

# **Advancing Brand Anthropomorphism**

Clarifying the Concept, Exploring Logo Anthropomorphism and  
Understanding Cultural Influence



**Gilang Widya Kartika**

Department of Marketing

Lancaster University Management School

United Kingdom

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### **Thesis Abstract**

Although brand anthropomorphism has been present in branding literature for nearly two decades, it remains conceptually fluid and in need of further theoretical and empirical development. Ongoing ambiguities around its definition, application, and implications highlight the need for greater clarity. This thesis addresses this gap by integrating theoretical and empirical approaches across three interrelated studies. The first study offers a systematic literature review that critically examines how brand anthropomorphism has been defined and applied, revealing key inconsistencies. The second introduces a novel cultural perspective, proposing the icon familiarity hypothesis, which explains how brands can humanise themselves by drawing on culturally iconic figures in logo design. The third investigates how logo anthropomorphism influences consumer responses during brand failures, focusing on emotional outcomes such as brand disappointment and brand betrayal. These three contributions are developed across three standalone yet interrelated papers, each offering a distinct but complementary perspective that deepens, expands, and refines the understanding of brand anthropomorphism within contemporary branding theory.

**Paper 1:** This paper undertakes a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis of 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023 to address inconsistencies in how brand anthropomorphism is defined, measured, and applied. It examines conceptual variations in the use of the term, identifies overlaps with related constructs such as brand humanisation and personification, and highlights the diversity of measurement approaches and outcome variables. The paper also explores emerging applications of brand anthropomorphism in digital contexts, including AI and virtual brand personas. It contributes by proposing a unified framework to clarify the construct, standardise its use, and guide future research.

**Paper 2:** This paper investigates the effect of logo anthropomorphism on perceived brand value by introducing the role of iconic familiarity in shaping consumer responses. Drawing on the stereotype content model, the study tests the mediating roles of perceived warmth and competence to explain how consumers respond to logos designed with culturally iconic human-like figures. Using a survey-based experiment, the findings show that iconic familiarity strengthens logo association, and that perceived competence—rather than warmth—drives perceived brand value. This paper contributes by proposing and empirically testing a novel cultural mechanism in brand anthropomorphism and offers practical guidance for brands in leveraging iconic figures in logo design to enhance brand evaluation.

**Paper 3:** This paper explores how logo anthropomorphism influences consumer responses in the context of brand failure, with a focus on emotional outcomes such as brand disappointment and brand betrayal. Building on the concept of icon familiarity, the study examines whether brand logos inspired by culturally familiar characters shape consumers' emotional reactions when a brand violates expectations. Using structural equation modelling with UK-based data, the study finds that while logo association does not directly predict brand betrayal, it indirectly influences it through the mediating role of brand disappointment. This paper contributes by extending brand anthropomorphism research into negative brand events, highlighting how anthropomorphic logos can elevate consumer expectations—and intensify emotional fallout—when brands fail.

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Ten years is not a short amount of time for someone to complete their studies. It is a long journey—one that undoubtedly shapes a person's character in profound ways. Quoting Robert Greene in *The Laws of Human Nature*: "Your character will determine your fate. If you are inwardly strong, focused, and resilient, you will overcome the inevitable obstacles. If not, you will be broken by them." There were moments throughout this journey when the process nearly broke me. Yet, as this thesis strives to show, there is profound importance in choosing, humanising, and ultimately understanding character—especially for a brand. For it is through this character that the process of brand anthropomorphism becomes more meaningful, more intentional, and more effective—even when conveyed through something as simple and silent as a logo. Therefore, allow me to express my deepest gratitude to those who have helped shape me into someone with strong character—someone who does not easily give up, especially in completing this thesis. There are many people who have accompanied me throughout this long and transformative journey.

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**I dedicate this thesis to all of you.**



## **Declaration**

I confirm that none of the content included in this thesis has been previously submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for any other degree or qualification at this university or any other educational institution. The work presented here is entirely my own. Some ideas developed in this thesis originated from insightful discussions with my main supervisors, Professor Ahmad Daryanto and Professor Nicholas Alexander, as well as my extended supervisor, Dr Eman Gadalla

**Excerpts of some concepts and materials used in this research (e.g. the logo designs applied in the study) have been published in the following academic paper:**

### **Academic publication**

Daryanto, A., Alexander, N. and Kartika, G., 2022. The anthropomorphic brand logo and its effect on perceived functional performance. *Journal of Brand Management*, 29(3), pp.287–300.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the Study

The world seems to have its own way of restoring balance. At a time when brands were often perceived as greedy capitalist entities—treating consumers and employees as mere profit-generating statistics—the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and forced a fundamental re-evaluation. Brands were no longer expected to operate solely for commercial survival; instead, they were compelled to transcend the stereotype of the brand-as-monster, often viewed as a societal burden. In this context, brands were increasingly called upon to become meaningful societal actors—to act as 'friends' and display their human side. Brand anthropomorphism thus transformed from a strategic option into a moral and communicative imperative. This aligns with the work of Epley et al. (2007), who argue that during periods of heightened uncertainty, individuals seek emotional and social stability. Anthropomorphised brands fulfill this psychological need by acting as symbolic social agents. When consumers perceive brands as capable of empathy, care, or understanding, they are better equipped to navigate fear and unpredictability.

During this crisis, brands were expected to embody more ethical, morally aware personas. Brands were called to be 'human', rather than profit-driven machines. In the UK, for example, Dyson donated 10,000 ventilators to hospitals (Bashir, 2020). In India, Thyrocare provided free COVID-19 testing and changed its slogan from "Think Thyroid, Think Thyrocare" to "Honestly yours." Across the globe, both international and local brands contributed meaningfully to society, offering their support as if they were empathetic, socially responsible citizens. Conversely, brands that failed to act "humanely" by prioritising profit over people faced reputational backlash. These events revealed a deeper truth: brands occupy a vital role in society, both in times of crisis and stability. Yet for a brand to be accepted and

humanised by consumers, it must undergo a process of brand anthropomorphism that integrates culturally resonant elements. This is precisely why iconic brands exhibit such resilience—even during global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. Iconic brands possess a unique strength derived from their deep cultural connection, compelling narratives and distinctive brand personalities. These brands transcend brand functional utility and become a cultural symbol, becoming integral to consumer identities and societal values (Whelan, Moon, & Erevell, 2024; Torelli, 2013; Cottineau, 2012; Holt, 2004). Interestingly, the cultural dimension of brand anthropomorphism remains under-researched in the current literature.

Additionally, the urgency to understand brand anthropomorphism is compounded by the rapid advancement of technology and the digitalisation of consumer-brand interactions. Technological progress has not only expanded the possibilities for anthropomorphism through AI, chatbots, and virtual agents (e.g. Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa), but has made it an essential branding strategy. In this landscape, anthropomorphised brands maintain emotional, relational, and cultural connectivity by simulating human interaction. Consumers increasingly relate to brands as if they were social beings capable of understanding, adapting, and responding (Bhalla and Pathak (2023); Liu et al. (2022)).

These two driving forces—pandemic-induced emotional reorientation and digital transformation—have encouraged a surge of academic interest in brand anthropomorphism. As shown in the systematic literature review conducted in this research (Chapter 4), academic work on brand anthropomorphism has evolved gradually since the late 1990s. Pioneering studies by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) laid the conceptual groundwork, yet the explicit use of the term "brand anthropomorphism" only gained scholarly traction from the mid-2000s onward, coinciding with increased attention to social cognition and strategic branding. From a review of 157 peer-reviewed articles, this thesis finds that most brand anthropomorphism research remains empirical in nature, increasingly using experimental and quantitative

approaches (see **Table 1**). The field has moved from the influence of representations of human-like characters to multidimensional and interactive anthropomorphic brand elements. In parallel, literature reviews and conceptual papers have played foundational roles in defining theoretical boundaries and clarifying terminology. These works are essential for transforming brand anthropomorphism from an abstract metaphor into a robust and multidimensional construct with psychological and strategic relevance (see **Table 2**).

**Table 1** Brief Comparative Overview of Methodological Research

Methodology	Frequency	Purpose	Key Examples
<b>Experimental studies</b>	Most frequent	Used to manipulate anthropomorphic cues (e.g. logos, voice, avatars) and test causal effects	Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto (2009, 2013); Kim et al. (2017)
<b>Survey-based (Quantitative)</b>	High	Used to examine consumer responses via self-reported measures, often with established scales	Guido & Peluso (2015); Golossenko et al. (2020)
<b>Scale Development Studies</b>	Moderate	Aim to develop or adapt validated measurement instruments for brand anthropomorphism	Huang et al. (2020); Golossenko, Pillai & Aroean (2020)
<b>Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)</b>	Increasing	Used to explore complex relationships among variables, including mediators/moderators	Daryanto, Alexander & Kartika (2022); Tuškej & Podnar, 2018
<b>Qualitative studies</b>	Limited	Provide in-depth exploration of consumer interpretations or cultural meanings	Brandão & Popoli (2023); Vernuccio, Patrizi, & Pastore
<b>Mixed methods</b>	Rare	Combine quantitative analysis with narrative or textual data for richer insight	Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2019; Saha, Das, & Paul, 2023.

**Table.2** Comparative Overview of Literature review Research

Type of Paper	Frequency	Purpose	Key Examples
<b>Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs)</b>	Moderate	Synthesise empirical studies, map trends, and identify gaps	Sharma & Rahman (2022)
<b>Conceptual Framework Papers</b>	Few	Provide high-level overviews and interpretive commentary on the field; Define brand anthropomorphism; Propose models and typologies	MacInnis & Folkes (2017); Blut et al. (2021)
<b>Critiques and Theoretical Clarifications</b>	Few	Address metaphorical biases, conceptual vagueness, or boundary overlap	Avis & Aitken (2015)

Yet despite this progress, substantial research gaps remain. Many studies continue to conflate brand anthropomorphism with related constructs like brand personality, humanisation, and personification, leading to conceptual ambiguity and theoretical fragmentation. The field lacks a unified construct definition, which hinders cumulative theory building, measurement standardisation, and clarity in academic discourse. Moreover, visual and symbolic forms of anthropomorphism—particularly brand logos—remain underexplored, even though they serve as critical touchpoints that carry both emotional and cultural meaning. There is limited empirical understanding of how anthropomorphised logos that incorporate culturally iconic elements influence consumer perceptions of brand value, competence, and identification. Equally underexamined is the "dark side" of brand anthropomorphism: the emotional risks associated with heightened consumer expectations. While the literature has largely emphasised positive outcomes like trust and loyalty, fewer studies have addressed how anthropomorphised brands may intensify feelings of disappointment or betrayal when they fail

to meet these expectations. This is especially relevant in an era defined by social accountability and consumer moral scrutiny. Finally, many existing studies adopt a single-lens perspective (psychological, strategic, or cultural), neglecting the interplay between cognitive processes, branding tactics, and sociocultural symbolism. As a result, brand anthropomorphism is often treated as a static construct rather than a dynamic, socially embedded phenomenon.

This research addresses these critical gaps through a trilogy of interconnected studies. The first paper provides a systematic literature review (SLR) that brings much-needed conceptual clarity by focusing exclusively on studies that explicitly employ the term "brand anthropomorphism." It introduces a unified three-dimensional framework (strategic, psychological, cultural) that consolidates and advances the field. The second paper empirically investigates how anthropomorphised brand logos, particularly those inspired by culturally iconic figures (e.g. Sherlock Holmes), influence consumer perceptions of competence and perceived value. The third paper explores how these logos may trigger emotional consequences in the context of brand transgressions, revealing that brand disappointment mediates the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. Together, these studies offer a multi-level, empirically grounded, and culturally contextualised understanding of brand anthropomorphism. By clarifying conceptual boundaries, expanding the construct to include visual and symbolic dimensions, and revealing its emotional risks, this research contributes meaningfully to both theoretical discourse and managerial practice. It equips academics with a refined analytical toolkit and provides brand strategists with practical guidance on building more resilient, emotionally intelligent, and culturally resonant brand identities in an increasingly complex consumer landscape.

## 1.2 Conceptual Background

This chapter aims to introduce the key concepts that underpin the studies. These concepts include brand anthropomorphism, logo anthropomorphism, icon familiarity, logo association, stereotype content model, perceived value, brand disappointment, and brand betrayal.

### **Brand Anthropomorphism**

To begin, this study proposes a more holistic and up-to-date definition of brand anthropomorphism compared to existing definitions in the literature. This definition reflects the evolving nature of the concept at the intersection of social psychology, strategic branding (specifically brand design in this study), and cultural theory. Rather than merely tracing the definitional evolution of brand anthropomorphism within the existing literature, this study acknowledges the theoretical progression of the concept. Initially, brand anthropomorphism was conceptualised as an individual tendency to humanise non-human objects, with brands being one such object (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Over time, this perspective shifted toward a firm-driven approach, as researchers began to define brand anthropomorphism as a strategic branding approach (Kwak, Puzakova, & Rocereto, 2017; Vernuccio, Patrizi, & Pastore, 2021). In practice, brand anthropomorphism often preceded its formal theorisation—an observation that underscores its strategic relevance and utility within brand management.

In this study, this conceptual foundation is further enriched by incorporating the cultural dimension (Daryanto, Alexander, & Kartika, 2022; Holt, 2004; McCracken, 1986). These three dimensions—psychological, strategic, and cultural—collectively enhance the understanding of brand anthropomorphism: social psychology offers insights into why consumers anthropomorphise brands, strategic branding explains how firms employ anthropomorphism,

and culture reveals what anthropomorphism means within broader societal and symbolic contexts.

Accordingly, this study defines brand anthropomorphism as a multidimensional and culturally embedded process through which brands are designed to possess and express human-like traits (e.g. intentions, emotions, or physical features), thereby enabling consumers to perceive, relate to, and interact with brands as social entities. This multidimensional evolution—spanning psychological, strategic, and cultural dimensions—positions brand anthropomorphism as a rich and dynamic construct central to understanding how brands become meaningful, relatable, and enduring in the eyes of consumers. In this study, brand anthropomorphism serves as a foundational lens through which the design, perception, and impact of anthropomorphic brand elements—particularly logos—are examined within broader psychological and cultural contexts.

### **Logo anthropomorphism**

Logo anthropomorphism refers to the intentional integration of human-like features with culturally symbolic representations into brand logo design, aimed at evoking anthropomorphic perceptions in consumers. Rooted in social psychology, branding strategy, and cultural theory, logo anthropomorphism functions as a visual and rhetorical device that reduces brand abstraction, communicates personality traits such as competence and warmth, and fosters emotional, cognitive, and symbolic connections between consumers and the brand. The proposed definition of logo anthropomorphism contributes meaningfully to the branding literature by addressing several theoretical and empirical gaps. First, it offers conceptual clarity by distinguishing logo anthropomorphism from general brand anthropomorphism. While the broader construct of brand anthropomorphism encompasses various consumer-brand



interactions and symbolic meanings, logo anthropomorphism focuses specifically on the visual and design-based application of human-like features within brand logos. This specificity allows researchers and practitioners to examine anthropomorphism at the level of visual identity, an area that has been relatively underexplored despite its prominence in brand touchpoints.

Second, the definition is theoretically grounded in an interdisciplinary synthesis of social psychology, branding strategy, and cultural theory. By integrating these perspectives, the definition moves beyond isolated disciplinary treatments and offers a unified conceptualisation that captures both consumer perception and managerial intent. From the psychological lens, it explains why consumers are cognitively predisposed to respond to anthropomorphic cues; from the strategic branding lens, it explains how firms leverage these cues to communicate meaning; and from the cultural lens, it situates logo anthropomorphism within broader societal narratives and identity work. This comprehensive theoretical scaffolding ensures both explanatory depth and conceptual robustness.

Third, the definition underscores the strategic and symbolic functions of logo anthropomorphism rather than treating it as a purely aesthetic phenomenon. In doing so, it highlights how logos can serve as rhetorical devices that communicate brand personality, values, and emotional tone. This strategic positioning aligns with the growing need in brand research to understand how visual identity contributes to brand meaning, differentiation, and long-term consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, the symbolic dimension—particularly through cultural referencing and archetypal borrowing—illustrates how logos function as cultural signifiers that extend the brand's reach into collective memory and social discourse.

Finally, the definition proposes logo anthropomorphism as a researchable construct that is both measurable and empirically testable. It invites further exploration into how specific anthropomorphic design elements (e.g., facial cues, symmetry, curvature) influence consumer

evaluations such as perceived warmth, competence, trust, and self-identification. In doing so, it opens new pathways for quantitative and qualitative inquiry into logo design, brand symbolism, and visual rhetoric—thus enriching the methodological diversity of branding research.

### **Icon Familiarity**

This concept represents a critical component of the present study. It serves as the foundation for explaining the effects of logo anthropomorphism, specifically by demonstrating that the impact is not simply derived from embedding any human-like figure into a brand logo. Rather, the effect emerges when the logo incorporates a recognisable and culturally iconic human character—a figure that elicits a sense of familiarity upon consumer exposure. The findings of this study reveal that such design choices influence consumers’ perceptions of brand personality, which in turn shape their perceptions of brand value. Furthermore, this research identifies that icon familiarity plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions when the brand commits a transgression or error. Through this concept, the study explains effects that, while seemingly basic and fundamental, have received limited attention, particularly in relation to brands that are humanised through the use of culturally iconic characters.

In this study, icon familiarity is defined as follows: Icon familiarity refers to the extent to which consumers recognise and feel a sense of familiarity with culturally or symbolically significant characters or symbols embedded within brand logos. It encompasses prior exposure, cultural knowledge, and symbolic associations that enhance logo recognition, influence consumer perception, and support the communication of brand values and personality traits. As a construct, icon familiarity integrates cognitive fluency and cultural resonance, functioning as a strategic tool in logo design to strengthen brand identity and consumer-brand connection.

The conceptualisation of icon familiarity in this research is developed through a synthesis of insights from the literature on brand familiarity, logo design, and brand iconicity. While brand familiarity has traditionally referred to the extent of the consumer's direct and indirect experiences with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987), icon familiarity narrows this focus to the consumer's recognition of culturally or symbolically meaningful icons embedded within brand logos (Daryanto et al., 2022). In doing so, it extends the cognitive perspective of familiarity by incorporating cultural symbolism and visual semiotics as central dimensions that shape how consumers recognise, interpret, and respond to brand logos.

### **Logo Association**

The concept of logo association in this study builds upon the broader theory of brand associations, which posits that consumers develop mental connections between a brand and various attributes, values, or experiences (Keller, 1993). In the case of logos, these associations are evoked through visual design—including colour, shape, typography, and symbolic content—positioning the logo as more than a mere identifier, but rather as a strategic branding device capable of communicating complex brand meanings rapidly and memorably (Wheeler, 2014; Barroso et al., 2022). As noted by Milton Glaser, the logo is "the gateway to the brand" and therefore plays a central role in shaping initial and ongoing perceptions of brand identity (Wheeler, 2012; Kelly, 2017). When designed effectively, logos become visual shortcuts that generate immediate recognition while simultaneously triggering deeper associations with brand personality, values, or even self-identity (Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010).

In this study, logo association is conceptualised as the mechanism by which familiar, iconic, and often anthropomorphic elements embedded within logos (e.g. a Sherlock Holmes-

like character) evoke symbolic and cultural meaning. These associations not only influence how consumers interpret brand traits—such as competence and warmth—but also shape perceived brand value and consumer responses to brand behaviours (e.g. trust or betrayal). Thus, logo association operates at the intersection of visual semiotics, brand strategy, and consumer psychology, playing a central role in how logos function as emotionally and culturally charged brand touchpoints.

Furthermore, in both empirical studies, logo association functions as the central mediating mechanism that channels the effects of icon familiarity into meaningful cognitive and emotional responses. It is this construct through which symbolic recognition becomes actionable perception—driving both the construction of brand value and the experience of brand failure. As such, this study positions logo association not merely as a passive outcome of design, but as an active, multidimensional construct central to understanding the psychological consequences of logo-based branding strategies.

### **Stereotype Content Model**

Understanding how consumers form impressions of brands is central to branding research. One powerful framework for explaining these impressions is the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), a theory grounded in social psychology that explains how individuals form judgements of others based on two fundamental dimensions: warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske et al., 2018). These dimensions emerge from two essential evaluative questions: “What are this person’s intentions towards me?” (warmth), and “How capable is this person of carrying out those intentions?” (competence). Individuals perceived as warm are seen as kind, sincere, and trustworthy, while those perceived as competent are judged by their intelligence, confidence, and capability (Li & Nan, 2023).

Crucially, this model has been extended beyond interpersonal judgement to the domain of consumer-brand relationships. As consumers increasingly relate to brands in human-like ways (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Lee, 2009), researchers have applied the SCM to explain how people stereotype brands along these same two dimensions. This transition from person-to-brand perception is formalised in the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) introduced by Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone (2012), which conceptualises brands as social actors capable of expressing intentions (warmth) and enacting those intentions (competence). Thus, the stereotype content model offers a compelling theoretical lens for examining how consumers evaluate brands not just functionally, but also socially and emotionally.

This framework is particularly relevant in the context of brand anthropomorphism, which refers to the attribution of human-like traits to brands. As consumers increasingly anthropomorphise brands—encouraged by deliberate marketing efforts such as human-like mascots, avatars, and narratives—brands are no longer seen as impersonal corporate entities, but rather as intentional agents with personalities, motives, and values (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Epley et al., 2007; Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). This anthropomorphic shift makes the application of SCM to branding not only appropriate, but necessary for understanding how consumers categorise and respond to brands. When a brand is perceived as warm or competent, it elicits specific consumer reactions, such as trust, admiration, or even caution and scepticism, depending on how these traits are interpreted in each context.

Within the scope of this thesis, the SCM provides a foundational framework to explain how and why logo anthropomorphism influences consumer perceptions of brand warmth and competence. As the literature shows, warmth and competence perceptions are not just abstract traits—they are deeply consequential, influencing brand attitudes (Lee & Oh, 2021), purchase intentions (Roy & Naidoo, 2021), CSR evaluation (Jeong & Kim, 2021), brand loyalty (Fang, 2019), and even reactions to brand failures (Wang, Ming & Zhang, 2020). A pattern emerging

from these studies is clear: brand anthropomorphism frequently serves as an antecedent to brand stereotyping, which in turn mediates various consumer behavioural and attitudinal outcomes.

Therefore, by integrating the SCM into this thesis, the research provides a theoretically rigorous and empirically supported lens for understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying brand perception. It also extends the literature by investigating how specific anthropomorphic cues—particularly culturally iconic logo designs—shape consumers’ warmth and competence judgements, and how these judgements influence broader consumer-brand relationships, including perceived value, disappointment, and betrayal.

## **Perceived Value**

Perceived value is a foundational concept in marketing research, long recognised for its central role in shaping consumer decision-making and brand evaluation (Zeithaml, 1988; Hanaysha, 2018). Defined as the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given, perceived value reflects a subjective trade-off between benefits and sacrifices (Zeithaml, 1988; Hellier et al., 2003). Over time, the construct has evolved from a narrow focus on price–benefit calculations to a multidimensional framework encompassing functional, emotional, and social dimensions (Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). These dimensions capture not only tangible attributes such as quality and performance, but also symbolic and affective meanings derived from brand experience.

In this study, perceived value functions as the key outcome variable—the culmination of consumers’ cognitive and emotional processing of anthropomorphic logo design elements. Specifically, the model investigates how consumers’ recognition of iconic figures within logos (i.e. icon familiarity) leads to meaningful logo associations, which then influence brand

competence and brand warmth—two dimensions derived from the Stereotype Content Model (SCM). These perceptions, in turn, shape consumers' overall evaluation of the value a brand provides. In the context of this study, perceived value is critically examined through the lens of brand anthropomorphism—a strategy in which brands adopt human-like traits to foster relatability, trust, and emotional engagement (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Kervyn et al., 2012). Anthropomorphic branding has been shown to enhance functional value by signalling competence and reliability, elevate social value by enabling identity expression and affiliation, and intensify emotional value by deepening attachment and psychological comfort (Nguyen et al., 2024; Han et al., 2023; Guido & Peluso, 2015). This thesis builds on and extends this understanding by investigating how anthropomorphic visual elements—particularly logo design—affect perceived value formation.

By integrating perceived value into the conceptual framework, this research provides an understanding of how anthropomorphic cues embedded in brand logos influence not only consumer perception, but also the broader relational and cultural dimensions of brand meaning. The construct thus serves as a critical outcome variable, bridging the psychological mechanisms of brand perception with strategic marketing objectives.

## **Brand Disappointment**

Brand disappointment constitutes a critical construct in this thesis, representing a core outcome of disrupted consumer-brand relationships, particularly in the context of anthropomorphic branding. Defined as the negative emotional response resulting from the failure of a brand to meet consumer expectations, brand disappointment reflects a below-expected brand performance that triggers disillusionment and often precedes more severe emotional reactions, such as brand betrayal (Haase et al., 2022; Zafrani et al., 2023; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999).

In this study, brand disappointment is conceptualised as an intermediate affective outcome that mediates the relationship between consumers' symbolic engagement with brand logos—specifically via icon familiarity and logo association—and their deeper emotional disconnection, expressed through brand betrayal. As the empirical model illustrates, logo association significantly influences brand disappointment, highlighting how anthropomorphised and iconic branding elements can raise affective expectations, which, when violated, lead to consumer disillusionment.

The inclusion of brand disappointment in this thesis is not incidental—it is a deliberate effort to advance the understanding of how anthropomorphic branding can backfire when symbolic or relational expectations are not fulfilled. Drawing from the discipline of negative events in marketing (Khamitov, Grégoire, & Suri, 2020), this research positions brand disappointment as a distinct and under-theorised emotional response, one that is more frequently experienced than anger or hate (Haase et al., 2022), yet equally consequential in shaping post-violation consumer behaviours such as brand switching, online complaints, and negative word-of-mouth. Importantly, this study also expands the scope of antecedents to brand disappointment by introducing the role of brand anthropomorphism, particularly through human-like logos grounded in culturally iconic imagery. While previous research has established that anthropomorphism enhances trust, warmth, and consumer-brand connection (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Kervyn et al., 2012), it has also been shown to create elevated expectations of relational consistency and human-like behaviour. When brands fail to meet these anthropomorphic expectations—through incongruent actions, miscommunication, or unmet symbolic promises—they risk triggering disappointment (Jin & Qian, 2021; Puzakova & Aggarwal, 2018; Yang & Aggarwal, 2025).

Thus, brand disappointment in this thesis is treated not only as a reactive emotion, but as a diagnostic indicator of expectation misalignment within consumer-brand relationships. It



bridges the cognitive processing of brand symbolism (via logo association) and the emotional disconnection that leads to brand betrayal, serving both as an outcome and a warning signal of branding inconsistency, strategic overreach, or relational breakdown. Moreover, this research foregrounds brand disappointment as a strategically actionable construct. While often seen as detrimental, brand disappointment can provide meaningful insight into consumer expectations, affective thresholds, and the limitations of anthropomorphic branding. By understanding the conditions under which anthropomorphism leads to disappointment, brands can more effectively manage emotional risks, calibrate symbolic branding strategies, and mitigate negative consumer responses.

In sum, brand disappointment offers a nuanced lens to examine the emotional volatility of anthropomorphised branding. Its inclusion enhances the emotional depth of the conceptual framework, introduces a vital counterbalance to the predominantly positive narratives of anthropomorphism, and contributes to a more complete understanding of consumer-brand dynamics in a symbolic and emotionally charged branding landscape.

## **Brand Betrayal**

Brand betrayal serves as a critical construct in this thesis, capturing one of the most emotionally intense and psychologically consequential responses a consumer can experience within the context of consumer–brand relationships. It is defined as a perceived violation of trust, morality, or relational norms, wherein consumers believe a brand has acted with negative intent—through deception, ethical misconduct, or symbolic dissonance—leading to an acute sense of personal offence and emotional rupture (Reimann et al., 2018; Rasouli et al., 2023). Unlike general dissatisfaction or disappointment, brand betrayal reflects deep psychological

injury, triggering a strong "hot" affective reaction characterised by resentment, indignation, and, in many cases, a desire for retaliation (Kähr et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2022).=

In the context of this study, brand betrayal is positioned as a key downstream outcome, following the cognitive and emotional processes initiated by icon familiarity and logo association, and further shaped by brand disappointment. As illustrated in the conceptual framework, logo association with anthropomorphised and culturally iconic brand figures raises expectations of human-like consistency, trustworthiness, and moral agency. When these expectations are violated—whether through ethical misconduct, symbolic incongruence, or perceived inauthenticity—the emotional cost is heightened, culminating in a perceived breach of trust and brand betrayal. This pathway is theoretically underpinned by Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), which asserts that transgressions violating deeply held ethical and relational expectations result in stronger emotional responses than mere performance failures.

The inclusion of brand betrayal in this thesis responds to the need for a more nuanced and affectively rich understanding of consumer backlash, particularly within anthropomorphic branding strategies. While anthropomorphism has often been studied for its ability to foster warmth, engagement, and relational closeness, this thesis foregrounds its double-edged potential—demonstrating that the same human-like traits that enhance connection also intensify feelings of violation when brands fall short of those ideals (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013; Patrizi et al., 2024). When brands are humanised, consumers attribute intentionality and moral responsibility to them, increasing the likelihood that transgressions will be judged through the lens of interpersonal betrayal rather than as simple corporate missteps.

Brand betrayal is particularly relevant for this research because it marks the emotional and behavioural tipping point in the breakdown of consumer-brand relationships. It not only

signals a loss of trust but also predicts negative behaviours such as boycotting, brand switching, retaliatory word-of-mouth, and participation in anti-brand communities (Brandão & Popoli, 2023). The thesis further explores how the personal relevance of brand symbolism, activated through logo design and icon familiarity, makes anthropomorphised brands more vulnerable to betrayal judgments, especially when symbolic consistency and authenticity are compromised.

In distinguishing brand betrayal from brand disappointment, this research advances theoretical clarity by emphasising perceived motive and emotional intensity as core differentiators. While disappointment may result from unmet performance expectations, betrayal arises when consumers perceive a deliberate moral violation, leading to a sense of personal betrayal and emotional rupture (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999; Reimann et al., 2018). This distinction is essential for understanding how brands can recover from negative consumer reactions, as betrayal requires not only remediation but also a restoration of moral and relational trust, a process far more complex than recovery from disappointment.

Ultimately, the integration of brand betrayal into this thesis provides a critical lens through which to evaluate the risks and responsibilities of anthropomorphic branding. As brands increasingly adopt human-like personas to foster closeness and differentiation, they must recognise that these strategies also elevate consumer expectations of ethical congruence and symbolic consistency. Failure to uphold these expectations can result in betrayal, a deeply personal and emotionally charged response that can threaten brand equity, reputation, and long-term consumer loyalty. By conceptualising brand betrayal as a central outcome in the psychological chain from icon familiarity to consumer backlash, this thesis offers a more comprehensive model of consumer-brand dynamics, revealing how visual branding and anthropomorphic cues shape not only perceptions of value and connection, but also the emotional depth of disconnection when trust is broken.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Research

As stated in the title, this thesis aims to contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of brand anthropomorphism. Specifically, it does so through one systematic literature review and two empirical studies. The overarching goal of these three studies is to address research questions that, while fundamental, have received limited attention in prior research. The central research questions guiding this thesis are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How has brand anthropomorphism been conceptualised, operationalised, and thematically explored in the literature? – Addressed in Paper 1 through a systematic literature review.
- **RQ2:** How does logo anthropomorphism, designed with iconic characters that consumers are familiar with (e.g. Sherlock Holmes), impact consumer perceptions of the brand? – Examined in Paper 2 using a quantitative method.
- **RQ3:** How does logo anthropomorphism incorporating familiar iconic characters influence consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoing, including feelings of disappointment and betrayal? – Investigated in Paper 3, also through quantitative research.

This thesis aims to advance the literature on brand anthropomorphism by addressing foundational issues that have received limited attention in prior research. The first study, a systematic literature review of 157 peer-reviewed articles (1998–2023), identifies significant inconsistencies in how brand anthropomorphism has been defined, measured, and applied. Specifically, it reveals the frequent conflation of related constructs—such as brand humanization, brand personification, and human brand—which has hindered theoretical clarity and fragmented scholarly discourse. The review also highlights the absence of a standardized measurement framework, with studies employing varied and often incompatible operationalisations. While recent efforts (e.g. BAQ, BASC) show progress, these tools have

yet to gain widespread adoption. Despite these challenges, the growing body of research treating brand anthropomorphism as a distinct construct signals a shift toward greater conceptual precision and methodological consistency. By clarifying definitional boundaries and calling for unified measurement approaches, this thesis lays the groundwork for brand anthropomorphism to evolve into a cohesive and standalone domain within humanized branding. In doing so, it provides a stronger foundation for both theoretical development and practical application in increasingly digital and competitive brand environments.

The second study in this thesis is motivated by a foundational concern within branding literature—*is a brand merely a logo, or something deeper?* This question reflects an enduring theoretical debate that has shaped the evolution of branding thought. Early perspectives treated the brand as a visual signifier, primarily represented by logos, symbols, or names (AMA, 1960). However, this narrow view has since been challenged by scholars like Aaker (1996), Keller (1993), and Kapferer (2012), who argue that a brand encompasses identity, personality, values, and consumer experiences. Neumeier (2005) further emphasized that “a brand is not a logo, it’s a person’s gut feeling about a product, service, or organization.” This theoretical progression gave rise to views that treat brands as psychological (Keller, 1993; Fournier, 1998), cultural (Holt, 2004), and even holistic entities—where *everything a company does* contributes to its brand (Godin, 2009). Within this shifting paradigm, brand anthropomorphism has emerged as a powerful strategic tool, enabling brands to forge emotional and symbolic connections by attributing human-like qualities to brand elements.

Given the prominence of brand anthropomorphism theory in branding discourse, the primary aim of this study is to extend that conversation into the domain of logo design, a relatively underexplored but visually critical touchpoint. Specifically, this study investigates how logo anthropomorphism, when designed with familiar, iconic cultural elements (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), influences consumer perceptions through the lens of brand stereotypes—

competence and warmth. The empirical findings demonstrate that iconic, anthropomorphised logos significantly enhance brand competence perceptions and perceived brand value, with competence mediating the relationship between logo association and value. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader branding literature by showing that logo anthropomorphism is not just an artistic or aesthetic choice but a strategic branding mechanism that shapes consumer judgment. It responds directly to the evolving discourse on branding's role beyond visual identity—positioning logos as symbolic carriers of brand meaning rather than mere signifiers. This suggests that thoughtful integration of culturally familiar anthropomorphic elements into logos can elevate perceived competence and value.

The third paper aims to advance the brand anthropomorphism literature by investigating how logo anthropomorphism influences consumer responses to negative brand experiences. While prior studies predominantly highlight the positive effects of brand anthropomorphism, this research challenges that one-sided narrative by addressing an important research gap: What happens when anthropomorphised brands fail? This study focuses specifically on logo anthropomorphism and investigates how such designs impact consumer reactions in the context of brand wrongdoing. The paper argues that logos, particularly those infused with familiar, culturally significant icons (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), function not only as visual identifiers but as semiotic devices that carry symbolic meaning, evoke emotional responses, and shape consumer expectations. When these expectations are violated, the anthropomorphic qualities that previously fostered emotional closeness can paradoxically intensify negative responses, such as brand disappointment and brand betrayal.

This paper also contributes to the growing body of brand disappointment research by moving beyond aesthetic dimensions such as logo shape or colour, which have dominated previous inquiries. Instead, it positions the logo as a meaning-making mechanism—one that is capable of both enriching and destabilising the consumer-brand relationship, depending on how

expectations are managed or violated. The integration of cultural symbolism in logo anthropomorphism heightens both the power and the risk of such brand elements: with strong associations come high expectations, and thus greater emotional fallout when those expectations are not fulfilled.

Ultimately, this study offers a significant theoretical contribution by bridging brand anthropomorphism with negative consumer emotions, highlighting that anthropomorphised logos—while effective in humanising brands and fostering relational bonds—also carry reputational risk. For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of aligning brand behaviour with the symbolic and emotional promises embedded in logo design. For researchers, the study opens new pathways for exploring the emotional consequences of symbolic branding, particularly in contexts of trust violation, crisis, and consumer disillusionment.

## 1.4 Study Context

The three studies in this thesis collectively explore the effects of brand anthropomorphism on how consumers form perceptions of a brand.

For the first study, a systematic literature review was conducted in response to a central concern: although brand anthropomorphism has become an increasingly popular topic among researchers and a widely adopted strategy in marketing practice, its conceptual foundations, measurement consistency, and contextual applications remain fragmented. For the two subsequent empirical studies focus on investigating the effects of logo anthropomorphism on consumer perception. Both studies employ hypothetical scenarios rather than analysing real brands. For this purpose, a fictional brand was created—PriceInvestigate.com, a fictional price comparison website described to participants as a well-

established company with millions of monthly visitors. A brand logo was also designed specifically for this fictitious brand, drawing visual inspiration from the iconic British fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. This character was selected because of his cultural significance and the potential to activate icon familiarity and logo associations—two key constructs central to understanding how consumers respond to anthropomorphic logo design.

Sherlock Holmes is widely regarded as a British cultural icon. He is often seen as a character that represents the social and intellectual spirit of late-Victorian Britain (Harrington, 2007) and has even been interpreted as a symbol of national identity (Chapman & Hilton, 2004). Literature frequently positions Holmes as the archetype of the English detective (Jaber, 2013), and his enduring popularity is evident through the vast number of adaptations across film, television, radio, and, more recently, digital platforms such as mobile apps, blogs, and virtual reality (Casetti, 2015; Hills, 2017). In 2013, Time magazine listed Sherlock Holmes among the “100 Most Influential People Who Never Lived” (Time-Life Book, 2013). Beyond his iconic status, Sherlock Holmes is also notable for the way in which many individuals perceive him as a real person. Researchers have documented how Holmes is uniquely treated as a living figure—even more so than other British literary characters. Saler (2003) explains that Holmes is the first fictional character to be regarded as real, while his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is sometimes seen as the fictional entity. Saler identifies two types of “believers”: naïve believers, who genuinely treat Holmes as real, and ironic believers, who knowingly engage in the fiction to participate in what is known as the “Sherlockian game.” These reactions, shaped by early mass media and celebrity culture, have contributed to Holmes becoming not just a literary figure but a media celebrity in his own right.

Numerous real-life examples highlight how deeply embedded Holmes is in British cultural consciousness. In 2002, for instance, the Royal Society of Chemistry awarded Sherlock Holmes an Extraordinary Honorary Fellowship, marking the centenary of Conan Doyle’s



knighthood (McGourty, 2002). Fans, often referred to as “Sherlockians,” have historically sent thousands of letters addressed to his fictional residence, 221B Baker Street (Harrington, 2007). In 1893, when Conan Doyle killed off Holmes in *The Adventure of the Final Problem*, the public response was so emotional that Holmes received actual obituary notices, and over 20,000 readers reportedly cancelled their subscriptions to *The Strand Magazine* (Saler, 2003; Armstrong, 2016). These examples not only underscore Holmes’ cultural impact but also informed the rationale for his use in the logo design of the fictional brand—specifically to ensure that the logo could be perceived as anthropomorphic by participants, aligning with the study’s goal of examining the effects of an anthropomorphised brand logo.

The third study extends this investigation by examining the potential downside of logo anthropomorphism, particularly in the context of brand crises. It explores whether logos designed with culturally iconic figures may unintentionally intensify negative emotional reactions when a brand fails to meet consumer expectations. In doing so, it challenges the prevailing assumption in existing literature that brand anthropomorphism is inherently beneficial, instead revealing how emotional attachment formed through anthropomorphic logos may also increase the likelihood of brand disappointment and even brand betrayal.

## 1.5 Summary of research contributions

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the brand anthropomorphism literature by addressing conceptual, methodological, and practical gaps across three interlinked studies.

- **The first study, a systematic literature review**, is the first research on brand anthropomorphism literature, which identifies conceptual and measurement inconsistencies in the brand anthropomorphism literature. Based on the analysis of 157 peer-reviewed articles, this study proposes several solutions to address them, which are

summarised in an integrative framework. This framework proposes unified definitions of brand anthropomorphism (i.e., *brand as human*, *brand with human traits*, and *brand as interactive agent*) and standardised measurements for brand anthropomorphism (i.e., *cognitive perception*, *emotional engagement*, and *behavioural interaction*). This integrative framework also explains that these proposed solutions will have an impact on explaining how the effects of brand anthropomorphism influence consumer perceptions and consumer behaviours.

- **The second study is the first empirical study in this thesis.** This empirical research contributes by providing a deeper explanation of how the effects of logo anthropomorphism work. Unlike previous studies, however, this research demonstrates that the effects of anthropomorphism in logo design can be represented through the presence of iconic characters with whom consumers are familiar. In this study, elements associated with Sherlock Holmes—as an iconic character familiar to the research participants (i.e. people in the UK)—were used. The findings reveal that the effect of logo anthropomorphism, through iconic familiarity, can generate certain associations formed from the logo design. These associations significantly influence consumers' perceived value, and this effect is mediated by consumers' perceptions of whether the brand is seen as competent or warm.
- **The third empirical study expands our understanding of the effects of logo anthropomorphism on consumer perceptions in situations where a brand has made a mistake.** Specifically, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse in the brand anthropomorphism literature by questioning whether the effects of brand anthropomorphism are always positive, or whether they can, in some cases, be negative. The findings support the latter view. This study reveals that when a brand commits a transgression, consumers are more likely to experience disappointment (i.e., brand

disappointment), and that this reaction can be triggered merely by the presence of iconic character elements embedded in the brand's logo design. These design elements shape mental associations that consumers form about the brand. Furthermore, while this disappointment does not directly lead to a sense of betrayal (i.e., brand betrayal), the study finds that disappointment—rather than logo associations alone—serves as the critical emotional bridge that can escalate into brand betrayal, particularly when the brand fails to uphold the values implied by its logo. These insights offer a more nuanced understanding of the potential risks of logo anthropomorphism in brand crisis scenarios and highlight the emotional consequences of symbolic design choices in shaping consumer-brand relationships.

## 1.6 A Structural Map to the Thesis

This thesis adopts an alternative format (PhD by publication) and is based on one published article (Chapters 5–6), as illustrated in **Figure 1**. In total, the thesis consists of seven chapters, including a detailed methodology chapter (Chapter 2), a dedicated chapter outlining revisions and improvements made during the correction period (Chapter 3), a systematic literature review paper (Chapter 4), the empirical studies (Chapters 5 and 6), and a concluding chapter (Chapter 7). Each research paper within this thesis includes its own research objectives, findings, and contributions, all of which are derived from the overarching research aim of the thesis.

**Chapter 1:** As illustrated in **Figure 1**, each chapter in this thesis contributes to and is interconnected with the others. The first chapter provides an overview of the research background, introduces the key theoretical concepts, outlines the aims and context of the

research, and presents a summary of the findings and key contributions. It also offers a structural roadmap for the thesis. Below is a concise explanation of the purpose of each chapter.

