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Source Credibility in Nestlé's Breakfast Cereal Anthropomorphic Mascots

Azahar Harun[1], Mohamed Razeef Abd Razak[2], Norsharina Samsuri[1], Mohd Zaki Mohd Fadil[1], Roszi Nazariah Nasni Naseri[1], Cheng Siew Beh[3]

[1]Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
[2]Islamic Research in Art, Design & Humanities (IRADAH) Research Group, Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
[3]Department of Design & Visual Communication, Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan, 81700 Johor, Malaysia
*Corresponding Authors Email Address: azahar581@melaka.uitm.edu.my

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Abstract

An anthropomorphic mascot is one of the marketing communication agents commonly found on breakfast cereal boxes. Many studies have argued that anthropomorphic mascots could enhance the brand appeal, purchase encouragement and brand loyalty. In this study, three specimens, Nestlé's Koko Krunch, Nestle's Honey Star and Nestle's Cookie Crisp were chosen. The objective was to examine each of the specimens and establish understanding regarding their significance in relation to source credibility. In order to achieve this, we employed Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). Prior to that, two raters examined the specimens using the Source Credibility Scale (SCS) model which includes Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Perceived Similarity. The data was processed using Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) calculator to determine the reliability of the qualitative enquiry process. The finding shows that all specimens feature anthropomorphic characters based on animals that are not native to Malaysia. Despite this, the specimens can attract attention and promote active living. This study concludes that the Nestle breakfast cereals anthropomorphic mascots are dependent largely on the source credibility factors (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Similarity) which are essential for capturing attention, product arousal, purchase encouragement and purchase decision.

Keywords - *Anthropomorphic mascots, breakfast cereal, Source Credibility Scale, Character Design*

1. Introduction

Many of us would agree that breakfast cereals in Malaysia are not considered a staple meal. Despite this, marketers continue to promote them on mainstream media through creative marketing strategies. One of the common approaches is by employing a mascot as a brand representative. In this regard, Nestle is one of the major producers of the breakfast cereal segment in Malaysia. Formerly known as Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company, this company started its business in Penang in 1912 and then moved to Petaling Jaya, Selangor in 1962 (The Star Online, 2016). Today, Nestle manufactures its products from eight factories and operates its head office from Mutiara Damansara, Selangor. Nestle is a household name and recognized by many Malaysians for its multitude of processed foods ranging from dairy products to whole grain. Regarding the breakfast cereal segment, Nestle currently offers eight breakfast kinds of cereal brands which include *Nestle Cookie Crisp, Nestle Honey Star, Nestle Koko Krunch, Nestle Koko Krunch Duo, Nestle Fitnesse, Nestle Corn Flakes, Nestle Milo and Nestle Cheerios.*

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2. Anthropomorphism in Advertising

Scholars state that anthropomorphism has been acknowledged for brand positioning, prolonging recognition and persuading consumers to make a purchase decision. Garretson and Niedrich (2004) study how creating a spokes-characters trust can lead to positive brand attitudes; Garretson & Burton (2005) concentrate on the anthropomorphic agent as advertisement and package cues in integrated marketing communications; Mize and Kinney (2008) analyze the influence of spokes-characters on brand relationship quality factors; and Garretson, Netemeyer, & Burton (2012) addresses how the personality traits of an anthropomorphic agent can lead to strengthening brand equity.

Usually, the characterization of an anthropomorphic agent is based on humans (real or fictional) and nonhuman or inanimate objects (animals, vegetables, tools, etc.). In Japan, anthropomorphic agents featuring lovable personalities are termed Kawaii which means cute and childlike (Siti Azizah, 2015). In the study of the Hello Kitty brand, Sanrio Company has been able to encourage consumers to stay loyal to the brand even until adulthood. The company has managed to accomplish this success by integrating character licensing, third-party collaboration, capitalizing on nostalgia, product-line extensions, brand extensions, sustaining consumer interests, and harnessing technology (Hosany et al., 2013).

There is no doubt that anthropomorphic mascots have a positive effect on consumer attitudes toward the brand, brand trust, and the willingness to pay a premium price (Folse et al., 2012). In spite of this, yet there is a lack of study on anthropomorphic mascots in Malaysia hence leads to the main question of how does the source credibility reflect the character design of breakfast cereal anthropomorphic mascots?

3. Research Design

The main objective of this study is to examine the character design of Nestle breakfast cereal anthropomorphic mascots using a Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012). This method offers clear methodological guidelines in processing a large number of data (visuals) and systematically describing its meaning. It involves collecting data and assigning successive parts of a subject to categories of a coding scheme. To begin, three specimens of Nestle breakfast cereal (Nestle's Koko Krunch, Nestle's Honey Star and Nestle's Cookie Crisp) from a local hypermarket. The sampling process was based on the criteria that each of the cereal boxes must exhibit an anthropomorphic mascot on its surface. Next, the specimens were identified, categorized and coded to describe the typical patterns or characteristics as well as identify the relationship among the content qualities (Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). To ensure the reliability of the QCA, a modified version of the Source Credibility Scale (SCS) introduced by Rattanachat and Chaiprasit (2014) was adopted. The variables of the SCS consist of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Similarity. According to Pairoa and Arunrangsiwed (2016), the SCS has been widely used in marketing communication research as a method to understand how the positive image of the endorser or communicator affect audience perception. For that reason, we developed an instrument for SCS using five-point bi-polar adjectives which starts with extremely negative to the moderate midpoint and finally to extreme positive. This instrument is intended to measure the extent to which a stimulus is perceived to be aesthetically pleasing with the emphasis on its design.

