness to buy(Putranto & Nirmala, 2024) . Chen and Lin (2021) also pointed out that brand personification can establish emotional connections and positive evaluations by strengthening brand attachment and overall experience, and that consumers 'social needs will make this effect stronger.(Chen & Lin, 2021).

H2: Brand personification can strengthen emotional connections

Previous research found a strong correlation between brand personification and emotion (β=0.391, p<0.000), which supports hypothesis H2. The results show that anthropomorphic brands can greatly enhance the emotional bond between customers and brands. By using anthropomorphic images and interactive methods, brands can bring psychological distance closer, making everyone feel more belonging and feel more authentic. In this way, emotional resonance and brand attachment will also be stronger (S. Li & He, 2024) .For example, Mixue Ice Cream, its snowman image, active social media and down-to-earth communication methods can all narrow the distance between the brand and consumers, and enhance brand closeness and emotional connectiony(Putranto & Nirmala, 2024) .Therefore, companies should highlight the social attributes of brands and allow consumers to deeply participate in anthropomorphic activities, so as to maximize brand attitudes. Moreover, customers 'social needs and psychological characteristics will also make the benefits of brand anthropomorphism on emotional connections more obvious(Chen & Lin, 2021) . Therefore, adding some human-like characteristics to a brand has become an important way to strengthen consumers 'emotional connection and enhance brand value.

H3: Emotional connection has a positive impact on brand attitudes

Previous studies found a beta coefficient of 0.279 and a significance level of p < 0.001, indicating that this result is statistically significant. Simply put, when consumers are more emotionally motivated, they tend to rate the brand better. This view was also confirmed by subsequent research. For example, emotionally relying on a brand and establishing deep emotional bonds can significantly increase customer goodwill and trust (Lee, 2023). There is also evidence that emotional attachment to a brand directly increases brand awareness and indirectly increases brand loyalty and purchase willingness by enhancing confidence and satisfaction. In addition, positive emotional experiences and external emotional connections can strengthen consumers 'sense of belonging and identity with the brand, thereby making their overall attitude towards the brand more positive(Tien, E, & Jhang, 2024).Therefore, companies should focus on establishing emotional connections with customers and continuously strengthen these emotional bonds to improve brand attitudes and overall market performance.

H4: Emotional connection mediates between brand personification and brand attitude

Previous research found that if the mediating effect of psychological distance is taken into account, the coefficient of brand personification drops to 0.109, but it is still important (p<0.000), which suggests that emotional tendency partially explains the relationship between brand personification and brand attitude. In addition, combining the results of the first two assumptions, brands that use anthropomorphic information and pay more attention to emotion will have better results(Y. Li et al., 2024).Through intermediary analysis, Bhalla and Pathak (2023) found that the emotional connection between consumers and brands is an important channel through which brand personification affects brand attitudes (Bhalla & Pathak, 2023).In addition, when Nguyen et al.(2024) studied beverage brands, they found that brand anthropomorphism can significantly enhance consumers 'attitudes towards the brand by deepening emotional connections (Nguyen et al., 2024).

H5: Brand attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Whether this attitude is rational or emotional, it can greatly increase consumers 'willingness to buy. Studies have shown that the beta coefficient of the rational part of brand attitudes is 0.384 (p<0.001), which means that the better the attitude towards the brand, the stronger the willingness to buy it.For example, studies in different industries such as fast food, tires and luxury goods have found that good brand attitudes can effectively stimulate

consumers 'purchasing decisions and actual consumption behavior(Wells & Tan, 2024). In addition, in new areas such as social media and KOL marketing, brand attitudes also have a great impact on purchase intentions(Zhao, Xu, Ding, & Li, 2024). This further proves the positive effect of brand attitude on purchase intention.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Research contributions

6.1.1 Theoretical contributions

This research has brought several new contributions to the brand personification theory. It examines how brand personification affects brand attitudes, emotional connections and purchase intentions. First, it expands the theoretical framework of brand personification. Previous research has mostly focused on its impact on a single outcome, such as trust or loyalty. This study integrates anthropomorphism, emotional connections, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions into a complete model, systematically demonstrating how brand anthropomorphism enhances emotional connections, thereby improving brand attitudes, and ultimately purchase intentions. These results not only confirm the hierarchical influence process of brand personification, but also provide theoretical basis for the deep psychological mechanism between consumers and brands.