**Chapter 2:** This chapter outlines the philosophical foundation, motivations, and justifications for the research methods employed across the three main studies in the thesis. It begins by establishing the philosophical positioning that underpins the entire research design and guides the selection of appropriate methods. The chapter then introduces the types of variables used throughout the thesis (e.g. independent, dependent, mediating, and control variables), offering an overview of the empirical structure and objectives of the two quantitative studies. This is followed by a justification for using the systematic literature review method in Chapter 4 and the quantitative method for analysing the effects and relationships among variables in the two empirical studies (i.e. Chapters 5 and 6). The chapter concludes with a description of the process used to develop hypothetical scenarios, design anthropomorphised logos, and outlines the procedures and techniques for data collection and analysis.

**Chapter 3:** This chapter is included prior to the discussion of the three main research studies. Its purpose is to provide a clear and structured explanation of the revisions and improvements made to the thesis during the correction period. Rather than placing this information in the appendix, it is presented as a standalone chapter to ensure transparency and clarity. It allows the reader to understand the changes and enhancements that have been made to the research and helps to contextualise the purpose and contributions of the studies presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

**Chapter 4:** This chapter presents the first research paper, entitled “*Unpacking the Inconsistencies in Brand Anthropomorphism Literature: A Systematic Literature Review to Establish Conceptual Clarity.*” This paper corresponds to Research Question 1 within this thesis. The study employs a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis to examine 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023. This research forms the conceptual foundation of the thesis by critically exploring how the construct of brand anthropomorphism has been defined, measured, and applied in the existing literature. Motivated by growing interest and ongoing ambiguity, the paper identifies significant overlap with adjacent constructs and a lack of standardised measurement tools. Using keyword co-occurrence mapping and thematic content analysis, the study exposes the fragmented nature of the field and advocates for a unified framework to enhance conceptual precision. The review also provides important theoretical insights by distinguishing brand anthropomorphism from related constructs such as brand personality and brand love, which also attempt to explain brand humanisation effects. Moreover, the findings of this review lay the groundwork for the subsequent empirical studies by inspiring the topics explored—namely logo anthropomorphism, cultural influence, and consumer responses to brand failures—and informing decisions around research methods and statistical analysis techniques.

**Chapter 5:** The first empirical study in this thesis, titled “*Anthropomorphic Brand Logo and Perceived Value: The Mediating Role of Brand Warmth and Brand Competence*”, investigates how logo anthropomorphism—particularly through the use of a familiar cultural icon (i.e. Sherlock Holmes)—influences consumer perceptions of brand value. This article corresponds to Research Question Two within this thesis. It draws on several explanations, concepts, and research materials—including the elements of the hypothetical scenarios (such as the fictional brand and the anthropomorphised brand logo design being investigated)—from a previously

published article in the Journal of Brand Management (2022), titled “*The Anthropomorphic Brand Logo and Its Effect on Perceived Functional Performance*” (Daryanto, Alexander, and Kartika, 2022). Drawing on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), this study tests whether perceptions of brand warmth and competence mediate the relationship between logo association and perceived value. Using structural equation modelling, the findings reveal that while icon familiarity enhances logo associations, only brand competence significantly mediates the effect on perceived value. Brand warmth, in contrast, does not exert a meaningful influence in this context. This study contributes to the growing literature on brand anthropomorphism and underscores the importance of logo anthropomorphism and cultural influences in shaping brand associations, which ultimately affect consumers’ perceptions of brand value through logo design.

**Chapter 6:** The second empirical study in this thesis, titled “Anthropomorphic Brand Logo: The Impact of Icon Familiarity on Logo Associations, Brand Disappointment, and Brand Betrayal”, builds upon the first empirical study by shifting the focus from positive brand outcomes to the consequences of negative brand experiences. This article corresponds to Research Question Three within this thesis. This paper investigates how logo anthropomorphism—specifically through the use of culturally familiar icons—influences consumer reactions when a brand fails. It addresses a critical gap in brand anthropomorphism research by acknowledging that no brand is immune to mistakes, and that anthropomorphised brands may be perceived more harshly in such contexts compared to non-anthropomorphised ones. The findings confirm that icon familiarity positively influences logo associations, reinforcing the strategic role of cultural symbolism in brand perception. Furthermore, the results show that logo associations significantly predict brand disappointment, while brand betrayal is not directly predicted by logo associations. Instead, brand disappointment acts as a

key emotional mediator, suggesting that disappointment is a critical step in the escalation from brand wrongdoing to perceived betrayal. This study contributes to the brand anthropomorphism literature by demonstrating how anthropomorphised logos, embedded with culturally familiar imagery, shape not only brand associations but also consumers' emotional responses during brand crises. It offers a more nuanced understanding of the risks and responsibilities associated with anthropomorphised brand logos and highlights the importance of managing expectations tied to culturally resonant brand designs.

**Chapter 7:** This final chapter serves as the conclusion of the thesis. It presents, discusses, and summarises the conceptual and empirical contributions, outlines the research limitations, and offers suggestions for future research.

### **Interconnecting the Three Papers: A Cumulative Contribution to Brand Anthropomorphism Theory**

This thesis offers a coherent and theoretically significant contribution to branding literature by advancing the construct of brand anthropomorphism through a three-paper model that builds cumulative knowledge and practical relevance. It begins by identifying the theoretical fragmentation in brand anthropomorphism research (Paper 1), proceeds to empirically explore the mechanisms through which logo anthropomorphism shapes consumer value perceptions (Paper 2), and culminates by examining the emotional consequences of anthropomorphic branding in failure contexts (Paper 3). Each study contributes distinctively yet cohesively, allowing for a rigorous synthesis that enriches both academic discourse and branding practice.

**Paper 1 provides the conceptual foundation**, identifying a lack of consensus in defining brand anthropomorphism and revealing a conflation with overlapping constructs such

as brand personality, humanisation, and personification. Through a systematic literature review of 157 articles, the paper proposes a reconceptualisation of BA as a multidimensional construct comprising strategic (brand-led design choices), psychological (consumer attribution processes), and cultural (symbolic meaning in sociocultural contexts) dimensions. This reconceptualisation not only clarifies terminological confusion but also sets the stage for empirical inquiries that operationalise brand anthropomorphism through concrete visual and narrative brand elements—specifically, logos.

**Paper 2 builds directly on this foundation**, advancing the literature by proposing and testing the iconic familiarity hypothesis. Drawing on the stereotype content model (SCM), the paper argues that logos designed with culturally iconic human-like figures—e.g. Sherlock Holmes—activate logo associations that subsequently influence brand trait perceptions. The findings show that brand competence, more than brand warmth, mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value. This challenges dominant assumptions in anthropomorphism literature that prioritise warmth, instead emphasising competence as the key brand appraisal mechanism in logo design. The theoretical contribution lies in extending brand anthropomorphism literature from abstract personality traits to visual symbols that function as semiotic devices in consumer-brand relationships. Managerially, the paper provides a blueprint for designing logos that signal credibility and value by embedding culturally resonant icons.

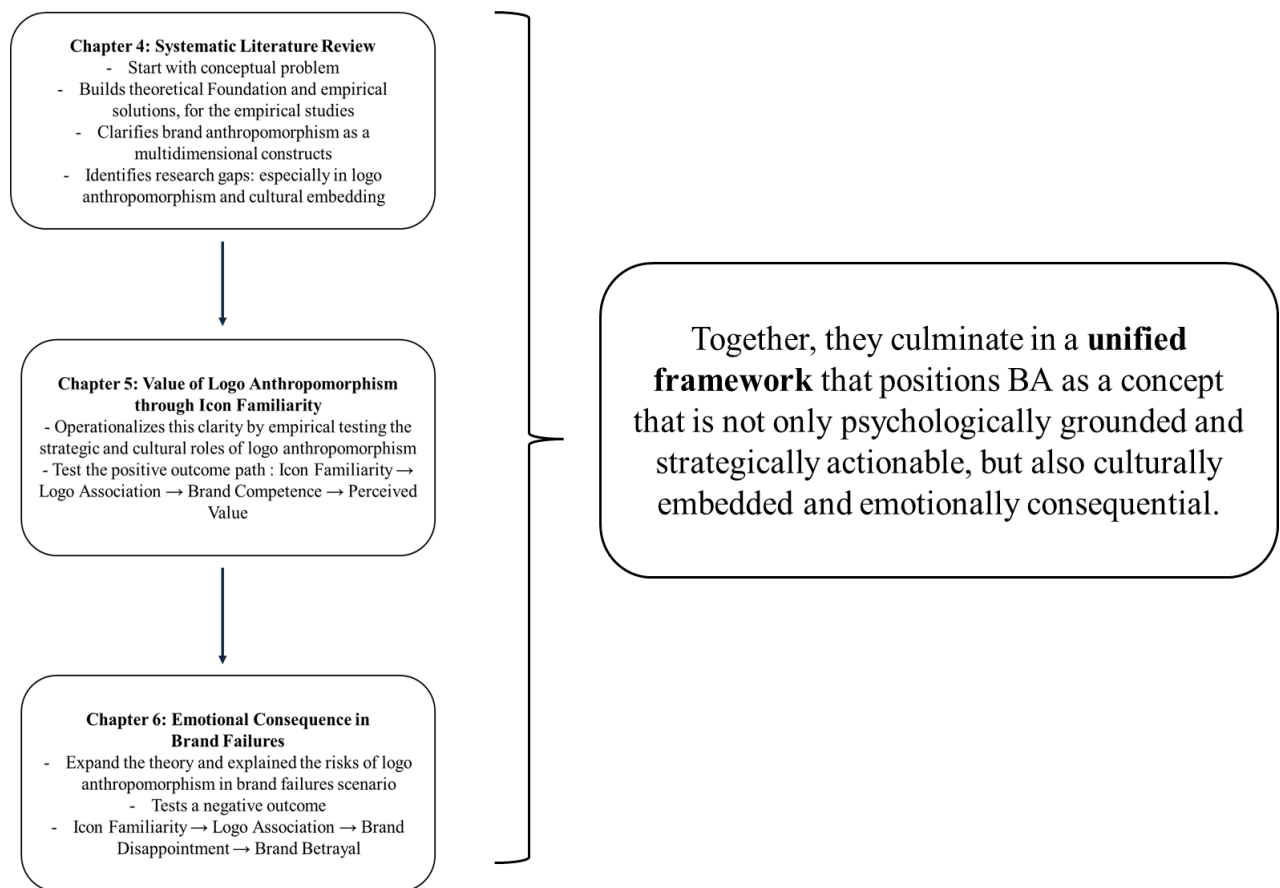
**Paper 3 extends this discussion into high-stakes brand contexts** by exploring how logo anthropomorphism operates under conditions of brand failure. While Paper 2 emphasised the constructive outcomes of logo anthropomorphism, Paper 3 explores its potential liabilities. The study reveals that logo anthropomorphism heightens consumer emotional expectations—especially when culturally familiar icons are used—such that brand failures trigger deeper psychological responses. Using a sequential mediation model, the paper finds that logo



association significantly predicts brand disappointment, which in turn predicts brand betrayal. These findings underscore that anthropomorphic logos, while strengthening consumer-brand bonds, also elevate the emotional costs of brand transgressions. Theoretically, this contributes to emerging literature on the "dark side" of anthropomorphism, while practically, it urges brand strategists to weigh emotional risk when humanising brand elements.

Together, these three papers form a unified thesis with theoretical robustness and empirical depth. Paper 1 justifies the need for reconceptualisation; Paper 2 confirms the utility of logo anthropomorphism in value creation; Paper 3 cautions its application by demonstrating its potential for emotional backlash. What unites them is the operationalisation of brand anthropomorphism through **icon familiarity** and **logo association**, both of which serve as the connective tissues across the studies. By mapping these constructs to different consumer response pathways—cognitive evaluation in Paper 2, and emotional reactivity in Paper 3—the thesis presents a comprehensive framework that accounts for both the promise and peril of anthropomorphic branding.

This thesis therefore moves the brand anthropomorphism literature forward in several critical ways. First, it resolves conceptual ambiguities by offering a clear, multidimensional framework. Second, it introduces a novel cultural mechanism—icon familiarity—through which logos can embody human-like qualities. Third, it empirically validates both the upsides (competence-driven value) and downsides (betrayal through disappointment) of logo anthropomorphism. The integrative nature of this work situates it at the intersection of branding theory, consumer psychology, and cultural semiotics, offering a rigorous, relevant, and original contribution to the field. Its implications extend beyond academic discourse, equipping brand managers with strategic insights for leveraging anthropomorphic design while managing consumer expectations and emotional outcomes.



**Figure 1:** Connections between research papers in this thesis

## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter aims to familiarise the reader with the methodological approach employed to address the research objectives of this thesis. The discussion begins by outlining the philosophical assumptions that underpin the research, providing the rationale for the adoption of a quantitative research methodology. It then proceeds to detail the methodological framework used throughout the thesis, accompanied by a justification for the selected research strategy. Following this, the chapter presents a brief overview of the research design, including the overview of constructs and measured variables, and the study selection protocol and construct measurement design. The discussion then continues with a comprehensive

explanation of the data collection process, which includes the data collection method, the sampling strategy, and the sample sizes utilised across the empirical studies.

## 2.1 Philosophical Underpinning: A Positivist Orientation

The philosophical assumptions underpinning this thesis serve as the foundation upon which its methodological orientation is constructed. These assumptions provide not only transparency in the selection of research methods but also coherence in linking epistemological and ontological beliefs to the broader research strategy. The study adopts a positivist philosophical stance, which aligns with the view that reality exists objectively and independently of human perception, and that valid knowledge is derived from systematic observation, measurement, and empirical analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019; Bryman, 2016). Positivism postulates that the social world, much like the natural world, can be studied using the tools of science—hypothesis testing, structured data collection, and statistical modelling—to uncover generalisable laws of behaviour (Crotty, 1998).

This ontological position—that reality is external and observable—is consistent with the epistemological orientation adopted in this thesis, which seeks to examine consumer responses to anthropomorphic brand logos as observable phenomena that can be objectively measured and analysed. Under this paradigm, concepts such as logo anthropomorphism, icon familiarity, brand competence, brand warmth, brand disappointment, and brand betrayal are treated as quantifiable constructs. The use of validated psychometric instruments, controlled experimental designs, and structural equation modelling reflects a commitment to empirical rigour and replicability, hallmarks of positivist inquiry (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015).

The choice of a positivist approach is especially suited to the aims of this thesis, which investigates the effects of culturally embedded logo anthropomorphism on consumer cognition and emotion. These effects are assumed to be systematic and generalisable across individuals who share cultural familiarity with the anthropomorphised icons, and thus amenable to statistical examination. This view stands in contrast to interpretivist perspectives, which might focus on the subjective meanings consumers ascribe to logos through personal narratives. While such an approach might offer depth, the current research seeks explanatory clarity through the identification of causal mechanisms and mediating relationships that govern consumer response to brand stimuli. As such, causal inferences are derived through theory-driven modelling and statistical validation, rather than through hermeneutic interpretation or narrative inquiry (Hair et al., 2019).

The integration of quantitative methods across all three studies in the thesis further reflects this philosophical commitment. Study 1 applies systematic review and bibliometric mapping to synthesise conceptual developments in brand anthropomorphism. Studies 2 and 3 employ survey-based experimental designs to test causal pathways, using statistical techniques such as structural equation modelling (SEM) to assess direct and indirect effects. These methodological decisions are not incidental; they are grounded in a positivist view that reality can be decomposed into discrete constructs whose relationships can be modelled, tested, and refined (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In summary, the philosophical orientation of this thesis shapes its approach to knowledge production, guiding how brand anthropomorphism is defined, operationalised, and empirically examined. The thesis positions itself within a realist ontology and a positivist epistemology, asserting that consumer responses to anthropomorphic brand design—whether in the form of perceived competence, perceived value, disappointment, or betrayal—can be measured objectively and interpreted through theoretical frameworks such as the Stereotype

Content Model. These assumptions provide a robust foundation for methodological coherence and ensure that the findings contribute meaningfully to the cumulative body of knowledge in branding and consumer behaviour.

## 2.2 Methodology

This section presents the methodological foundations of the thesis. It outlines and justifies the overall research design, the specific methods of data collection and analysis, and the rationale for adopting a quantitative approach to examine the effects of logo anthropomorphism—particularly when designed using culturally iconic characters—on consumer perceptions and emotional responses. The methodology aligns with the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research and is grounded in established practices in empirical branding research.

### **Justification for Quantitative Research Design**

This thesis adopts a quantitative research strategy, which is widely recognised for its capacity to establish generalisable findings through structured data collection, objective measurement, and statistical analysis. According to Bell and Bryman (2022), quantitative research is characterised by an emphasis on quantification in both data collection and analysis, making it particularly appropriate when the aim is to examine relationships between variables or test theoretical models. The choice of this method reflects the researcher's philosophical alignment with positivism, a paradigm that assumes the existence of an objective reality that can be

measured and explained through empirical observation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this thesis, which investigates consumer perceptions of anthropomorphic brand logos—particularly when embedded with iconic cultural figures such as Sherlock Holmes—a quantitative approach allows for the precise measurement of constructs such as icon familiarity, logo association, brand competence, brand warmth, perceived value, brand disappointment, and brand betrayal. These variables are treated as observable phenomena that can be systematically evaluated through validated scales and theory-driven models. This approach enables causal inference and mediation testing, aligning with the thesis’s goal to uncover the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses to logo anthropomorphism.

## 2.3 Research Design Overview

The thesis comprises three interrelated studies, each employing a quantitative approach suited to its specific research objectives. Together, these studies build a coherent empirical investigation of logo anthropomorphism as a branding strategy, its symbolic power, and its emotional consequences.

### **Study 1: Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis**

The first study employs a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis to address the conceptual fragmentation in brand anthropomorphism research. A total of 157 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1998 and 2023 were identified across five major academic databases (Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Emerald, and EBSCO). Using inclusion/exclusion criteria and guided by PRISMA guidelines, the study systematically mapped how brand anthropomorphism has been conceptualised, operationalised, and thematically explored.

Bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer supplemented the content review, offering a visual representation of thematic clusters and scholarly influence. This study established the theoretical foundation for the thesis by identifying key inconsistencies in the literature and clarifying the boundaries of the construct.

### **Study 2: Scenario-Based Survey on Perceived Value**

The second study investigates how logo anthropomorphism, when designed using an iconic cultural figure (Sherlock Holmes), impacts perceived brand value through the mediating roles of brand competence and brand warmth, as conceptualised within the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2007). A between-subjects experimental design was employed, in which participants evaluated a hypothetical brand logo containing either an anthropomorphic design or a neutral version. Data were collected from 443 UK-based participants using an online survey. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to assess the hypothesised relationships. All constructs were measured using established multi-item Likert scales adapted from the branding and consumer psychology literature.

### **Study 3: Scenario-Based Survey on Brand Wrongdoing**

The third study examines the emotional consequences of logo anthropomorphism in the context of brand transgressions, focusing on the emergence of brand disappointment and brand betrayal. This study again uses a survey-based design, collecting data from 642 participants in the UK. Participants were exposed to a hypothetical brand failure involving a deceptive pricing strategy. The brand's logo—again designed with visual elements inspired by Sherlock

Holmes—served as the focal stimulus. SEM was used to test a sequential mediation model, in which logo association influences brand betrayal indirectly via brand disappointment. This study highlights how anthropomorphised logos, while strengthening consumer-brand bonds, also raise moral expectations that may amplify emotional reactions when those expectations are violated.

The research designs for each of the studies, including research focus, context, methodology and brief overview of analytical techniques are summarised in Table 1.



<b>Paper</b>	<b>Research Focus</b>	<b>Research Context</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Analytical Technique (Main)</b>
Paper 1	To synthesise how brand anthropomorphism has been conceptualised, measured, and thematically explored between 1998 and 2023 in peer-reviewed literature.	Brand anthropomorphism literature	Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis	157 peer-reviewed articles	Systematic Literature Review, Content analysis (Excel), Co-occurrence & bibliometric mapping (VOSviewer)
Paper 2	To investigate how logo anthropomorphism, designed with iconic characters (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) impacts consumer perceptions of brand value via brand competence and warmth.	Retail branding (PriceInvestigate.com)	Scenario-based online survey using experimental design	n = 550 (UK-based consumers)	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS and SPSS
Paper 3	To examine how logo anthropomorphism with familiar iconic figures influences consumer reactions to brand wrongdoing, including disappointment and betrayal.	Brand failure scenario (PriceInvestigate.com)	Scenario-based survey using experimental design	n = 642 (UK-based consumers)	Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS and SPSS

**Table 1:** Summary of the research designs for each of the three st

## 2.4 Overview of Constructs and Measured Variables

In quantitative research, understanding the role and classification of variables is fundamental to developing a coherent research model and enabling empirical testing (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Variables—often synonymous with research constructs—are theoretical concepts that cannot be directly observed but can be inferred through measurable indicators such as behaviours, responses, or evaluations (McDaniel Jr & Gates, 2018). This thesis employs five commonly recognised types of variables: independent variables, dependent variables, mediating variables, moderating variables, and control variables. Each of these serves a unique function in the analytical model and contributes to the study's ability to test causal relationships and explanatory mechanisms.

**Table 2:** Summary of variables used in each of the studies

Study	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Mediating Variable	Moderating Variable	Control Variable
Study 1 (SLR)	Not applicable (Systematic Review)	Not applicable (Systematic Review)	Not applicable (Systematic Review)	Not applicable (Systematic Review)	Not applicable (Systematic Review)
Study 2	Icon Familiarity; Logo Association	Perceived Value	Brand Competence; Brand Warmth	No Moderating Variables	No Control Variables
Study 3	Icon Familiarity; Logo Association	Brand Disappointment; Brand Betrayal	Brand Disappointment	No Moderating Variable	Deal Proneness; Price Sensitivity

**Table 2** above summarises the variables used across the three studies included in this thesis.

Study 1, a systematic literature review, does not involve the empirical testing of variables. Instead, it synthesises and maps prior conceptualisations and operationalisations of brand anthropomorphism over a 25-year period. While not a quantitative study per se, it

informs the theoretical constructs that are later empirically tested in Studies 2 and 3. Study 2 is an experimental survey study investigating how logo anthropomorphism—operationalised through icon familiarity and logo association—influences perceived brand value. Here, icon familiarity and logo association serve as independent variables, while perceived value is the dependent variable. The study tests the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2007), incorporating brand competence and brand warmth as mediating variables. These mediators help explain the psychological mechanisms by which consumers interpret anthropomorphised logos. While no formal moderators were tested, several control variables (e.g. age, gender, education, and familiarity with the iconic figure) were included to isolate the effect of the main constructs and account for demographic variation. Study 3 extends the model by exploring the emotional consequences of logo anthropomorphism in the context of brand wrongdoing. In this study, logo association is again the independent variable, while brand betrayal serves as the dependent variable. The study introduces brand disappointment as a mediating variable, capturing the sequential process through which consumers emotionally react to perceived violations of trust by brands with anthropomorphic logos. Similar to Study 2, no moderating variables were tested, but the same control variables were applied to enhance the internal validity of the model.

By distinguishing and operationalising these different types of variables, the thesis offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to investigating how anthropomorphic logo design—especially when grounded in culturally iconic figures—influences not only consumer evaluation but also emotional attachment and potential disappointment or betrayal. This understanding contributes to both theoretical development and practical branding strategy.

## 2.5 Article Selection Process and Design of Measurement Instruments

A critical aspect of this thesis's methodological rigour lies in the design of the instruments used for data collection and the operationalisation of key constructs across its three constituent studies. The following summary provides an overview of the sources, scales, and rationale used to measure the primary constructs, with attention to psychometric validity, relevance to the research objectives, and contextual fit with the phenomena of brand anthropomorphism and logo perception.

### **Study 1: Systematic Literature Review**

As Study 1 is a systematic literature review, instrument design in the traditional survey sense is not applicable. Instead, rigour is ensured through systematic procedures for article identification, selection, and evaluation. The data collection relied on comprehensive database searches (EBSCO, Emerald, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Scopus) using the term "brand anthropomorphism," employing inclusion/exclusion criteria that prioritised peer-reviewed, English-language articles published between 1998 and 2023 within management, marketing, business, advertising, and psychology. Conceptual relevance and methodological alignment were further ensured by screening articles manually, applying systematic review protocols, and validating thematic relevance through multiple rounds of eligibility checks. Additionally, the review drew connections to scales such as the Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism Questionnaire (IDAQ; Waytz et al., 2010), which, though not applied directly in this study, informed the historical context and development of brand anthropomorphism measures such as BASC (Golossenko et al., 2020) and BAQ (Huang et al., 2020).

## **Study 2: Logo Anthropomorphism and Perceived Value**

In Study 2, measurement instruments were carefully adapted from prior validated scales to ensure construct validity:

- Logo Association was measured using a four-item scale developed by Daryanto et al. (2022), preceded by a two-item semantic differential assessment of the logo's resemblance to Sherlock Holmes (i.e. "not at all associated (1) – very much associated (11)").
- Icon Familiarity was measured using a three-item scale also adapted from Daryanto et al. (2022), evaluating the consumer's familiarity with the iconic figure.
- Brand Warmth and Brand Competence were measured using four-item scales adapted from Fiske et al. (2007) and Kolbl et al. (2020), rooted in the Stereotype Content Model.
- Perceived Value was assessed using a multi-dimensional scale adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Kolbl et al. (2020), capturing three value domains: Functional Value (five items), Emotional Value (five items) and Social Value (four items).

All items in Study 2 were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (7)." The psychometric properties of each construct were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), all of which met recommended thresholds.

### **Study 3: Logo Anthropomorphism and Brand Wrongdoing**

Study 3 extended the constructs measured in Study 2 to investigate emotional responses to brand wrongdoing. The instruments used include:

- Logo Association and Icon Familiarity were measured using the same scales from Daryanto et al. (2022), ensuring consistency across studies.
- Brand Disappointment was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Tan et al. (2021), capturing consumers' negative emotional reactions following unmet brand expectations.
- Brand Betrayal was assessed using a three-item scale from Grégoire and Fisher (2008), designed to evaluate perceptions of intentional harm or deception by the brand.

To strengthen internal validity, the following control variables were incorporated:

- Price Sensitivity was measured with a five-item scale synthesised from prior studies (Awad et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2017; Goldsmith et al., 2010; DeVecchio, 2005; Kim et al., 1999; Lichtenstein et al., 1993).
- Deal Proneness was captured using a five-item scale drawn from Sharma et al. (2024), Cheah et al. (2023), and others.

The inclusion of these control variables was guided by empirical evidence showing that both constructs can influence consumer responses to pricing and perceived fairness, thereby ensuring that the effects of logo association on emotional outcomes were not confounded by price-related dispositions. As with Study 2, all items were rated on seven-point Likert-type scales, and the measures were validated through reliability and validity checks using established psychometric standards. Across the three studies, instrument design was guided by the dual imperatives of theoretical fidelity and empirical robustness. Study 1 employed systematic inclusion protocols to construct a conceptual foundation for empirical inquiry.

Studies 2 and 3 utilised well-established and adapted measures to operationalise core constructs of interest in logo anthropomorphism research. The consistency in scale design and validation across studies ensures methodological coherence and enhances the cumulative contribution of the thesis to brand anthropomorphism theory and practice.

## **2.6 Data collection Method: A Multi-Study Quantitative Approach**

### **Study 1: Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis**

In the first study, data collection involved the systematic identification, screening, and evaluation of peer-reviewed articles explicitly focusing on the construct of brand anthropomorphism. Using five major academic databases—EBSCO Business Source Ultimate, Emerald, Elsevier Science Direct, JSTOR, and Scopus—the review covered publications between 1998 and 2023. The systematic approach followed guidelines recommended in methodological literature (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003; Bramer et al., 2017) and adhered to PRISMA principles (Moher et al., 2009) to enhance replicability, transparency, and validity. Articles were evaluated using clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria and assessed for relevance, quality, and thematic focus. The robust search protocol, which narrowed 3,311 initial articles to 157 high-quality peer-reviewed publications, ensures the reliability and validity of the review findings (Whiting et al., 2008; Podsakoff et al., 2005). The study further incorporated bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer and content analysis in Excel to identify conceptual clusters and theoretical gaps, offering a data-driven foundation for subsequent empirical work.

### **Study 2 and 3: Data collection procedure**

Primary data in this thesis were collected directly by the researcher for a specific purpose, which is to answer the research question. In both empirical studies, primary data were collected

by making an online survey to obtain information from the participants. Using convenience sampling, 697 participants were recruited for the first empirical study, and 642 participants recruited for the second empirical study. Participant data for both empirical studies were collected through an online crowdsourcing platform, called Prolific Academic.

### **Justification for the use of convenience sampling**

The use of convenience sampling in this thesis is methodologically justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. While convenience sampling is often critiqued for limitations in external validity and potential demographic bias (Bryman, 2016; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016), a growing body of research argues that its appropriateness should be evaluated not by default scepticism but through a more nuanced lens—one that considers the theoretical alignment, empirical purpose, and practical constraints of the research context (Coppock & McClellan, 2019; Doebel & Frank, 2023). This thesis, which investigates consumer perceptions and emotional reactions to logo anthropomorphism, provides a compelling context where convenience sampling is both empirically valid and methodologically sound.

In the context of this thesis, which seeks to examine how consumers perceive anthropomorphised brand logos designed with culturally iconic figures (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), convenience sampling offers distinct advantages that align with the study's epistemological and practical goals:

- **Alignment with Target Population Characteristics:** The central aim of the thesis is to explore consumer interpretations and emotional responses to brand logos embedded with culturally familiar symbols. Therefore, the population of interest is not the general population per se, but rather consumers who possess cultural fluency with British iconography, are brand-aware, and are active participants in consumer-brand



relationships. Recruiting from online consumer panels in the UK ensures that participants are not only accessible, but also demographically appropriate for the cognitive and emotional evaluations central to this research. In this sense, the convenience sample is not “random” but strategically aligned with the cultural and psychological dimensions of the research.

- **Suitability for Experimental and Scenario-Based Designs:** Both Study 2 and Study 3 employ scenario-based experiments and surveys—a design format that benefits from participants who can readily immerse themselves in hypothetical brand contexts, evaluate symbolic stimuli, and provide structured responses. Previous research affirms that online convenience samples are particularly effective for testing theoretical models in such controlled contexts, where internal validity is prioritised over population-level generalisability (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Highhouse & Gillespie, 2009). In experimental and perceptual research, the relevance and engagement of participants with the research stimuli are often more important than random representativeness.
- **Resource Efficiency and Empirical Rigor:** Online convenience sampling allows for the rapid collection of large sample sizes, which strengthens the statistical power of structural equation modelling (SEM), the primary analytical technique used in Studies 2 and 3 (Hair et al., 2019). The use of quota screening (e.g. UK residence, English fluency, age) further increases the contextual appropriateness of the sample, while preserving resource efficiency. This trade-off between representativeness and practicality is commonly accepted in experimental branding research, particularly when the goal is to uncover underlying psychological mechanisms rather than make population-wide estimates (Callegaro, Manfreda, & Vehovar, 2015).
- **Consistency with Industry Standards and Scholarly Precedents:** Convenience sampling has been extensively used in high-quality consumer research published in top-

tier journals (e.g., *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Marketing Research*), particularly when studying constructs such as brand warmth, trust, disappointment, and anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Puzakova et al., 2013). In these studies, the validity of the theoretical relationships between constructs is prioritised over demographic generalisability. The use of convenience samples is justified so long as the constructs are well operationalised, the measures are psychometrically validated, and the theoretical predictions are tested under controlled conditions—all of which are met in this thesis.

While convenience sampling inherently carries limitations in terms of generalisability, it is methodologically appropriate and theoretically defensible in the context of this thesis. Given the experimental design, the cultural specificity of the stimulus materials, and the focus on psychological and symbolic interpretations of brand logos, the use of convenience samples drawn from online UK-based consumers enables the research to meet its internal validity, theoretical contribution, and practical applicability objectives. This approach is consistent with best practices in contemporary branding and consumer behaviour research and is aligned with the broader standards of empirical inquiry in the social sciences.

### **Justification of Sample Size**

Determining an appropriate sample size is a critical component of research design, as it directly affects the statistical power, reliability, and generalisability of the findings. In this thesis, which involves two empirical studies (Study 2 and Study 3), sample sizes were determined through both theoretical considerations and context-specific considerations, ensuring robustness in estimation, alignment with methodological standards, and relevance to the research context.

- **Heuristic Guidelines for Sample Size in Multivariate Analysis:** The sample size decisions in this thesis are guided by established quantitative research recommendations. One frequently cited guideline comes from Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), who propose the formula  $N > 50 + 8m$ , where  $N$  is the minimum number of participants and  $m$  is the number of independent variables. Applying this to the empirical models in this thesis, which involve multiple predictors and mediators (e.g., logo association, icon familiarity, competence, warmth, disappointment), the minimum recommended sample size ranges from approximately 74 to 82 participants. Both empirical studies far exceed this threshold: Study 2 includes 550 participants, and Study 3 includes 642 participants, thereby enhancing statistical power and the reliability of parameter estimates.

Additionally, Comrey and Lee (1992) offer a qualitative evaluation of sample size adequacy: 50 = very poor; 100 = poor; 200 = fair; 300 = good; 500 = very good; more than 1000 = excellent. According to this scale, both of the empirical studies in this thesis fall into the "very good" range, lending strong support to the adequacy of the samples for structural equation modelling (SEM), which is known to require larger samples due to the complexity of model estimation (Hair et al., 2019). Similarly, Coakes and Steed (2001) recommend a minimum of 200 participants for studies employing SEM, noting that larger samples improve the stability of regression coefficients, reduce standard error, and provide more generalizable findings. Given the use of SEM in both empirical studies in this thesis, the decision to recruit sample sizes of over 500 is not only statistically defensible but methodologically optimal.

- **Statistical Power Considerations:** Power analysis is a crucial factor in determining the adequacy of sample size. According to Cohen (1988), a sample size should provide sufficient statistical power (typically .80 or higher) to detect small to medium effect

sizes in multivariate models. Although a priori power analysis was not explicitly detailed in the empirical papers, the sample sizes used exceed conventional benchmarks for detecting both direct and indirect effects in mediation models. As noted by MacCallum et al. (1996), SEM models with latent constructs require large sample sizes to achieve model identification, accurate parameter estimation, and acceptable model fit indices. With 550 and 642 participants respectively, the models tested in this thesis are well-positioned to yield stable and reliable results, especially given that the models include multiple latent variables and mediating paths.

- **Cultural and Contextual Appropriateness of the Sample:** Beyond statistical adequacy, the selection of UK-based participants is grounded in the theoretical and cultural design of the research. Both empirical studies use a fictional logo inspired by Sherlock Holmes, an iconic figure deeply embedded in British cultural identity. The decision to recruit participants from the United Kingdom is thus not arbitrary but instead reflects a purposeful alignment between the research stimulus and the participants' cultural fluency. Cultural familiarity enhances the construct validity of the manipulations involving logo anthropomorphism, especially when relying on symbolic association and recognition-based stimuli. Previous literature in cultural branding (e.g. Holt, 2004) and visual semiotics (Scott, 1994) suggests that consumers' interpretation of brand symbols is deeply shaped by their cultural schemas, making UK participants uniquely positioned to respond meaningfully to a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo. Moreover, ensuring cultural congruence between the stimulus and the participant population supports ecological validity—the extent to which experimental findings can be meaningfully applied to real-world contexts where consumers interact with culturally resonant brand symbols (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1981). This design

choice aligns with best practices in consumer behaviour and symbolic branding research.

- **Methodological Rigor and Sample Quality:** To further ensure methodological soundness, the thesis employs inclusion criteria such as English language proficiency, cultural familiarity, and age appropriateness, which—though often associated with purposive sampling—were implemented within a convenience sampling framework using online panels. This hybrid strategy maximises sample relevance while retaining the logistical benefits of digital data collection (Doebel & Frank, 2023; Coppock & McClellan, 2018). The sample sizes also support measurement model validation, as all constructs were subjected to reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , CR) and validity (AVE, discriminant validity) tests. Larger samples improve the reliability of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reducing the likelihood of model misfit and enhancing the generalisability of latent construct relationships.

Taken together, the sample sizes used in this thesis are not only adequate by heuristic and statistical standards but are also theoretically aligned, culturally justified, and methodologically rigorous. The decision to use UK-based convenience samples with purposive screening is supported by literature in branding, experimental design, and measurement theory. By ensuring both statistical power and cultural appropriateness, the research enhances the credibility, validity, and applicability of its findings in the field of brand anthropomorphism.

## **Chapter 3. Revision Narrative: Addressing Examiners' Feedback**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical and comprehensive explanation of the major revisions undertaken to improve the quality and coherence of this thesis following the viva voce examination. This chapter was deemed necessary due to the significant length of time that has elapsed between the viva examination and the resubmission of the revised thesis. Additionally, the substantial and in many cases major revisions made across multiple components of the thesis warranted a dedicated account that helps readers understand the extent and rationale of these changes. The revisions presented in this chapter have been made in direct response to the constructive comments, suggestions, and critiques provided by both internal and external examiners during the viva. Moreover, further improvements were made through extensive and ongoing discussions with my two main supervisors and one extended supervisor over the course of the past year. Their insights and guidance played a crucial role in refining both the structure and substance of the thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to outline in detail how six key areas identified by the examiners have been addressed in the revised submission. These include: (1) the inclusion of a standalone methodology chapter, (2) the addition of transition sub-sections to link the component papers, (3) the expansion of empirical studies with comparative and demographic analyses, (4) the alignment of each paper's word count with academic journal standards, (5) the elimination of repetition and synthesis of arguments, and (6) the preparation of the thesis for examination in written form only.

This chapter aims not only to describe the revisions made but also to demonstrate how they have collectively strengthened the thesis in terms of conceptual clarity, methodological

rigour, structural cohesion, and scholarly contribution. The changes are presented in a manner that reflects both responsiveness to academic critique and a commitment to producing a coherent, publishable, and field-relevant body of doctoral research.

### 3.2 Post-viva Revisions

The process of revising a doctoral thesis post-viva extends well beyond a procedural requirement; it presents a critical opportunity for reflexive engagement, theoretical realignment, and methodological refinement. This chapter outlines the substantive changes made to the thesis, which aims to deepen the investigation into the effects of brand anthropomorphism. It also provides a comparative analysis between the original 2020 pre-viva version and the revised 2025 re-submission. A key distinction between the two versions lies in their conceptual positioning. The original thesis was predominantly grounded in a self-focused perspective, relying heavily on constructs such as brand-self congruity and brand-self connection (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). While this orientation was theoretically sound, the earlier version fell short in addressing broader conceptual ambiguities in the literature, lacked methodological cohesion, and failed to fully incorporate cultural mechanisms that underpin anthropomorphic brand design.

In contrast, the revised thesis aims to make both theoretical and practical contributions to the brand anthropomorphism literature. It comprises three interrelated research papers. The first is a systematic literature review that seeks to clarify the conceptual boundaries and definitional inconsistencies of brand anthropomorphism as a research construct. The second is an empirical study that introduces and tests the role of logo anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly through the lens of cultural symbolism operationalised via the concept of iconic familiarity. The third study builds upon this by exploring the implications

of logo anthropomorphism in the context of brand transgression, offering insight into how anthropomorphic branding can influence consumer perceptions of brand disappointment and brand betrayal. Taken together, these papers reflect a multidimensional approach that more accurately captures the evolving complexity of branding within a symbolic, globalised, and emotionally charged marketplace. The key revisions undertaken between the 2020 and 2025 versions are summarised in the table below.

### **Paper 1: From Narrative Conceptual Paper to Systematic Literature Review**

The 2020 version of the thesis was grounded in a narrative review of the brand anthropomorphism literature, with a specific focus on the self-focused perspective. While it successfully identified relevant constructs such as brand-self congruity and brand-self connection, it lacked a robust methodological strategy for synthesising the literature. The absence of systematic review criteria, inclusion/exclusion rationale, or visual mapping limited its utility for theory-building or future research direction. The revised thesis addresses this shortcoming by adopting a systematic literature review and bibliometric mapping approach, drawing on 157 peer-reviewed articles spanning 25 years. The new review not only offers definitional clarity by distinguishing brand anthropomorphism from adjacent constructs (e.g., personification, humanisation), but also visually maps the intellectual structure of the field using VOSviewer. This data-driven mapping reveals five dominant thematic clusters and positions the thesis within a broader scholarly ecosystem. The shift from a narrative summary to a framework-building literature review elevates the thesis from being a participant in the discourse to a shaper of future research agendas. It contributes a typological structure that can guide subsequent empirical and theoretical work—a key criterion for doctoral research and journal publication.



**Table 3.1 Revisions Undertaken in Paper 1**

2020 Version	2025 Version
Focused on a narrative review of literature identifying conceptual gaps	Transformed into a systematic literature review + bibliometric mapping of 157 articles
Limited to qualitative insight	Added quantitative mapping (VOS viewer) to detect thematic clusters and academic influence
Centred around “self-focused” perspective	Now offers a unified conceptual framework for the entire field, contributing to theoretical consolidation

**Paper 2: From Logo-Self Connection to Logo Anthropomorphism and Icon Familiarity**

The second major advancement in the thesis lies in its theoretical expansion from identity-based interpretations of brand logos to the cultural semiotics embedded in iconic familiarity. In the 2020 thesis, Paper 2 explored the mediation of logo-self connection and logo appeal, focusing on the perceptual relationship between consumers and brand design. While promising, this version lacked a deeper theoretical mechanism explaining why and how certain logos exert symbolic power. The 2025 version introduces "icon familiarity" as a novel cultural construct, grounded in the Stereotype Content Model (Cuddy, et al., 2009). It demonstrates how culturally embedded characters (e.g., Sherlock Holmes) can activate schema congruity in consumer cognition, transferring perceived competence and warmth from the character to the brand. These reframing positions the brand logo not merely as an aesthetic device but as a cultural artefact that encodes and activates shared symbolic meaning. This innovation contributes a culturally grounded mechanism to the study of brand anthropomorphism—something previously underexplored in the literature. It also enhances the thesis's relevance beyond the consumer-brand identity dyad, allowing for deeper engagement with cultural branding, semiotics, and symbolic interactionism.