After the instrument was completed, two raters were assigned to examine each of the specimens. These independent raters are trained professionals in graphic design and were briefed about the QCA procedure to increase familiarity with the coding scheme which include specific questions on the persuasive effect of source credibility. Source credibility is a term commonly used to imply a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message. According to scholars, it is likely that a persuasion index will likely be higher if the person perceives the source as credible (cited in Caprano, 2015). Their agreement was tested using Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) protocol which is a commonly used term for the extent to which two or more independent raters evaluate a characteristic of a message or artefact and reach the same conclusion (Lombard et al., 2010). Two coefficient values, percent agreement and Cohen's kappa, are calculated to determine the reliability between the independent raters and the qualitative inquiry. The operational range of

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values for this index is between 0.0 (no reliability) and 1.0 (perfectly reliable). Next, the raters' responses based on social credibility stimuli were analyzed and discussed.

4. Findings and Discussions

This section presents the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) which also include the Inter Rater Reliability (IRR) test results on source credibility (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness & Similarity). Two coefficient values, Percent Agreement and Cohen's Kappa are used for determining the trustworthiness of the QCA.

Specimen A Specimen B Specimen C

Figure 1. Nestle's Breakfast Cereal Anthropomorphic Mascots

In Table 1, Specimen A: (*Nestle's Koko Krunch*), has a high Mean Percent Agreement (83.3 %) and a high Mean Cohen's Kappa (0.700). Specimen B: (*Nestle's Honey Star*), has a moderate Mean Percent Agreement (67.7 %) and low Mean Cohen's Kappa (0.011). Specimen C: (*Nestle's Cookie Crisp*) has a low Mean Percent Agreement (50 %) and low Mean Cohen's Kappa (0.011). Overall, these results suggest that the trustworthiness of the QCA is fair and therefore could be used to reflect the source credibility of each of the specimens. The following provides a summary of the findings.

Table 1: Source Credibility (Attractiveness,Trustworthiness & Similarity)

Specimens	Mean Percent Agreement	Mean Cohen's Kappa	Reliability of Source
Source Credibility in Nestle's Breakfast Cereal Anthropomorphic Mascots			
			Credibility
A. Nestle's Koko Krunch	83.3%	0.700	High
B. Nestle's Honey Star	67.2%	0.110	Low
C. Nestle's Cookie Crisp	50.0%	0.010	Low

4.1 Perceived Attractiveness

The finding shows that Specimen A: *Nestle's Koko Krunch*, Specimen B: *Nestle's Honey Star* and Specimen C: *Nestle's Cookie Crisp* possess attractiveness partly because of their character design is lovable and recognizable. However, in terms of anthropomorphic quality, Specimen A and Specimen B are seen to have more pleasant personality. Specimen A is portrayed as a smart and cute Koala bear whereas Specimen B is an astronaut bear that looks futuristic, techy and comandful. Meanwhile the character design in Specimen C is perceived less credible due to its appearance which seems incongruous and wicked. Hence, it is seen as undesirable and unsuitable for children. Despite this, perhaps it is acceptable to judge that all specimens have good stylization as to depict the brand positioning in the breakfast cereal market.

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4.2 Perceived Trustworthiness

The finding shows that Specimen A: *Nestle's Koko Krunch* and Specimen B: *Nestle's Honey Star* have equal score in regard to trustworthiness. The character design in both specimens is perceived reliable, reputable as well as friendly looking. This can be confirmed by the body gestures, facial expressions and colours that applied in character design. Meanwhile, in Specimen C: *Nestle's Cookie Crisp*, the character design, in this case a puma, is perceived as untrustworthiness because the acceptance knowledge of the actual animal in nature which is regarded as a predator.

4.3 Perceived Similarity

It can be concluded that the character design in Specimen B: *Nestle's Honey Star* has the most similarity aspect on all scales of source credibility such as optimistic, energetic, active and healthy followed by the character in Specimen A: *Nestle's Koko Krunch* that has a similarity on the scales of optimistic, energetic and healthy. However, in Specimen C:Nestle's Cookie Crisp the perceived similarity aspect is rather vague and unclear due to the fact that the anthropomorphic character does not reflect positivity let alone convey any meaning.

5. Conclusion

In this study, three specimens of Nestle breakfast cereal anthropomorphic mascots (A. *Nestle's Koko Krunch*, B. *Nestle's Honey Star* and C. *Nestle's Cookie Crisp*). Were examined on Source Credibility Scale (SCS) that include Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Similar. The study discovers that Specimen A: *Nestle's Koko Krunch* and Specimen B: *Nestle's Cookie Crisp* are perceived credible due to their lovable and positive personality. On the other hand, Specimen C: *Nestle's Cookie Crisp* features incongruous and wicked characteristic which seems less appealing thus unable to persuade consumers. This study concludes that the Nestle breakfast cereals anthropomorphic mascots are dependent largely on the Source Credibility parameters (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Similarity) which are essential for capturing attention, product arousal, purchase encouragement and purchase decision.

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