Second, this study more accurately measures and explains the mechanism of action of brand personification. By introducing psychological distance (especially social distance) as a mediating variable, it reveals how anthropomorphism affects brand attitudes, thus enriching brand humanization theory. The study also explores the social and interactive dimensions of anthropomorphism, showing how more humane brand-consumer interactions cultivate emotional bonds and positive attitudes. The proposed model and empirical data not only support previous research, but also further clarify the boundaries, operating methods, and psychological basis of brand personification(David-Ignatieff, Buzeta, De Pelsmacker, & Mouelhi, 2023) .

6.1.2 Management implications

This research provides practical guidance for brand management practices. First, the results show that enhancing a brand's social characteristics-such as creating a tailor-made brand image and enabling human-computer interaction-can significantly improve anthropomorphism, thereby strengthening customers 'emotional connections and positive brand attitudes. Therefore, brand leaders should use social platforms, avatars and intelligent customer service tools to develop brands with distinctive personality and interactive capabilities, so that brands can become objects that customers are willing to socialize. In the current era of digital and intelligent transformation, brands that adopt anthropomorphic design and interactive methods can effectively increase customer engagement and loyalty.

Secondly, the study found that brands that have deeper interactions and emotional exchanges and personification can gain higher consumer goodwill and trust than brands that rely solely on superficial personification. Therefore, when using anthropomorphic strategies, brands should pursue "both form and spirit"-not only to create a clear and unforgettable brand image, but also to build strong consumer relationships through continuous interaction and emotional communication. The study also recommends that brand managers consider how different product types and consumer psychological characteristics affect the effectiveness of brand personification. By flexibly adjusting the content and methods of brand personification, companies can achieve more accurate market positioning and differentiated competition(M. Zhang et al., 2020) .

6.2 Research limitations and future directions

6.2.1 Limitations

Concepts and theories in the field of brand personification are a bit confusing. Researchers use different definitions and measurement methods, and there are inconsistent explanations of how brand personification works. The theoretical foundation is fragmented and it is difficult to compare different studies or accumulate knowledge. Moreover, much of the literature is based on cross-sectional data or treats this phenomenon as static, paying little attention to how consumer-brand relationships change over time. For example, as the relationship with a brand develops, the impact of anthropomorphism on attitudes and

emotional connections may change, but longitudinal studies are rare. Third, the positive impact of brand personification is inconsistent in different situations. There is evidence that when brands emphasize "uniqueness" rather than "popularity", the beneficial impact of anthropomorphism on attitudes may be weakened or even reversed. In addition, customer psychological characteristics, social environment (such as social density), and product categories can significantly regulate the effect of personification, but there has been little empirical research on these moderating factors(Ding, Lee, Legendre, & Madera, 2022). Most research focuses on specific industry or cultural contexts, and there is no systematic cross-industry or cross-cultural comparison, which reduces the universality of the results.

6.2.2 Future research directions

Future research can be carried out from multiple directions. First, scholars should integrate different methods-such as the humanization methods of design-driven and perception-driven-into a coherent theory and universal measurement tool to consolidate the theoretical foundation of brand personification. Secondly, the study need more long-term follow-up research to observe how brand personification and consumer relations change over time, while taking into account the influence of factors such as brand life cycles and consumer growth stages. In addition, research should also explore the limitations and potential risks of brand personification, such as in brand crises or anti-brand movements, where it may trigger strong negative reactions or damage trust.

Next, research should assess moderating factors more rigorously and systematically analyze how consumer characteristics (such as social needs, pursuit of uniqueness), social environment (such as congestion, cultural background) and product categories affect the anthropomorphism effect. At the same time, it is recommended to expand the scope of research to cover new areas such as smart technology, sustainable brands and virtual brands, as well as different cultural environments, to improve the universality and practical significance of the research. Finally, with the development of AI and virtual reality technologies, digital and intelligent forms of brand personification deserve more in-depth study, especially the psychological and behavioral effects in scenarios such as human-computer interaction and virtual avatars(Hill & Troshani, 2024) .

In general, there are still abundant theoretical and application opportunities for brand anthropomorphism research; future work should give priority to theoretical integration,

method innovation and broader situational testing to promote sustainable development in this field.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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