**Table 3.2 Revisions Undertaken in Paper 2**

2020 Version	2025 Version
Examined logo anthropomorphism's mediation on brand perception (via appeal)	Refocused to introduce "icon familiarity" as a cultural mechanism in brand logo design
Focused on performance/appeal as the outcome	Shifted outcome to perceived brand value, aligned with brand competence and warmth
Exploratory and concept-driven	Now theory-driven, tested through the Stereotype Content Model and empirically validated via SEM

### **Paper 3 From Brand Betrayal with Volkswagen's Case to Logo anthropomorphism effect on brand failure**

Paper 3 in the original 2020 thesis examined consumer forgiveness and betrayal using a real-world brand failure case (Volkswagen). Although grounded in the real-world relevance of transgression events, this approach suffered from limitations in internal validity and construct isolation, especially given the influence of prior brand attitudes and media coverage. The revised 2025 version replaces the real-world case with a controlled experimental design involving a fictional brand, "PriceInvestigate.com," and a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo. It applies sequential mediation modelling, demonstrating how logo association, mediated by brand disappointment, leads to brand betrayal. This model provides a rigorous empirical demonstration of how anthropomorphic branding strategies may backfire by intensifying consumers' emotional responses during brand failures. The revised study shifts the conversation from anthropomorphism as a branding benefit to its potential as a double-edged sword, particularly in high-stakes consumer-brand interactions. It highlights the emotional volatility embedded in symbolic brand design—an increasingly important topic in an era of brand activism and cancel culture.

**Table 3.3 Revisions Undertaken in Paper 3**

2020 Version	2025 Version
Focused on brand betrayal only	Shifted toward brand betrayal and disappointment and how logo anthropomorphism affects this
Used real brand case (Volkswagen)	Reframed into controlled fictional scenario using Sherlock Holmes-themed logo to increase design control and internal validity
Limited focus on mediation	Now demonstrates sequential mediation (logo → disappointment → betrayal)

### 3.3 Response to Examiners Feedback and Revisions

#### 1. Inclusion of a Standalone Methodology Chapter

**Examiners Comment:** Present a standalone methodology chapter to outline in detail the research philosophy, sampling frame, and research design of the whole thesis. The questionnaire must be included in the main body of the thesis or its appendix.

**Response and Revision:**

A dedicated Chapter 2: Methodology has been added to provide a comprehensive discussion of the philosophical, methodological, and procedural foundations of the thesis. This chapter now outlines the researcher's ontological position (realism) and epistemological stance (positivism) and justifies the adoption of a quantitative research methodology. The chapter integrates details on the overarching research design, the sampling strategies employed across the empirical studies, and the analytical techniques used (e.g. Structural Equation Modelling). Additionally, validated instruments and construct measurements are documented clearly, and full versions of the questionnaires used in both empirical studies have been included in the thesis appendix for transparency and replicability.

## **2. Integration of Linking Sub-Sections Between Chapters**

**Examiners Comment:** Present sub-sections in between each chapter to outline how the papers relate to each other and how they each contribute to addressing the research questions for the whole thesis.

### **Response and Revision:**

To ensure structural coherence and intellectual flow across the thesis, new sub-sections have been added between each main chapter. These bridging sections explicitly articulate how each paper builds upon the theoretical and empirical foundations of the previous one. They also clarify how the three papers collectively address the overarching research questions, offering a cumulative understanding of brand anthropomorphism from conceptual, cultural, and emotional perspectives. This structural enhancement ensures that the thesis reads as a cohesive and integrated body of work.

## **3. Expansion of Empirical Studies with Comparative and Demographic Analysis**

**Examiners Comment:** Conduct additional studies in both empirical papers to enable comparative analyses and account for more demographic variables as controls.

### **Response and Revision:**

Both empirical studies have been expanded to incorporate more robust demographic analysis and control variables. In Study 2, additional demographic variables such as age, gender, and education level were collected and integrated into the model to test for group differences and potential moderating effects. Study 3 has been revised to include deal proneness and price sensitivity as control variables. Moreover, multi-group analysis was conducted to explore

potential differences in emotional response pathways across demographic subgroups. These additions enhance the generalisability, validity, and explanatory power of the findings.

#### **4. Adherence to Journal Word Count Standards**

**Examiners Comment:** Ensure that the word count for each paper adheres to the standard of business management journals (around 10,000 words including references).

#### **Response and Revision:**

Every effort has been made to align each paper with the conventions of high-ranking business and management journals. While the revised papers do slightly exceed the 10,000-word benchmark, this has been a conscious and academically driven decision to ensure that each chapter stands as a robust, self-contained contribution that meets doctoral-level expectations for conceptual depth, methodological transparency, and empirical rigour. Specifically, the extended length is a result of the following considerations:

- The need to clearly integrate examiners feedback, including additional comparative analysis, the inclusion of more control variables, and expanded justification of theoretical frameworks.
- The effort to provide detailed explanation of data collection and SEM procedures, as required for methodological transparency in empirical research.
- The decision to write each paper in a journal-ready format, while also ensuring the chapters make sense independently for examiners unfamiliar with the entire thesis.
- The inclusion of clear literature positioning and critical reflection, which are essential for demonstrating scholarly maturity.

That said, the papers have been carefully revised to eliminate all unnecessary repetition and non-essential elaboration. The structure, argumentation, and referencing have been streamlined to maintain focus and clarity. The current word counts remain within the range accepted by journals such as the Journal of Business Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, and Journal of Brand Management, which are known to allow flexibility for well-justified empirical studies or theoretical reviews. It is therefore submitted that the slight extension beyond the recommended word count has been necessary to preserve the academic quality and integrity of the work and is fully in line with expectations for doctoral research of publishable standard.

## **5. Elimination of Repetition and Improved Argument Synthesis**

**Examiners Comment:** Remove the substantial number of repetitions within the thesis and synthesise the arguments.

### **Response and Revision:**

The entire thesis has undergone a rigorous editorial review to identify and eliminate unnecessary repetition. Theoretical concepts such as brand anthropomorphism, brand-self congruity, and logo-self connection are now introduced once and referenced consistently thereafter. Redundant discussions and overlapping definitions have been removed or consolidated. Furthermore, the general conclusion chapter has been rewritten to synthesise the cumulative findings across all three papers, presenting a coherent theoretical contribution to the literature.

## **6. Examination of the Revised Written Document Only**

**Examiners Comment:** We are not going to hold a second viva, rather the examiners will examine the revised written document only.

### **Response and Revision:**

Acknowledging that no second viva will be conducted, every effort has been made to ensure that the revised thesis is fully self-contained and comprehensible in written form. This chapter serves as a transparent guide to the revisions made, while new signposting and prefaces throughout the thesis direct readers to the most relevant updates. The aim has been to anticipate potential queries and to clarify all major changes within the body of the document itself.

## **3.4 Conclusion**

The revisions presented throughout this chapter reflect a comprehensive and intellectually engaged response to the examiners' feedback. Collectively, these changes have not only addressed the technical and structural concerns raised during the viva but have also substantially enhanced the academic rigour and contribution of the thesis. The updated version of the thesis now demonstrates clearer philosophical and methodological alignment, improved integration of empirical findings, and a deeper exploration of the cultural and emotional dimensions of brand anthropomorphism. Each of the three core papers has been refined to meet the expectations of both doctoral research and publication standards, offering a multifaceted understanding of how anthropomorphic branding operates in a symbolic, globalised, and emotionally charged consumer landscape.

Importantly, the revisions were made with full awareness that the revised submission would be assessed solely in written form. As such, this chapter has been designed to

transparently document and justify all major amendments. It is hoped that this clear articulation of changes will support the examiners in their evaluation and affirm the revised thesis's readiness for award. They reflect a genuine engagement with examiners feedback and a commitment to scholarly rigour. The revised thesis now offers a more mature and multi-dimensional investigation into brand anthropomorphism, advancing theoretical understanding, empirical insight, and practical relevance. It is hoped that the updated submission will meet the expectations of the examiners and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse in branding and consumer behaviour research.



## **Chapter 4.**

### **Unpacking the Inconsistency in Brand Anthropomorphism Literature: A Systematic Literature Review to Establish Conceptual Clarity.**

#### **Abstract**

Brand anthropomorphism has gained prominence in consumer research and branding practice. Despite its importance, the construct of brand anthropomorphism remains inconsistently defined, measured, and applied, leading to conceptual fragmentation and limiting its robustness in the branding literature as well as its effectiveness as a branding strategy. This study undertakes a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis of 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023 to address these challenges. The research is guided by three key questions: how the term "brand anthropomorphism" is conceptualised in the literature, how brand anthropomorphism is measured, and how emerging approaches are shaping its application. Findings reveal significant variability in the use of brand anthropomorphism, which is often conflated with related constructs such as "brand humanisation" and "brand personification." Measurement approaches vary widely, ranging from self-reported scales to implicit indicators, underscoring the need for methodological standardisation. The outcomes of brand anthropomorphism are equally diverse, including enhanced consumer loyalty, emotional attachment, and trust. Additionally, emerging technologies, such as AI and virtual brand personas, present new opportunities for its application. This study contributes by providing conceptual clarity to the fragmented discourse on brand anthropomorphism, proposing a unified framework to standardise its use and measurement, and identifying key pathways for future research. It offers actionable insights for academics and practitioners, highlighting how a cohesive understanding of brand anthropomorphism can advance theory and enhance branding strategies in an increasingly digitalized consumer landscape.

**Keywords:** Brand anthropomorphism, Systematic Literature Review, Bibliometrics, Anthropomorphism,

## 4.1 Introduction

Brand anthropomorphism, or the attribution of human characteristics to brands, has gained significant interest as both a theoretical concept and practical strategy. The implementation of brand anthropomorphism, which is to use humanlike characteristics for a brand (Kwak, Puzakova & Rocereto, 2017), existed much earlier than the discussion of anthropomorphism in the branding literature.

The importance of brand anthropomorphism as a branding strategy, according to Wan and Aggarwal (2015), can be seen from the common occurrence in consumers' everyday life. This phenomenon has long existed within commercial settings, as evidenced by iconic examples such as the Michelin Man named "Bibendum" (created in 1898) (Michelin Guide, n.d., 2024; Michelin, n.d., 2023; Carter-Lome, 2022) and M&M Candies mascots "Red, Yellow, Blue, Green, Orange and Brown" (created in 1954) (Taylor, 2023; Lacey, 2103; Mars, Incorporated, n.d) and personified product designs, as done by Coca-Cola with a human form and shape of bottle, or the Amazon logo on their packaging that resembles a smiling face (Zhang, Li, Ye, Qin and Zhong, 2020; Harun, Razak, Rahim & Radzuan, 2016). In the digital era brand anthropomorphism has evolved through advancements in technology, seen in the development of humanised digital assistants such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa, which simulate consumer and brand interactions and make the brand become relevant "entities" in consumers' lives (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Some brands, such as Durex, enhance their brand by creating a blog and engaging in two-way communication with their consumers on social media, thereby creating a chance for the brand to be a "friend" with their customers. (Zhang, et al.,2020). These examples illustrate that brand anthropomorphism is an effective branding strategy for creating, building and strengthening consumer-brand relationships (Bai, Zhang and Chu, 2023; Ubgade and Joshi, 2022; Daryanto, Alexander and Kartika, 2022; Sharma and Rahman, 2022; Delgado-Ballester, Palazón, and Peláez, 2020).

Despite its practical ubiquity and longstanding importance in business, academic interest in brand anthropomorphism only gained momentum in the late 1990s, with foundational research by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) initiating discussions of humanised brand traits (e.g. brand personality) and highlighting the concept of anthropomorphism as a key factor in consumer-brand relationships. Recently, researchers have addressed some questions regarding this topic. So far, this includes questions about the definition of brand anthropomorphism (Puzakova, Kwak & Rocereto, 2009; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Kim, Puzakova, Kwak, & Jeong, 2017; Miles & Ibrahim, 2013; Tuškej and Podnar, 2018; Gretzel, & Murphy, 2019; Huang, Wong & Wan, 2020; Yang, Aggarwal & McGill, 2020), its antecedents and outcomes (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2009; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013), measurement scales (Guido and Peluso, 2015; Golossenko, Pillai, & Aroean, 2020), and its differentiation from related concepts within the humanised branding literature (Karanika and Hogg, 2020).

The growing interest in explaining the concept of brand anthropomorphism is evidenced by an increasing number of conceptual papers and literature reviews within the fields of marketing, branding, and consumer behaviour research (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Aggarwal, Bajpai, & Khandelwal, 2020; Yang, Aggarwal, & McGill, 2020; Blut, Wang, Wunderlich, & Brock, 2021; Ding, Lee, Legendre, & Madera, 2022; Sharma & Rahman, 2022; Khan, Anas, & Uddin, 2023). These studies reflect the growing focus on understanding the nuances of brand anthropomorphism, underscoring its relevance in contemporary marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Among these literature reviews on brand anthropomorphism, Sharma and Rahman (2022) provides the most comprehensive overview of brand anthropomorphism, explaining that the research of brand anthropomorphism is fragmented and there is still much uncertainty about how to study this concept. Despite growing

interest in the topic and while the concept has gained popularity and brand anthropomorphism strategies are widely used, the construct remains fragmented and inconsistently conceptualised.

Based on the findings of this literature review, the inconsistency in the brand anthropomorphism literature can be attributed to the interchangeable use of terms such as “brand personification,” “brand humanisation,” and “human brand,” as well as the inclusion of varied constructs like “consumer tendency to anthropomorphise” and “product anthropomorphism.” This indicates a lack of agreement or commitment within the literature to use “brand anthropomorphism” as the primary construct to explain anthropomorphism phenomena in the context of branding. Such inconsistency in terminology not only creates confusion but also risks leading to false conclusions and impeding scientific progress (Then & Ting, 2011; Ward, 2012; Zwanenburg, 2015). The use of different terms to describe similar constructs (synonymy) and the same term to describe different constructs (polysemy) further complicates the field. This inconsistency results in findings that are often difficult to interpret, inconsistent, and challenging to replicate (Larsen, Voronovich, Cook, & Pedro, 2013).

To address the inconsistencies in brand anthropomorphism research, this study undertakes a systematic literature review to synthesise and critically analyse existing research. The primary objective is to establish a unified conceptual foundation for brand anthropomorphism by identifying discrepancies, clarifying definitions, and distinguishing the construct from related terms. This effort seeks to provide a coherent framework that will guide future research and offer actionable insights for practitioners, enabling them to implement anthropomorphism strategies with precision and confidence. Without such an effort, the field risks stagnation, as unresolved ambiguities may hinder theoretical advancements and limit the strategic potential of brand anthropomorphism.

This study systematically reviews 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023 that explicitly use the term “brand anthropomorphism.” The review is complemented by bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer and content analysis conducted with Excel. This rigorous approach provides novel insights into how the term “brand anthropomorphism” is utilised in academic literature, establishing it as a distinct construct, differentiating it from related concepts such as brand personality and brand personification, and tracing the development and advancement of its operationalisation. Moreover, this review clarifies the impact of brand anthropomorphism and identifies emerging themes and future research directions, emphasising areas where the construct holds strategic value, such as AI integration, social media engagement, and cross-cultural applications. By consolidating diverse findings and standardising terminology, this study aims to advance the theoretical foundations of brand anthropomorphism and ensure its practical relevance in contemporary branding research. In doing so, it provides a critical stepping stone for scholars and practitioners to navigate and expand this vital area of research.

## 4.2 Literature review

### 4.2.1 Defining brand anthropomorphism as a construct

The interdisciplinary nature of brand anthropomorphism has led to a proliferation of definitions within the academic literature. Based on an analysis of 157 peer-reviewed articles, brand anthropomorphism can be understood as a strategic (Vernuccio, Patrizi, & Pastore, 2021; Kwak, Puzakova, & Rocereto, 2017), psychological (Bhalla & Pathak, 2023; Malhotra & Dandotiya, 2023; Sehgal, Jham, & Malhotra, 2023; Liu, Wei, Zhu, & Chen, 2022; Golossenko, Pillai, & Aroean, 2020; Tuškej & Podnar, 2018), and cultural (Holt, 2004; McCracken, 1986; Gretry, Horváth, & Belei, 2017; Brandão & Popoli, 2023) process. This multidimensional

conceptualisation reflects how brands acquire human-like traits that enable consumers to perceive and interact with them as social entities.

The strategic dimension of brand anthropomorphism centres on the deliberate actions undertaken by brands to humanise their identity. Vernuccio et al. (2021) and Kwak et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of anthropomorphic elements such as mascots, avatars, and storytelling in fostering differentiation and relational bonding. These elements project relatable personalities that resonate with consumers and strengthen emotional engagement. By embedding human-like characteristics into their marketing communications, brands can create unique identities that stand out in competitive markets. This strategic use of anthropomorphism not only enhances brand perception but also facilitates stronger consumer-brand relationships through human-like interactions.

In contrast, the psychological dimension explores anthropomorphism from the consumer's perspective, focusing on the cognitive and emotional processes that drive the attribution of human characteristics to brands. Bhalla and Pathak (2023) and Malhotra and Dandotiya (2023) highlight how consumers anthropomorphise brands to simplify complex brand attributes, fostering trust, loyalty, and forgiveness in times of brand crises. Liu, Wei, Zhu and Chen (2022) further examine the emotional connection that arises when consumers perceive brands as social entities capable of understanding and addressing their needs. These findings suggest that anthropomorphism functions as a mechanism through which consumers engage with brands on a personal and emotional level, enhancing overall brand attachment.

The cultural dimension of brand anthropomorphism expands its significance by highlighting how anthropomorphic elements, such as logos and brand identities, are shaped by cultural icons and symbols that resonate with a brand's consumers. These cultural elements play a pivotal role in humanising a brand, serving as a strategic shortcut—particularly for

emerging brands—to achieve an iconic status. As Holt (2024) and McCracken (1986) suggest, for a brand to attain iconic status, its functional role must evolve into a cultural icon, embodying and shaping societal values, myths, and narratives. While this cultural impact remains underexplored in brand anthropomorphism literature, real-world cases demonstrate its influence. A prime example is Starbucks, whose logo draws from Greek mythology's Sirens (mermaids)—symbols of mystery, allure, and the sea—aligning with the brand's Seattle origins. Starbucks integrates this cultural symbolism into its brand identity through a stylised two-tailed siren in green, representing exotic, premium coffee from around the world. Furthermore, by giving the siren a human-like smiling face, Starbucks fosters a friendly yet sophisticated brand personality. This case illustrates how logo anthropomorphism, through borrowing iconic characters and archetypes, allows brands to instantly connect with audiences by tapping into familiar cultural associations. It underscores the power of cultural symbolism in enriching brand storytelling, enhancing consumer engagement, and reinforcing brand legitimacy. By leveraging these anthropomorphic elements, brands do more than establish strong identities—they shape and sustain cultural norms, influencing shared aspirations. This perspective highlights how brand anthropomorphism transcends its functional role to become a powerful cultural tool, bridging the relationship between brands, consumers, and society. Ultimately, anthropomorphic elements are not only commercially advantageous but also culturally transformative, contributing to the collective identity of the communities in which brands operate.

Adding to this discourse, Daryanto, Alexander, and Kartika (2022) propose that anthropomorphic logos, when designed with culturally embedded iconic characters, can significantly enhance consumer perceptions of functional performance. Their study demonstrates that the appeal of an anthropomorphised logo, such as one inspired by Sherlock Holmes, strengthens its cultural relevance and symbolic meaning. This cultural embeddedness

enhances the connection between the logo and the consumer's self-identity, a concept termed "logo-self connection." The authors emphasise that this connection mediates the relationship between logo anthropomorphism and perceived functional benefits, underscoring the role of sociocultural associations in building brand meaning. Gretry, Horváth, and Belei (2017) enhance this discussion by emphasising the importance of aligning anthropomorphic strategies with cultural norms to ensure relevance across diverse markets. Together, these studies demonstrate how anthropomorphic brands and logos function as powerful tools for navigating and embedding themselves within cultural narratives, thereby influencing consumer behaviour by embodying shared ideals and aspirations. The integration of anthropomorphic elements into cultural frameworks not only enriches brand identity but also reinforces its role in shaping societal norms and collective identities.

#### 4.2.2 Development in the research on brand anthropomorphism definition

The evolution of research in brand anthropomorphism can be traced through three key perspectives. Initially, the concept was framed within trait psychology, focusing on the consumer's tendency to anthropomorphise brands. It later emerged as a strategic branding approach, where brands deliberately incorporate anthropomorphic elements to enhance consumer engagement. More recently, as explored in this study, researchers have begun examining brand anthropomorphism through a cultural lens, emphasizing how cultural factors shape the way brands adopt and leverage anthropomorphic characteristics.

Early definitions, emerging prominently in the early 2010s, primarily positioned brand anthropomorphism as a psychological phenomenon rooted in consumer perception. These studies emphasised the cognitive processes through which consumers attribute human-like traits, emotions, and intentions to brands. Drawing heavily from foundational work in



anthropomorphism by Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2007), researchers such as Aggarwal and McGill (2007) conceptualised anthropomorphism as a heuristic mechanism that enables consumers to simplify their interactions with brands and foster relational bonding. This perspective highlighted the relational benefits of anthropomorphism, including enhanced trust, loyalty, and forgiveness in consumer-brand relationships (Tuškej & Podnar, 2018). Recent studies further examine the psychological influences on anthropomorphism. For instance, Whelan & Hingston (2024) suggest that individuals with chronic concerns about infectious diseases are more likely to anthropomorphise brands and products as a substitute for human interaction. However, this tendency diminishes in consumers with high germ aversion, indicating that health concerns interact in complex ways with anthropomorphic perception. This suggests that anthropomorphism is not a universally applicable strategy but one that must be carefully tailored based on consumer psychology and contextual factors.

By the mid-2010s, the literature began incorporating strategic dimensions into the conceptualisation of brand anthropomorphism. Research such as Kwak, Puzakova, and Rocereto (2017) and Vernuccio, Patrizi, and Pastore (2021) explored how marketers intentionally humanise brands through the design of anthropomorphic elements such as mascots, avatars, and logos. These studies emphasised the deliberate efforts by marketers to enhance emotional engagement, differentiate brands in competitive markets, and create enduring consumer connections. For instance, Kucuk (2020) highlighted the impact of anthropomorphic branding strategies, such as "speaking" or "acting" brand characters, on consumer perceptions and behaviours. This strategic perspective advanced the understanding of anthropomorphism as a marketer-driven tool for humanizing brands, complementing the consumer-driven psychological perspective.

In recent years, particularly post-2020, there has been a notable shift toward a more integrative and nuanced understanding of brand anthropomorphism, with increasing emphasis

on its cultural dimension. Scholars such as Holt (2004) and McCracken (1986) argue that anthropomorphic brands transcend their functional roles, becoming cultural icons that embody and shape societal values, myths, and narratives. For example, Daryanto, Alexander, and Kartika (2022) demonstrated how anthropomorphic logos designed with culturally embedded characters—such as those inspired by Sherlock Holmes—enhance consumer perceptions of functional performance and foster stronger logo-self connections. These findings underscore the role of anthropomorphic elements in embedding brands within collective cultural memory and identity, transforming them into symbols of shared ideals and aspirations.

This evolution of definitions also addresses critiques raised in the branding literature. Avis and Aitken (2015) challenged the conceptual vagueness of brand constructs like personality and relationships, critiquing their metaphorical basis and lack of theoretical rigor. Unlike brand personality, which anthropomorphises brands through abstract human-like traits (e.g., sincerity, excitement), brand anthropomorphism focuses on the direct attribution of human characteristics, such as intentions, emotions, and social behaviours, to brands. This specificity allows brand anthropomorphism to move beyond metaphorical and often ambiguous descriptions of personality traits.

Early definitions of brand anthropomorphism rooted in psychology clarified the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying anthropomorphism, countering the critique of ad hoc methodologies. The strategic dimension brought operational clarity, emphasizing how anthropomorphic elements could be systematically designed and leveraged by marketers to achieve specific branding outcomes. Most recently, the cultural dimension has elevated anthropomorphism beyond individual and transactional domains, situating it within broader societal narratives and addressing the demand for deeper cultural relevance and theoretical justification.

This progression culminates in a holistic understanding of brand anthropomorphism as a multifaceted construct that integrates psychological, strategic, and cultural dimensions. The psychological dimension elucidates how consumers humanise brands to reduce complexity and form relational bonds (Bhalla & Pathak, 2023). The strategic dimension highlights how marketers craft anthropomorphic features to drive emotional engagement and market differentiation (Golossenko, Pillai, & Aroean, 2020). Finally, the cultural dimension situates anthropomorphism within broader societal narratives, demonstrating how anthropomorphic brands contribute to the creation of iconic culture and collective identity (Gretry, Horváth, & Belei, 2017).

#### 4.3 Defining the review question.

This systematic review will be different than the previous literature review papers. Where they still included general phrases such as “human” and “person” in their research, the present review paper focuses only on papers which specifically use the term brand anthropomorphism. Thus, the objective of this research is to provide a needed basis for a common understanding of brand anthropomorphism as a construct to explain an anthropomorphism phenomenon within brand literature. Specifically, it contributes an overview of how the term of brand anthropomorphism is used in the branding literature.

Therefore, to contribute to the advancement in brand anthropomorphism literature, in this systematic literature review the author focuses on reviewing the existing literature that studies brand anthropomorphism as a construct. The author believes that it is important to review the relevant and current literature in brand anthropomorphism, so there is a better understanding that not all theories that use the concept of human and humanisation in the branding literature could be considered as a brand anthropomorphism study. For this purpose,

this paper presents a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed research papers from journals focusing on brand anthropomorphism in the period of 1998-2023. To guide the review, the following research questions were stated:

**RQ1.** How is the term brand anthropomorphism used in the peer-reviewed literature?

**RQ2.** How is brand anthropomorphism measured in the peer-reviewed literature?

**RQ3.** What thematic clusters emerge from the brand anthropomorphism peer-reviewed literature?

#### 4.4 Locating, selecting and evaluating studies

In conducting the review, the author performed an initial search using five academic databases. These academic databases are: EBSCO Business Source Ultimate, Emerald, Elsevier Science Direct, JSTOR, and Scopus. By undertaking the article searches using a wide range of databases, the author hopes this can create a more comprehensive search and a more valid systematic review (Whiting, Westwood, Burke, Sterne, and Glanville, 2008; Huang, Yang, Gao, Yang, & Zhao, 2014; Bramer, Rethlefsen, Kleijnen and Franco, 2017). As suggested by previous studies, using a wide range of databases can maximise the search to find the relevant studies and minimise selection bias (Suarez-Almazor, Belseck, Homik, Dorgan, and Ramos-Remus, 2000). To search for articles on brand anthropomorphism, the author scanned these databases using the ‘all fields’ search topic (i.e. articles, titles, abstract and keywords). Every database has their specific search procedures, and to make the process replicable for future research, the author will specify each procedure from the seven databases in the appendix of this document.

To ensure the quality of the articles and to follow previous systematic literature reviews in the branding field (Keränen, Piirainen, and Salminen, 2012; Dangelico, and Vocalelli, 2017; Plumeyer, Kottemann, Böger and Decker, 2019), the author considered only published articles with a peer-reviewed evaluation process. This is because a peer reviewed article is believed to follow the standard format for scholarly publications (Klang, Wallnöfer, and Hacklin, 2014; Soto-Simeone, Siren and Antretter, 2020) and to have a significant impact on scholarly discourse (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005). The author chose not to include working papers, books, book chapters, and conference papers.

The initial search was only focused on the relevant research fields. By only focusing on these research fields, the author hopes to keep the search process specific, so the objectives of the systematic review in this paper can be achieved. For each search, the author limited the search to only focus on management, business, marketing, advertising, and psychology. The author decided to include the search of articles in ‘psychology’ as part of the limitation to search for brand anthropomorphism articles, because there are articles within this area that are considered relevant to brand anthropomorphism literature. The relevancy of the psychology subject area within brand anthropomorphism literature is also explained in previous literature. Previous research in brand anthropomorphism literature have used studies from social psychology to help explain the concept of ‘anthropomorphism’ in the context of branding. Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo (2007) is the most commonly used by previous research to explain brand anthropomorphism as the consumers’ tendency to attribute humanlike characteristics (i.e. mind, intentions, effortful thinking, emotional state and behavioural features) in the brand as a non-human object (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007, 2012; Avis, 2012; Delgado-Ballester, Palazon and Pelaez, 2019; Karankika and Hogg, 2020; Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto, 2009; Wen, Wan, Peng Chen and Jin, 2017). In addition to this, a scale called IDAQ which stands for ‘Individual difference in anthropomorphism questionnaire’ by Waytz, Cacioppo and Epley

(2010) that was published within the social-psychology subject area, was used as a reference for the development of brand anthropomorphism scales (e.g. Ghuman, Huang, Madden and Roth, 2015; Guido and Peluso, 2015; Golossenko, Pillai and Aroean, 2020).

**Table 1.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specifically studied brand anthropomorphism as a construct</li> <li>Mentioned brand anthropomorphism as construct on the article.</li> <li>Peer-review articles</li> <li>Article focus on management, business, marketing, advertising, and psychology.</li> <li>Time frame: 1998-2023</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not included working papers, books, book chapters, conference papers, commentary articles and editorial articles.</li> <li>Non-English article</li> <li>Only mentioning brand anthropomorphism in the reference list and on the author's detail</li> </ul>

Since the primary interest of this systematic literature review is to review research that specifically studied brand anthropomorphism as a construct and not the other constructs that can be explained by an anthropomorphism theory (e.g. brand personality), the author in this review has tried to narrow down the search results by using the string of “brand anthropomorphism”. Moreover, the author also used these databases to search for brand anthropomorphism articles published in English with a range of publication between 1998-2023. By using the quotations marks (“...”) in the database searches, the author received different results than if the author searched the phrase brand anthropomorphism with no quotes. Specifically, the author gets 3,311 articles when searching brand anthropomorphism without the quotation marks. These 3,311 articles were identified from the five databases that were used in this systematic literature review. The details are: Emerald provides 516 results, EBSCO provides 430 results, JSTOR provides 128 results, Elsevier Science Direct provides 355 results and Scopus provides 1,882 results.

However, by searching brand anthropomorphism enclosed by quotation marks (i.e. “brand anthropomorphism”), the author received fewer results. In total, there are 767 articles from five databases that were used. The details are: Emerald provides 132 results, EBSCO provides 32 results, JSTOR provides 31 results, Elsevier Science Direct provides 59 results and Scopus provides 513 results. The identified articles were then recorded in a single excel document. Duplicates and non-relevant articles were checked and removed. This resulted in 607 articles for further analysis. In the screening process, articles were fully read by the researcher and carefully reviewed and assessed using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, to remove from the sample articles that are not peer-reviewed articles, articles that did not fall within the research focus areas of management, business, marketing, advertising, and psychology, articles published in 2024 (as this systematic review only covers up to 2023), articles that were not written in English, and articles that only mentioned the brand anthropomorphism construct in their reference list and author details. In this process, a total of 157 articles were selected to proceed to the next selection process. In the eligibility phase, to ensure that the remaining articles fully comply with the established criteria, the researcher conducted a thorough re-reading of the entire 157 articles, from the title to the reference list. A summary of the selection criteria is shown in **Figure 1**. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the articles included in the next phase are those that mention the brand anthropomorphism construct at least one time, within the article itself and not only in the reference list or in the author’s details. As a result of this entire selection process, this systematic literature review will analyse 157 articles.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis and Visualisation

To analyse the selected 157 articles, this systematic literature review employed two software tools: Excel and VOSviewer. Beyond data analysis, these tools were also utilised for data

management and visualization. Excel facilitates structured data organization and descriptive analysis, while VOSviewer excels at bibliometric analysis and network visualization—a combination increasingly endorsed in systematic literature reviews (Donthu, Kumar, Pandey, Pandey, & Mishra, 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

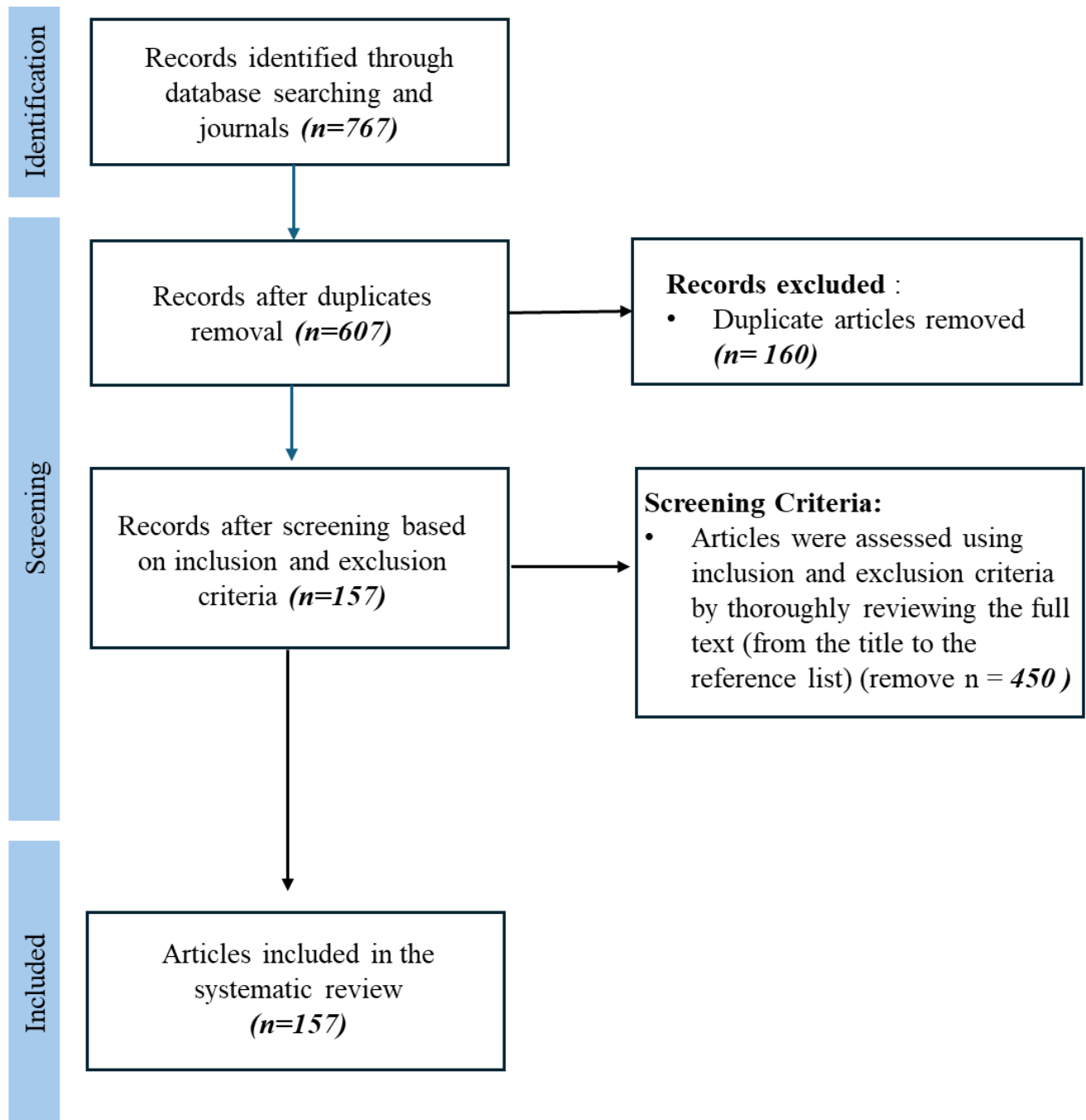
Specifically, Excel was used to document, clean, and organise metadata, including publication year, journal, authors, keywords, and citations. The software supports descriptive analysis, enabling the identification of publication trends, frequently studied themes, and methodological distributions. Pivot tables and charts provided a clear summary of findings, ensuring transparency and replicability (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Excel's versatility in handling large datasets made it ideal for systematically applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, a critical step for maintaining methodological rigor.

In addition, VOSviewer, widely recognised for its bibliometric capabilities, was employed to conduct co-occurrence analysis of keywords, citation network mapping, and bibliographic coupling (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). These analyses offered visualizations that illuminated intellectual structures, research clusters, and interdisciplinary trends within the field. For instance, keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed thematic clusters such as consumer-brand relationships and the psychological underpinnings of brand anthropomorphism. Bibliographic coupling highlighted connections among influential authors and institutions, reflecting the evolution and fragmentation of the field.

The integration of Excel and VOSviewer was strategically chosen to address the complexity of synthesizing fragmented literature on brand anthropomorphism. Excel ensured meticulous data handling and provided detailed descriptive insights, while VOSviewer visualised research patterns and intellectual networks, fostering a deeper understanding of the field's trajectory. This methodological rigor aligns with best practices in systematic reviews,



emphasizing the need for transparency, replicability, and comprehensive analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). Together, these tools enabled this study not only to consolidate existing knowledge but also to identify gaps and propose future research directions, significantly contributing to the theoretical and practical development of the brand anthropomorphism literature.



**Figure 1** Search process for the systematic literature review

## 4.6 Findings

### 4.6.1 Publication year and the trend of using brand anthropomorphism as a construct

In the initial screening process, the present review found an increasing trend in anthropomorphism research in the branding and marketing literature. However, not many of these articles were focused solely on studying brand anthropomorphism. For example, from the 607 articles, 114 articles were focused on research in the field of anthropomorphism in various entities, for instance: artificial intelligence, robots (i.e. anthropomorphised robots), AR shopping assistants, destinations, chatbots, design, smartphones, coronavirus, money, sadness, luck, food, perception, experience, companies, and objects.

From this review process, it was also found that the use of the construct of anthropomorphism seems to change depending on the object being studied. The increasing number of researchers studying the effects of anthropomorphism also increases the variety of anthropomorphism constructs. Examples include constructs such as: “perceived anthropomorphism (Ahn, Cho, and Sunny, 2022; Marikyan, Papagiannidis, Rana, Ranjan, and Morgan, 2022), “robo-advisor anthropomorphism (Baek and Kim, 2023)”, “chatbot anthropomorphism (Konya-Baumbach, Biller, and von Janda, 2023; Xie, Liang, Zhou and Jiang, 2024), “anthropomorphic medical AI (Zhang, Tan and Lee, 2024)”, “pet anthropomorphism (Apaolaza, Hartmann, Paredes, Trujillo, and D’Souza, 2022)”, “service robot anthropomorphism (Odekerken-Schröder, Mennens, Steins, and Mahr, 2021)”, “destination anthropomorphism (Chan and Gohary, 2023)”, “money anthropomorphism (Wang, Kim and Zhou, 2023),” “Artificial intelligence assistants (AIAs) anthropomorphism (Uysal, Alavi, and Bezençon, 2022)”, and “word anthropomorphism (Kumar, Purani, and Viswanathan, 2020)”.

Additionally, from the review of 607 articles, it was also found that previous researchers were not consistent in using constructs to explain brand anthropomorphism. For example, some previous researchers used other constructs that were still related to brands, such as “anthropomorphis(z)ed brand (Sierra, Hyman, Lee and Suh, 2015; Awanis, Schlegelmilch and Cui, 2017; Rajagopal, 2019; Wu and Jiang, 2019; Messer, Wölfl, and Feste, 2019; Chen, Chen and Yang, 2020; Eng and Jarvis, 2020; Ha, Chen, Uy, and Capistrano, 2021; Karpinska-Krakowiak and Eisend, 2021; Kim and Jang, 2022), “anthropomorphism of a brand (Yang, Zheng, Zhao and Gupta, 2017), “anthropomorphization for brands (Kumar, 2018), “anthropomorphizing of brands (Hubert, 2018), “brand anthropomorphization (Kwak, Puzakova, and Rocereto, 2015), “anthropomorphizing brands (Zhang, Hu, Tso, and Liu; 2023), “anthropomorphic brands (Roy and Attri, 2022; Zong and He, 2022)”, “brand anthropomorphizing (Pentina, Hancock, and Xie, 2023), “anthropomorphic brands (Zong and He, 2022)”, “anthropomorphic product (Ding, and Xu, 2023)”, “product anthropomorphism (Hu, Gong, Lu and Ding, 2023)”, “anthropomorphised products and brands (Liu, Wang, Liu and Zhai, 2024)”, and “humanised brand (Vinitha, Kumar, and Purani, 2021). Some other researchers also used other concepts to explain the effects of anthropomorphism in the brand and marketing context. For example, some of them studied spokes-characters, humanization of the brands, human brand (Haq and Bonn, 2018; Chiu and Ho, 2023), brand person, anthropomorphic brand mascots (Bennet and Thompson, 2016) and dehumanization (Weihrauch and Huang, 2021).

From the screening process of several articles that were not included in this review, it demonstrates an indication that the previous researchers were not consistently using brand anthropomorphism as a construct in their studies. In comparison to other constructs that can also explain the humanising brand process, such as brand personality, it can be concluded that the lack of consistency among all the previous researchers is due to the following factors: (1)

the complexity and subjectivity of anthropomorphism in the branding literature; (2) the lack of standardisation; (3) the limited amount of research on brand anthropomorphism; (4) the tendency of overlapping with other constructs; and (5) the practical relevance of brand anthropomorphism.

The first factor is the complexity and subjectivity of brand anthropomorphism. Brand anthropomorphism is a complex concept, as evidenced by the diverse perspectives and research traditions surrounding it (Chen, and Li, 2021; Sharma and Rahman, 2022; Pramesti and Harsono, 2023). The complexity of brand anthropomorphism arises from its interdisciplinary nature and the diverse perspectives applied in its study. Therefore, to understand the concept of brand anthropomorphism, theories from marketing, consumer behaviour, and psychology are needed. In addition to this, subjectivity in the usage of the anthropomorphism concepts in branding literature also become a factor why researchers in the past have not consistently used brand anthropomorphism as a construct in their studies. As mentioned in the earlier section, there is a diversity of terms used to label brand anthropomorphism. This demonstrates that the use of the anthropomorphism concept in branding literature is dependent on the research focus. This condition is different from how researchers treat brand personality. The concept of brand personality is less confusing because it focuses only on explaining the effect of personality traits on brands. Overall, the complexity and subjectivity of brand anthropomorphism influence the theoretical and conceptual confusion, and this can hinder some researchers from committing to using brand anthropomorphism as a construct in their research.

The second factor is lack of standardisation. There are a limited number of publications on a standardised scale of brand anthropomorphism, in contrast to research in the field of brand personality, which has standardised scales such as the brand personality scale developed by Jennifer Aaker (1997). This scale includes five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Additionally, there are also scales

from Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009). Moreover, in their systematic literature review article, Saeed, Burki, Ali, Dahlstrom and Zamer (2022), found 16 brand personality scales exist within the literature. Most of these scales are adaptations from existing brand personality scales. Only a few researchers in brand personality literature have published their own brand personality measurement. On the other hand, there is still a limited number of standardised brand anthropomorphism scales. Most existing brand anthropomorphism scales have only recently been developed and published. For example: ‘brand product anthropomorphism scale’ by Guido and Peluso (2015), ‘brand anthropomorphism questionnaire (BAQ) by Huang, Zhou, Ye, and Guo (2020), and brand anthropomorphism scales (BASC) by Golossenko, Pillai and Aroean (2020) (Sharma and Rahman, 2022). Some of the measurements in brand anthropomorphism research are the adaptation of the ‘anthropomorphic tendency scale’ by Epley et al., (2007).

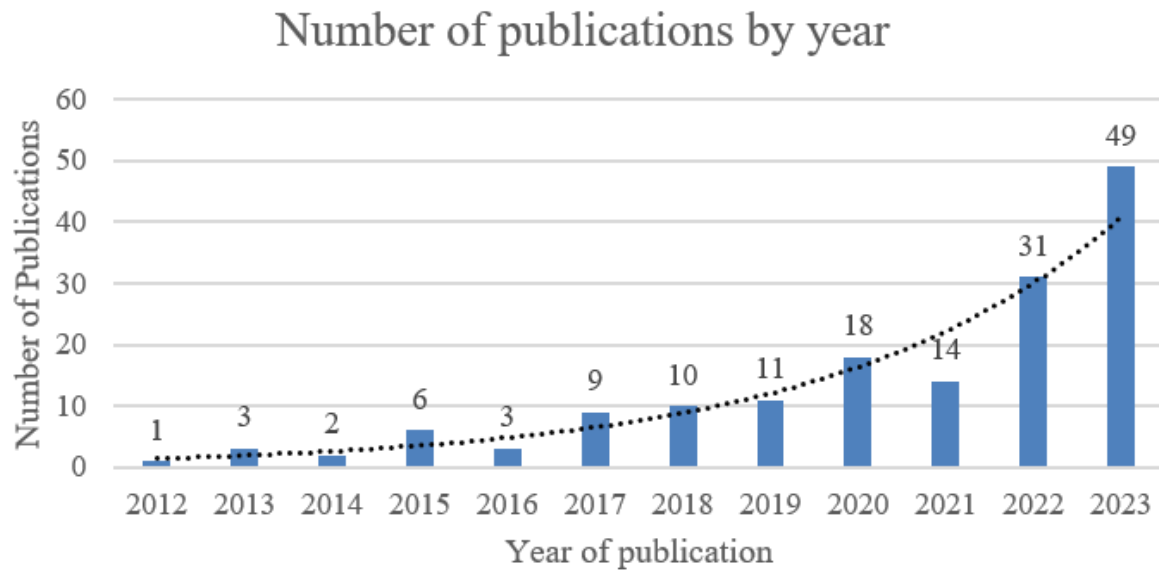
The third factor is the limited number of studies focusing on brand anthropomorphism. Compared to research on brand personality, the number of studies on brand anthropomorphism is relatively few. This can be demonstrated by comparing the results on searching both terms on Google Scholar. When searching for articles about brand personality on Google Scholar, 1,880,000 articles were found within 0.06 seconds. In contrast, the results for brand anthropomorphism, as searched on Google Scholar, generated less than brand personality, with 30,700 articles found within 0.05 seconds.

The fourth factor is overlap with other constructs. This factor suggests that the concept of brand anthropomorphism shares similarities with other constructs that also explains the process and effect of humanising brands by consumers. These constructs include: brand personification, brand humanisation, brand identity, brand image, brand personality, and human brand. Additionally, from the review of the previous studies, it was also found that some

studies focused on the effects of humanising brands do not explicitly label the concept as brand anthropomorphism.

Lastly, the inconsistency in using the brand anthropomorphism as a construct in previous studies is due to minimal usage of the brand anthropomorphism concept in branding strategies. Although this concept has provided early benefits to brands, such as creating positive emotional connections between consumers and brands, providing a unique value proposition in comparison to the competitors, and fostering a positive brand perception; for brand practitioners, using brand anthropomorphism as part of their brand strategy can be perceived as a complex (Soni and Jain, 2017; Yang, Aggarwal, and McGill, 2020; Brandão and Popoli, 2023) and expensive approach. Therefore, it will require careful consideration to incorporate the brand anthropomorphism approach into branding strategies. It is hoped that in the future, more research will be conducted to give more real cases and to explain the managerial implications of the brand anthropomorphism concept. It is also hoped that with increasing research on brand anthropomorphism, this concept will further clarify, making it easier for practitioners to use. This will encourage brand owners to willingly explore and experiment with brand anthropomorphism as part of their branding strategy.

As shown in **Figure 2**, from the 157 selected articles, a dynamic trend can be seen from 2012 to 2023. Where in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2021, the number of research on brand anthropomorphism experienced a decrease in comparison to their previous and later years. It was found that in 2023 there was an increasing number of researchers using and studying brand anthropomorphism as a construct. This increasing number could be a sign that the researcher is becoming more consistent in using the brand anthropomorphism construct on their research in branding.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of publications on brand anthropomorphism by year

#### 4.6.2 Publication journals and authors

The 157 articles included in this systematic literature review spanned across 74 different journals, indicating a broad spectrum of research in the field. The approach of this systematic literature review is different from some previous reviews on brand anthropomorphism. In this review we do not limit the criteria on journals that published the article that relates to brand anthropomorphism as a construct. This decision is based on the recognition of the vast variability, inconsistency, and diversity on how previous researchers use the brand anthropomorphism construct. Therefore, this review aims to attain a broader and more diverse selections of articles. This is so it can provide a more comprehensive overview of the different perspectives, conceptualisations, operationalisation, and research methodologies related to brand anthropomorphism as a construct.

Some key journals are identified. Journal of Business Research, where most of the articles were published, with 16 articles. Following that, Journal of Product & Brand

Management, with 10 articles, suggests a strong focus on brand management with the review. Then there is European Journal of Marketing with 7 articles and Journal of Consumer research with 6 articles which are also significant contributors, highlighting the centrality of marketing and consumer behaviour studies. Some other key journals with fewer articles consist of: Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, International Journal of Research in Marketing, and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, each having contributed 5 articles. Moderate contributions came from journals such as the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Journal of Brand Management, and Marketing Intelligence & Planning, each contributing 3 articles. Additionally, numerous journals contributed single articles, demonstrating the wide range of sources and the interdisciplinary nature of the review. The inclusion of journals from various disciplines highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the research topic, underscoring trends and focal points in the literature. A full frequency of publications for each journal is shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Frequency of publications on the brand anthropomorphism, by journals

<b>Journal</b>	<b>Count of title</b>
Journal of Business Research	16
Journal of Product & Brand Management	10
European Journal of Marketing	7
Journal of Consumer Research	6
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, International Journal of Research in Marketing, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Psychology	5
Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC, Psychology and Marketing, Computers in Human Behavior, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	4
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Journal of Brand Management	3
Social Behavior & Personality: an international journal, Journal of Interactive Advertising, Journal of Interactive Marketing, Consumer Psychology Review, Information & Management, Journal of Distribution Science, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, European Business Review, Business Horizons, Journal of Contemporary Marketing Science	2



International Journal of Organizational Analysis, Young Consumers, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, Journal of Asia Business Studies, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, Current Issues in Tourism, International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research, Journal of Business Ethics, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, Management Decision, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Cogent Business and Management, Service Industries Journal, European Journal of Management and Business Economics, Technology in Society, Baltic Journal of Management, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Event Management, Journal of Promotion Management, Journal of Education for Business, Journal of Retailing, Journal of Gambling Studies, Journal of Service Theory and Practice, Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, Journal of Global Marketing, Management Research Review, Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science: Bridging Asia and the World, Nankai Business Review International, Journal of Historical Research in Marketing, Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management, Frontiers in Psychology, Public Relations Review, Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management, International Journal of Technology, Knowledge & Society: Annual Review, Industrial Marketing Management, International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing, Australasian Marketing Journal (AMJ), Tourism Management, Information (2078-2489), Journal of Advertising, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice

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#### 4.6.3 Bibliometric Analysis

In this section, the 157 articles were analysed using a bibliometric analysis method. This analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software version 1.6.20. The steps of the analysis process using this software are as follows: (1) The records retrieved from Excel were exported into a CSV matrix, consisting of all the DOI numbers of the 157 articles; (2) this data was then imported into VOSviewer for bibliometric and visual analysis. Using this software, several analyses were performed, tailored, and adjusted to address the research questions mentioned in the previous section. Before presenting the analyses that answer the research questions, we will first provide an explanation of the countries and institutions analysis.

The analysis of countries and institutions is a critical component of this systematic literature review because it offers a foundational understanding of the global and institutional landscape of research on brand anthropomorphism. By identifying the most prolific countries

and institutions, this analysis highlights where the majority of contributions originate, and which regions or organisations are shaping the theoretical and practical development of the field. This understanding is particularly valuable for examining the geographical distribution of expertise and influence, with countries such as the United States and institutions like Lehigh University emerging as key contributors due to their high research productivity and impact, as reflected in citation counts.

Moreover, this analysis reveals collaborative networks and interdisciplinary connections that are essential for fostering innovation and advancing the field of brand anthropomorphism. It also serves as a strategic roadmap for future research by identifying potential collaborators and regions with untapped research opportunities. By contextualizing the research activity within global and institutional frameworks, this analysis not only affirms the significance of brand anthropomorphism as an academic domain but also ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of its development. This is crucial for addressing fragmentation and variability within the literature, thereby contributing to a more cohesive and robust academic discourse.

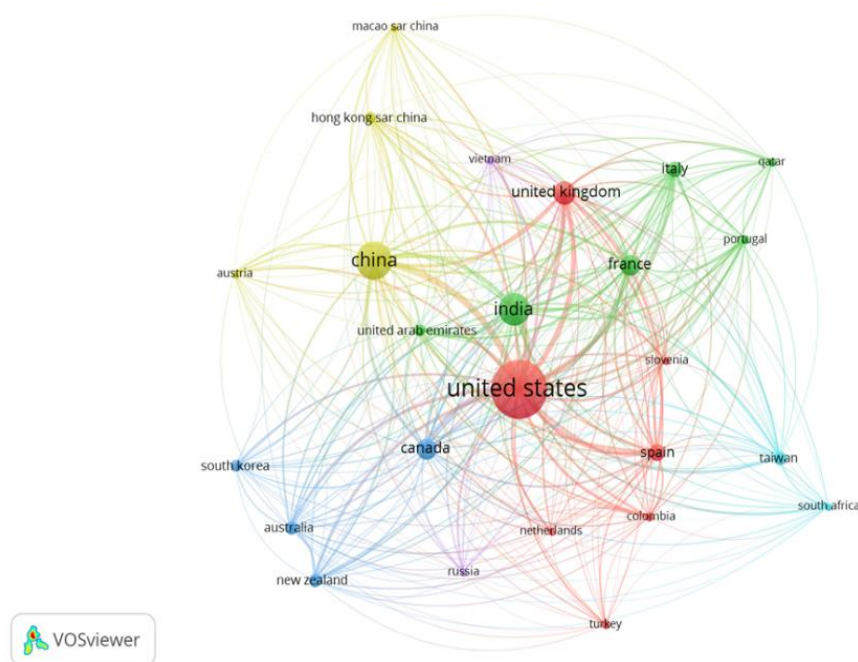
#### 4.6.3.1 Countries and Institutions analysis

The data in **Table 3** lists the top 10 countries in terms of the number publications on brand anthropomorphism. This data shows that the United States is the country with the highest number of publications (55 times), followed by China (27 times), India (22 times), the United Kingdom (13 times), Canada (10 times), Australia, Taiwan, and New Zealand (5 times for each), Hong Kong (4 times), and the Netherlands (2 times). The data in **Table 3** also shows that the United States is a major contributor to the development of research in brand anthropomorphism. This is because it is not only the country with the most publications but

also the country which produces articles that are most frequently cited by researchers all over the world, as indicated by the 2,426 citations. Overall, the data in **Table 3** and visualisation in **Figure 3** provide an insight of the research productivity and research impact of different countries in brand anthropomorphism.

**Table 3.** Top 10 Countries Ranked by Number of Publications.

Rank	Country	Publications	Citations
1	United States	55	2,426
2	Canada	10	845
3	China	27	534
4	United Kingdom	13	412
5	Australia	5	385
6	Taiwan	5	302
7	India	22	260
8	Hongkong	4	256
9	New Zealand	5	252
10	Netherlands	2	247



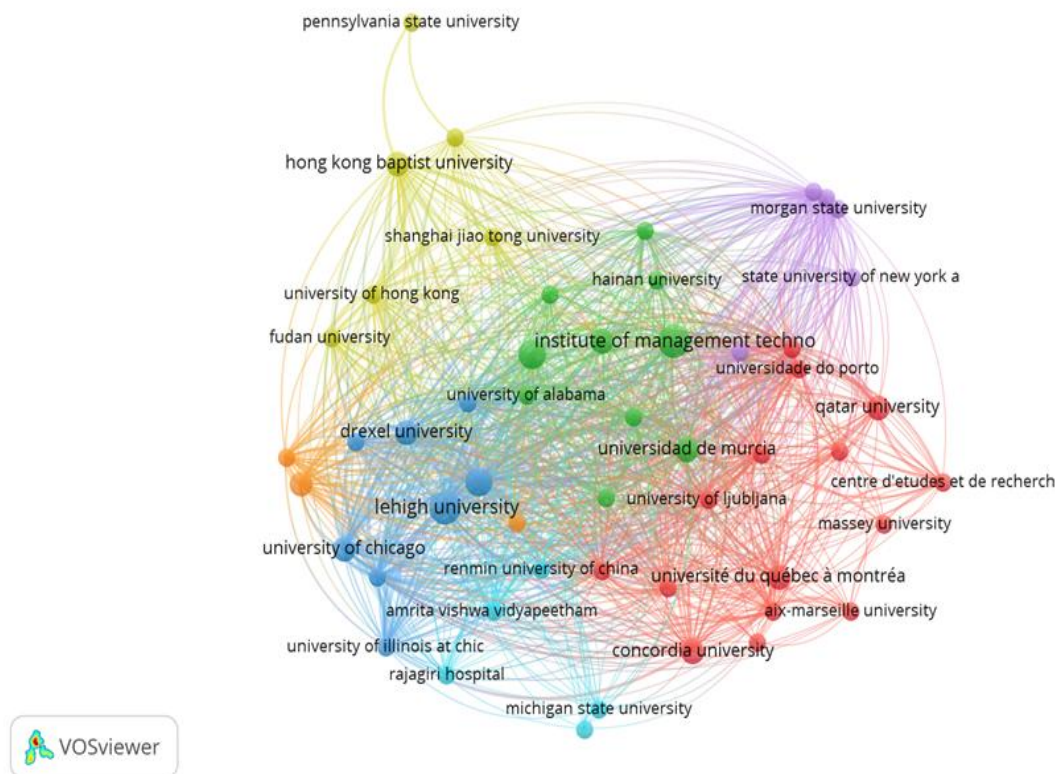
**Figure 3.** Map of countries network. The nodes represent countries. The line represents cooperation relationship.

We also conducted a bibliographic coupling analysis with organisations as the unit of analysis to show how the different academic institutions are interconnected in the field of brand

anthropomorphism. To conduct this analysis, this review uses a low threshold, so it can include a broad range of connections, and the data can show the majority of institutions conducting brand anthropomorphism research. Specifically, for this analysis, the data used included institutions that published at least two documents and had at least one citation. The result of this analysis, from the total of 260 organizations in our data, 52 organizations met the thresholds. The data in **Table 4** and the **Figure 4** show that the Lehigh University is a significant contributor to the development of brand anthropomorphism research. The data also shows that both Lehigh University and the Institute of Management Technology published five articles, but their citation levels are quite different (i.e., 228 vs 45). This distinction highlights Lehigh University’s leadership, particularly through the Department of Marketing at the Lehigh University College of Business. Its dominance can be attributed to several critical factors. First, the institution’s research is not only prolific but also impactful, as evidenced by the influence of highly cited works such as *“Brand as Rivals: Consumer Pursuit of Distinctiveness and the Role of Brand Anthropomorphism”* by Marina Puzakova and Pankaj Aggarwal (2018). Puzakova, an associate professor of Marketing, has played a pivotal role in advancing the field by addressing theoretical gaps, introducing innovative frameworks, and bridging the divide between theory and practice.

**Table 4.** Top 10 Institutions Ranked by Number of Publications

Rank	Organizations	Publications	Citations
1	Lehigh University	5	228
2	University of South Carolina	4	542
3	University of Toronto	2	172
4	University of Chicago	3	75
5	Universidad de Murcia	3	99
6	Institute of Management Technology	5	45
7	Drexel University	3	368
8	Parthenope University of Naples	2	35
9	Universidade do Porto	2	35
10	University dei Valle	2	62



**Figure 4.** Map of institution network. The node represent institution. The lines represent cooperation relationships

#### 4.6.3.2 Exploring the Usage of Brand Anthropomorphism in Peer-Reviewed Literature

This section addresses the first research question: "**How is the term brand anthropomorphism used in peer-reviewed literature?**" To answer this question, the most appropriate approach is conducting a Co-occurrence Analysis of Keywords using VOSviewer. Co-occurrence analysis is an optimal method as it visualises complex relationships between keywords, creating network maps that intuitively depict how terms like "brand anthropomorphism" are interconnected with other concepts. This allows for the identification of thematic clusters and emerging research trends (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

The approach is particularly effective in highlighting dominant themes, such as the influence of psychology, advertising, and business, while also uncovering interdisciplinary expansions into fields like political science and mathematics. These findings emphasise the

broad applicability of brand anthropomorphism across diverse domains (Donthu et al., 2021). Moreover, the analysis reveals conceptual ambiguities by mapping overlaps with related constructs, such as brand personality and humanisation, providing clarity on the construct's boundaries and definitions.

A key strength of VOSviewer lies in its ability to bridge interdisciplinary gaps by uncovering unexpected connections—such as the integration of anthropomorphism in legal and political science contexts—that might remain hidden with traditional literature review methods. Furthermore, this analysis serves as a foundation for guiding future research by identifying underexplored areas and methodological gaps. By offering actionable insights, it advances both the theoretical understanding and practical applications of brand anthropomorphism in marketing and branding research (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The findings from this analysis are presented and discussed in the following section.

#### 4.6.3.3 Co-occurrence analysis

In this section, the data in **Tables 5 - 7** and the **Figure 6** explain the keywords that frequently appear over a specific time frame, which is between 1998-2023 in brand anthropomorphism literature. This data is the result of co-occurrence analysis with 'Concepts' as the unit of analysis. Based on this analysis, this review aims to provide insights into the key areas and research hotspots in brand anthropomorphism research. The data indicate how often these keywords co-occur in the brand anthropomorphism literature. To obtain this data, this review set a threshold of 5 as the minimum number of occurrences of keywords. As a result, out of a total of 415 keywords, 94 keywords met the threshold.

As the result of the co-occurrence analysis, it's found that research in brand anthropomorphism is multifaceted, with significant contributions from psychology, business

and advertising. This suggests that the psychological aspects of brand anthropomorphism and the business-related implications are heavily researched in brand anthropomorphism literature. It indicates a strong interest among researchers in understanding how consumers psychologically perceive and relate to brands, as well as the business strategies involving brand anthropomorphism. Additionally, advertising and social psychology are also important topics in research on brand anthropomorphism. This highlights the importance of advertising strategies that utilise anthropomorphic elements and the social psychological aspects of consumer-brand interactions. Research in these areas likely explores how brand anthropomorphism influences consumer attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, the substantial frequency of marketing indicates a broad application of brand anthropomorphism in marketing practices. Additionally, the presence of computer science suggests an interdisciplinary approach, potentially involving AI and machine learning techniques to analyse and enhance brand anthropomorphism.

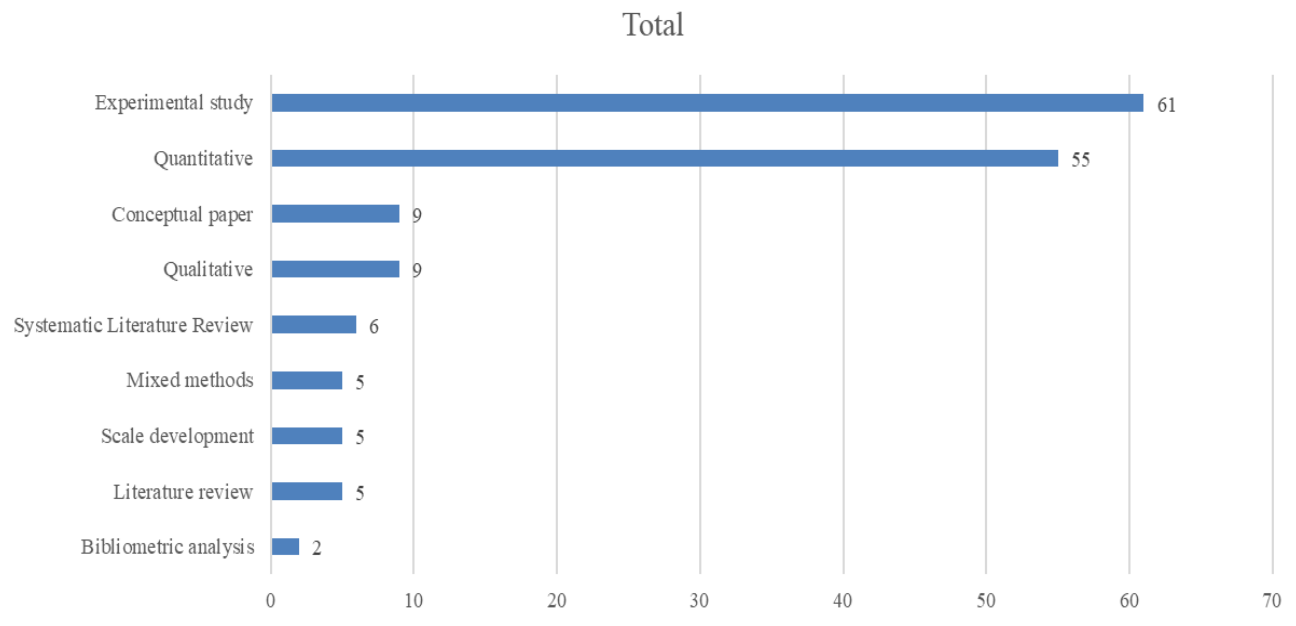
As for brand management, the co-occurrence of this keyword reflects the strategic importance of brand anthropomorphism. This includes how brand managers design, implement, and measure the effects of brand anthropomorphism to create strong and positive consumer-brand relationships. Moreover, an interesting finding from this analysis is the presence of keywords like “Political Science”, “Mathematics”, and “Law” among the top 10 highest frequency terms in brand anthropomorphism research. This data reveals the fluid nature of the anthropomorphism within branding contexts. These findings also highlight the interdisciplinary character of brand anthropomorphism and its applications across various academic and practical domains, explaining why these three areas frequently appear in our findings.

First, the prominence of “Political Science” (Jain, Chawla, Ganesh, & Pich, 2018; van Esch, Cui, Arli & Hutchins, 2022) as a high-frequency keyword reflects a growing increasing

interest in examining how brand anthropomorphism influences public trust, identity, and loyalty, concepts that are often central in political science. Brand anthropomorphism, where brands are imbued with human-like characteristics, resonates with the political domain because it involves understanding of how entities (like brands or political figures) can personify values (Chen, Wu, and Tai, 2023; Centeno, Cambra-Fierro, Vazquez-Carrasco, Hart, & Dinnie, 2019), intentions, and ideologies. Studies in this area explore how brand anthropomorphism elicit trust, how they are used to create affiliations with political causes, or how they impact consumer perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Moreover, political science frameworks such as agenda-setting and social identity theory may intersect with brand anthropomorphism to study how humanised brands can influence or reflect public opinion and societal values.

Secondly, "Mathematics" as a frequently occurring keyword may initially seem unrelated to brand anthropomorphism but showing the increasing use of advanced quantitative methodologies in this research domain. Mathematical modelling and statistical techniques are essential for operationalising brand anthropomorphism, as researchers rely on complex quantifications and models to quantify abstract concepts like "human-like traits" in brands. Techniques such as structural equation modelling (SEM), machine learning algorithms, and network analysis (often rooted in mathematics) are used to analyse large datasets, identify patterns, and establish causal relationships between brand anthropomorphism and consumer outcomes. This is also illustrated in **Figure 5**, where among the 157 articles reviewed in this study, quantitative methods were the second most frequently used approach, following experimental studies.





**Figure 5.** Research Methodologies Adopted in 157 Articles

Finally, “Law” as a recurring keyword indicates the legal implications of brand anthropomorphism, particularly in areas of consumer rights, ethical branding, and intellectual property (Kucuk, 2020; Dalman, Agarwal, &Min, 2021; Dalman & Ray, 2022; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013; Grohmann & Bodur, 2015). The humanisation of brands raises questions about accountability, ethical advertising, and the legal boundaries of brand identity and personification. Together, these disciplines underscore the multifaceted dimensions of brand anthropomorphism and its implications for both theory and practice across fields. **Table 7** summarises the keywords related to research methods within the brand anthropomorphism research.

**Table 5.** Top 10 Most Frequent Keywords in Brand Anthropomorphism Research.

No	Keywords	Frequency
1	Psychology	142
2	Business	140
3	Advertising	114
4	Social Psychology	113
5	Marketing	102
6	Computer Science	86
7	Brand Management	55
8	Political Science	50
9	Mathematics	50
10	Law	45

**Table 6.** 10 Keywords Related to Branding

No	Keywords	Frequency
1	Brand management	55
2	Brand awareness	34
3	Brand equity	28
4	Brand loyalty	14
5	Brand extension	13
6	Brand personality	17
7	Corporate branding	11
8	Brand engagement	8
9	Brand community	7
10	Brand relationship	7

**Table 7.** 10 Keywords Related to Research Methods

No	Keywords	Frequency
1	Structural equation modelling	10
2	Statistics	10
3	Scale	8
4	Moderation	9
5	Empirical research	8
6	Qualitative research	6
7	Conceptualization	7
8	Mediation	6
9	Discriminant validity	5
10	Internal consistency	5



Cluster 3. Classic and modern topics	advertising, affect (linguistics), anthropology, archaeology, cognition, cognitive psychology, communication, economics, geography, geometry, history, interpersonal communication, mathematics, medicine, microeconomics, neuroscience, operating system, perception, perspective (graphical), preference, product (mathematics), psychology, social psychology
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In **Figure 6**, we can see several clusters from the visualisation of the co-occurrence analysis, and a detailed breakdown of the keywords for the main clusters in **Table 8**. The first cluster is **Interdisciplinary Knowledge and Business Study** cluster. This cluster represents the integration and correlation of diverse field of study that investigate or mention the brand anthropomorphism construct in their research. The dominant keyword in this cluster is business. This indicates a significant interest from researchers in various fields to study the brand anthropomorphism concept and explore its benefits for the business purposes. This cluster shows that the study of brand anthropomorphism is not limited to the scope of marketing and branding alone. In this cluster, we can see that there are keywords ranging from aesthetics, computer science, knowledge management, law, sociology, politics, philosophy, to tourism, that are being used to explain and understand the effects of brand anthropomorphism. This cluster emphasises the cross-disciplinary connections that brand anthropomorphism research and practice have in various domains. This analysis suggests that this is due to the evolving nature of the brand anthropomorphism concept, and the need for a comprehensive and more holistic understanding of brand anthropomorphism. However, this can also explain why there is little consistency among researchers on using the brand anthropomorphism as a construct in the research to explain the humanising brand phenomenon.

The second cluster, named **Brand Ecosystem Dynamics**, captures the interconnected nature of brand-related concepts and how they interact within the broader ecosystem of brand

management and consumer-brand relationships. Brand management is the dominant topic in this cluster. There are also many keywords related to the branding research, such as: brand awareness, brand community, brand engagement, brand equity, brand extension, brand loyalty, brand relationship, and corporate branding. This indicates that research on brand anthropomorphism is still widely studied within the scope of branding. Additionally, this cluster can provide insights into research trend topics in brand anthropomorphism studies. The emergence of keywords such as social media, world wide web, creativity, identification, new product development, and product management, highlight research topics within brand anthropomorphism literature that still require investigation.

The third cluster is **Classic and Modern Topics**. It can be seen from **Figure 6** that three keywords dominate this cluster: Psychology, Social Psychology, and Advertising. These keywords are commonly used in early (classic) research to understand brand anthropomorphism phenomenon. Research on these three topics explains how marketing and brand researchers ‘borrowed’ the concept of anthropomorphism to explain the process of humanising brands in branding and marketing studies. Other keywords explain the development of how brand anthropomorphism research is. This ranges from topics closely related to branding and marketing studies, such as product, perspective, preference, and perception, to topics that are further from studies of branding and marketing yet still relevant to explain brand anthropomorphism, such as economics, microeconomics, cognitive psychology, history, communication, mathematics, anthropology, medicine, and neuroscience. This cluster captures the interdisciplinary approach to understanding how brands are perceived, interacted with and studied across various field.

The fourth cluster is the **Scientific and Methodological Foundations** cluster of brand anthropomorphism research. This cluster emphasises integration of scientific methods, statistical techniques, and conceptual frameworks that are used for conducting brand

anthropomorphism research. It highlights the importance of empirical research, validity measures, and advanced modelling in understanding and analysing the brand anthropomorphism construct. This cluster shows that the majority of brand anthropomorphism research utilises quantitative methods such as surveys and statistical analyses to investigate its impact on consumer behaviours and brand outcomes. Specifically, based on the review of the literature we have in this paper, the majority of the research within brand anthropomorphism studies use regression analysis, experimental study, scale development, and study using structural equation modelling. Although not the majority, there are also research that utilises qualitative research methods. As for the literature study, there are research that conduct a systematic literature review and bibliometric analyses are also used to map the research landscape and identify trends in brand anthropomorphism literature. In addition to this there are also researcher that use a qualitative method to review the brand anthropomorphism literature. Overall, of these research methods and approaches help researchers gain insight into the concept of brand anthropomorphism, its theoretical development, the operationalisation of the construct, and to suggest the potential research directions. All of these contributing to the advancement of knowledge in brand anthropomorphism research.

The last cluster is the **Consumer-centric Studies in Brand anthropomorphism** cluster. This cluster consists of keywords that are frequently researched alongside brand anthropomorphism studies. The keywords in this cluster indicate research that not only relates to brand anthropomorphism but also focuses their research on the consumer. For example, there is brand personality. Brand personality and brand anthropomorphism are closely intertwined concepts in branding literature. The relationship between brand personality and brand anthropomorphism research is important as the projection of a specific brand personality relies on brand anthropomorphism strategies to make brands more relatable and appealing to consumers. These two concepts often complement each other in understanding how either

consumers or companies humanise brands. Both brand personality and brand anthropomorphism are essential for creating and affecting consumer perception of the brand and consumer engagement with the brand. From the review in this paper, several studies on brand personality also investigate the concept of brand anthropomorphism to explain its effects on how companies or consumers attribute human traits and behaviours to brands so it can create a strong and positive emotional connection between consumers and brands. However, there are also some studies in brand personality that only mention brand anthropomorphism, usually in the literature review section, and do not specifically research brand anthropomorphism in their study.

Moreover, within this cluster there is also the topic of competence. According to Aaker's Brand Personality Framework (1997), competence is considered one of the core dimensions that define brand personality alongside sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness. The topic of competence is related to research on brand anthropomorphism because brand personality traits can be reinforced through anthropomorphism. For example, if brand personality includes traits like reliability and intelligence (two aspects of competence), anthropomorphising the brand with characters or avatar that exhibit these traits can strengthen the brand's overall personality (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Fournier, 1998; Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto, 2009; Sirgy, 1982). Together, these elements help create a relatable, trustworthy, and differentiated brand that resonates with consumers on both emotional and cognitive levels. An example is when IBM created "IBM Watson". IBM Watson was created with a brand personality that portrays the brand as intelligent, innovative, and reliable. The competence aspect can be seen from Watson's ability to analyse data and provide solutions to customers, showcasing IBM's expertise. By imbuing these human characteristics to Watson, IBM's consumers are more likely to perceive the brand as relatable and trustworthy.

Furthermore, there are also two topics related to brand anthropomorphism research: consumer behaviour and marketing management. One of the main objectives of research on brand anthropomorphism is to explain the effects of brand anthropomorphism on consumer behaviour and how the concept of brand anthropomorphism can influence decision-making in developing marketing strategies, which is discussed within the scope of marketing management. Specifically, the results of research on brand anthropomorphism can explain the phenomenon of consumer-brand relationships, which can be understood through three concepts: emotional attachment, perceived trustworthiness, and simplified cognitive processing. Research on brand anthropomorphism also contributes to the study of consumer behaviour, as some studies explain the influence of brand anthropomorphism on the consumer's decision-making process. On the other hand, research on brand anthropomorphism is related to the topic of marketing management because it contributes not only in theoretical forms but also in more practical marketing strategies. Specifically, research in brand anthropomorphism helps to explain its influence on strategic branding planning, marketing communication, and product and service design.

#### 4.6.3.4 Content analysis using Excel

Because this research aims to examine why brand anthropomorphism, as a construct in branding literature, is not consistently utilised in academic studies compared to constructs such as brand personality or brand love, we conducted a content analysis to systematically examine the occurrence and positioning of "brand anthropomorphism" in the literature. Using Excel, the analysis traced where and how the term and its related constructs appear across the 157 selected articles. This involved a detailed examination of key sections, including the introduction, literature review, research methods, discussion, and conclusions, to identify patterns, gaps, and trends. By providing a comprehensive understanding of how brand anthropomorphism is



conceptualised and applied, this approach offers critical insights into the theoretical and methodological inconsistencies that may explain the construct's limited and inconsistent use in branding research. This analysis can contribute to the development of brand anthropomorphism literature, particularly in understanding how researchers utilise the construct to explain the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism. This analysis not only sheds light on the current state of the construct's application in academic research but also provides valuable insights into its potential for explaining consumer behaviour and guiding strategic brand management practices.

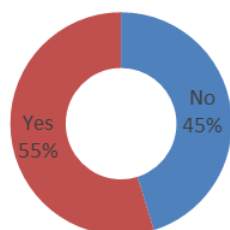
**Table 9.** Occurrence of Brand Anthropomorphism in Peer-Reviewed Articles

Occurrence of Brand Anthropomorphism	Yes	No
Literature Review	86	71
Introduction	46	111
Research Methods	39	118
Discussion and Conclusion	57	100
Future Research	55	102

**Figure 7:** Occurrences of the Brand Anthropomorphism term in **a)** Literature Review, **b)** Introduction, **c)** Research Methods and **d)** Discussion and Conclusions Sections.

**a)**

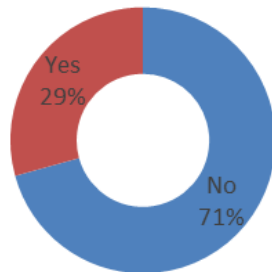
**Occurrences of Brand Anthropomorphism in the Literature Review Section**



Row Labels	Count of title
No	71
Yes	86
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>157</b>

b)

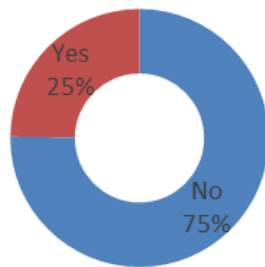
**Occurrences of Brand Anthropomorphism  
in the Introduction Section**



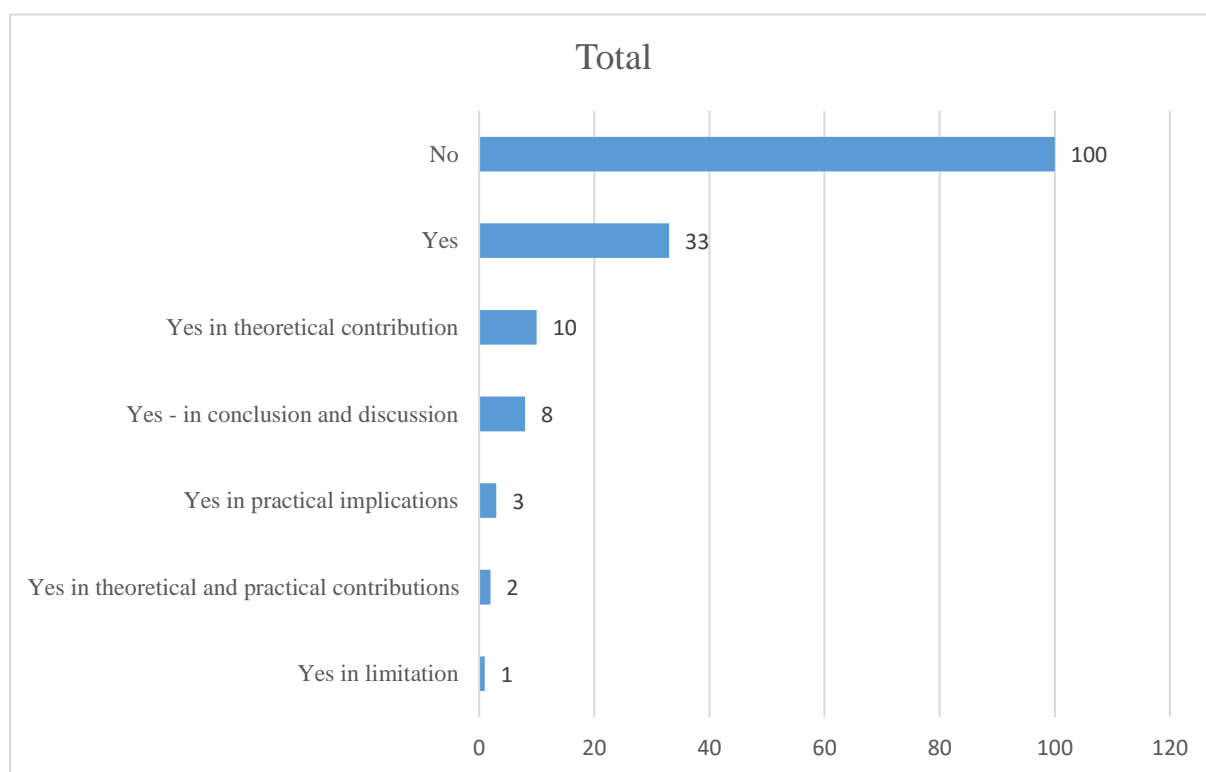
Row Labels	Count of title
No	111
Yes	46
Grand Total	157

c)

**Occurrences of Brand Anthropomorphism  
in the Research Methods Section**



Row Labels	Count of title
No	118
Yes	39
Grand Total	157



**Figure 7.** Occurrences of Brand Anthropomorphism in the Discussion and Conclusions Section.

The findings shown in **Figure 7** demonstrate that "brand anthropomorphism" is most frequently mentioned in the literature review section, appearing in 86 articles, compared to only 46 mentions in the introduction and 39 in the research methods sections. This suggests that the construct is predominantly employed as a theoretical framework or conceptual anchor, used to frame research questions. However, its lower presence in the methods sections highlights a relative lack of operationalisation, suggesting that while the concept is theoretically robust, it is less frequently applied in empirical investigations. Similarly, mentions in discussions and conclusions (57 articles) and future research sections (55 articles) emphasise the forward-looking nature of the construct, pointing to its potential for theoretical development and its relevance for identifying research gaps.

This pattern underscores a broader trend: brand anthropomorphism is more prominently discussed in theoretical contexts than in practical applications. For example, only 33 articles explicitly address the construct in their theoretical and practical contributions sections, while the majority (100 articles) omit it altogether. This aligns with the findings of the systematic literature review, which identified a gap in the practical applicability of brand anthropomorphism due to the absence of standardised frameworks and validated operational tools. Moreover, the overlapping use of related constructs, such as brand personality and humanisation, contributes to theoretical ambiguity and fragmentation, further complicating its application in practice.

The analysis also highlights a lack of methodological consistency in the literature. Despite frequent discussions of brand anthropomorphism in the literature review sections, its operationalisation in empirical studies is limited. This aligns with the systematic literature review's observation of the paucity of standardised measurement scales, with only a few recent scales, such as the Brand Anthropomorphism Scale (BASC), gaining traction. This inconsistency hampers the construct's ability to generate actionable insights, reducing its impact on both academic research and managerial practice.

Interestingly, the mentions of brand anthropomorphism in future research sections indicate a growing recognition of its importance as a priority for further exploration. These articles often call for interdisciplinary studies to bridge gaps and expand the construct's applications in areas such as political science, legal studies, and artificial intelligence. This finding is consistent with the results of the co-occurrence analysis conducted using VOSviewer, which highlighted the term's intersections with non-traditional domains. These studies demonstrate the construct's potential for broader applications beyond traditional branding and marketing contexts, reinforcing its relevance across various disciplines.

This analysis reveals both strengths and limitations in the current literature on brand anthropomorphism. The construct's frequent appearance in theoretical contexts underscores its conceptual importance and interdisciplinary appeal, yet its limited presence in empirical studies and practical contributions highlights significant gaps. To advance the field, future research should focus on addressing these gaps by developing standardised frameworks and robust measurement tools, ensuring greater consistency in its operationalization. Additionally, more emphasis on practical implications is needed to bridge the divide between theory and practice, enhancing the construct's relevance for branding and marketing strategies.

The findings of this content analysis not only corroborate the insights from the systematic literature review but also extend them by providing a detailed examination of how brand anthropomorphism is integrated into academic discourse. By identifying patterns and gaps in its usage, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the construct's evolution and its potential for future research, laying the groundwork for more impactful studies that can fully realise its theoretical and practical contributions to the field.

#### 4.6.4 An examination of the measurement of the term Brand Anthropomorphism

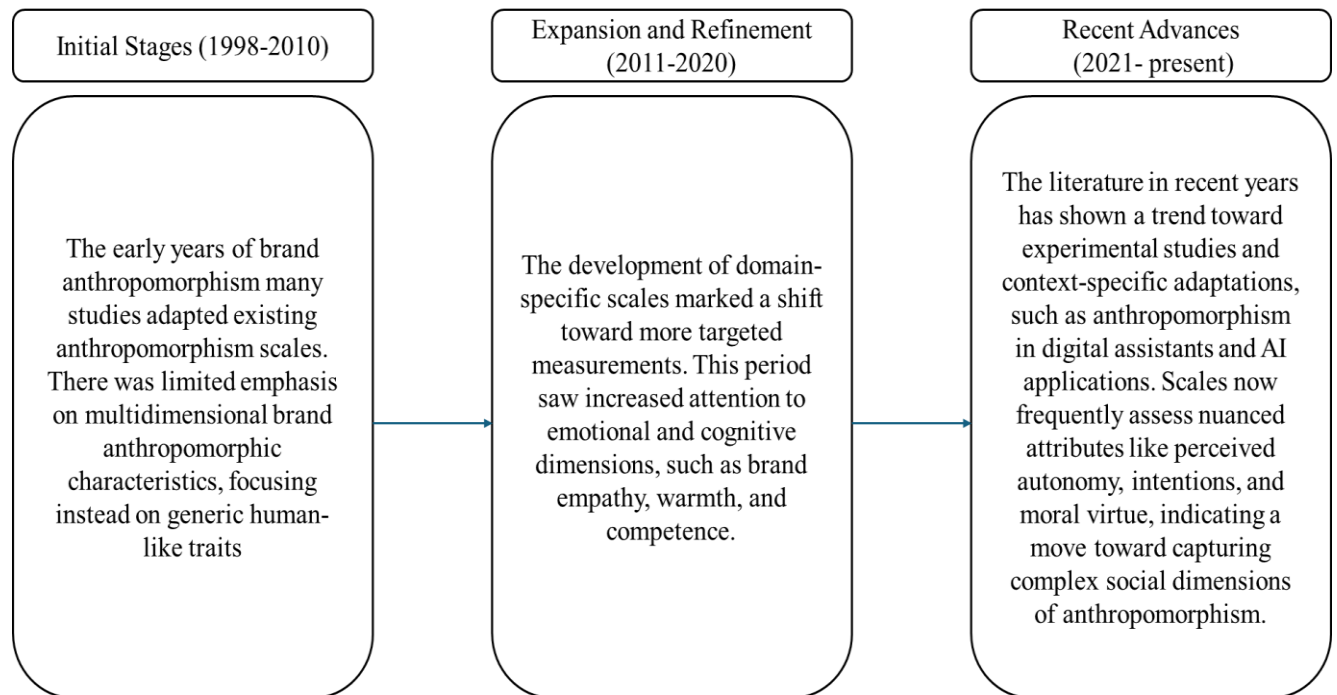
This section systematically examines the development and application of scales to measure the term brand anthropomorphism. This is based on 46 scales extracted from 157 articles, across studies published between 1998 and 2023. Based on that, this study reviews the trajectory of scale development to measure the term brand anthropomorphism, mapping the trends, and highlighting the gaps that can be useful as guidance for future research.

#### 4.6.4.1 Trends in Scale Development

Previous reviews indicate a shift from generic personality traits towards more nuanced construct. Many studies adapt existing anthropomorphism scales, such as the Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism Questionnaire (IDAQ) by Waytz et al., (2010) and modify them for branding context. This reliance on pre-existing scales provides continuity in construct measurement, but it may not fully capture the nuances of the anthropomorphism effect in the context of branding. Some newer scales attempt to bridge this gap by introducing elements tailored to branding, such as specific references to the brand elements like logo anthropomorphism (Daryanto, Alexander, and Kartika, 2022), brand “intentions” or “Social Presence”.

Based on our review, we also found that many scales adopt a multi-dimensional approach, measuring distinct anthropomorphic dimensions for brands, such as warmth, competence, and autonomy. For example, Golossenko et al. (2020) developed a multi-dimensional scale to assess four facets of brand anthropomorphism: appearance, moral virtue, cognitive experience, and emotionality. From our review, we identified three key measurement dimensions. The first is cognitive and emotional attributes. One scale differentiates between cognitive (e.g., “the brand thinks”) and emotional attributes (e.g., “the brand cares”). The second key measurement dimension is warmth and competence, derived from stereotype content model research. These dimensions—warmth and competence—have emerged as prominent aspects in measuring brand anthropomorphism, especially in studies on brand trust and loyalty. The final dimension is moral and ethical judgment. A smaller subset of scales incorporates moral or ethical dimensions, assessing consumer perceptions of a brand’s intentions and integrity, which is particularly relevant in studies exploring brand transgressions or CSR. While multi-dimensional scales provide a more comprehensive assessment of brand anthropomorphism, their complexity may limit applicability in certain research contexts.

Conversely, single-item or unidimensional scales risk oversimplifying a construct that likely requires a nuanced, multi-faceted approach. Validating these multi-dimensional scales across diverse contexts, brands, and consumer segments could strengthen their utility in effectively capturing the effects of brand anthropomorphism.

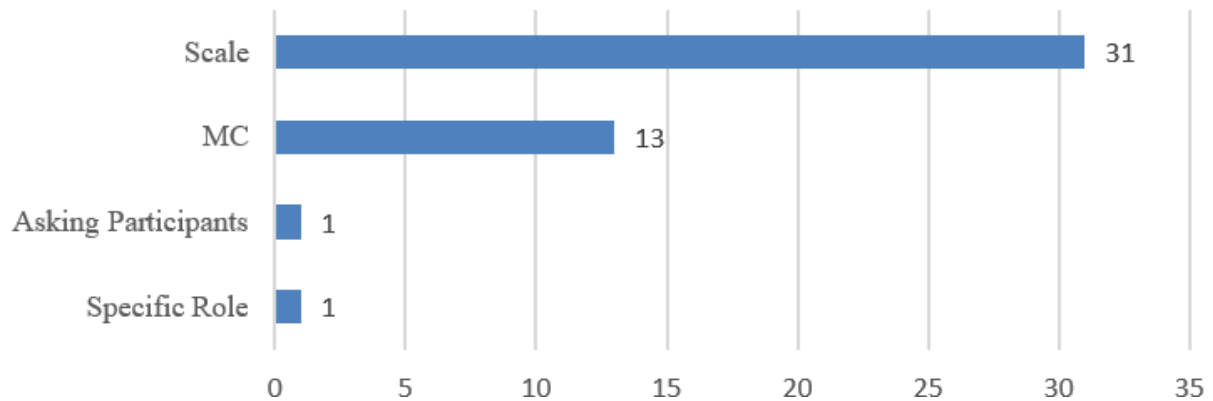


**Figure 8.** Evolution of Scale Development Trends

#### 4.6.4.2 The use of the scales

The data shown in the chart in **Figure 9** reveals key insights into how researchers employed brand anthropomorphism scales across studies. The data shows that the majority of studies (31 out of 46) utilised the scales to measure the construct, making this the predominant approach. This heavy reliance on structured scales may indicate a collective effort within the academic community to create a consistent framework that can capture the multi-dimensional nature of brand anthropomorphism. These scales are likely designed to enhance reliability and

comparability across studies, allowing researchers to draw more robust conclusions about how anthropomorphism influences consumer perceptions and behaviours.



**Figure 9.** Types of scales used in the brand anthropomorphism articles

The use of "manipulation checks" (MC), present in 13 of the studies (i.e., Delgado-Ballester, Palazón, & Peláez, 2020; Dalman & Ray, 2022; Puzakova & Kwak, 2017; Chen, Wan & Levy, 2017; Wen Wan, Chen, & Jin, 2017; Han, Wang, & Yang, 2023; Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016; Kwak, Puzakova, Rocereto, 2017; Chang, Lee, Lee, & Wang, 2023; Zhang, Zhou, & Yan, 2023; Wang, Touré-Tillery, & McGill, 2023; Ma, Tu, Zhou & Niu, 2023; Van Esch, Cui, Arli, & Hutchins, 2022) points to another significant approach, particularly in experimental designs. Manipulation checks are essential for verifying that the intended anthropomorphic characteristics are perceived by participants, thus confirming the validity of experimental manipulations. This method suggests that many researchers are not only interested in measuring brand anthropomorphism but also in controlling and manipulating it as an experimental variable to observe causal effects. However, the reliance on manipulation checks rather than full scales in these cases may mean that some studies prioritise establishing a basic anthropomorphic perception over capturing the full complexity of the construct.



The less common methods, such as "asking participants" directly about their perceptions (Aggarwal, Pankaj and McGill, 2012) and "assigning specific roles" to the brand (Kim and Kramer, 2015), reveal additional experimental techniques that could allow for a more flexible or contextual exploration of anthropomorphism. By directly asking participants or by assigning roles that evoke human-like qualities (such as a brand playing the role of a "friend" or "servant"), researchers can explore more situational or context-dependent aspects of anthropomorphism. These approaches, while limited in their use, can provide more insights that scales might overlook, particularly when studying how anthropomorphism influences specific consumer-brand interactions.

The variety in scale types indicates that the field of brand anthropomorphism research is still evolving and lacks a universally agreed-upon measurement standard. The dominance of structured scales suggests a push for standardisation, but the continued use of diverse methods like manipulation checks and role-based assignments reflects an ongoing need to adapt measurements to fit specific research contexts or experimental designs. This diversity in measurement approaches could also indicate the underlying complexity of the brand anthropomorphism construct, which encompasses multiple dimensions such as warmth, competence, agency, and morality. Overall, while the scales are the preferred choice, the field may benefit from further methodological innovation and cross-validation of measurement tools. Developing scales that balance comprehensiveness with adaptability to various contexts could improve the accuracy and comparability of brand anthropomorphism research, ultimately advancing understanding of its effects on consumer perception and behaviour.

#### 4.6.4.3 Challenges in Brand Anthropomorphism Scales development

Based on the review of 46 scales in the data, the findings highlight the fragmented approach to measuring brand anthropomorphism. This aligns with the earlier discussion on the inconsistent use of the term “brand anthropomorphism” in brand anthropomorphism literature. Researchers frequently use term such as “humanisation”, “personification” and “anthropomorphism” interchangeably. This synonymity can blur the boundaries between concepts, leading to potential issues with construct validity. Which each term may carry subtle distinctions, for example “humanisation” implying a general imparting of human traits and “personification” often indicating more specific qualities or behaviours. Their interchangeable usage can obscure these nuances. This overlap in terminology complicates the clear operationalization of brand anthropomorphism, making it challenging to distinguish brand anthropomorphism from adjacent constructs like brand personality or brand humanisation. Moreover, this interchangeable usage can hinder the comparability of results across studies, as it creates inconsistency in construct definitions and measures. As a result, establishing brand anthropomorphism as a distinct and robust construct in branding literature is impeded, as the lack of clear definitional boundaries may weaken the internal and external validity of findings across studies. Many scales are designed to assess consumer outcomes, including brand trust, loyalty, and emotional attachment, as seen in studies focused on luxury brands and nonprofit brands. However, the inconsistency in scale dimensions can lead to varied interpretations of these outcomes, limiting comparability across studies. A universal scale could address this by providing a reliable predictor of consumer outcomes across different branding contexts.

Another challenge in brand anthropomorphism literature is the inconsistency in dimensional focus. Some studies emphasise agency and mind, focusing on aspects such as the brand’s perceived ability to act independently or have intentions, thoughts, and consciousness. In contrast, other studies prioritise empathy and morality, examining whether consumers

perceive brands as capable of understanding or sympathising with them or whether the brand acts in accordance with ethical principles. This variation in focus reflects differing theoretical foundations and research objectives, which, while valuable, pose challenges to the development of a universally applicable brand anthropomorphism scale.

The emphasis on different dimensions also impacts how brand anthropomorphism is perceived and measured. Studies that prioritise agency, for example, may frame anthropomorphism as a construct linked closely to control and autonomy, suggesting that brands with higher perceived agency are more influential or trustworthy. Conversely, studies that emphasise empathy or morality might align brand anthropomorphism with relational constructs, suggesting that anthropomorphised brands foster stronger emotional connections or moral judgments from consumers. These varying emphases highlight the multidimensional nature of brand anthropomorphism but also underscore a need for consensus regarding core dimensions.

The inconsistent dimensional focus contributes to a fragmented landscape, where different studies measure distinct aspects under the umbrella of brand anthropomorphism. This fragmentation challenges the comparability of results, as well as the possibility of developing a standardised and universally applicable scale that encapsulates all relevant dimensions of the construct. Achieving consistency in both terminology and dimensional focus would therefore be instrumental in advancing the construct's conceptual clarity and in enhancing its utility for researchers and practitioners alike. Standardising these elements could also facilitate more reliable cross-study comparisons and support the development of a comprehensive framework that captures the full scope of brand anthropomorphism.

Another critical observation based on our data is that few studies assess these scales longitudinally or across different cultural context. Brand anthropomorphism might manifest

differently across demographic, product categories, and even cultural settings, yet these scales are rarely tested for generalizability. While some studies attempt to incorporate cultural considerations (e.g., Teng, Zhang, Foti, Wang & Yang, 2022) the lack of consistent cross-cultural adaptation limits the applicability of these scales in diverse contexts. A lack of longitudinal validation also leaves questions regarding the stability of brand anthropomorphism over time.

Lastly, there is need for adaptive and context-specific brand anthropomorphism measures. This is because of the growth of digital brands and virtual brands interactions highlights the need for adaptive brand anthropomorphism scales that can capture new forms of brand interactions, such as through voice assistants and AI-based customer service. Scales that include dimensions like interactive responsiveness and virtual embodiment could provide more holistic picture of brand anthropomorphism in digital contexts.

In summary, while progress has been made in developing multi-dimensional scales for brand anthropomorphism, the field would benefit from standardised scales that are validated across contexts and that address the fragmented use of terminology. Such standardisation could facilitate meta-analytic comparisons and provide more accurate insights into the impact of anthropomorphism on consumer-brand relationships.

#### 4.6.5 An Exploration of Outcomes Related to the Brand Anthropomorphism

This section addresses the research questions: **“What are the various outcomes of brand anthropomorphism as a construct?”** and **“Which brand anthropomorphism approaches are emerging in this literature?”**. To answer these questions, we employed bibliographic coupling analysis. Following the guidelines outlined by Donthu et al. (2021), this method was chosen because it focuses on shared references among recent studies, making it particularly

effective for identifying current and emerging themes in brand anthropomorphism research. Unlike co-citation analysis, which often emphasises older, highly cited works, bibliographic coupling offers a present-focused perspective, prioritizing recent developments and outcomes.

By grouping articles into thematic clusters such as Consumer Behaviour, Emotional Responses, and Ethical Branding, this analysis systematically uncovers a diverse range of outcomes, including emotional attachment, consumer loyalty, ethical judgments, and engagement within digital environments. The integration of quantitative metrics, such as link strength, with qualitative insights into these clusters ensures a comprehensive understanding of how brand anthropomorphism shapes consumer perceptions and brand strategies. Moreover, this approach identifies critical research gaps and emerging opportunities, such as the role of anthropomorphism in AI-driven branding and corporate social responsibility, offering valuable guidance for future research.

By providing both clarity and depth, bibliographic coupling delivers a systematic and reliable framework to explore the outcomes of brand anthropomorphism, making it an indispensable tool for advancing theoretical and practical contributions in this domain.

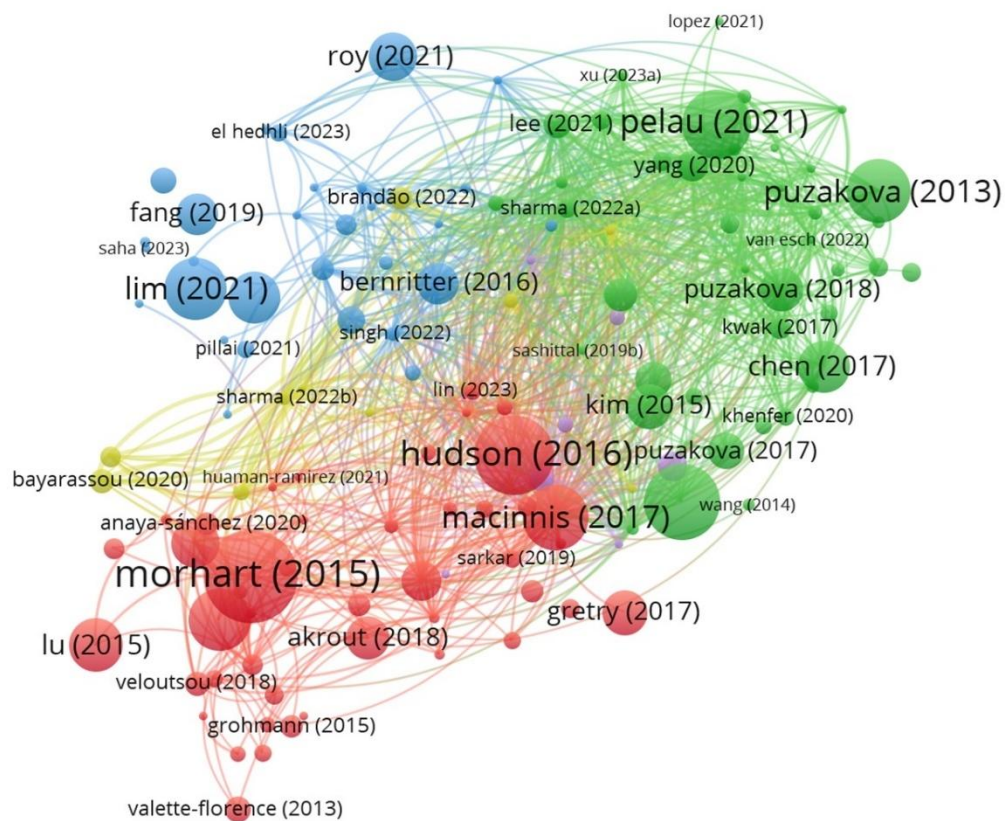
#### 4.6.5.1 Bibliographic Coupling analysis

This section presents the bibliographic coupling analysis, with documents as the unit of analysis. The primary purpose of this method is to examine the interconnectedness of research papers based on shared references. By conducting this analysis, the present research identifies clusters of studies within the brand anthropomorphism literature, key research themes, influential studies, and the overarching structure of the field. The data analysed in this section highlight significant contributions to the field, thematic concentrations, and trends for future

research. For this analysis, authors with a minimum of two citations were included. Out of a total of 157 documents, 135 met this threshold.

As shown in **Table 10**, the articles with the strongest total link strength were MacInnis and Folkes (published in 2017; cited 250 times; total link strength 889), Sharma and Rahman (published in 2022; cited 23 times; total link strength 844), Golossenko, Pillai, and Aroean (published in 2020; cited 63 times; total link strength 752), Brandão and Popoli (published in 2023; cited 2 times; total link strength 735) and Yang, Aggarwal, and McGill (published in 2020; cited 57 times; total link strength 729).

The data visualisation presented in **Figure 10** illustrates the clustering results from the bibliographic coupling analysis, identifying five research themes within the brand anthropomorphism literature. These clusters are as follows: (1) Brand anthropomorphism and Consumer-brand relationships (Red) cluster; (2) Brand anthropomorphism and Consumer behaviour cluster (green); (3) Brand anthropomorphism and Stereotype-Based Perception cluster (blue); (4) Brand anthropomorphism and Emotional responses cluster (yellow); and (5) Brand anthropomorphism and its effects cluster (purple). Each cluster highlights key thematic concentrations, reflecting the diverse areas of inquiry within this domain research.



**Figure 10.** Bibliographic coupling analysis, where the links and nodes indicate the strength of relationships between different research works.

The first cluster resulting from the bibliographic coupling analysis is titled **“Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer-Brand Relationships”**. This cluster encompasses a group of studies that explore how brand anthropomorphism influences the process of creating, building, and maintaining consumer-brand relationships. Many key reference articles within this cluster demonstrate how brand anthropomorphism affect consumer perceptions and relationships with the brand. These relationships are frequently characterised by dimensions such as trust, loyalty, love, and social interactions (e.g., Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020; Bairrada et al., 2018). Based on the analysis, we also identified five key themes within this cluster, which are summarised in **Table 10**.

**Table 10.** Key themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer-Brand relationships cluster

Key Themes	Explanation
Trust and Loyalty in Brand Relationship	This theme focusses on the role of trust and royalty in consumer-brand interactions, particularly in online communities. Studies show that anthropomorphized brands foster emotional connections, which in turn, lead to increased consumer loyalty (e.g., Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020).
Brand Personality and Personification	Anthropomorphised brands are often assigned human traits, such as personality, which influence consumer perceptions. This process affects how consumers relate to brands on both a personal and emotional level (e.g., Avis & Aitken, 2015).
Symbolic and Utilitarian Brand Qualities	Previous research highlights that consumers' love for brands often derives from both symbolic (emotional) and utilitarian (functional) reasons. This theme suggests that anthropomorphised brands appeal to both the emotional and rational aspects of consumer decision-making (e.g., Bairrada et al., 2018)
Social media and Communication Styles	This theme explores the role of brand communication, particularly how Anthropomorphised brands engage consumers through personalised, human-like communication on social media platforms. (e.g., Deng et al., 2021)
Brand Authenticity and Hypocrisy	Several studies emphasise the importance of perceived authenticity in anthropomorphised brands. These studies show that consumers value authenticity in anthropomorphised brands and react negatively to perceived hypocrisy (e.g., Guèvremont, 2019)

Based on the analysis and identification of themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer-Brand Relationships cluster, this research suggests five trends for future research in brand anthropomorphism literature. These suggested trends are summarised in **Table 11.**



**Table 11.** Trends for future research for the brand anthropomorphism and Consumer-Brand Relationships cluster

Future research trends	Explanation
Impact of AI and Chatbots on Consumer-Brand Relationships.	The increasing use of AI and chatbots in consumer-brand relationships has emerged as a significant topic in recent studies (Lin & Wu, 2023). Future research should explore how brand anthropomorphism is either enhanced or diminished by automated brand interactions, and the subsequent effects on consumer trust and loyalty. The future studies could give more explanation on the evolving nature of consumer-brand relationships affects by brand anthropomorphism in the digital age.
Cultural Differences in Brand Anthropomorphism	While much of the existing literature focuses on global perspectives, further research is needed to investigate how different cultural contexts influence consumer responses to brand anthropomorphism. Understanding regional variations in consumer-brand relationships, particularly in emerging markets could provide a rich avenue for future exploration.
Sustainability and Ethical Branding	With the increasing emphasis on Sustainability, brand anthropomorphism may play role in how brands humanise their ethical practices and corporate social responsibilities. Future studies could examine how brand anthropomorphism communicate sustainability efforts in ways that resonate emotionally with consumers, potentially fostering stronger brand loyalty and brand trust.
Brand love and social media	As social media continues to dominate consumer engagement, future research could focus on how brand anthropomorphism can help the process of brand to build deeper emotional connections and foster brand love through personalised communication on social media. Studies such as those by Deng et al., (2012) and Hudson et al., (2016) highlight the potential for social media to enhance these relationships.
Visual Brand Anthropomorphism	The visual dimensions of brand anthropomorphism, particularly the influence of brand logos (Daryanto et al., 2022), are gaining increased attention. Future research could explore how visual brand elements, such as logos, and other design cues, contribute to consumers perceptions of brand authenticity.

The second cluster is named “**Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Behaviour**”. The studies within this cluster focus on explaining how brand anthropomorphism

influences various aspects of consumer behaviour. Specifically, several studies in this cluster explore the psychological and behavioural impacts that brand anthropomorphism have on consumers, including decision-making, product evaluation, emotional attachment, and ethical considerations. Furthermore, through bibliographic coupling analysis, we identified five key themes within this cluster, which are summarised in **Table 12**.

**Table 12.** Key themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Behaviour cluster

Key Themes	Explanation
Behavioural Effects of Brand Anthropomorphism	This theme encompasses studies that explore how brand anthropomorphism influences automatic behaviours and consumer decision-making process (e.g., Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Puzakova & Aggarwal, 2018).
Consumer Emotional Attachment	Research within this theme, demonstrates that brand anthropomorphism can trigger stronger emotional connections and brand attachment (e.g., (Ma et al., 2023; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022).
Influence of Social and Contextual Factors	This theme investigates how social and contextual factors, such as social exclusion or crowding, influence preferences for anthropomorphised brands (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Puzakova & Kwak, 2017).
Brand Roles and Personality Traits	This theme focuses on how brands are perceived as having interpersonal traits, like warmth or competence, and how these perceptions affect consumer interactions (e.g., Liu et al., 2022; Han et al., 2023).
Brand Anthropomorphism and Ethical Consumer Behaviour	This theme focuses on how brand anthropomorphism affects unethical consumer behavior or brand perception after product wrongdoings (e.g., Kim et al., 2023; Puzakova et al., 2013).

Similar to the explanation in the previous cluster, in this cluster we also suggest trends for future research in the brand anthropomorphism literature. These suggested trends are summarised in **Table 13**.

**Table 13.** Trends for future research in the Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Behaviour cluster

Future research trends	Explanation
AI and Brand Anthropomorphism in Service Roles	As AI devices are increasingly anthropomorphised (Pelau et al., 2021), future research may investigate the impact of AI-human interactions effect on consumer brand trust and brand loyalty. This area will be particularly relevant as AI-driven technologies become more embedded in-service roles.
Brand anthropomorphism and Its Psychological and Social effects	Future studies could explore the social and psychological impacts of brand anthropomorphism on marginalised or excluded consumers, expanding on prior research such that by Pancani et al., (2019). This could shed light on how these consumers emotionally engaged with brand anthropomorphism.
Brand Anthropomorphism in Ethical and Sustainable branding	As consumers become more socially conscious, there is a growing need for research that examines how brand anthropomorphism can affects consumers' ethical behaviours, particularly in crisis situations. Studies such as those by Puzakova & Kwak (2023) and Kim et al. (2023) offer foundational insights into this area.
Brand anthropomorphism and Its Impact on Brand Personality and Consumer Behaviour	Future research could investigate how specific personality traits (e.g., warmth, competence), of brand anthropomorphism could influence consumer preferences across various sectors (Liu et al., 2022; Han et al., 2020). This exploration could provide deeper insights into how these traits affect brand loyalty and decision-making.
Negative Effects of Brand Anthropomorphism	There is also a need for future research to examine the potential negative consequence of brand anthropomorphism, such as instances where it backfires or diminishes perceptions of product ownership (zhang et al., 2023; Schroll, 2023). Understanding these negative outcomes will help brands better manage their brand anthropomorphic strategies.

The third cluster is titled “**Brand Anthropomorphism, Warmth, and Competence**”.

The articles within this cluster explore how brand anthropomorphism is connected to and influences two key human-like traits: warmth and competence. These traits are essential in understanding how consumers perceived anthropomorphised brand. Specifically, warmth reflects perceptions of friendliness, sincerity, and trustworthiness in a brand. In contrast,

competence refers to a brand's ability to deliver on promises, maintain performance, demonstrate skills, and ensure effectiveness. This cluster comprises studies that examine how these perceived traits impact brand engagement, emotional connections, and purchasing behaviours. Furthermore, through bibliographic coupling analysis, we identified five key themes within this cluster, which are summarised in **Table 14**.

**Table 14.** Key themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism, Warmth, and Competence cluster

Key Themes	Explanation
Warmth vs. Competence in Consumer perception	A significant body of research examines how consumers react to warmth and competence in brand anthropomorphism, and how these perceptions influence trust and loyalty (e.g., Kervyn et al., 2022), (Li & Nan, 2023), (El Hedhli et al., 2023).
Emotional Connection and Brand Trust	This theme explores how brand anthropomorphism fosters emotional attachment and trust between consumers and brands, particularly during time of crisis (e.g., Datta & Mukherjee, 2022; Sehgal et al., 2023).
Social Perception and Brand Stereotypes	This theme explores the role of stereotypes (both positive and negative) in shaping consumer attitudes towards anthropomorphised brands, often based on warmth and competence (e.g., Guo et al., 2022), (Malhotra & Dandotiya, 2023).
The Role of Brand Anthropomorphism in Tourism	Numerous studies discuss the application of anthropomorphism in hospitality, tourism, and service industries, focusing on how warmth and competence are used to engage customers (e.g., Husain et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023).
The Role of social media and Its Effect on Digital engagement	This theme addresses how brands utilise anthropomorphic qualities in real-time marketing, social media communication, and AI-based systems, such as chatbots, to enhance digital engagement (e.g., Harrison & Kwon, 2023; Roy & Naidoo, 2021)

We also suggest trends for future research within this cluster in the brand anthropomorphism literature. The trends we propose are summarised in **Table 15**.

**Table 15.** Trends for future research in the Brand Anthropomorphism, Warmth and Competence cluster.

Future research trends	Explanation
Brand Anthropomorphism, the Role of AI and Virtual Influencers	The use of AI in consumer-brand interactions and virtual influencers will likely grow, with emphasis on balancing perceptions of warmth and competence (e.g., El Hedhli et al., 2023; Jham et al., 2023)
Brand Anthropomorphism, Brand Stereotyping and Consumer Bias	Further research is needed to understand how stereotypes (e.g., gender, culture) influence consumer responses to brand anthropomorphism, especially when brand exists in diverse market (Guo et al., 2022)
Brand Anthropomorphism in Crisis Management	Future research is needed investigate how brands that emphasise warmth over competence (or vice versa) are perceived during crises or product failures (e.g., Datta & Mukherjee, 2022; Sehgal et al., 2023)
Brand Anthropomorphism in the Context of Service Industries	Service industries (e.g., hospitality, tourism) will likely continue to use brand anthropomorphism, as their strategy to build trust and engagement, particularly in post-pandemic marketing (e.g., Husain et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023)
Integration of AI and Consumer-Brand Interactions	With the increasing presence of AI, future research may want to explore the boundaries between human-like AI and consumer responses, focusing on how these systems can enhance or detract from warmth and competence (e.g., Roy & Naidoo, 2021; Pillai & Nair, 2021)

The fourth cluster, based on our bibliographic coupling analysis, has been named **“Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses”**. This title is considered appropriate as the studies within this cluster predominantly focus on the emotional responses that consumers develop in their relationships with brands. The articles explore both positive emotions (such as brand love and loyalty) and negative emotions (such as brand hate and online negative engagement). Emotions like brand love, brand hate, and other emotional attachments play a central role in shaping how consumers perceive and interact with brands. Furthermore, brand anthropomorphism plays a critical role in influencing these emotional responses, as brands with human-like characteristics tend to evoke stronger emotional connections with

consumers. Through our bibliographic coupling analysis, we identified five key themes within this cluster, which are summarised in **Table 16**.

**Table 16.** Key themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses cluster

Key themes	Explanation
Brand Anthropomorphism, Brand love and Emotional Stability	This theme examines how emotional stability in consumers influences their relationships with brands, especially in terms of brand love for luxury or premium brands (e.g., Bhalla & Pathak, 2023).
Brand Anthropomorphism, Brand Hate and Negative Consumer Response	This theme focuses on brand hate, exploring how consumers react negatively to brands, and express their discontent, through online channels and social media (e.g., Aziz & Rahman, 2022; Bayarassou et al., 2020; Brandão & Popoli, 2022)
Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Connection	This theme highlights the role of brand anthropomorphism in fostering stronger emotional connections with consumers. This connection leading to brand love and brand loyalty (e.g., Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2022)
Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Coping Mechanisms	Studies in this theme explore how consumers cope with emotional stress in consumer-brand relationships, particularly in response to negative brand experiences (e.g., “fight or flight” responses) (e.g., Bayarassou et al., 2020)
Brand Anthropomorphism, social media and Emotional Expression	This theme focuses on how consumers use social media platform to express their emotions about brands, both positive (e.g., love) and negative (e.g., hate) (e.g., Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2019; Sharma et al., 2022)

Based on the review of previous studies categorised within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses cluster; after identifying the themes in this research, we also suggest trends for future research. The proposed trends are summarised in **Table 17** below.

**Table 17.** Trends for future research in the Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses cluster.

Future research trends	Explanation
Emotional Extremes in Consumer-Brand Relationships	Further research is needed to examine the extremes of emotional responses (e.g., brand love versus brand hate), focusing on how brands can effectively navigate these emotional extremes (Aziz & Rahman, 2022; Bayarassou, et al., 2020).
The Effect of Brand Anthropomorphism on Emotional Engagement.	Future research could delve deeper into how brand anthropomorphism elicits stronger emotional bonds, particularly across different product categories and cultures (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020).
The Impact of Negative Emotions on Brand Longevity	More research is needed to understand the long-term impact of negative emotions, such as brand hate, on brand longevity and consumer behavior ((Brandão & Popoli, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).
Emotional Coping and Resilience in Consumer-Brand Relationships	Further studies are needed to explore how consumers emotionally cope with failed brand relationships and how brands can rebuild trust through communication and crisis management (Bayarassou, et al., 2020).
Consumer Empowerment and Emotional Voice on social media	As consumers become more empowered on social media, future research could focus on how they use these platforms to express their emotions and influence brand perception (Sharma et al., 2022).

The final cluster is named “**Brand Anthropomorphism and Its Effects**”. This name was chosen because the articles in this cluster focus on the effects of brand anthropomorphism. The studies analyse various outcomes of this phenomenon, from how it influences consumer attitudes and ethical judgments to its impact on consumer-brand relationships, emotional responses, and brand loyalty. From our analysis, we identified five key themes within the cluster, which are summarised in **Table 18**.

**Table 18.** Key themes within the Brand Anthropomorphism and Its Effects cluster

Key themes	Explanation
Brand Anthropomorphism and Ethical Judgment	This theme has studies that explore how brand anthropomorphism affects consumers' ethical judgments, especially in the situations involving brand failure or crises (e.g., Dalman et al., 2021).
Self-Brand Integration and Emotional Attachment	As it mentioned on the previous cluster, it also appears for this theme that brand anthropomorphism can be the factor that make stronger emotional attachments, and this often leading to increased self-brand integration, where consumers feel closer to the brand on personal level (e.g., Delgado_Ballester et al., 2017).
The effect of brand anthropomorphism on Advertising Perception	This theme examines how the use of brand anthropomorphism models or products in advertisements impacts on consumer attitudes toward the brand and the ad itself (e.g., Aydinoglu & Cian, 2014)
Voice-Based Branding and Brand Anthropomorphization	The growing field of voice assistants represents a significant area where brand anthropomorphism plays a role in how consumers perceive and interact with brands through virtual assistants (e.g., Vernuccio, et al., 2021; 2023).
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Anthropomorphism	This theme investigates how CSR efforts are perceived differently depending on the degree of brand anthropomorphization. Such perceptions can influence brand defense and consumer support (e.g., Aljarah et al., 2023).

And based on our analysis of several articles included in the **Brand Anthropomorphism and Its Effects cluster**, we propose several trends for future research, which are summarised in **Table 19**.

**Table 19.** Trends for future research in the Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses cluster.

Future research trends	Explanation
Ethical Perceptions and Brand Failures	Future research is needed to explore how brand anthropomorphism could influence ethical judgements in consumers, especially during brand crisis and public relations failures (Dalman et al., 2021).
Brand Anthropomorphism and the growth of voice-based anthropomorphism.	With the increasing presence of voice assistants, future research could focus on how anthropomorphised voice-based branding strategies affect brand loyalty and consumer trust (Patrizi, et al., 2024).



The role of brand anthropomorphism in Corporate Social Responsibility	Future research should explore the intersection between anthropomorphism and CSR, particularly how humanizing brands during corporate social responsibility efforts affects consumer perception (Aljarah et al., 2023).
Emotional Attachment and Self-Brand Connection	Future research should explore more on how brand anthropomorphism deepens self-brand connection and emotional engagement and then looking the long-term effects on brand loyalty and brand advocacy (Delgado-Ballester, et al., 2017).
The Impact of Brand Anthropomorphism in Digital Advertising	Because digital and social media evolve, further research might analyse how the use of anthropomorphised images or characters in advertising campaigns influences consumer perception and behaviour. (Aydinoğlu & Cian, 2014).

#### 4.7 Integrative Frameworks to Address Inconsistencies in the Use of the Brand Anthropomorphism Construct

##### **The Key Challenges: Conceptual and Measurement Inconsistencies**

Based on the findings obtained through a systematic literature review, bibliometric analysis, and content analysis, this study identifies a major challenge and a fundamental question that has become central to the brand anthropomorphism literature. The two key challenges emerging from the review are conceptual inconsistencies and measurement inconsistencies. In addition to identifying these challenges, this study proposes several solutions to address them, which are summarised in **Figure 11**.

The framework illustrated in these figures is built on the premise that brand anthropomorphism, as revealed in the literature, may originate from consumer cognitive tendencies, brand strategies, or cultural influences. Regardless of its source, brand anthropomorphism remains a construct that explains the various ways in which brands and consumers engage in the process of humanising brands. While brand anthropomorphism has been extensively explored from multiple perspectives, its application and interpretation remain inconsistent across studies. Some researchers equate brand anthropomorphism with brand

humanisation, referring to the process in which brands are assigned social and emotional characteristics to enhance consumer relatability. Others conflate brand anthropomorphism with brand personification, which involves attributing personality traits to a brand, similar to the concept of brand personality, a perspective commonly applied in advertising research. Another related but distinct conceptualisation is brand animation, which focuses on the use of visual or technological elements to make a brand appear more human, such as through brand mascots or AI-driven assistants designed to interact with consumers.

This conceptual divergence underscores the fluidity of brand anthropomorphism as a construct. This is further evidenced by the co-occurrence analysis conducted in this study, which identifies the ten most frequently occurring keywords in the brand anthropomorphism literature. These keywords reflect how the construct has evolved and diversified over time. Some of the most frequently occurring keywords remain aligned with core disciplinary areas, such as psychology, business, advertising, social psychology, marketing, and brand management, which have traditionally shaped discussions on brand anthropomorphism. However, the analysis also reveals emerging interdisciplinary directions, indicated by the increasing presence of computer science, political science, mathematics, and law. This trend suggests that brand anthropomorphism is expanding beyond the branding and marketing domain, highlighting its growing relevance across disciplines. Moreover, the co-occurrence analysis also reveals that brand anthropomorphism significantly contributes to branding literature, particularly in relation to brand management, brand awareness, brand equity, brand loyalty, brand extension, brand personality, corporate branding, brand engagement, brand community, and brand relationships. These areas have historically been central to consumer-brand relationship research, where brand anthropomorphism plays a crucial role in explaining why consumer-brand interactions often resemble human relationships rather than being purely transactional. The ability of anthropomorphised brands to evoke emotional responses, build

consumer trust, and foster long-term loyalty makes the construct highly relevant in contemporary branding research. However, the inconsistencies in its definition, usage, and measurement across studies continue to limit its theoretical and empirical development.

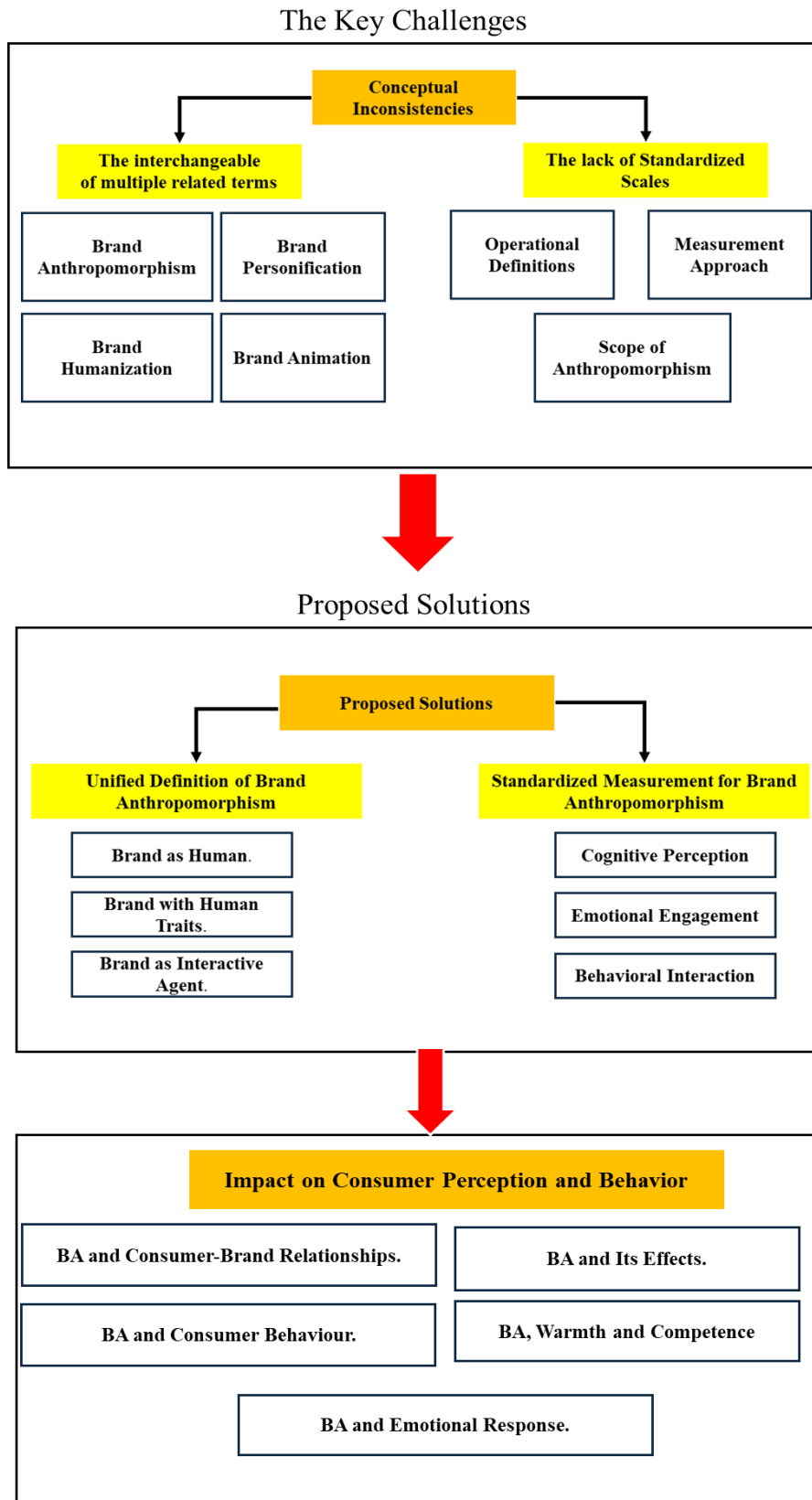
In addition to definitional ambiguities, there exists a divergence in measurement approaches. Researchers employ various scales to measure brand anthropomorphism, often adapting constructs from different disciplines, including psychology (e.g., consumer tendency to anthropomorphise), branding (e.g., brand personality), and human-computer interaction (e.g., AI-driven anthropomorphism). This results in measurement discrepancies, leading to inconsistent conclusions regarding its impact on consumer behaviour. Measurement inconsistencies further exacerbate the fragmentation within brand anthropomorphism research, creating challenges in establishing a coherent theoretical foundation. Various scales and methodologies have been developed to assess brand anthropomorphism, yet they differ significantly in their operational definitions, measurement approaches, and scope, leading to inconsistencies across studies.

One of the primary issues lies in the operational definitions used to conceptualise brand anthropomorphism. While some scales measure the extent to which a brand is perceived as human-like, others assess consumer tendencies to anthropomorphise objects in general, making it difficult to determine whether the anthropomorphic perception is an inherent brand characteristic or a cognitive bias on the part of the consumer. This variation complicates empirical comparisons, as different studies may be measuring fundamentally different constructs under the umbrella of brand anthropomorphism. Another layer of inconsistency stems from differences in measurement approaches. Many studies rely on self-reported surveys, which capture subjective perceptions of anthropomorphism, while others employ implicit association tests, experimental designs, or qualitative assessments that examine how consumers unconsciously or behaviourally respond to anthropomorphised brands. The

divergence in research methodologies means that findings across studies are often difficult to reconcile, as they emerge from distinct paradigms with different underlying assumptions. Additionally, the scope of anthropomorphism being measured varies considerably across studies. Some measurement tools focus specifically on visual brand elements, such as logos or mascots, examining how certain design features evoke human-like perceptions. Other studies, however, adopt a broader perspective by assessing consumer-brand interactions in AI-driven and digital environments, where anthropomorphism manifests through conversational agents, chatbots, or virtual brand assistants. The absence of a standardised approach that accommodates both traditional and technologically mediated forms of brand anthropomorphism further limits the ability to compare and generalise findings across different contexts.

These disparities in measurement not only make empirical comparisons challenging but also hinder the development of a unified theoretical model for brand anthropomorphism. Without a consistent and universally accepted measurement framework, research in this area remains fragmented, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about how anthropomorphism influences consumer perceptions and behaviours. A more standardised and multi-dimensional approach to measurement is needed to bridge these gaps and enhance the reliability and applicability of brand anthropomorphism research.

Given these insights, it is evident that a more unified and structured approach is needed to ensure that brand anthropomorphism is studied in a conceptually precise and methodologically rigorous manner. The framework proposed in this study provides a pathway to addressing theoretical ambiguities, standardising measurement approaches, and positioning brand anthropomorphism within the broader consumer-brand relationship discourse.



**Figure 11.** Integrative Frameworks Based on Literature Review Findings

### **Proposed Solutions: A Unified Definition and Standardised Measurement**

The systematic literature review highlights the absence of a coherent classification system in existing studies on brand anthropomorphism, resulting in conceptual ambiguity and inconsistent usage of related terms. To address this issue, the proposed framework establishes a structured categorisation of brand anthropomorphism, distinguishing three interconnected yet distinct dimensions, each representing varying degrees of anthropomorphisation. By systematically delineating these dimensions, this framework provides clarity and precision, ensuring that future research adopts a more consistent approach in defining and measuring brand anthropomorphism.

The first dimension, Brand as Human, represents brands that are fully anthropomorphised and perceived as human-like entities. Unlike traditional brand representations that merely exhibit human-like qualities, these brands are designed to function as autonomous, interactive agents, often blurring the line between human and non-human interactions. Examples include AI-driven virtual influencers such as Lil Miquela, whose social presence and dynamic engagement mimic real human influencers, and voice-based AI assistants like Alexa and Siri, which not only process information but also simulate human-like conversations, expressions, and decision-making abilities. These brands do not merely possess human traits; they operate as human substitutes, engaging in social interactions, displaying emotions, and responding dynamically to consumer inputs. Their ability to simulate real-time interactions and adapt to user behaviour makes them functionally indistinguishable from human agents, thus reinforcing their position as the highest level of anthropomorphism.

The second dimension, Brand with Human Traits, consists of brands that selectively embody human-like characteristics, such as distinct personalities, emotions, and social roles, but are not perceived as actual humans. Unlike fully anthropomorphised brands, these entities incorporate symbolic human elements that influence consumer perception and engagement

while still being recognised as non-human entities. Examples include brand mascots such as Tony the Tiger and the Michelin Man, which exhibit facial expressions, gestures, and personalities to foster consumer attachment while remaining visibly artificial. Additionally, some brands cultivate human-like personalities through marketing narratives, such as Apple's "cool and innovative" persona in contrast to Microsoft's "functional and professional" identity. These brands do not operate as independent human-like agents but instead evoke emotional responses and facilitate brand-consumer relationships by embodying symbolic human traits that enhance relatability, trust, and consumer engagement.

The third dimension, Brand as Interactive Agent, encompasses brands that engage consumers through human-like interactions without necessarily possessing explicitly anthropomorphic traits. Unlike fully humanised brands or brands with predefined personalities, these brands adopt interactive and conversational elements that simulate social presence while maintaining a functional brand identity. Examples include AI chatbots such as Amazon Alexa and Apple's Siri, which communicate in natural language but are primarily perceived as technological assistants rather than autonomous entities. Similarly, virtual brand assistants and social media personas represent brands in a humanised manner, engaging with consumers through personalised responses, humour, and conversational interaction without being perceived as sentient beings. This dimension highlights the importance of interaction-based anthropomorphism, where consumer engagement is influenced by the perceived warmth and responsiveness of the brand rather than its visual or personality-based humanisation.

By clearly delineating these three levels of anthropomorphism, this framework resolves conceptual inconsistencies and prevents the interchangeable use of related constructs such as brand humanisation, brand personification, and brand animation. Establishing this classification enables future researchers to define the scope of their studies with greater

precision, ensuring more rigorous theoretical contributions and empirical consistency in the study of brand anthropomorphism.

A critical issue identified in the systematic literature review is the lack of consistency in measuring brand anthropomorphism, which has led to fragmentation across studies and limited the comparability of findings. Existing research employs a wide range of measurement scales, many of which assess only isolated aspects of anthropomorphism, such as brand warmth, perceived intentionality, or emotional engagement, rather than capturing the construct in a comprehensive manner. This narrow and inconsistent approach undermines the reliability of empirical findings and restricts the development of a unified theoretical framework. To address this gap, a multi-dimensional measurement model is proposed, incorporating three core dimensions that reflect the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of brand anthropomorphism. By systematically integrating these dimensions, this framework provides a standardised approach that enhances the comparability, validity, and robustness of future research.

The first dimension, Cognitive Perception, examines the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as having a mind of its own, capable of independent decision-making and goal-directed behaviour. This dimension reflects the degree of perceived agency, intelligence, and self-awareness attributed to a brand, influencing consumer expectations regarding the brand's autonomy. Key indicators include perceived intelligence, brand autonomy, and goal-oriented behaviour, all of which contribute to the extent to which a brand is seen as an intentional and thinking entity. For example, consumers may rate Apple's Siri as highly autonomous because it processes requests dynamically, makes recommendations, and adjusts its responses based on contextual cues. The perception of cognitive abilities reinforces the belief that anthropomorphised brands are not merely passive entities but active agents capable of engaging in social and functional interactions.



The second dimension, Emotional Engagement, assesses the depth of emotional connection between consumers and anthropomorphised brands. This dimension is particularly relevant in understanding how anthropomorphic features influence consumer trust, attachment, and brand loyalty. Key indicators include brand attachment, perceived warmth, and trust, all of which shape the consumer-brand relationship. Anthropomorphised brands that successfully evoke human-like warmth and emotional presence tend to foster stronger connections with consumers, leading to greater brand affinity and loyalty. For instance, consumers who feel an emotional bond with the Michelin Man may exhibit higher brand loyalty due to the perceived friendliness, approachability, and emotional reliability associated with the brand. The ability to trigger emotional resonance differentiates anthropomorphised brands from their non-humanised counterparts, reinforcing long-term consumer commitment.

The third dimension, Behavioural Interaction, captures how consumers interact with anthropomorphised brands, particularly in digital and AI-driven environments. Unlike traditional branding constructs that focus on static brand characteristics, this dimension emphasises consumer engagement, real-time social interaction, and perceived responsiveness. Anthropomorphised brands that utilise chatbots, AI-driven assistants, and interactive digital platforms foster higher consumer involvement, as they enable conversational interactions and adaptive engagement strategies. Key indicators within this dimension include social interaction, perceived responsiveness, and interactive engagement levels, all of which influence how consumers experience brand anthropomorphism in technology-mediated environments. For example, brands that deploy AI-powered chatbots to provide real-time customer support enhance engagement by simulating human-like communication and responsiveness, creating the perception of an active and socially present brand entity.

By integrating these three fundamental dimensions—Cognitive Perception, Emotional Engagement, and Behavioural Interaction—into a standardised measurement model, this

framework addresses the methodological inconsistencies that have previously hindered the field. The incorporation of multi-dimensional assessment criteria ensures that brand anthropomorphism is evaluated holistically rather than in fragmented ways, providing a more comprehensive and rigorous measurement approach. Moreover, this model enhances the comparability of empirical findings across studies, allowing researchers to generate more consistent insights into the impact of brand anthropomorphism on consumer perception and behaviour. Future research can adopt this standardised framework to ensure greater methodological consistency, facilitating the development of a cohesive body of knowledge that accurately reflects the psychological and behavioural mechanisms underlying anthropomorphised brands.

### **How do these challenges and proposed solutions affect consumer perceptions and behaviour?**

As illustrated in **Figure 11**, once brand anthropomorphism is consistently defined and measured, its impact on consumer perceptions and behaviours is expected to be more accurately explained. According to the findings from the Bibliographic Coupling Analysis presented in the previous section, achieving this level of accuracy is particularly essential for understanding the effects, roles, and positioning of brand anthropomorphism within the following areas of literature: consumer-brand relationships, consumer behaviour, the Stereotype Content Model (i.e., brand warmth and brand competence), consumer emotional responses, and other related effects, such as how brand anthropomorphism influences consumers' ethical judgments, self-brand integration and emotional attachment, consumer perceptions of advertising, voice-based branding, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

When brand anthropomorphism is inconsistently defined, consumers may struggle to interpret the human-like qualities of a brand, leading to varied psychological and behavioural outcomes. Some consumers may perceive an anthropomorphised brand as warm and relatable, fostering emotional connections, while others may view it as deceptive or manipulative, reducing brand trust. The framework addresses these conceptual inconsistencies by establishing a unified definition of brand anthropomorphism that categorises anthropomorphised brands into three distinct dimensions: Brand as Human, Brand with Human Traits, and Brand as an Interactive Agent. This distinction allows researchers and practitioners to better predict how different forms of brand anthropomorphism influence consumer trust, engagement, and loyalty.

Additionally, measurement inconsistencies limit the ability to assess how anthropomorphised brands shape consumer decision-making and brand attachment. Different studies have measured brand anthropomorphism using disparate operational definitions, ranging from perceived warmth and intentionality to AI-driven interactivity. This variability creates contradictory findings, making it difficult to determine whether anthropomorphized brands enhance consumer loyalty or, in some cases, lead to consumer scepticism. To overcome this issue, the framework introduces a standardized measurement model incorporating three core dimensions—Cognitive Perception, Emotional Engagement, and Behavioural Interaction—ensuring greater consistency in evaluating consumer responses to anthropomorphized brands.

Findings from the bibliographic coupling analysis reinforce the urgency of addressing these challenges, as they reveal the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways in which brand anthropomorphism has been examined in different research clusters. The first major research cluster, Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer-Brand Relationships, highlights how anthropomorphised brands foster trust, loyalty, and long-term attachment. However, the

inconsistency in defining anthropomorphism has led to varied interpretations of how these relationships develop. Some studies suggest that human-like brands enhance emotional connection, while others argue that excessive anthropomorphism can lead to consumer resistance, particularly when the brand's human-like qualities are perceived as artificial or manipulative. By introducing a unified definition, the proposed framework ensures that researchers can systematically examine consumer-brand relationships without the confusion caused by interchangeable terminologies.

A second research cluster, Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Behaviour, demonstrates how anthropomorphism affects decision-making, product evaluations, and ethical perceptions. The findings in this area are often inconsistent due to the lack of standardised measurement tools, leading to discrepancies in how consumers perceive warmth, competence, and authenticity in anthropomorphised brands. The proposed framework's inclusion of a standardised measurement approach allows researchers to analyse consumer behavioural responses more systematically, clarifying whether anthropomorphism drives positive engagement or leads to unintended negative consequences, such as brand scepticisms or perceived deception. The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) provides another key perspective within the bibliographic coupling analysis, offering insight into how consumers perceive anthropomorphised brands based on warmth and competence. While existing research suggests that warm and competent brands are more likely to gain consumer trust and loyalty, inconsistencies in how anthropomorphism is defined and measured have made it difficult to determine whether these perceptions are inherent consumer biases or the result of brand-driven anthropomorphic strategies. The framework provides a structured classification of anthropomorphism, allowing researchers to explore whether warmth-driven anthropomorphism (e.g., friendly brand mascots) elicits different consumer responses than competence-driven anthropomorphism (e.g., AI-powered brand assistants).

Beyond trust and brand evaluations, the emotional responses of consumers to anthropomorphised brands have been another focal point in brand anthropomorphism literature. The bibliographic coupling analysis identifies Brand Anthropomorphism and Emotional Responses as a key research cluster, revealing that both positive and negative emotional reactions can arise depending on how anthropomorphism is executed. Some brands successfully leverage anthropomorphism to foster brand love, emotional attachment, and social bonding, while others inadvertently generate brand hate, scepticism, and negative emotional reactions when anthropomorphism is perceived as excessive or inauthentic. These inconsistencies in consumer response stem from the lack of a structured approach in measuring emotional engagement with anthropomorphised brands. The proposed framework directly addresses this gap by incorporating emotional engagement as a core measurement dimension, ensuring that future research can systematically analyse consumer emotions in response to anthropomorphised branding strategies.

The final research cluster, Brand Anthropomorphism and Its Effects, highlights the broader implications of anthropomorphism on consumer ethics, self-brand integration, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Some studies suggest that humanized brands enhance ethical perceptions and consumer advocacy, while others argue that anthropomorphised brands can create ethical dilemmas, such as misleading consumers into trusting AI-driven recommendations without transparency. The framework's standardised measurement model ensures that these ethical considerations are quantified consistently, enabling researchers to examine whether brand anthropomorphism strengthens or weakens consumer trust in ethical brand behaviour.

In conclusion, the challenges of conceptual and measurement inconsistencies in brand anthropomorphism research have far-reaching consequences for consumer perception and behaviour. The proposed framework addresses these challenges by clarifying the conceptual boundaries of anthropomorphism, distinguishing between different levels of human-like brand representation, and introducing a standardised measurement model that enhances comparability across studies. Insights from the bibliographic coupling analysis further highlight the necessity of this framework, as they demonstrate how brand anthropomorphism intersects with consumer-brand relationships, stereotype content models, emotional responses, and ethical perceptions. By establishing a coherent and replicable structure, this framework bridges theoretical gaps, resolves methodological ambiguities, and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how anthropomorphised brands shape consumer experiences and decision-making.

#### 4.8 Managerial Implications

In addition to contributing to the advancement of discussions and explanations regarding the construct of brand anthropomorphism, this study also underscores its strategic potential in modern branding. Based on the findings of this systematic literature review, we propose the following eight key recommendations for branding practitioners:

- **Enhancing Consumer-Brand Relationships through Human-like Brand Attributes:** The analysis of the literature confirms that brand anthropomorphism strengthens consumer-brand relationships by fostering emotional attachment, trust, and loyalty. Brands should strategically integrate human-like traits into their marketing efforts through mascots, spokespersons, or AI-driven brand personas (Husain et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). For instance, brands such as Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri

exemplify how consumers develop human-like interactions with brands, leading to deeper engagement. Additionally, it is essential for branding practitioners to incorporate anthropomorphism into their social media communication strategies. Several studies highlight the positive impact of anthropomorphic brand communication in fostering consumer engagement through personalised, human-like interactions (Deng et al., 2021; Hudson et al., 2016). Furthermore, brand anthropomorphism has been found to evoke brand love, particularly when consumers engage with brands on social media platforms.

- **Strategic Standardisation of Brand Anthropomorphism Practices:** Given the inconsistencies in how brand anthropomorphism is conceptualised, applied, and measured, brands should adopt a standardised approach to ensure its effectiveness. Marketers must align their anthropomorphic branding strategies with the brand's core identity and positioning—for instance, leveraging a warm and friendly persona (as seen with Disney) or adopting a competent and authoritative identity (such as IBM Watson). Standardising anthropomorphic brand strategies will ensure consistent messaging and consumer perception across platforms.
- **Leveraging Emerging Technologies for Interactive Brand Experiences:** The rise of AI-driven branding and digital transformation presents new opportunities to implement anthropomorphism beyond traditional mascots and advertisements. Technologies such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and AI-generated avatars enable brands to simulate human-like interactions, making the brand feel more personable and engaging. This enhanced interactivity contributes to greater consumer brand engagement and loyalty.
- **Cultural Sensitivity in Brand Anthropomorphism Strategies:** The study highlights that the effectiveness of brand anthropomorphism varies across cultural contexts. In Western markets, brand anthropomorphism tends to be associated with independence

and competence, whereas in Eastern markets, it is more commonly aligned with community-driven and relational attributes. Brand managers must tailor their anthropomorphic strategies to align with cultural differences, ensuring that anthropomorphic elements resonate effectively with target consumers across global markets.

- **Navigating the Ethical and Legal Considerations of Anthropomorphised Brands:**

While anthropomorphic branding fosters engagement, it also raises ethical and legal concerns related to consumer manipulation and trust. Overly human-like AI-driven brand personas may blur the distinction between human and artificial interactions, potentially leading to unintended emotional attachments among consumers. To mitigate ethical risks, brand managers must ensure transparency in AI interactions, avoiding deceptive marketing practices that could compromise consumer trust and damage brand reputation.

- **Developing Measurement Frameworks for Effective Brand Anthropomorphism**

**Implementation:** The study identifies a lack of standardised measurement tools in brand anthropomorphism research, which poses a challenge for marketers attempting to assess its effectiveness. To address this gap, branding practitioners should collaborate with researchers to develop robust measurement frameworks that capture key consumer responses to anthropomorphism. Metrics such as consumer engagement levels, emotional attachment, and brand trust can serve as key performance indicators (KPIs) for evaluating the success of anthropomorphic branding strategies.

- **Leveraging Anthropomorphic Branding for Social Impact:** Given the increasing emphasis on social responsibility, sustainability, and authenticity, brands should consider integrating anthropomorphism into their CSR initiatives. The findings suggest that anthropomorphic branding can enhance consumer perceptions of brand



authenticity and social commitment, thereby fostering positive emotional connections between consumers and brands (Guevremont, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Puzakova et al., 2013; Puzakova & Kwak, 2023). Consumers increasingly expect brands to act ethically and responsibly, and anthropomorphism can play a crucial role in humanizing CSR narratives. By personifying ethical values, brands such as Patagonia, which leverages sustainability-driven messaging, can strengthen consumer trust and brand advocacy.

#### 4.9 Limitations and future research directions

Although this review offers a structured attempt to synthesise and clarify research on brand anthropomorphism, certain limitations remain. One key constraint stems from the conceptual complexity and interdisciplinary nature of brand anthropomorphism, which led to a focus on studies that explicitly use the term “brand anthropomorphism.” While this approach enhances construct clarity, it may have inadvertently excluded relevant research that examines similar phenomena under different labels, such as “brand humanisation” or “brand personification.” To achieve a more comprehensive understanding, future research could adopt a broader perspective by integrating these closely related constructs. Like any systematic review, this study relied on specific search terms and inclusion criteria to identify relevant literature. Despite efforts to ensure a rigorous selection process, the use of particular databases and the exclusion of non-English studies may have led to the omission of valuable research from different linguistic and cultural contexts. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating cross-cultural comparisons to better understand how cultural differences influence consumer perceptions of brand anthropomorphism.

Another limitation lies in the variation of measurement approaches across studies. While this review highlights the evolution of measurement scales in brand anthropomorphism

research, inconsistencies in scale development and methodological approaches make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. To strengthen the field, future research should focus on developing and validating standardised measurement tools that allow for greater comparability across studies. Additionally, experimental and longitudinal studies would be useful in examining the causal relationships and long-term effects of brand anthropomorphism on consumer behaviour.

This review also primarily focuses on academic perspectives, leaving its practical implications for branding practitioners relatively underexplored. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, future studies should investigate real-world applications of brand anthropomorphism in different industries. Furthermore, with the increasing presence of AI-driven brand interactions, there is a growing need to explore how emerging technologies, such as virtual brand personas and AI-powered brand engagement, shape consumer perceptions of anthropomorphised brands.

Addressing these limitations will help refine the theoretical and practical understanding of brand anthropomorphism, offering clearer insights for both researchers and practitioners in branding and consumer behaviour.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

The review of 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023 highlights a significant inconsistency in how brand anthropomorphism has been conceptualised, measured, and applied in the branding literature. This inconsistency largely stems from the interchangeable use of related constructs such as "brand humanisation," "brand personification," and "human brand." While these terms share commonalities, they differ in their scope and focus. Brand anthropomorphism specifically involves attributing human

characteristics, emotions, or intentions to brands, allowing consumers to interact with them as social entities. In contrast, brand humanisation generally encompasses broader efforts to make brands relatable, while brand personification focuses on assigning distinct personalities to brands. The frequent conflation of these terms in academic and practical contexts has hindered the development of a unified framework for studying brand anthropomorphism.

This conceptual fragmentation is further exacerbated by the varied methodologies used to measure brand anthropomorphism. The lack of standardised scales and the use of diverse operationalisations, ranging from self-reported measures to implicit indicators, reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the construct but also contribute to its theoretical ambiguity. For example, while constructs like brand personality benefit from established scales such as Aaker's (1997) framework, brand anthropomorphism lacks a universally accepted measurement model. Recent efforts, including the development of scales like the Brand Anthropomorphism Questionnaire (BAQ) and Brand Anthropomorphism Scale (BASC), mark progress in addressing this gap but are yet to achieve widespread adoption.

Despite these challenges, there is evidence of growing commitment among researchers to use "brand anthropomorphism" as a distinct construct. An analysis of publication trends reveals a marked increase in the number of studies explicitly focusing on brand anthropomorphism, particularly in recent years. This reflects a shift towards conceptual and methodological clarity, as researchers increasingly distinguish brand anthropomorphism from overlapping constructs. Emerging research also underscores its strategic importance in fostering emotional connections, enhancing brand loyalty, and differentiating brands in competitive markets. Furthermore, advancements in technology, such as AI-driven brand personas and social media interactions, have expanded the practical applications of anthropomorphic branding, making it an integral part of contemporary marketing strategies.

This review concludes that achieving conceptual clarity and methodological consistency is imperative for advancing the field of brand anthropomorphism. By differentiating it from related constructs and standardising its measurement, future research can unlock its full potential as a theoretical and practical tool. A more cohesive understanding of brand anthropomorphism will not only enrich academic discourse but also provide actionable insights for practitioners, enabling them to leverage anthropomorphic strategies effectively in an increasingly digitalised and competitive branding landscape. Such efforts will pave the way for brand anthropomorphism to evolve into a robust, standalone domain within the broader humanised branding literature.

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## **Chapter 5. Anthropomorphic Brand Logo and Perceived Value: The Mediating Role of Brand Warmth and Brand Competence**

### **Abstract**

In this research we examine the effect of the anthropomorphic brand logo – measured with icon familiarity and logo association, on perceived value, and whether brand competence and brand warmth can explain the underlying mechanisms of the effect. To test our hypotheses, we use a hypothetical brand logo associated with the iconic British character Sherlock Holmes. Using structural equation modelling to test the relationship of the key constructs, our results revealed that icon familiarity enhances logo association, reinforcing the relevance of using a culturally embedded symbol to anthropomorphise a brand logo. More importantly, we found that brand competence, rather than brand warmth, mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value. This study contributes to the brand anthropomorphism literature by clarifying the effect of logo anthropomorphism on perceived value by testing the underlying mechanism of the effect through brand competence and brand warmth. The findings offer practical implications for brand managers, emphasising the strategic importance of incorporating familiar iconic characters into brand logo design to foster positive consumer perceptions of brand competence and overall brand value.

**Keywords:** logo anthropomorphism; brand anthropomorphism, logo association, icon familiarity, Stereotype content model, Brand Competence, Brand Warmth, Perceived Value

### **5.1 Introduction**

A well-designed brand logo is more than just a visual symbol. While a brand encompasses much more than its logo (Faust, & Eilertson, 1994; Schroeder, 2008; Girard, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Matthews, 2013; Danker, 2014), a well-designed logo is essential for conveying the brand's identity and values to consumers. The brand logo serves as a visual element for the brand's promise, personality, positioning, and serves as the first interaction a consumer has with the brand, making it a critical touchpoint in the consumer-brand relationship. Although the brand itself is built on factors such as product quality, customer service, and overall reputation, a thoughtfully designed brand logo provides a recognisable visual symbol that encapsulates these broader brand attributes. Previous research indicates that a well-designed logo can increase market share (Doyle & Bottomley, 2004), and improve financial performance (Park, Eisingerich, Pol & Park, 2013). This has led many brands to invest their time, money,



and effort in designing a brand logo that can deliver substantial benefits for the brand (Henderson & Cote, 1998).

A brand without a well-designed logo risk losing visual impact and may fail to establish a distinct identity in the consumers' mind. In today's visually saturated marketplace, brand logos help consumers quickly identify and differentiate between a brand and its competitors. Research suggests that brand logos can influence consumers perceptions, trust and brand recall, all of which are essential for creating long-term and positive consumer-brand relationships (Luffarelli, Mukesh & Mahmood, 2019). Therefore, brands continually seek ways to create strong, memorable, and meaningful brand logos. It is crucial to create a brand logo design that can not only make the brand stand out among the rest but can also be relevant (Yassin, 2023).

In a more practical context, brands are increasingly designing brand logos with anthropomorphic characteristics by infusing brand logos with human-like qualities or associating them with iconic figures. This strategy is known as logo anthropomorphism (Daryanto, Alexander & Kartika, 2022). The presence of human-like characteristics in a brand logo significantly shapes consumers perceptions and can enhance interactions with the brand by making it appear more familiar, more approachable, and allowing for a stronger, more personal connection (Daryanto, et al., 2022; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011). Research suggests that logo anthropomorphism can positively influence consumer perceptions of the brands' functional performance (Daryanto, et al., 2022). This strategy has become increasingly common as companies seek to differentiate themselves in visually crowded markets and create more personal connections with consumers through their brand logo.

Several well-known brands have successfully employed brand logo anthropomorphism. For instance, Michelin Tires uses the Michelin Man (Bibendum) as a symbol of approachability

and durability, while Pillsbury's Doughboy (Poppin' Fresh) projects warmth and friendliness (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011). Similarly, Geico's logo incorporates the Geico Gecko to add a relatable, humanised element to the brand (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012), and Procter & Gamble's Mr. Clean logo exudes strength and reliability (Luffarelli, Mukesh, & Mahmood, 2019). In recent years, brands have also adopted more subtle anthropomorphic elements; for example, Amazon's logo features a smile-like arrow that conveys warmth, friendliness, and customer satisfaction by spanning from "A" to "Z" to represent the breadth of the company's offerings.

While many brands have successfully employed logo anthropomorphism, the specific design choices underlying logo anthropomorphism raised important questions: What type of character should the brand consider when they adopt a logo anthropomorphism strategy for their brand logo design? Should brands incorporate widely recognized, iconic figures, and if so, how does the consumers' familiarity with these figures impact their perceptions? Additionally, how do these familiar characters shape the consumers' impression of the brand? These questions are central to understanding how brands can optimise their anthropomorphic logo design to influence consumer perceptions. To address these questions, this study builds on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) which evaluates consumers' perceptions based on warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2018; Li & Nan, 2023; Kervyn, Fiske & Malone, 2022). Warmth encompasses traits like friendliness, sincerity, and trustworthiness, while competence refers to perceptions of capability, intelligence, and reliability. Within the context of branding, warmth and competence are essential elements of the brand that influence consumer preferences and engagement (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). By applying SCM to logo anthropomorphism, this study examines how anthropomorphic elements in logos can strategically enhance perceptions of warmth and competence, shaping consumer perceptions toward the brand.

Specifically, this study investigates the role of icon familiarity—the extent to which consumers recognise and feel connected to an iconic figure embedded in a brand logo. Familiar icons, such as Sherlock Holmes, can reinforce specific brand attributes by evoking qualities that are culturally associated with that figure, such as intelligence, curiosity, and reliability. The use of a familiar icon in logo design may strengthen consumer-brand associations by drawing on pre-existing knowledge, feelings, and cultural meanings attached to that character (Daryanto et al., 2022). For instance, a brand logo incorporating elements of Sherlock Holmes may convey high competence due to the character’s association with intelligence and logical reasoning, while also evoking warmth through familiarity and cultural resonance.

This study contributes to the growing literature on brand anthropomorphism by providing empirical insights into how logo anthropomorphism with iconic figures influences consumer perceptions and perceived value. By examining the differential effects of warmth and competence perceptions in logo anthropomorphism, this research offers practical implications for marketers aiming to optimise logo design for stronger consumer engagement. Ultimately, understanding how consumers interpret anthropomorphic logos with familiar icons can guide brands in creating designs that are not only visually distinctive but also foster deeper, emotionally resonant connections with consumers.

## 5.2 Theoretical background

### **Logo Anthropomorphism**

Anthropomorphism in branding literature is primarily understood through the foundational work of Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2007), who define it as “the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behaviour of non-human agents with human-like characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions”. This broad definition includes the psychological process of

humanising brands, or “anthropomorphic thinking,” and has been applied to various brand contexts. However, anthropomorphism has also been used to describe specific human-like features in brands and products that evoke such thinking. For example, brand logos, or car headlights and grilles of cars that resemble human faces (Landwehr, McGill, & Herrmann, 2011). Based on the review of the literature in brand anthropomorphism, there are three perspectives to explain brand anthropomorphism. These are: (1) brand anthropomorphism as a consumer personality trait (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Avis, 2011; Kim, Chen & Zhang, 2016; Kwak, Puzakova & Rocereto, 2015); (2) brand anthropomorphism as a brand positioning strategy (Puzakova & Kwak, 2017; Kwak, Puzakova, & Rocereto, 2017; Reavey, Puzakova, Andras & Kwak, 2018), and (3) brand anthropomorphism as a process (Delgado-Ballester, Palazón, and Peláez, 2019; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017; Letheren, Kuhn, Lings & Pope, 2016).

Among the three perspectives, the theoretical framework and empirical focus of this study positions it within the lens of brand anthropomorphism as a brand positioning strategy. This perspective highlights the intentional use of anthropomorphic elements in branding to strategically influence consumer perceptions and differentiate the brand in the marketplace (Puzakova & Kwak, 2017; Kwak, Puzakova, & Rocereto, 2017). Specifically, this study explores how anthropomorphic brand logos—incorporating culturally iconic elements, such as those inspired by Sherlock Holmes—function as communicative tools to convey brand values and personality traits, particularly competence and warmth. By examining the impact of these design choices on brand associations and perceived value, this research emphasises the deliberate role of anthropomorphism in strengthening brand identity and positioning. This approach identifies anthropomorphic branding as a pivotal mechanism for cultivating emotional and cognitive connections with consumers, thereby underscoring its strategic significance in competitive brand management. Ultimately, this study contributes to the

literature by demonstrating how anthropomorphic elements in logos operate as rhetorical devices to convey core brand meanings and enhance consumer engagement.

Recently, Daryanto et al. (2022) defined logo anthropomorphism as the tendency of consumers to attribute human-like characteristics to brand logos intentionally designed to convey these qualities. This definition aligns with the three perspectives on brand anthropomorphism identified above. Firstly, understanding logo anthropomorphism involves recognising consumers' tendency to anthropomorphise brands. Secondly, considering brand anthropomorphism as a process empathises that logo anthropomorphism involves not only consumer tendencies but also intentional design choices by companies to imbue logos with human-like qualities. Delgado-Ballester et al. (2019) explain that, compared to the tangible products or services brands offer, the brand itself is an abstract construct (Fleck, Michel, & Zeitoun, 2014). To make the brand feel less abstract, companies may use anthropomorphic elements within the logo, positioning it as a brand asset that conveys core values and personality. Thirdly, viewing logo anthropomorphism as a brand positioning strategy helps to define its role as a communicative tool that shapes brand perception and interactions. Therefore, in this research, logo anthropomorphism is also explained as the brand communication tool or the rhetorical device for the brand. Logo anthropomorphism can be regarded as a strategic branding tool aimed at influencing consumer perceptions and interactions with the brand. Despite the growing interest in brand anthropomorphism, research specifically addressing logo anthropomorphism remains limited.

Supporting this perspective, De Chernatony (2010) suggests that brand logo design should be approached strategically rather than tactically. In other words, designers must carefully leverage various design elements, such as colour, font, shape, and lines, so that the final logo embodies "the core essence of the brand's nature". Therefore, we propose that logo

anthropomorphism can be a valuable approach for brands to communicate their core meaning and values through brand logo design. In the context of brand design, researchers acknowledge that anthropomorphism can evoke human schemas through visual or verbal descriptions (Triantos, Plakoyiannaki, Outra, & Petridis, 2016). Logo anthropomorphism demonstrates how design elements create meaning within a brand's logo (Bardone, 2011; Henderson, Cote, Leong, & Schmitt, 2003; Mithen & Boyer, 1996; Payne, Hyman, Niculescu, & Huhmann, 2013). Studies in branding literature also underscore the significance of logo anthropomorphism in shaping brand identity and perception.

For example, Duffy (2014) examines why some consumers are drawn to “plant-based” designs in brand logos, linking this preference to factors such as enculturation, positive associations, and emotional resonance. This perspective draws on theories of visual imagery, emotion, anthropomorphism, anthropogenics, anthropopathism, and anthropomorphobia. Similarly, Schroll, Schnurr, and Grewal (2018) found that handwritten typefaces in brand logos enhance consumer evaluations, suggesting that specific design elements influence perceptions of warmth and relatability. Payne et al. (2013) also explored how anthropomorphic elements in sports brand logos impact consumer evaluation processes. Harun, Razak, Rahim, & Radzuan (2016), utilising an adapted Visual Preference Survey (VPS), found that respondents were more likely to positively evaluate graphic symbols with familiar anthropomorphic stimuli (such as common human facial features) than those with less familiar anthropomorphic cues. This finding aligns with Aggarwal and McGill's (2007) assertion that the easier it is for consumers to anthropomorphise a stimulus, the more favourably they tend to respond to it. Therefore, the strategy of logo anthropomorphism is understood to be advantageous for brand design, as ascribing human-like characteristics can help reduce uncertainty by increasing perceived familiarity (Waytz & Morewedge, 2010; Payne et al., 2013).

While anthropomorphism in logos can enhance consumer engagement and brand perception, it is essential to consider cultural and contextual factors that may influence its effectiveness.

### **Icon Familiarity**

Icon familiarity refers to the level of consumer recognition and familiarity with an iconic character or symbol associated with a brand logo. This familiarity encompasses consumers' previous exposure to, and recognition of iconic elements integrated into the logo design (Daryanto et al., 2022). In this study, the explanation of icon familiarity is grounded in the established concepts of brand familiarity and its influence on logo design. Brand familiarity can be defined as the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experiences with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Research has shown that consumers' knowledge of a brand is less accessible and weaker when they are unfamiliar with the brand and stronger when they are familiar with it (Campbell & Keller, 2003).

Brand familiarity plays a crucial role in brand recognition, as previous studies have demonstrated. For example, in advertising contexts, familiar brands are more noticeable, easily recalled, and generally better liked by consumers than unfamiliar brands (Chattopadhyay, 1998; Lange & Dahlén, 2003; Rindfleisch & Inman, 1998). In some instances, brand familiarity can act as a buffer against negative information, such as in cases of brand crises or product recalls (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002; Mowen, 1980; Mowen & Ellis, 1981).

In brand logo design, familiarity is an essential element. According to Robertson (1989), a brand logo should be designed to appear familiar, convey a shared meaning to the target market, and evoke positive affect. Logo familiarity is largely a function of how

frequently consumers encounter a logo. De Marchis et al. (2018) found that familiarity positively correlates with aesthetic appeal and self-reported emotional responses, indicating that consumers favour logos they recognise. Furthermore, familiarity has a negative correlation with response times, implying that well-known logos facilitate quicker recall. Therefore, effective logo design should aim to create a familiar and visually attractive logo that enhances brand recognition and consumer connection.

Prior research has further elaborated on the benefits of designing logos that foster brand familiarity. For instance, Morgan, Fajardo, and Townsend (2021) found that consumers respond more favourably to image-based logos for familiar brands compared to text-based logos, while text-based logos are preferred for less familiar brands due to higher processing fluency. Similarly, Kimura et al. (2013) observed that the “memory colour effect” is stronger for logos of highly familiar brands, where consumers are more likely to perceive the colour of a familiar logo differently than its actual colour. Additionally, García-Madariaga and Sandoval (2023) found that brand familiarity enhances the effectiveness of advertising and consumer behaviour, with quicker logo recognition correlating with positive consumer actions, such as increased donations for non-profit organisations.

Other studies have examined the role of logo complexity. Grinsven and Das (2016) highlighted that logo complexity can moderate the effects of exposure on brand recognition and attitudes, with complex logos improving brand recognition and attitudes through repeated exposure. Finally, Grobert et al. (2016) noted that in cases of logo redesign, consumers with high brand familiarity may experience negative surprise, indicating potential resistance to logo changes. Conversely, brand attachment can increase positive surprise, as consumers with a strong emotional connection to the brand may be more accepting of a new logo.



In addition to brand familiarity, this study's concept of icon familiarity also draws on the idea of brand iconicity. Brand iconicity refers to the added value of a brand due to its ability to function as a cultural symbol, transcending its functional attributes to embody broader cultural meanings (Norris, Swyne, Taylor & Taylor, 2021; Cantone, Covà & Testa, 2017; Cova & D'Antone, 2016; Holt, 2004). In *How Brands Become Icons* (2004), Holt outlines the process by which brands acquire cultural value, suggesting that brands "perform" myths aligned with societal desires and address cultural contradictions. These myths are created through complex interactions among businesses, consumers, influential actors (e.g., cultural critics), and popular culture (Kravets & Öрге, 2010).

Previous studies have further explored how iconicity in branding influences logo design. For example, Rossolatos (2018) explains that iconicity in branding aligns with semiotic principles where brand language appropriates signs, transforming them into integral elements of its expressive inventory. Iconicity thus emphasises the relationship between signs and symbols, underscoring that iconic elements in logos are not devoid of symbolic meaning. The concept of "intra-iconic gestalts" in Rossolatos' work captures the self-referential nature of brand imagery within its semiotic structure, where iconic signs reflect the brand's inner logic rather than external qualities. These frameworks provide the foundation for our investigation into icon familiarity in this study.

Icon familiarity serves as a strategic element in brand logo design, allowing brands to leverage culturally embedded icons to strengthen consumer associations and perceptions of brand competence. By understanding the impact of familiar icons within logos, brands can effectively communicate their core values, resonate with consumer expectations, and reinforce their cultural significance. This study highlights the potential for brands to use icon familiarity not only to enhance logo recognition but also to build a meaningful connection with consumers through iconic representations that align with desired brand traits and cultural relevance.

## **Logo Association**

The importance of logos in branding is succinctly captured in Milton Glaser's statement, "the logo is the gateway to the brand" (Wheeler, 2012; 2014; Kelly, 2017). A brand logo's design is a crucial element that fosters associations in consumers' minds, building connections to what the organisation stands for and who it represents. According to Wheeler (2014), brand logos should be carefully crafted to create perceptions and associations at a speed unmatched by other forms of communication. The logo can even serve as a powerful tool for establishing associations between the brand and the consumer's self-concept, encouraging consumers to view the brand as an extension of their own identity (Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010). Thus, as a symbolic representation, the brand logo's role extends beyond aesthetics; it serves as a visual cue that conveys meaningful associations reflecting the brand's values and personality (Barroso, Viniegra, & Garcia, 2022).

Prior research has highlighted the influence of brand logos on consumer associations. For example, two studies examining university logos found that, despite initial resistance to a new design, the updated logo at Aalto University ultimately became a positive source of brand associations among students, reinforcing the university's corporate identity (Erjansola, Lipponen, Vehkalahti, Aula, & Pirttilä-Backman, 2021). Additionally, Sanchez, Perez, and Luces (2022) found that well-designed logos can enhance the visual identity of higher education institutions, especially those facing challenges in establishing brand associations. In the context of retail brands, as markets become more saturated and brands increasingly resemble each other, strong logo associations can differentiate them. Effective logos generate powerful associations that go beyond basic attributes, supporting brand loyalty and improving organisational performance (Girard, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2012).

This study focuses not only on how brand logos impact brand associations but also on how the process of logo association builds these connections in consumers' minds through logo design. Based on brand association theory, logo association can be defined as the connections or associations consumers establish with a brand logo. These associations are stored in consumers' memories and, similar to general brand associations, logos can evoke specific memories or thoughts related to the brand (Daryanto et al., 2022). Much like brand associations, logo associations can be related to product attributes, service quality, or consumer experiences (John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006).

This research specifically examines the role of brand logos associated with iconic, anthropomorphic characters. In this context, logo association can also be understood as the extent to which consumers associate a brand logo with a familiar, iconic figure. This study explores how designing a logo with recognisable, iconic elements—such as those associated with Sherlock Holmes—can enhance consumers' perceptions of brand competence and perceived value.

### **Stereotype Content Model and Brand Anthropomorphism**

When we meet other people, we have a tendency to construct perceptions about them. To understand how we build these perceptions towards others, research in the social psychology domain has proposed the stereotype content model theory (SCM). According to the SCM theory, our perceptions towards other people can be classified into two dimensions, these are warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2018; Li & Nan, 2023; Kervyn, Fiske & Malone, 2022).

These two dimensions are built on our assessment of others that arises when we meet them and ask “what intention does this person have towards me? Is this person going to risk

my life or is this person a good person?” and “How capable is this person of carrying out this intention?” (Fiske et al., 2007). When we meet other people, we have a tendency to judge their intentions and capabilities. According to Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2007), person warmth perception can answer our question about someone's intention to us, while person competence perception will answer our question about someone's capabilities to perform their intentions. We perceive someone as having warmth characteristics by measuring their kindness, sincerity, friendliness, and trustworthiness. On the other hand, we perceive someone as having competence characteristics by measuring their intelligence, confidence, competition and independence (Li, & Nan, 2023).

The concept of SCM is also used to explain how consumers build their perceptions and their evaluations towards a brand. As a bridge from SCM research in social psychology, Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone (2012) introduced the Brand as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) approach. This approach helps to explain brands as social objects that can express their intentions and abilities. These two things affect the consumers' perception of the brand as a warmth or competence brand (Kervyn et al., 2012; Zawisza and Pittard, 2015). This consumer perception results in brand stereotyping, and according to several previous studies, brand stereotyping has some positive influences on brand evaluation, brand-related emotions, increases consumer desire to buy and own the brand, and consumer perceptions of the value that brands can provide them (i.e. functional, emotional and social) (e.g. Aaker, Garbinsky and Vohs, 2012; Ivens Leischnig, Muller and Valta, 2015; Kolbl, Diamantopoulos, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, and Zabkar, 2020).

Previous research explained that to apply and use SCM theory in the context of brands, we must understand beforehand that consumers have a tendency to build relationships with brands just as they build relationships with other people (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Fournier, 1998). This is then supported by the efforts of brand practitioners to humanise brands by giving

human-like traits to the products or services they offer to consumers (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Fournier, 1998; Epley et al., 2007; Waytz et al., 2010; Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). Previous studies have explained that the tendency of consumers to anthropomorphise the brand, and the many marketing efforts to humanise the brand, affects how consumers see brands not only as transactional entities in their lives, but also as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998; Guthrie, 2009; Kolbl et al., 2020). In addition, consumers also have a tendency to perceive brands in the same way as they are perceived by other people (Keryvn et al., 2012; Kim, Chen, & Zhang, 2016). Therefore, it is important to include the concept of brand anthropomorphism in the explanation of how SCM theory is used for understanding how consumers build their perceptions of brands. Based on this explanation of consumer-brand relationships and brand anthropomorphism, Keryvn et al., (2012) introduced the BIAF approach to apply SCM in the context of brands and to explain brand warmth and brand competence perceptions.

As can be seen in the summary in **Table 1**, recently many researchers have investigated the effect of brand anthropomorphism on brand stereotyping in several different contexts. There is a pattern that can be identified from these studies. This pattern is the majority of studies treated the brand anthropomorphism (in different contexts) as an antecedent of brand perception, and brand perception is treated as a mediator variable that affects marketing outputs (i.e. buying pleasure (Jeong and Kim, 2021); purchase intention and attitude towards brands (Roy and Naidoo, 2021; Lee and Oh, 2021); green product purchase intention (Wang, Ming and Zhang, 2020); continuance intention and brand loyalty (Fang, 2019); consumer intention to endorse brands and branded content (Bernritter, Verlegh, and Smit, 2016).

For example, Lee and Oh (2021) examined the effects of hotel anthropomorphism and explained how hotel anthropomorphism can help the brand to be perceived as a warmth brand, which then has a positive effect on the customers' visit intention. Roy and Naidoo (2021) found

that when chatbots were given an anthropomorphic conversation style by giving the impression of warmth (vs. competence), it encouraged consumers to perceive the brand as having human-like characteristics, and this could help create a favourable product decision. Additionally, research by Jeong and Kim (2021) investigated the effects of brand anthropomorphism in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In their research, they found that when their CSR brand was presented as a visual humanising brand, consumers will treat the brand as a human-like agent who has altruistic intentions to help others. This creates warm characteristics and makes consumers more likely to buy from the brand.

**Table 1.** Literature review findings

Study	Journal	Research Context	Research output
Lee and Oh (2021)	Journal of Business Research	Anthropomorphism-based communications for hotel brand	Anthropomorphism activated warm perceptions in hotel advertising, and this led to increased visit intention through perceived warmth.
Roy & Naidoo. (2021)	Journal of Business Research	Chatbot anthropomorphism	Positioning chatbots as warm (vs. competent) can make consumers perceive the chatbots and the brand as more human.
Jeong, and Kim (2021)	Journal of Brand Management	Brand anthropomorphism and CSR message effectiveness	<p>-When the brand was presented using humanised brand visuals and when the brand message was anthropomorphised, consumers were more likely to give positive evaluations towards the CSR.</p> <p>- The effect of brand anthropomorphism on CSR was mediated by warmth characteristics. In comparison</p>

			with competence characteristics.
Jin and Youn (2021).	Telematics and Informatics	Anthropomorphism, social phobia, chatbots, social perceptions of warmth-competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a moderating role of consumers' social phobia on the effects of AI's anthropomorphism on human-AI Interaction and brand outcomes.</li> <li>- The level of social phobia of consumers influences the relationship between consumer-chatbot personality matching vs mismatching and chatbot-and-brand-related outcomes.</li> </ul>
Wang, Ming, and Zhang (2020).	Journal of Cleaner Production	Green-product communication strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designing an advertisement with a warm animal anthropomorphic image is more likely to make consumers' positive responses than competent animal anthropomorphic images.</li> </ul>
Khenfer, Shepherd, and Trendel (2020)	Journal of Business Research	Customer empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When customers levels of competence were high, customer empowerment more likely to heighten a sense of social dominance and make them prefer an anthropomorphised brand (vs. non anthropomorphised brand). However, when customers level of competence was low or when they feel their competence was threatened, customers more likely to be annoyed with customer empowerment and they will prefer to avoid anthropomorphised brand.</li> </ul>

Zhang, Li, Ye, Qin, and Zhong (2020)	Journal of Consumer Behaviour	Brand distinctiveness	- Warm characteristics (and not competence) mediated the interaction effect of anthropomorphism and brand position on brand attitude.
Chang, Li, Yan and Kumar (2019)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Narrative person in social media advertising	- First person narration with warm characteristics more likely to gain more user likes. Because it fulfils the users motivation of social belonging. - On the other hand, third-person narration with competent images earn more likes by stimulating the motivation of self-enhancement.
Portal, Abratt, and Bendixen (2018)	Business Horizons	Human brand model	- The direction and tools that are required to build a human brand
Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit (2016)	Journal of Interactive Marketing	Consumers' online brand endorsements	- When the brand perceived as having warmth characteristics, either for profit or non-profit brands, they are more likely to receive online endorsements from consumers.

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### **Perceived Value and Brand Anthropomorphism**

Perceived value has long been a central focus of marketing research, attracting considerable attention (Hanaysha, 2018; Zeithaml, 1988). This concept has been explored from various angles, offering diverse interpretations. One perspective equates perceived value with price, suggesting that value is directly tied to the monetary cost of a product or service. Another



interpretation frames perceived value as the benefits consumers receive in exchange for the price they pay. A closely related perspective views perceived value as the trade-off between product quality and cost, emphasising the interplay of benefits and sacrifices in the consumer decision-making process. Together, these interpretations highlight the foundational role of value in shaping consumer choices. Finally, perceived value has also been conceptualised as a holistic evaluation of a product or service, reflecting subjective judgment and specific evaluation criteria (Pan & Kang, 2017; Zeithaml, 1988). In its narrowest sense, perceived value may be viewed as the price paid for a product or service. However, broader definitions, such as those proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (2016), conceptualise it as the total benefits consumers derive from using or owning a product. Hellier et al. (2003) further expands this view, defining perceived value as a consumer's comprehensive evaluation of a product's benefits relative to the time, effort, and money invested in obtaining it.

The significance of perceived value lies in its ability to explain how brands influence consumer perceptions and foster emotional connections. As de Chernatony and Dall'Omo Riley (1998) assert, the existence and relevance of a brand depend on its ability to create value through strategic marketing activities, which consumers interpret and internalise as perceptions. From the consumers' perspective, perceived value influences their assessment of a brand's utility and benefits, ultimately shaping brand image and expectations (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 1993). Widely regarded as a multidimensional construct, perceived value encompasses functional, social, and emotional dimensions (Sheth et al., 1991a, 1991b; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Functional value reflects a brand's ability to satisfy utilitarian needs, derived from attributes such as reliability, quality, and performance. Social value emerges from the brand's capacity to enhance self-concept and foster social affiliations. Emotional value stems from the brand's ability to evoke positive feelings and fulfil affective needs. Collectively,

these dimensions provide a nuanced framework for understanding how brands create meaningful consumer experiences.

In the context of brand anthropomorphism, perceived value gains additional complexity. Brand anthropomorphism refers to the process of imbuing brands with human-like characteristics, transforming them from passive entities into active participants in consumers' lives (Nguyen, Bui, & Ha, 2024; Kervyn et al., 2012; Kim & McGill, 2011; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). This strategy enhances consumer engagement by fostering trust, emotional connection, and relatability.

Brand anthropomorphism significantly enhances functional value by creating perceptions of competence, reliability, and capability. Research demonstrates that anthropomorphic elements, such as brand logos or characters, influence how consumers perceive a brand's ability to meet utilitarian needs. For instance, Daryanto et al. (2022) found that logos featuring culturally iconic figures, such as Sherlock Holmes, amplify perceptions of functional reliability by leveraging pre-existing cultural associations. This suggests that anthropomorphic branding not only humanises brands but also elevates their perceived utility, providing a foundation for trust and differentiation in competitive markets.

Beyond functionality, anthropomorphic branding strongly impacts social value by enabling consumers to express self-concept and establish social connections. Social value arises when brands symbolise group identity or cultural affiliation, fostering a sense of belonging. Han et al. (2023) demonstrated that anthropomorphic branding enhances perceptions of consumer-brand relationship commitment, which strengthens social bonds. By leveraging human-like traits, anthropomorphic brands facilitate social integration, creating shared significance within consumer communities.

Brand anthropomorphism also excels in enhancing emotional value by engaging consumers on a deeply personal level. Emotional value is created when brands evoke positive

emotions, foster attachment, or fulfil psychological needs. Anthropomorphic brands achieve this by presenting themselves as empathetic and relatable entities capable of understanding consumer emotions. Nguyen et al. (2024) emphasise that anthropomorphic branding strengthens emotional attachment by providing psychological comfort and reassurance. For example, Apple's "Get a Mac" campaign anthropomorphised Mac and PC computers as human characters, effectively highlighting their distinct personalities and creating relatable narratives. Similarly, the Michelin Man serves as a friendly, human-like representation of the Michelin brand, fostering emotional connections and making the brand more memorable (Guido & Peluso, 2015). Brand anthropomorphism's impact on perceived value extends beyond positive outcomes to potential challenges. Puzakova (2012) highlights that while anthropomorphism can foster emotional connections and loyalty, it may also result in negative consumer judgments when anthropomorphised brands face ethical failures or other wrongdoings. This complexity underscores the dual-edged nature of anthropomorphism, where favourable and unfavourable interactions influence consumer perceptions.

The mechanisms through which anthropomorphism shapes perceived value are mediated by constructs such as trust, attachment, and brand image. Fournier and Alvarez (2012) argue that trust plays a pivotal role, as consumers are more likely to rely on anthropomorphic brands exhibiting predictable and relatable behaviours. Emotional attachment further reinforces perceived value, transforming anthropomorphised brands into relational partners that foster long-term loyalty. However, the effects of anthropomorphism on perceived value are not universally consistent. Contextual factors such as cultural background, consumer personality, and product type significantly influence its effectiveness. Sharma and Rahman (2022) note that collectivist cultures respond more positively to anthropomorphic branding than individualist cultures, emphasizing the need for culturally tailored strategies.

Additionally, experiential goods often benefit more from anthropomorphic strategies than utilitarian products, given their emphasis on emotional and symbolic consumption.

Despite its growing prominence, several gaps remain in the literature. The long-term effects of anthropomorphism on perceived value are underexplored, as are its implications in digital contexts, such as AI-powered brand agents. Furthermore, the potential downsides of anthropomorphism, including consumer scepticism and brand fatigue, require further investigation to balance its benefits with potential risks.

In conclusion, brand anthropomorphism significantly enhances perceived value by influencing functional, social, and emotional dimensions. Its ability to humanise brands, evoke positive emotions, and foster social connections makes it a compelling strategy for building consumer trust and loyalty. However, its effectiveness depends on cultural, psychological, and contextual factors, necessitating nuanced and tailored approaches. This study contributes to the discourse by synthesising these insights and paving the way for future research and innovative applications in branding.

### 5.3 Hypotheses development

In the context of brand logo anthropomorphism, familiarity with iconic figures, alongside perceptions of brand competence and warmth, plays an essential role in shaping consumer perceptions and perceived brand value. This section examines how these elements interact to enhance the effectiveness of brand logos in generating meaningful associations and fostering consumer value.

#### **Icon Familiarity and Its Effect on Logo Association**

Prior research indicates that icon familiarity is a key factor in establishing strong logo associations (Daryanto et al., 2022). When brands incorporate familiar icons—such as

culturally significant or widely recognised figures—into their logos, they leverage pre-existing associations in the consumer’s mind. This familiarity encourages consumers to form immediate connections between the brand and the attributes associated with the icon. This effect is especially relevant with iconic figures like Sherlock Holmes, whose traits of intelligence, curiosity, and reliability are culturally ingrained. When consumers encounter a brand logo featuring such an icon, they are more likely to ascribe the icon’s attributes to the brand, creating a more immediate and resonant association.

The significance of familiarity in shaping consumer-brand associations is further supported by research on brand familiarity, which shows that familiar brands are more readily recalled, easily recognised, and favourably evaluated by consumers (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Campbell & Keller, 2003). Familiar logos act as cognitive shortcuts, allowing consumers to make quick assessments based on their existing knowledge and previous experiences. By embedding familiar icons in logos, brands can create a stronger brand identity that is both unique and immediately recognizable. This associative process enhances the logo’s role in effectively conveying the brand’s core identity to consumers.

Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

**H1: Icon familiarity is positively related to logo association**

**Stereotype Content Model (i.e., Brand Competence and Brand Warmth) as Mediating Variables Between Logo Association Level and Perceived Value**

The concept of brand competence, as defined within the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), includes attributes such as reliability, intelligence, and skill—qualities that reflect a brand’s perceived ability to fulfil its promises (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). These perceptions are fundamental to establishing consumer trust, as consumers are more inclined to feel secure with

brands they view as capable and skilled. Anthropomorphised logos featuring competence cues provide a cognitive “shortcut” that enables consumers to make swift assessments of a brand’s quality and dependability. When consumers encounter logos that evoke associations with competent, iconic figures, they may subconsciously transfer these qualities to the brand itself, reinforcing their perception of the brand as reliable and proficient (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012).

Logos that foster strong associations with competence-oriented icons enhance a brand’s reputation as a capable entity, which, in turn, positively influences consumers’ perceived value of the brand. From the perspective of signalling theory, brands can convey specific qualities, such as reliability and expertise, through design choices that incorporate competence cues (Spence, 1973). While a strong logo association can directly enhance perceived value by fostering familiarity and positive emotions, competence serves as a mediating factor that adds depth to this relationship.

Perceived value is a multidimensional construct, capturing a consumer’s overall assessment of a brand’s benefits relative to its costs. In the PERVAL model (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), competence drives functional value—a dimension of perceived value that reflects the brand’s usefulness, performance, and expected outcomes. Functional value is critical for consumers seeking quality and reliability, as it reassures them of the brand’s ability to meet their needs consistently and effectively. Research indicates that consumers assign greater value to brands they perceive as competent, viewing them as dependable and well-performing over time (Woodruff, 1997).

Additionally, competence perceptions enhance consumer trust, a foundational element of perceived value. Trust in a brand reduces perceived risk and uncertainty, increasing the likelihood that consumers will view the brand as a worthwhile investment. Trust is also crucial for fostering consumer-brand relationships, contributing to loyalty, satisfaction, and positive

word-of-mouth (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Logos that convey competence foster this trust, positioning the brand as a stable and reliable choice in the consumer's mind. Consequently, logos designed with recognisable competence cues not only strengthen brand association but also convey a sense of reliability. This dual impact suggests that competence amplifies the influence of logo associations on perceived value, making the brand appear both familiar and dependable.

By positioning competence as a mediator, we recognise that while logo associations contribute to brand recognition and positive perceptions, they may not fully account for perceived value without the added influence of competence. Consumers who perceive a brand as competent experience a strengthened link between logo associations and perceived value, as competence offers a cognitive basis for consumers to justify their positive assessments of the brand. In this way, competence enriches the perceived value derived from logo associations, leading consumers to attribute high functional value to brands they perceive as competent. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

**H2: Brand competence mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value.**

Within the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), brand warmth encompasses perceptions of friendliness, sincerity, and approachability (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Warmth serves a critical function in consumer perception, addressing the brand's intentions: is the brand well-intentioned and friendly toward its consumers? Brands perceived as warm are often viewed as more human, relatable, and community-oriented, which helps establish trust and cultivate a sense of partnership (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). This trust fosters deeper consumer-

brand relationships, positioning warm brands as partners rather than mere transactional entities (Fournier, 1998).

The theory of brand anthropomorphism supports this perspective, suggesting that logos designed with warm, human-like characteristics elicit positive emotions and facilitate affective connections with consumers. Logos that convey warmth activate schema-driven processes, where consumers draw on social cues to perceive the brand as approachable, trustworthy, and relatable (Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010). By infusing logos with warmth, brands can establish a foundation for emotional attachment, encouraging consumers to see the brand as an entity that values human connection and is committed to fostering long-term relationships. In the context of logo anthropomorphism, warmth is a key quality that humanises the brand and strengthens emotional connections with consumers. Logos incorporating familiar, human-like elements—such as approachable icons or relatable expressions—tend to evoke perceptions of warmth, making the brand appear more accessible, caring, and trustworthy (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). This emotional resonance is particularly relevant in today's marketplace, where consumers increasingly seek brands, they can connect with on a personal level, rather than merely as commercial providers (Aggarwal, & McGill, 2007).

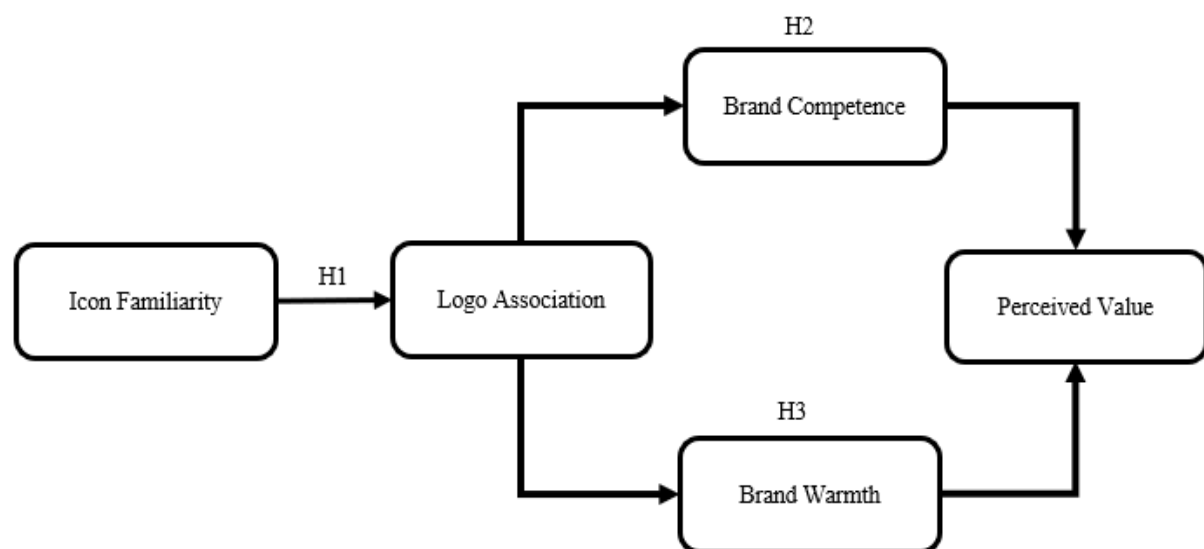
Brand warmth mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value by transforming familiarity and recognition into an emotional connection. While logo associations generated by recognisable figures or symbols establish familiarity and foster positive recall, warmth adds an affective dimension that deepens the consumer-brand connection. Logos designed with anthropomorphic elements that convey warmth not only reinforce associations with the brand but also elicit emotional responses that enhance perceived value. This occurs because warmth allows consumers to view the brand as an approachable partner that aligns with their emotional and social needs, ultimately elevating the brand's value assessment.



Warmth thus bridges logo association and perceived value, providing an emotional depth that converts mere recognition into meaningful connection. Through warmth, consumers come to see the brand not only as a provider of goods or services but as an entity with genuine, positive intentions toward them. Consequently, the brand becomes a source of both emotional and social satisfaction, boosting its perceived value and relevance in consumers' lives. We therefore hypothesise that:

**H3: Brand warmth mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value.**

In summary, the overall research framework is shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1** Research Framework

## 5.4 Research Method

### Overview of the present research

In this present research, we design logo anthropomorphism with an iconic character to test the effect of icon familiarity and the effect of logo association on the consumers' perceived brand

stereotype (i.e. perceived warmth and competence of the brand). We also examined whether consumers' perceived brand stereotypes mediated the effect of logo association on perceived value. The mediation analysis was performed using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) bootstrapping procedure with the standardised estimates of the mediation effects, as well as the 95% of confidence intervals. This SEM mediation analysis was carried out using AMOS 27.0.

### **Stimulus development**

We created three types of brand logos for a fictitious brand (see **Figure 2**). The creation of three distinct brand logo designs for the fictitious brand "PriceInvestigate.com" is a critical methodological step for this study. By designing logos with varying degrees of anthropomorphism—two anthropomorphic and one non-anthropomorphic—this study systematically explores how different visual elements influence consumer perceptions. This approach aligns with the core objective of the research: to understand the impact of logo anthropomorphism on brand warmth, competence, and perceived value, as informed by the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007) and prior work on logo anthropomorphism (Daryanto et al., 2022; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007).

Including three logo designs is essential for several reasons. First, it allows the study to test the nuanced effects of anthropomorphic elements on consumer evaluations. Anthropomorphic logos have been shown to evoke human-like associations that enhance perceptions of competence, trustworthiness, and emotional resonance (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011; Landwehr, McGill, & Herrmann, 2011). By varying the extent of anthropomorphism, the study can identify the optimal balance of design elements that maximise positive consumer responses while avoiding potential negative effects, such as cognitive dissonance or misinterpretation.

Second, this iterative approach is necessary to ensure the ecological and internal validity of the findings. Creating and testing multiple logos enables the study to isolate the most effective design, ensuring that the final logo resonates with the target audience and aligns with the research objectives. Pre-testing designs in this way aligns with branding literature emphasising that well-crafted logos significantly influence brand recognition, consumer trust, and overall brand performance (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Doyle & Bottomley, 2004).

Third, this approach contributes to the theoretical advancement of logo anthropomorphism research by addressing gaps in understanding how varying degrees of human-like cues in logos influence brand perception. Previous studies have largely focused on binary comparisons (e.g., anthropomorphic versus non-anthropomorphic), leaving unexplored the subtleties of incremental changes in anthropomorphic design. This study's inclusion of three logo designs fills this gap, offering insights into the gradient effects of anthropomorphic elements on brand warmth, competence, and perceived value (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012).

In conclusion, the creation of three logo designs is fundamental to the study's ability to generate meaningful insights. It provides a rigorous framework for testing hypotheses, ensures that the findings are both theoretically sound and practically applicable, and enhances the study's contribution to the literature on brand anthropomorphism and logo design. This approach underscores the importance of systematic design variation in uncovering the nuanced effects of visual branding strategies on consumer perceptions.

The brand was presented as that of a fictitious comparison website called "PriceInvestigate.com". Each logo used the tagline "PriceInvestigate.com gives you a better insurance deal". Additionally, each logo was designed using some elements associated with the iconic fictional private detective character of Sherlock Holmes. Two of the brand logos

were designed to be anthropomorphic, with the third brand logo designed with no anthropomorphism.

We chose the Sherlock Holmes character because it is an iconic character embedded in British society that serves the aim of the research as explained in the introduction. The brand logo design presented in **Figure 2a** has the most attributes that can be associated with Sherlock Holmes. In this brand logo design, we used the overcoat with a face-framing collar, a deerstalker cap and a magnifying glass. We then used a strapline in our logo to represent the unique selling point of the fictional brand we created for this research. The second brand logo design has fewer attributes that can be associated with Sherlock Holmes. In this brand logo design, we didn't use the overcoat with a face-framing collar and a deerstalker cap anymore but still used the magnifying glass and the strapline (see **Figure 2b**). The third brand logo design used even fewer attributes than that of the previous two brand logo designs (see **Figure 2c**). We only used the magnifying glass and the strapline.



**Figure 2** Brand logo designs used in the pre-test

We presented the three logos to participants who participated in an online survey ( $n = 33$ ) which they were invited to via Prolific. Of the participants, 61.3% are female, mean age is 33.26 ( $SD = 11.57$ ), 38.7% have a bachelor's degree and 25.8% have a college qualification. Participants were given a monetary compensation (£0.63) to reward their participation. In the

survey, participants were asked to indicate whether they know the Sherlock Holmes character (yes/no answer). Next, they were asked to select a brand logo design that was mostly associated with Sherlock Holmes. Out of the 33 participants, one participant was excluded because the participant failed to recognise the Sherlock Holmes character. The result shows that all participants selected **Figure 1a** as the most associated with Sherlock Holmes.

### **Logo association manipulation**

Based on results in the stimulus development stage above, **Figure 1a** was chosen by nearly all participants. In that stage, we used a choice option to tap the participants' preference. The drawback of using this method is that individuals' heterogeneity with respect to their evaluation of the brand logo is limited. To overcome this limitation, we now conduct another pre-test by using the brand logos in **Figure 1a** and **Figure 1b** to tap individuals' differences in their evaluation of the brand logos. **Figure 1a** represents a high level of logo anthropomorphism, integrating multiple visual elements associated with Sherlock Holmes, including the deerstalker cap, overcoat with a face-framing collar, and magnifying glass. This logo was designed to evoke a strong association with the iconic detective, thereby enhancing the perception of the brand's competence through its alignment with the character's intelligent and investigative traits. On the other hand, **Figure 1b** retains fewer attributes associated with Sherlock Holmes, as it excludes the cap and overcoat while keeping the magnifying glass and strapline. This design represents a moderate level of logo anthropomorphism, intended to evoke some degree of association without overwhelming the brand identity with too many Sherlockian elements. By including both logos in this stage, we aim to assess varying degrees of logo association to examine how different levels of anthropomorphism affect consumers' brand perceptions.

Using these two logos allows us to explore the gradient of logo anthropomorphism and its impact on brand association, specifically by capturing participants' evaluations across high and moderate levels of icon-related cues. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how logo elements contribute to brand perceptions and offers valuable insights into how logo anthropomorphism impacts perceived brand competence and warmth. In this second pre-test, participants were asked to evaluate each logo based on perceived associations with Sherlock Holmes and rate their perceptions of brand warmth and competence. This assessment provides a more robust measurement of individual differences in logo association, enabling a clearer understanding of how varying degrees of anthropomorphic elements influence consumer perceptions.

The second pre-test used participants who were invited to participate in an online survey using Prolific. The pre-test had 78 participants. 73.1% are female, mean age is 33.44 (SD = 13.72), 48.7% have a bachelor's degree and 32.1% have a high school diploma or equivalent qualification. Participants were given a monetary compensation (£0.75) to reward their participation. In the survey, participants were randomly assigned to view either **Figure 1a** (n = 45) or **Figure 1b** (n = 33). In both conditions, participants were asked to rate the degree to which each of the brand logo designs can be associated with Sherlock Holmes. We used two bipolar items, each rated with an 11-point scale: not at all associated - strongly associated, and not at all associated - very much associated. In addition to this measure, participants were also asked to respond to a series of statements to measure logo anthropomorphism, i.e. a consumer tendency to attribute human-like characteristics to a brand logo where the logo is designed in such a way as to intentionally convey human-like characteristics (Daryanto et al, 2022).

## Manipulation test result

The results of the pretest revealed that there is a significant difference in consumers' perception towards the brand logo association with Sherlock Holmes across the two conditions of the brand logo designs. Specifically, participants assigned to view **Figure 1a** (vs. **Figure 1b**) perceived the brand logo designs as more strongly associated ( $M_{\text{Figure 1A}} = 8.89$ ,  $M_{\text{Figure 1B}} = 6.67$ ,  $t(51) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.22$ ) and very much associated with Sherlock Holmes ( $M_{\text{Figure 1A}} = 8.89$ ,  $M_{\text{Figure 1B}} = 6.64$ ,  $t(54) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.30$ , highly anthropomorphised). Based on these results, for the main study, we selected **Figure 1a** to be used as stimulus of this present research.

## 5.5 Main Study

### Participants and Procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses, we targeted United Kingdom participants as the sample for this main study. We chose this sample because the aim of the study is to investigate the effect of logo association that was designed using an element from the iconic British character Sherlock Holmes. Using convenience sampling, we recruited a sample of six hundred and ninety-seven participants using an online survey that was distributed through Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing platform. We used this platform because it represents the European population (Stewart, Chandler, and Paolacci, 2017). Although we used a convenience sampling method, the sample for this present research was selected based on the screening procedure. Specifically, we excluded the participants that failed to answer the modified Instructional Manipulation Check (IMC) questions from the sample data. The study sample comprises 697 respondents, representing a diverse cross-section in terms of gender, education, and age (**Table 2**). The sample's demographic breakdown provides insights into the

representativeness and variability of the participants, which supports the generalisability of the study's findings.

**Table 2.** Demographic information

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	458	65.7%
Male	236	33.9%
Rather not say	3	0.4%
<b>Education Level</b>		
Bachelor's degree	272	39%
Doctoral degree	11	1.6%
High School diploma or equivalent	126	18.1%
Less than high school diploma	11	1.6%
Master's degree	89	12.8%
Some college	132	18.9%
Vocational/technical school (2 years)	56	8%

- Age average is 38.3 years old, and minimum age is 18 years old and maximum age is 75 years old and the standard deviation for the age is 12.8

Participants were given a monetary compensation (£0.75) and were told that the survey would take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The participants were asked to imagine that they were using the service from a brand of a fictional price comparison website. Participants were introduced to a fictional brand called PriceInvestigate.com. Participants were also introduced to the logo of this brand. The participants were then asked to read the following scenario:

***Please imagine that you are visiting this website***

*“You want to buy an insurance policy to cover your next holiday trip. You decide to use PriceInvestigate.com, which is a price comparison website. PriceInvestigate.com is a well-established company that has millions of visitors each month. PriceInvestigate.com promises customers better insurance deals. You visited the PriceInvestigate.com website, and you saw on the top left of the website the brand logo of the company as you can see below”.*



## **Assessment on non-response bias**

### **Measures**

After reading the scenario, the participants indicated their perception on how the brand logo of PriceInvestigate.com can be associated with Sherlock Holmes with two item semantic differential scales (e.g. “not at all associated (1) – strongly associated (11) and not at all associated (1) – very much associated (11)). Afterwards, participants then proceeded to another set of questions. We used self-developed items to measure logo association (four-item scale). We also include three items to measure icon familiarity (Daryanto et al, 2022). Icon familiarity measures the extent to which consumers are familiar with the iconic character used in our study. We also measured the participants’ warmth (four-item scale) and competence (four-item scale) perceptions of the brand logo. This measurement uses the scale adapted from a prior study (Fisket et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2020). The perceived values were measured using scales adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Kolbl et al., (2020). Specifically, there are three dimensions within the perceived values variable. These are: functional (five-item scale), emotional (five-item scale) and social (four-item scales). All items were measured using the seven-point Likert scale, with “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (7) as anchor points.

### **Screening procedure**

Although research to date has widely using many kinds of crowdsourcing platform (e.g. Prolific and MTurk), more recently there are some significant concerns, thoughts and questions regarding the quality of attention that the participants from this crowdsourcing platform have towards the study materials (i.e. the questions and answers on the online survey) (Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2013). While completing their task, participants in crowdsourcing platforms were not supervised, monitored, and were poorly compensated. Previous research

found that these participants have a tendency to skim through study materials and do not pay sufficient attention to the instructions. This can create data with poor reliability and validity (Oppenheimer, Meyvis and Davidenko, 2009; Goodman, Cyder and Cheema, 2013).

Therefore, to address these concerning issues, in this present study, we included an adapted IMC (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) in the questionnaire as part of the screening procedure. Specifically, we added one irrelevant statement in every measurement. We added this question in a random way, to test whether participants read and paid attention to the instructions in the questionnaire. For example, 'I like to run, even when its rains' was added in perceived brand stereotype – warmth. Two questions were also added to test our participants attentiveness to the instructions. These questions were: 'Please tick 'Agree'' and 'Please tick 'Disagree''. The participants were asked to respond to these questions with 7-point Likert Scale (i.e. Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (7)).

## **Assessment of measures**

### **Confirmatory factor analysis**

This present research runs a measurement model to assess the convergent and discriminant validity prior to the hypothesis testing by estimating the path relationships from a structural equation model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). We estimated the measurement model via a confirmatory analysis approach (CFA) (Using AMOS version 27.0). By conducting this analysis, we tested the reliability and validity of the psychometric properties of the scale used in the study (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012).

**Table 3** lists the standardised factor loadings and the composite reliability for the measurement model. We examined the standardised factor loadings of all items. All exceeded the Bagozi and Yi (2012) recommended threshold of 0.5 or higher, so convergent validity is

confirmed. **Table 3** also presents the composite reliability of each construct. We used the recommendation by Bagozzi and Yi (2012) that the cut-off values for composite reliability should be above the threshold of 0.70. The composite reliability for all measures exceeded the cut-off values. We also conducted a latent construct correlation analysis. This test was conducted to ensure how well the indicators measure the underlying constructs. We examined the discriminant validity by assessing the square root value of the average variance extracted (AVE). All the estimated numbers as shown in **Table 4** exceed the threshold recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which is 0.50. The data in **Table 4** suggests good internal consistency and convergent validity for all constructs, as evidenced by CR and AVE values. The correlations indicate meaningful relationships between constructs, particularly between brand-related perceptions (competence and warmth) and perceived values (functional, emotional, and social). The relatively low correlations involving SHF suggest that familiarity with Sherlock Holmes might not be strongly associated with other constructs in this study. This analysis provides a foundation for understanding how iconic elements in logos, such as those derived from well-known characters like Sherlock Holmes, can influence consumer perceptions of brand stereotypes and perceived values. After we conducted the test to check the reliability and validity of the psychometric properties of the scale used in the study, we also assessed the goodness-of-fits for the measurement model.

**Table 3.** Construct measures and results of second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

<b>Construct/ Items</b>	<b>CR/Loadings</b>
<b>Logo Association</b>	CR = 0.94
The logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes the fictional detective character.	0.95
The logo can easily imagine the Sherlock Holmes character	0.84
I associate the logo with Sherlock Holmes.	0.90
I am aware that the logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes	0.91
<b>Brand Stereotype:</b>	
<b>Brand Competence</b>	CR = 0.93
The logo represents a capable brand.	0.92
The logo represents a competent brand.	0.95

The logo represents an efficient brand.	0.83
The logo represents an intelligent brand.	0.81
<b>Brand Warmth</b>	CR = 0.89
The logo represents a friendly brand.	0.90
The logo represents a good-natured brand.	0.85
The logo represents a kind brand.	0.75
The logo represents a warm brand.	0.77
<b>Perceived Value</b>	CR = 0.84
<b>Perceived Functional Value</b>	0.87
The logo represents a brand with consistent quality.	0.87
The logo represents a brand with excellent service.	0.88
The logo represents a brand with acceptable standard of quality.	0.84
The logo can convey that the brand keeps its promises.	0.77
The logo can convey that the brand would perform consistently	0.78
<b>Perceived Emotional Value</b>	0.86
The logo represents a brand that can create a sense of enjoyment.	0.71
The logo represents a brand that can make me want to use their insurance offerings.	0.71
The logo represents a brand that can make me feel relaxed when I use their services.	0.79
The logo represents a brand that can make me feel good.	0.88
The logo represents a brand that is able to give me pleasure.	0.69
<b>Perceived Social Value</b>	0.65
The logo represents a brand that would help me to feel acceptable	0.82
The logo represents a brand that could improve the way I am perceived.	0.94
The logo represents a brand that could make a good impression about me on other people.	0.93
The logo represents a brand that could give its customer social approval	0.82
<b>Icon Familiarity</b>	CR = 0.78
I have seen the Sherlock Holmes films.	0.82
I am a fan of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.	0.87
<b>I am familiar with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes</b>	<b>0.48</b>

\*These items were measured using 7-point Likert-Scales. Fit indices:  $\chi^2 = 1130.67$ ,  $df = 360$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.14$ ; TLI = 0.95; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR=0.06.

**Table 4.** Latent construct correlation

	CR	AVE	LA	BC	BW	IF	PV
<b>LA</b>	0.94	0.81	<b>0.90</b>				
<b>BC</b>	0.93	0.78	0.19	<b>0.88</b>			
<b>BW</b>	0.89	0.67	0.05	0.59	<b>0.82</b>		
<b>IF</b>	0.78	0.55	0.23	0.12	0.09	<b>0.74</b>	
<b>PV</b>	0.84	0.64	0.13	0.76	0.75	0.16	<b>0.80</b>

Values in main diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE)

### **Common Method Bias**

In addition to the previous sections on how to address the concerns on a self-report measures survey instrument, this present research follows the suggestion by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003) to perform a common method bias assessment. According to previous literature, this assessment is needed to make sure that the result of the survey instruments on self-report measures is not threatened by common method bias.

For the high condition, to assess the degree of this potential threat, we conducted a Harman's one-factor test (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). The one-factor model yields a poor model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 3.65$ , CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06). In addition, we also performed Harman's single-factor test using SPSS. The result explained 37% of the common variance among the indicators, which ranged below the critical threshold of 50%. This provides evidence indicating that there is no significant common method bias in this study. To complement the statistical assessment, non-statistical techniques were also applied during the survey design to mitigate potential CMB. Specifically, irrelevant questions were inserted into the questionnaire to encourage participants to focus carefully and reduce the likelihood of response bias. For example, a question such as, "I like to run, even when it rains," was included to detect inattentive responses. Additionally, instructional manipulation checks (IMCs) were incorporated to ensure participants carefully read and followed the instructions. Together, these

measures—statistical and non-statistical—demonstrate a robust approach to minimizing the risk of CMB and ensuring the reliability and validity of the survey results.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics for Key Constructs

<b>Key Constructs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Manipulation Check	5.72	2.16
Logo Association	5.81	1.23
Logo Anthropomorphism	3.57	1.66
Brand Competence	4.61	1.05
Brand Warmth	4.23	1.00
Perceived Functional Value	4.39	0.94
Perceived Emotional Value	3.75	1.05
Perceived Social Value	3.26	1.26
Icon Familiarity	4.86	1.31
Brand Warmth	4.00	0.96
Perceived Functional Value	4.14	0.98
Perceived Emotional Value	3.58	1.05
Perceived Social Value	3.03	1.24
Icon Familiarity	4.75	1.27

## 5.6 Findings – Hypothesis Tests

To test the hypotheses of this study, we employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS 27.0. We examined the relationships between icon familiarity, logo association, brand competence, brand warmth, and perceived value. The SEM model tested the hypothesised direct and indirect effects, incorporating brand competence and warmth as mediators between logo association and perceived value. Below, we provide detailed findings for each hypothesis.

### **H1: Icon familiarity is positively related to logo association.**

Hypothesis 1 proposed that icon familiarity directly influences the level of logo association. The SEM analysis results confirmed this hypothesis, demonstrating a significant positive effect of icon familiarity on logo association ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $t = 5.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This outcome underscores

the power of familiar icons in strengthening brand logo associations by leveraging pre-existing knowledge and cultural associations. Specifically, when consumers encounter a brand logo incorporating elements reminiscent of an iconic figure—such as Sherlock Holmes—their familiarity with that character's attributes facilitates a stronger association with the brand. This connection is partly explained by schema theory, which suggests that individuals organise and interpret information based on pre-existing mental structures, or schemas. Familiar icons activate these schemas, allowing consumers to recognise the brand's intended qualities more readily. In this case, the Sherlock Holmes-inspired elements in the logo activate associations with traits such as intelligence, reliability, and problem-solving. Consumers, therefore, are more likely to transfer these traits to the brand, establishing a deeper, more immediate association.

Moreover, this finding aligns with associative learning theory, which posits that repeated exposure to an icon in various contexts strengthens the link between the icon and its characteristics. By embedding familiar icons into logos, brands benefit from the rich associative networks that consumers already have with these icons. Consequently, the brand logo is not merely a visual identifier but becomes a strategic cue that evokes the positive associations consumers hold with the icon itself. Thus, the data strongly support H1, indicating that icon familiarity plays a crucial role in enhancing logo association. By drawing on culturally ingrained symbols, brands can create logos that serve as powerful cognitive shortcuts, making it easier for consumers to connect with and remember the brand. This association-building process ultimately aids in reinforcing brand identity and fosters a lasting, memorable connection in the minds of consumers.

## **H2: Brand competence mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value.**

Hypothesis 2 posited that brand competence mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value. The results from our SEM analysis confirm this hypothesis, demonstrating a significant mediating role of brand competence in the model. Specifically, logo association was shown to positively influence brand competence ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 4.42$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and brand competence subsequently had a significant positive effect on perceived value ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $t = 6.96$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Further, the indirect effect of logo association on perceived value, mediated by brand competence, was also statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.074$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), providing robust evidence of the mediating role of brand competence. This finding suggests that when consumers associate a logo with attributes of competence—such as those conveyed by familiar and reliable icons—they are more likely to perceive the brand as valuable. This aligns with signalling theory, where brand logos are not merely aesthetic markers, but strategic symbols designed to communicate core brand qualities. Competence cues within the logo effectively serve as signals of brand reliability, expertise, and capability. Consumers interpret these cues, building an expectation that the brand can meet its promises, which directly enhances perceived value.

The mediating role of brand competence highlights its critical function in consumer perception, where it provides a cognitive framework through which logo associations are translated into assessments of brand value. When logos evoke competence, they do more than foster recognition; they establish an implicit trust in the brand's functional attributes, reliability, and expertise. Consequently, brand competence bridges logo association and perceived value by giving consumers a rationale for their positive evaluations, ultimately enriching the brand's perceived functional value. This effect underscores the multidimensional impact of brand competence as a mediator, positioning it as a vital pathway through which logo associations



contribute to overall brand value. Therefore, the results provide strong support for H2, confirming that brand competence mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived value. This finding has significant implications for brand strategy, suggesting that embedding competence cues in brand logos can serve as an effective approach to not only foster recognition but also enhance consumers' perceived value through strengthened perceptions of reliability and functional performance.

### **H3: Brand Warmth mediates the relationship between Logo Association and Perceived Value**

Hypothesis 3 proposed that brand warmth would mediate the relationship between logo association and perceived value. However, the results from our SEM analysis did not support this hypothesis. Specifically, the direct effect of logo association on brand warmth was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.055$ ,  $t = 1.28$ ,  $p = 0.277$ ), indicating a weak link between logo association and perceived warmth. Furthermore, the indirect effect of brand warmth on perceived value was also non-significant ( $\beta = 0.019$ ,  $p = 0.258$ ). These findings suggest that while logo associations may be effective in establishing familiarity and recognition, they do not necessarily evoke warmth perceptions within this particular brand context.

The lack of significant results implies that warmth, as an affective dimension, may require more direct emotional or relational brand cues that go beyond visual associations with familiar icons. Warmth in branding, as conceptualised in the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), encompasses qualities such as friendliness, sincerity, and approachability (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). However, simply associating a brand logo with a familiar icon, such as Sherlock Holmes, may not sufficiently evoke these affective attributes. Instead, warmth may require more personal, relational, or narrative-based elements to resonate with consumers on an

emotional level. For example, brand warmth is often effectively conveyed through interpersonal interactions, human-like customer service elements, or brand messaging that emphasises social and community-oriented values (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). These findings highlight that while logos designed with familiar cultural references may reinforce brand recognition, they may fall short in building emotional connections rooted in warmth. For consumers to perceive a brand as warm, additional cues—such as emotionally resonant brand communications, storytelling, or personified brand elements—may be necessary to foster a sense of approachability and genuine care. This insight aligns with existing literature suggesting that warmth perceptions in branding are more complex and multifaceted, often requiring cues that directly appeal to consumers' social and emotional needs (Aggarwal, & McGill, 2007).

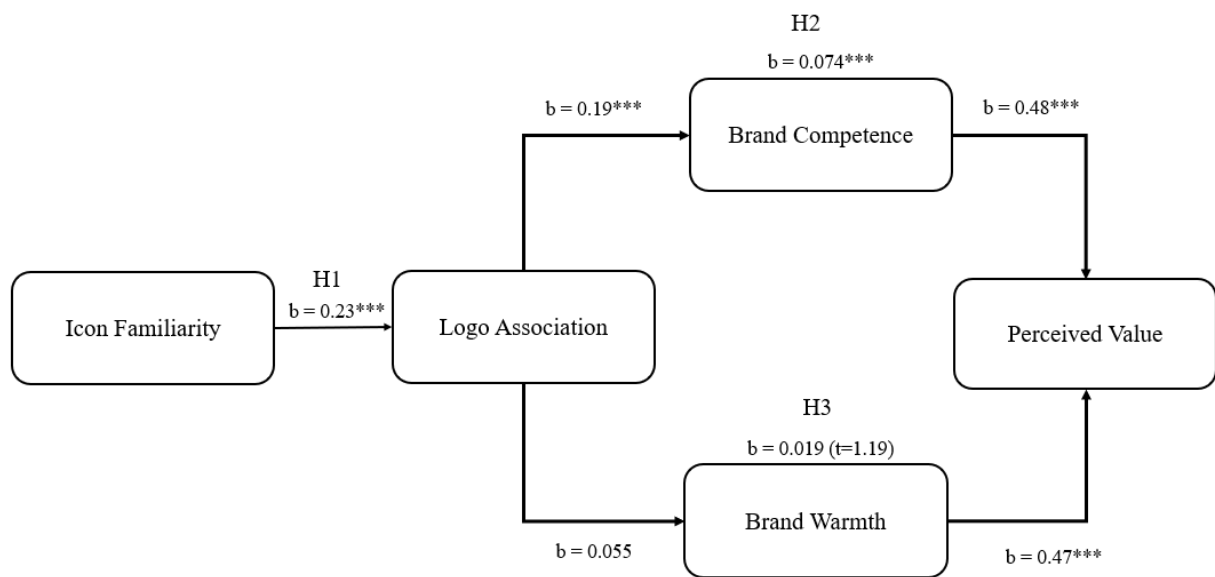
In conclusion, the results for H3 indicate that brand warmth does not mediate the relationship between logo association and perceived value in this study. These findings emphasise the limitations of using solely visual, icon-based associations to evoke warmth in branding. While familiarity-driven logo associations may enhance brand recognition, they do not appear sufficient for fostering the affective dimension of warmth. This suggests a need for more strategically crafted, emotionally engaging brand elements to effectively convey warmth, which in turn could enhance perceived value through deeper emotional connections with consumers

**Table 6.** The mediation effects

Path	Estimate (se)	p-value	CI: LL, UL
LA → BC → PV	<b>0.023</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>0.038, 0.108</b>
LA → BW → PV	0.016	0.258	-0.007, 0.044

Note: LA = Logo Association; BC = Brand Competence; BW = Brand Warmth;  
PV = Perceived Value

**Figure 3.** The model diagram. Fit indices:  $\chi^2 = 1138.89$ ,  $df = 364$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.13$ ; TLI = 0.95; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.055, SRMR=0.065



### 5.7 Results (Standardised path coefficients)

The analysis also showed several direct effects among the variables, as illustrated in the model diagram in **Figure 3**. Specifically, Icon Familiarity positively influenced Logo Association (effect = 0.23, 95% CI [0.16, 0.30],  $p < 0.01$ ,  $t = 5.20$ ). Logo Association was a significant predictor of Brand Competence (effect = 0.19, 95% CI [0.12, 0.26],  $p < 0.01$ ,  $t = 4.42$ ) but had no

significant effect on Brand Warmth (effect = 0.055, 95% CI [-0.023, 0.122],  $p=0.277$ ,  $t=1.28$ ). Furthermore, both Brand Competence and Brand Warmth were strong predictors of Perceived Value, with Brand Competence (effect = 0.48, 95% CI [0.36, 0.58],  $p<0.01$ ,  $t=6.96$ ) and Brand Warmth (effect = 0.47, 95% CI [0.37, 0.55],  $p<0.01$ ,  $t=8.87$ ) exhibiting significant positive relationships.

The analysis of the direct effects provides valuable insights into the relationships among the key constructs in this study. Specifically, **Figure 3** demonstrates how Icon Familiarity significantly influences Logo Association, emphasising the critical role of culturally familiar symbols in creating strong brand associations. Furthermore, the analysis highlights that Logo Association significantly enhances perceptions of Brand Competence, aligning with the view that effective logo design can effectively convey a brand's functional reliability and dependability. While Logo Association does not significantly impact Brand Warmth, both Brand Competence and Brand Warmth are identified as crucial predictors of Perceived Value. These findings underscore the importance of competence-driven logo design in shaping consumer perceptions of value. This study advances the theoretical framework by demonstrating that anthropomorphic elements in logos, particularly those emphasizing competence, play a pivotal role in influencing consumer perceptions of brand value. These results contribute to the literature by reinforcing the strategic importance of logo design in fostering meaningful brand associations and enhancing perceptions of brand competence, ultimately elevating perceived value.

## 5.8 General discussion

The present study contributes to the growing body of research on brand anthropomorphism by examining the intricate relationship between anthropomorphic brand logos, perceived brand

warmth and competence, and their subsequent impact on consumer perception of brand value. Building upon the foundational theories of brand anthropomorphism and the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), this research empirically tests how icon familiarity and logo association influence perceived brand stereotypes and, in turn, their effect on perceived brand value. Our findings provide partial support for the proposed hypotheses, highlighting the nuanced ways in which anthropomorphic elements in logos shape consumer perceptions.

This study finds a positive effect of logo anthropomorphism, as explained through the concept of icon familiarity. The results indicate that icon familiarity has a significant and positive influence on logo association, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. This suggests that positive associations with brand values in consumers' minds can be shaped through the process of "borrowing" associations from pre-existing iconic characters that consumers are already familiar with. These characters, having become cultural icons, serve as reference points in shaping brand perceptions. In this study, the character of Sherlock Holmes exemplifies such an iconic cultural figure. This finding supports the idea that when consumers encounter a brand logo featuring a widely recognised anthropomorphic figure, their pre-existing cultural and symbolic associations become integral to their evaluation of the brand. The stronger the familiarity with an iconic figure, the more pronounced the competence associations attributed to the brand become. This aligns with previous research suggesting that well-established anthropomorphic brand elements—such as the Michelin Man or the Geico Gecko—serve as mental shortcuts that reinforce brand meaning and trust (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Campbell & Keller, 2003). The findings further suggest that strategically embedding culturally significant anthropomorphic cues in brand logos can optimise consumer brand evaluations by leveraging pre-existing knowledge and associations. This supports the notion that brand anthropomorphism, particularly in the case of logo anthropomorphism, is not merely a visual branding strategy; rather, it is deeply embedded in consumer cognition and cultural

frameworks. The cultural embeddedness of brand anthropomorphism, while still underexplored in branding research, emerges as a crucial factor influencing consumer-brand relationships.

Furthermore, the findings align with prior research, which suggests that one of the key benefits of designing brand logos with anthropomorphic features is that they enhance consumers' processing fluency, making it easier for them to comprehend and associate meaning with a brand logo (Song & Schwartz, 2009). According to Labroo and Lee (2006) and Whittlesea (1993), processing fluency refers to a consumer's ability to easily or effortlessly process a given stimulus. This concept provides an explanation for why Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data: an iconic character embedded within a brand logo enhances consumers' ability to comprehend brand associations. When consumers encounter a brand logo associated with Sherlock Holmes, they are more likely to perceive the brand's message and associations as clear, familiar, and easily understood. This occurs because consumers attribute this ease of recognition to actual or imagined prior exposure, such as through reading Sherlock Holmes novels or watching adaptations of the character in films or television series (Labroo & Lee, 2006; Whittlesea, 1993; Payne, Hyman, Niculescu, & Huhmann, 2013).

A key insight from this study is the confirmation that anthropomorphic brand logos elicit both cognitive and affective responses that align with the dual dimensions of warmth and competence. These findings are consistent with prior research, which suggests that humanising brands enables consumers to ascribe social traits to them. Specifically, this study confirms Hypothesis 2, indicating that brand competence serves as a mediator in the relationship between logo association and perceived brand value. The use of familiar anthropomorphic cues in brand logos—particularly those grounded in cultural or symbolic associations—enhances brand competence perceptions. The results suggest that when a brand logo features an iconic human-like figure, such as Sherlock Holmes, it strengthens consumer associations with

intelligence, reliability, and expertise. This reinforces the dominance of competence-based associations over warmth-driven impressions in mediating the relationship between logo anthropomorphism and perceived brand value.

These findings align with prior research on SCM, which suggests that the competence dimension is associated with a brand's ability to deliver on its promises, encompassing perceptions of expertise, efficiency, and reliability (Fiske et al., 2007). Moreover, this result agrees with Daryanto et al. (2022), who found that anthropomorphic brand logos influence competence perceptions, particularly when brands incorporate culturally embedded human-like figures. Similarly, Bennett et al. (2013) demonstrated that anthropomorphised product spokes characters (e.g., Mr. Clean, Michelin Man) enhance competence perceptions by signalling reliability and expertise. These effects are particularly evident in product categories where technical skill and performance are key attributes, such as automotive, financial services, and technology brands.

In contrast to the strong mediating effect of competence, the findings revealed no significant support for Hypothesis 3, which proposed that brand warmth mediates the relationship between logo association and perceived brand value. The results indicate that logo associations alone were insufficient to elicit strong warmth perceptions, suggesting that warmth may require additional relational or emotional cues beyond visual and symbolic elements in a logo. This finding is in line with previous research suggesting that warmth in branding is more effectively conveyed through narrative-based or relational strategies (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). One possible explanation is that warmth as a brand attribute is more inherently tied to personal, human-like interactions and emotional storytelling, rather than static visual design elements. Guo, Liu, and Zhang (2022) argue that brands can cultivate warmth through socially oriented interactions with consumers, such as personalised communication, customer service experiences, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This aligns with Kervyn,

Fiske, and Malone's (2012) Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), which suggests that competence perceptions can be formed passively through observable brand elements such as logos and product design, whereas warmth perceptions require active relational engagement.

This study highlights the growing importance of brand anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly through culturally embedded anthropomorphic brand logos. More specifically, the findings emphasise the role of cultural familiarity in strengthening competence perceptions, ultimately influencing perceived brand value. The research further confirms that competence signals embedded in brand logos function as cognitive shortcuts, while warmth necessitates more interactive and relational engagement. As branding continues to evolve in an increasingly competitive and visually saturated marketplace, anthropomorphic branding strategies will remain a crucial avenue for reinforcing brand meaning and trust. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer-brand interactions, offering insights into the complex interplay between cognitive, cultural, and social dimensions of brand perception.

## 5.9 Theoretical implications

This research makes several significant theoretical contributions to the expanding literature on brand anthropomorphism, particularly in the context of logo anthropomorphism. First, this study advances the understanding of brand anthropomorphism by introducing and empirically testing the concept of icon familiarity. This concept captures the extent to which consumers recognise and associate a brand logo with a culturally embedded iconic character. The findings reveal that logo anthropomorphism extends beyond cognitive processing and branding strategies; it is also deeply rooted in cultural elements. Specifically, brands can anthropomorphise their logos by incorporating visual elements inspired by highly recognisable



cultural figures, effectively borrowing their symbolic meanings. This study demonstrates that icon familiarity significantly enhances logo association, reinforcing the role of culturally iconic figures in shaping consumer perceptions. Moreover, it highlights that brand anthropomorphism is not merely a consumer-driven cognitive process or a strategic branding tool—it is a holistic phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, including cultural familiarity. Given the limited attention to the role of cultural and iconic elements in brand anthropomorphism, this research provides a novel theoretical perspective by integrating cultural semiotics into brand anthropomorphism research.

Second, this study contributes to brand stereotype research by offering insights into how brand competence and warmth differentially mediate consumer perceptions. While brand competence was found to significantly mediate the relationship between logo association and perceived value, brand warmth did not exhibit a similar effect. This finding provides important theoretical refinements to the application of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) in branding, demonstrating that anthropomorphised logos primarily enhance perceptions of competence rather than warmth. This distinction suggests that competence-related attributes—such as expertise, reliability, and intelligence—are effectively conveyed through logos inspired by iconic figures associated with these traits (e.g., Sherlock Holmes). In contrast, warmth perceptions may require additional emotional or relational cues, such as brand storytelling or direct consumer interactions. This discovery extends prior research by illustrating that logo anthropomorphism does not universally enhance both warmth and competence but rather has nuanced effects depending on the nature of the anthropomorphic elements used.

Third, this research expands the scope of brand anthropomorphism theory by shifting the focus from broader brand or product anthropomorphism to logo anthropomorphism. Unlike previous studies that emphasise anthropomorphism in brand mascots, advertising characters, or product design, this study identifies the logo as a critical site of anthropomorphic brand

meaning. By conceptualising the logo as a potent carrier of human-like characteristics, this study broadens the theoretical framework of brand anthropomorphism, demonstrating that logos can serve as strategic brand assets that reinforce brand identity and consumer-brand relationships. This perspective contributes to the growing discourse on visual branding strategies, offering empirical support for the argument that logos play a fundamental role in shaping brand perceptions through anthropomorphic design choices.

Ultimately, this research advances the literature on brand anthropomorphism, stereotype theory, and logo design by demonstrating that logos designed with familiar, iconic anthropomorphic elements can enhance brand competence perceptions and perceived value. Furthermore, by integrating cultural semiotics into brand anthropomorphism research, this study offers a new theoretical lens through which researchers and practitioners can better understand the mechanisms through which logos influence consumer perceptions. These insights pave the way for future research exploring how different degrees of anthropomorphism in logos impact consumer responses across diverse cultural and market contexts.

## 5.10 Managerial implications

This study offers several important managerial implications for brand managers and business owners looking to strategically design brand logos that enhance consumer perceptions and reinforce brand value. The findings underscore the critical role of logo anthropomorphism, particularly through the use of culturally iconic figures, in shaping consumer responses to brand identity. One key takeaway is the importance of leveraging familiar cultural icons to strengthen brand association and identity. The results demonstrate that incorporating well-recognised figures—such as Sherlock Holmes—into brand logos significantly enhances logo association and perceived competence. This suggests that brands can borrow the credibility, expertise, and

symbolism of established cultural figures to quickly convey desirable brand traits. This approach is particularly effective for brands operating in high-competition markets, where differentiation is crucial. Brand managers should carefully select iconic elements that align with their brand values and ensure that these elements evoke the desired associations in consumers' minds. However, reliance on cultural icons should be executed with authenticity and strategic intent to avoid misalignment with the brand's core messaging.

Additionally, the study highlights that brand competence, rather than warmth, is the primary mechanism through which logo anthropomorphism influences perceived value. This finding is particularly relevant for brands in industries where reliability, expertise, and functionality are key drivers of consumer decision-making, such as financial services, healthcare, and technology. Brands seeking to establish themselves as competent and trustworthy should focus on designing logos that reflect precision, intelligence, and reliability, potentially drawing inspiration from culturally recognised symbols of expertise. For example, incorporating elements associated with investigative intelligence (e.g., magnifying glass, structured geometric forms, clean typography) can enhance perceptions of brand competence and functional value.

On the other hand, the results indicate that logo anthropomorphism alone is not sufficient to foster perceptions of warmth. While warmth is a critical dimension in branding—especially for businesses that rely on emotional connections, customer loyalty, and community engagement—this study suggests that logos alone may not effectively communicate warmth to consumers. Brand managers aiming to project warmth and approachability should complement logo design with other relational branding strategies. These include brand storytelling, human-centred marketing campaigns, personalised customer engagement, and community-driven initiatives that reinforce warmth beyond visual branding elements. For instance, brands can use

social media interactions, customer service experiences, and advertising narratives to humanise their brand further and enhance emotional connections with consumers.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the holistic nature of brand anthropomorphism, suggesting that effective brand humanisation requires an integrated approach. A well-designed logo with anthropomorphic elements should be supported by consistent brand messaging, product design, and service experiences that collectively reinforce the desired consumer perceptions. Brands must ensure alignment across all consumer touchpoints—from logo design to advertising and customer interactions—to maintain cohesive and impactful brand communication. Finally, cultural considerations play a pivotal role in the effectiveness of logo anthropomorphism. The study finds that icon familiarity significantly influences consumer perception, implying that brands must be mindful of cultural context and audience familiarity when choosing anthropomorphic elements. For international brands or those expanding into new markets, it is essential to assess whether certain cultural symbols carry the same level of recognition and positive association across different demographics. Conducting market research and consumer testing can help brand managers determine which anthropomorphic elements will resonate most effectively with their target audience while ensuring cultural sensitivity and relevance.

In conclusion, this research provides brand managers with practical strategies to enhance brand perception through logo anthropomorphism. By incorporating culturally iconic figures, emphasising competence-related attributes, and complementing logos with warmth-building brand communications, brands can strengthen their identity, improve perceived value, and foster deeper consumer engagement. Future branding strategies should adopt a holistic perspective, ensuring that logo design is seamlessly integrated with broader marketing and consumer experience initiatives.

### 5.11 Limitations and Future directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of logo anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perceptions, several limitations present opportunities for further research. First, the study employed a single hypothetical logo inspired by the Sherlock Holmes character to examine consumer responses to anthropomorphised logos. While this choice was strategic in leveraging a well-recognised cultural icon with strong competence-related associations, it inherently limits the generalisability of findings to other anthropomorphic logos. Future research should examine a broader range of anthropomorphised logos, including those featuring real-world figures and corporate mascots (e.g. Michelin Man, Mr. Clean). Additionally, future studies could investigate the effects of logo anthropomorphism using icon familiarity, where the chosen character extends beyond a single regional context (e.g. the UK) to a more global scale. For instance, well-known international brand icons such as Ronald McDonald (McDonald's) or Colonel Sanders (KFC) could be examined to explore how globally recognised characters are perceived and associated with specific brand values by consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This would provide deeper insights into the role of cultural context in shaping consumer-brand relationships through logo anthropomorphism.

Second, this study operationalised logo anthropomorphism primarily through static visual elements, such as shape, form, and iconic references. However, anthropomorphism in branding extends beyond static visual cues to include motion, animation, and interactivity. Research in consumer psychology suggests that dynamic and animated brand logos may further enhance engagement and memorability by reinforcing human-like qualities (Cian et al., 2014; Brasel & Hagtvedt, 2016). Future research should explore the impact of animated anthropomorphic logos, such as those used in digital advertising, mobile applications, or AI-driven brand avatars, to assess how movement and interactivity influence brand perceptions, emotional connection, and consumer engagement.

Third, this study primarily examined consumer perceptions of logo anthropomorphism in relation to perceived value and brand stereotypes (competence and warmth), but did not explore other key relational dimensions such as brand trust, loyalty, and attachment. Anthropomorphic brand elements are known to facilitate long-term brand relationships by fostering perceived trustworthiness and emotional attachment (Fournier, 1998). Future research could examine how anthropomorphised logos influence these relational constructs over time, particularly in contexts where brand loyalty and trust are critical, such as financial services, healthcare, and high-involvement consumer products. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate whether consumer perceptions of anthropomorphic logos evolve with repeated exposure and brand experiences, shedding light on the durability and long-term effectiveness of logo anthropomorphism as a branding strategy.

Fourth, this research examined logo anthropomorphism in an isolated brand context, without considering how it interacts with other brand touchpoints. In real-world branding, logos do not function in isolation but are embedded within a broader brand ecosystem that includes advertising, product packaging, customer service, and digital platforms. Future studies could investigate how logo anthropomorphism interacts with brand messaging, advertising narratives, and in-store experiences to create a holistic brand identity. Additionally, social media branding represents an increasingly relevant context for logo anthropomorphism, as logos often serve as brand avatars in digital interactions. Research could explore how anthropomorphic logos influence consumer engagement on social media platforms, where brands "speak" and "interact" with consumers in a more dynamic and personalised manner.

Fifth, a critical yet underexplored aspect of logo anthropomorphism is the role of gendered brand associations. Recent research by Yang and Aggarwal (2025) reveals that consumers tend to assign gender-based expectations to anthropomorphised brands, which in

turn shape their perceptions, expectations, and acceptance of a brand's actions and communications. Their findings indicate that brands perceived as female face stronger constraints due to gender stereotypes than their male counterparts. Consequently, when female-branded anthropomorphised logos engage in counter-stereotypical behaviours, they are more likely to encounter resistance from consumers. This insight is crucial for future research, as it highlights the potential barriers that gendered anthropomorphism may create in brand positioning and consumer engagement. While this study contributes to our understanding of how logo anthropomorphism influences consumer perception, particularly through icon familiarity and logo associations, it does not explicitly examine the role of gendered anthropomorphism in shaping brand stereotypes. Therefore, future research should build on these findings by investigating how gendered cues in logo anthropomorphism interact with consumer expectations. Specifically, further exploration is needed to determine whether gendered anthropomorphic logos face similar constraints as fully anthropomorphised brand mascots and whether consumers impose stricter gender-based expectations on them.

Additionally, future research should extend this analysis to real-world brand cases, particularly those that have shifted from traditionally masculine branding toward a more feminine or gender-neutral image. A notable example is Admiral Insurance, which has transitioned away from its stereotypically masculine naval admiral character in its branding and advertisements toward a more inclusive and approachable brand persona. Investigating this phenomenon would offer valuable insights into whether an anthropomorphised logo perceived as feminine faces greater challenges in gaining consumer trust in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as insurance or finance. Future research could explore how altering the gender representation of anthropomorphised brand characters, such as brand logos or mascots, influences consumer perceptions of warmth, competence, and reliability. For instance, does removing gender cues altogether enhance consumer acceptance, or does a clear gender identity

reinforce brand positioning in certain market segments? Addressing these questions would provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the intersection between gender and anthropomorphism in branding, enabling brands to optimise their strategic positioning, consumer engagement, and long-term brand equity.

Finally, future research should also explore the potential unintended consequences of logo anthropomorphism. While anthropomorphic logos enhance consumer perceptions of brand competence, they may also introduce risks such as leading consumers to develop unrealistic expectations about the brand's values. One key risk is that consumers may attribute human-like traits to anthropomorphised logos, expecting the brand to behave in ways consistent with those traits. Research by Puzakova et al. (2013) indicates that when brands are anthropomorphised, they are perceived as possessing intentionality, making them more susceptible to negative consumer reactions if their actions do not align with consumer expectations. For instance, if an anthropomorphised brand projects an image of warmth and friendliness but then engages in behaviour perceived as contradictory—such as prioritising profit over consumer well-being—this can lead to consumer disappointment, diminished trust, and even a sense of betrayal. The humanisation of the brand creates an emotional bond that is more easily disrupted by negative experiences than with non-anthropomorphised brands, as consumers feel they have been let down by a brand that was expected to “care” for them like a person. Moreover, anthropomorphic logos that emphasise emotional connections may make consumers more sensitive to brand failures.

## 5.12 Conclusion

Given the prominence of brand anthropomorphism theory in the branding literature, the primary goal of this research was to begin the conversation about the importance of



anthropomorphism in the design of a brand's logo. This study provides empirical insights into the impact of logo anthropomorphism on consumer perceptions, specifically through the use of familiar, iconic elements within brand logos. By focusing on how these anthropomorphised logos influence perceptions of brand stereotypes—competence and warmth—and their subsequent effect on perceived brand value, the research extends the current understanding of brand anthropomorphism. The findings underscore the significance of icon familiarity in enhancing logo association, with familiar icons, like Sherlock Holmes, reinforcing brand competence and functional value. This connection suggests that iconic cues in logos can act as cognitive shortcuts, enabling consumers to quickly associate specific qualities with the brand. While brand competence effectively mediated the relationship between logo association and perceived value, brand warmth did not demonstrate a similar effect, highlighting the differential impact of brand stereotypes. These results suggest that while logos with competence-related icons can reinforce perceptions of reliability and value, warmth might require additional relational or emotional cues to resonate fully with consumers.

In conclusion, this study contributes to branding literature by clarifying the distinct roles that competence and warmth play in consumer perceptions of anthropomorphised logos. The results suggest that brands seeking to enhance consumer engagement and perceived value should carefully consider the design elements within their logos, particularly when incorporating familiar, iconic imagery. Future research should continue exploring the nuanced effects of logo anthropomorphism across diverse contexts and cultural settings to broaden the applicability of these findings.

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## **Appendix**

### **A. Survey Questionnaire – Main Study**

#### **Part one: Introduction**

Welcome

#### **Dear respondent**

My name is Gilang Widya Kartika.

I am a PhD student in the Marketing Department at Lancaster University Management School, and I am conducting a study about brand logo.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire.

Please answer all the questions. The questionnaire should **take around 10-15 minutes** to complete. Please note that it is not possible to return to a page once it has been completed. When you arrive at the final 'thank you' page, you will know that your responses have been recorded in our database. Once you click the link below you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

#### **Data Protection**

Before you start the survey, please read this privacy statement, which tells you how any personal data you submit with your responses to this survey will be utilized and protected, and the rights you have in relation to it.

The researcher will not identify any individuals when reporting the results both internally and externally and will ensure that no individual can be identified by implication. After you finish the survey, the result will only be used by the researcher and researcher's supervisory team. The researcher will keep all your personal information confidential, that is the researcher will not share it with others. The researcher will remove any personal information from the written record of the participant's contribution.

The participants' data will be stored in encrypted files and on password-protected computers. The researcher will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in her office. The researcher will keep data that can identify the participants separately from non-personal

information (e.g. participant views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, the researcher will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. The data collected is completely anonymous and will be used only in aggregated form to complete my research.

If you understand the above information and wish to participate, please click the arrow below to confirm that you consent to any personal data you provide being used in the way described (if you do not consent then please close this browser window to exit the survey).

You can contact me at **[g.kartika@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:g.kartika@lancaster.ac.uk)** for more information if you wish.

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research you can also contact:

**Professor Gillian Hopkinson**

as the Head of Marketing Department, Department of Marketing  
Lancaster University Management School

Email at : [g.hopkinson@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:g.hopkinson@lancaster.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your help with this.

To participate with this study, please click on the button below.

☐ Click **here** to go to the main survey

Q1 Please enter your Prolific ID:

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**Part two: The Questions**

**Q2**

**Please imagine that you are visiting this website**

You want to buy an insurance policy to cover your next holiday trip. You decide to use PriceInvestigate.com, which is a price comparison website. PriceInvestigate.com is a well-established company that has millions of visitors each month. PriceInvestigate.com promises customers better insurance deals. You visited the PriceInvestigate.com website, and you saw on the top left of the website the brand logo of the company as you can see below.

Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.



Please indicate the extent to which the following logo can be associated with Sherlock Holmes.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Not at all associated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly associated
Not at all associated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much associated

Q3 Logo Association

Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below: (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 =

Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

The logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes, the fictional detective character.

The logo can easily imagine the Sherlock Holmes character.

Cooking should be taught at school.

I associate the logo with Sherlock Holmes.

I am aware that the logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes.

#### **Q4 Logo Anthropomorphism**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo is alive (like a person)

The logo has humanlike qualities.

The logo has a mind of its own.

The logo has the ability to experience emotions.

Please tick 'Disagree'

The logo has consciousness.

The logo looks human-like.

The logo is life-like.

The logo has a human-like appearance.

### **Q5 Brand Stereotype – Brand Competence**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo represents a capable brand.

The logo represents a competent brand.

I love to use social media every day.

The logo represents an efficient brand.

The logo represents an intelligent brand.

### **Q6 Brand Stereotype – Brand Warmth**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo represents a friendly brand.

The logo represents a good-natured brand.

I like to run, even when it rains.

The logo represents a kind brand.

The logo represents a warm brand.

### **Q7 Perceived Values – Perceived Functional Values**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).



The logo represents a brand with consistent quality. (1)

The logo represents a brand with excellent service. (2)

The logo represents a brand with an acceptable standard of quality. (7)

The logo can convey that the brand keeps its promises.

My favourite colour is blue

The logo can convey that the brand would perform consistently.

### Q8 Perceived Emotional Values

Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.



P

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo represents a brand that can create a sense of enjoyment.

The logo represents a brand that can make me want to use their insurance offerings.

The logo represents a brand that can make me feel relaxed when I use their services.

The logo represents a brand that can make me feel good.

Detective characters are better than superhero characters.

The logo represents a brand that is able to give me pleasure.



### **Q9 Perceived Social Values**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo represents a brand that would help me to feel acceptable.

The logo represents a brand that could improve the way I am perceived.

The logo represents a brand that could make a good impression about me on other people.

A cup of coffee is better than a cup of tea.

The logo represents a brand that could give its customer social approval

### **Q10 Icon Familiarity**

**Please look at the fictitious brand logo below.**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

I have read the Sherlock Holmes novels.

I have seen the Sherlock Holmes films.

I am a fan of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.

I am familiar with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.

I am not familiar at all with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.

Please tick 'Agree'

### **Q11 Respondent Characteristics**

**What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Rather not say (3)

**Q12 Please indicate the year in which you were born: eg. 1980**

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**Q13 What is the highest level of qualification you have completed?**

- ☐ Less than high school diploma (1)
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent (2)
- ☐ Vocational/technical school (2 year) (3)
- ☐ Some college (4)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (5)
- ☐ Master's degree (6)
- ☐ Doctoral degree (7)

**Q14 In which country do you currently reside?**

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (195)

Thanks for your participation in this study.

## **Chapter 6. The Anthropomorphic Brand Logo: Impact of Icon Familiarity on Logo Associations, Brand Disappointment, and Brand Betrayal**

### **Abstract**

This study examines the impact of icon familiarity on logo association and explores how these factors shape consumer perceptions of negative brand experience. Specifically, it investigates whether logo anthropomorphism designed with associations to culturally iconic characters in the UK (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) influences whether brand failures are perceived as mere disappointment (i.e. brand disappointment) or escalates into a sense of betrayal (i.e. brand betrayal). Furthermore, this research explores whether this transition from disappointment to betrayal occurs as a sequential process, analysing the mediating role of brand disappointment in the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. This study offers new insights into the effects of logo anthropomorphism, particularly in situations where brands fail to meet consumer expectations. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse data collected from 642 participants in the United Kingdom via an online survey. The findings reveal that icon familiarity positively influences logo association, reinforcing the role of cultural branding in shaping brand perceptions. Additionally, logo association significantly predicts brand disappointment, suggesting that even the mere presence of a brand logo can influence consumer perceptions of brand negative experience. However, while logo association did not directly predict brand betrayal, the results show that brand disappointment mediates the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. This indicates that disappointment acts as a crucial emotional bridge in the escalation from brand wrongdoings to brand betrayal. The study extends prior research on brand anthropomorphism by demonstrating the effect of logo anthropomorphism designed with culturally familiar icons on logo association in situations where the brand commits a mistake.

**Keywords:** Brand logo; Logo Anthropomorphism; Icon Familiarity; Logo Association; Brand Disappointment; Brand Betrayal; Service Failures; Deal Proneness; Price Sensitivity

## 6.1 Introduction

Brand anthropomorphism has become a prevalent phenomenon in consumers' daily lives (Wan & Aggarwal, 2015). Marketers encourage consumers to view brands as more than just names or logos by imbuing them with human-like characteristics—personality traits, emotions, and behaviours—that make these brands relatable and engaging (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). Numerous brands have embraced this approach by creating recognisable mascots such as Mr. Peanut, Tony the Tiger, the Michelin Man, the Pillsbury Doughboy, and the Geico Gecko, while others adopt names that evoke person-specific roles, such as Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben's, or Dr. Pepper (Wan & Aggarwal, 2015).

The process of brand anthropomorphism involves several key steps. First is assigning human traits to a brand to make it appear as if it possesses feelings, thoughts, and intentions. Next, storytelling plays a crucial role, as narratives allow consumers to connect with the brand on an emotional level. This is seen in early examples like the orphan Annie doll, which was marketed as a companion to be rescued rather than just a toy, and later with Cabbage Patch Kids in 1982, where dolls were “adopted” with accompanying adoption papers and birth certificates, thereby transforming the act of purchasing into a meaningful, emotional experience. One of the most enduring instances of anthropomorphism is the Michelin Man (Bibendum), introduced in 1889 (Brar, 2025; Salama, 2022; Muench, 2021; Gouda, 2016). Long before anthropomorphism was recognised as a deliberate marketing tactic, the Michelin Man established a friendly, reliable brand anthropomorphism that continues to resonate with consumers.

Technological advances have further broadened the scope of anthropomorphism. Digital assistants like Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri, for instance, use human names, voices, and conversational styles to create a relatable, interactive presence (MacInnis & Folkes,

2017). Even product design has adopted anthropomorphic elements, as illustrated by the human torso-shaped bottles of Gaultier perfumes and the “cute face” of Volkswagen Beetles (DiSalvo & Gemperle, 2003; DiSalvo, Gemperle, & Forlizzi, 2005). In modern marketing, companies across diverse industries harness these strategies to convey brand values and build lasting relationships. Advertisements featuring mascots—such as Tony the Tiger or the Duracell Bunny—help soften the corporate image, making brands feel warm and approachable. Campaigns like Apple’s “Get a Mac” further demonstrate how contrasting anthropomorphised personas can position a brand as cool and relatable, thereby driving customer loyalty.

At its core, brand anthropomorphism is about humanising brands to create a deeper, emotional bond with consumers. By consistently integrating human-like qualities across all touchpoints—from visual symbols and narratives to interactive digital personas—brands transform into dynamic entities that consumers can relate to as if they were interacting with a friend. Ultimately, when executed with consistency and creativity, anthropomorphism not only enriches brand storytelling but also redefines the way consumers experience and engage with brands, transforming them into memorable, emotionally resonant figures in everyday life. However, this approach is a double-edged sword. While it can enhance consumer attachment and foster loyalty, it also raises expectations; any deviation from the established persona can lead to disappointment or heightened scrutiny (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998 Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Wan & Aggarwal 2015; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017; DiSalvo & Gemperle, 2003).

The increasing application of brand anthropomorphism has generated significant interest among researchers, who seek to explain this phenomenon across various contexts. From a review of the literature in brand anthropomorphism, three distinct perspectives emerge, each offering a nuanced understanding of brand anthropomorphism. The first perspective is consumer-centric and rooted in social psychology (Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010; Epley,

Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). It views brand anthropomorphism as a result of the consumers' innate tendency to subjectively perceive brands as human-like. This perspective posits that consumers naturally anthropomorphise brands, even without explicit encouragement (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011; Cohen, 2014; Fleck, Michael, & Zeitoun, 2014). However, this definition is narrow, as it assumes anthropomorphism arises solely from consumer perception, overlooking the role brands play in shaping this phenomenon.

A broader view shifts the focus to the brand's deliberate positioning strategies. In this context, brand anthropomorphism is defined as the intentional use of human-like characteristics to enhance consumers' tendency to perceive a brand as human (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013; Kim, Chen, & Zhang, 2016). This perspective emphasises branding communications, including the use of mascots, avatars, and logos, to foster anthropomorphism (Kim et al., 2016; Delbaere et al., 2011; Phillips & Lee, 2005). Some studies even highlight how brand-wide storytelling and the attribution of personality help create enduring consumer-brand relationships (Aaker, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Langner, Fischer, & Rossiter, 2016). The third perspective integrates cultural elements into the discussion, recognising that brand anthropomorphism is influenced by and influences the cultural context in which it operates. This cultural dimension highlights the importance of societal values and narratives in humanising brands. Holt (2004) and McCracken (1986) argue that for a brand to become iconic, it must transcend its functional purpose, embedding itself within cultural narratives to create emotional and symbolic connections with consumers. By leveraging cultural elements, brands can achieve greater relevance and differentiation, ultimately becoming iconic within their societal context.

Research demonstrates that incorporating culturally iconic elements significantly enhances a brand's anthropomorphism and relevance. A key example is Ferrari's "Prancing Horse" logo, as documented by Aversa, Schreiter, and Guerrini (2021). This logo, derived from

the coat of arms of Italian WWI aviator Francesco Baracca, illustrates how brands can repurpose cultural symbols to establish iconic familiarity. The Ferrari logo not only aligns the brand with Baracca's heroic legacy and Italian national pride but also embodies values of modernity and innovation. By embedding this culturally significant symbol, Ferrari created an emotional resonance that transformed its logo into a global symbol of performance, prestige, and passion. In addition to this, Daryanto, Alexander, and Kartika (2022) showed how designing anthropomorphic logos with iconic elements, such as Sherlock Holmes, positively influences consumer perceptions of brand competence and functional performance. These studies underscore the strategic importance of iconic familiarity in brand anthropomorphism, as it fosters cultural resonance for the humanised brand, and it eventually can strengthen consumer-brand relationships.

To harness the power of brand anthropomorphism and icon familiarity, brands must understand three critical components. Recognising the consumers' natural tendency to anthropomorphise brands is crucial in designing effective brand strategies. Companies should craft branding strategies that not only humanise the brand but also create meaningful and differentiated value for consumers. Incorporating iconic cultural elements strengthens brand resonance and positions the brand as part of consumers' cultural identity. By addressing these aspects, brands can go beyond functional relevance to achieve cultural significance, thereby fostering consumer loyalty and becoming an integral part of the societal fabric. Brand anthropomorphism, when coupled with iconic familiarity, allows brands to transcend their utilitarian roles, evolving into cultural icons that resonate deeply with their audiences.

However, just as in human interactions, these relationships are not always positive. Consumers may experience moments of unmet expectations, leading to brand disappointment, or even perceive the brand's actions as a violation of trust, resulting in brand betrayal. According to Tan, Balaji, Oikarinen, Alatalo, and Salo (2021), brand disappointment



(Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016) and brand betrayal (Einwiller, Lis, Ruppel, & Sen, 2019; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Reimann, MacInnis, Folkes, Uhalde, & Pol, 2018) are among the most frequently studied negative brand constructs due to their significant impact on consumer behaviour. Consumers who feel disappointed or betrayed by a brand often engage in negative behaviours, such as public criticism or brand retaliation.

While brand anthropomorphism is often seen as a mechanism that strengthens consumer-brand relationships, it does not make brands immune to negative consumer reactions. Prior research suggests that anthropomorphised brands may, in fact, be more vulnerable to brand disappointment and brand betrayal. Jin and Qian (2021) explain that brand anthropomorphism enhances emotional connections between consumers and brands by imbuing them with human traits and emotions. This heightened emotional bond raises consumer expectations, making them more susceptible to disappointment when brands fail to meet these expectations. Recent findings by Yang and Aggarwal (2025) further illustrate that anthropomorphised brands can create brand disappointment, particularly when they violate gender expectations. Their research suggests that when a brand is anthropomorphised as male or female, it may face backlash if it engages in gender-incongruent behaviours, leading to lower perceptions of brand fit and greater consumer dissatisfaction. This misalignment can amplify brand disappointment and negatively impact consumer-brand relationships. Additionally, previous studies have documented how brand anthropomorphism intensifies perceptions of brand betrayal. Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2013) demonstrated that anthropomorphised brands are particularly vulnerable when they face negative publicity, engage in wrongdoing (Puzakova, 2012), or implement price increases (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). Consumers tend to interpret the actions of anthropomorphised brands through a moral lens, heightening their sensitivity to perceived brand betrayal.

Despite growing interest in brand anthropomorphism, research on its effects in the context of negative brand events remains underdeveloped. There is a pressing need for further exploration of how brand anthropomorphism influences consumer perceptions when brands commit mistakes. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) highlight the necessity of understanding the underlying mechanisms driving negative consumer-brand relationships and whether brand anthropomorphism exacerbates these outcomes. Building on this, the present study aims to examine how brand logo design featuring anthropomorphic elements—particularly those derived from highly iconic characters—shapes consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoings. Specifically, this research investigates the impact of anthropomorphic brand logos inspired by iconic figures such as Sherlock Holmes on consumer expectations and reactions to brand transgressions. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How does an anthropomorphised brand logo incorporating elements from an iconic character (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) influence logo associations?
- **RQ2:** How do these logo associations shape consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoing? Specifically, do consumers interpret brand missteps as mere disappointment (brand disappointment) or as a more severe breach of trust (brand betrayal)?
- **RQ3:** Does perceiving brand wrongdoing as mere disappointment increase the likelihood of consumers ultimately feeling betrayed by the brand?

This study builds on previous research, “The Anthropomorphic Brand Logo and Its Effect on Perceived Functional Performance” (Daryanto, Alexander, & Kartika, 2022), to further investigate the impact of iconic character-based brand anthropomorphism on consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoing. By exploring the role of iconic familiarity in brand logo design, this study contributes to the broader literature on brand anthropomorphism, consumer-

brand relationships, and brand crises. This research extends the understanding of brand anthropomorphism by investigating its potential drawbacks in the context of brand transgressions. By examining how anthropomorphised brand logos inspired by iconic characters influence consumer perceptions, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the complexities of brand anthropomorphism and consumer-brand relationships. From a managerial perspective, the findings will provide valuable insights for marketers and brand strategists seeking to mitigate the risks associated with brand anthropomorphism. By understanding how consumers react to brand transgressions based on anthropomorphic branding, firms can design more resilient branding strategies that manage consumer expectations effectively.

## 6.2 Theoretical Background

### **Logo anthropomorphism and the effect of Icon familiarity**

As brands increasingly seek to differentiate themselves in competitive markets, logo anthropomorphism serves as a strategic tool to make brand identities more relatable and memorable. Logo anthropomorphism can be defined as the practice of designing brand logos with human-like characteristics to generate positive consumer perceptions and enhance consumer-brand relationships (Nguyen, Bui, & Ha, 2024; Daryanto et al., 2022). This cognitive process enables consumers to interact with brands in a more personal and meaningful way, leading to heightened brand engagement. Anthropomorphised brand logos create perceptions of warmth, trust, and reliability, shaping consumer responses and expectations toward the brand (Nguyen et al., 2024). Moreover, Daryanto et al. (2022) suggest that anthropomorphic logos positively impact perceived functional performance, particularly when they are visually appealing and culturally iconic. This effect is mediated by logo-self connection, wherein

consumers relate to the anthropomorphic brand logo on a personal level, reinforcing their perception of the brand's credibility and reliability.

A particularly compelling finding from Daryanto et al. (2022) is that brands can strategically incorporate elements from iconic characters (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) to design logos with human-like characteristics. Their research demonstrates that by designing anthropomorphised logos that reference culturally iconic figures, brand logos can positively impact the perceived functional performance of a brand. This aligns with real-world branding practices, for instance Ferrari's Prancing Horse logo, which originated from a deeply embedded cultural and historical narrative before being strategically repurposed into a globally recognised brand symbol (Aversa, Schreiter, & Guerrini, 2021).

The Prancing Horse emblem, originally associated with the Italian WWI flying ace Francesco Baracca, was a powerful national symbol long before it became Ferrari's brand identity. As Aversa et al. (2021) documents, Baracca was celebrated as a national war hero, and his personal emblem—a black, rearing horse—became synonymous with courage, strength, and patriotic valor. Enzo Ferrari's decision to incorporate this pre-existing, culturally significant symbol into his racing team's identity was a masterstroke of strategic repurposing—a process in which brands borrow and modify existing cultural symbols to shape new brand meanings. By adopting and subtly altering Baracca's Prancing Horse (e.g. changing the shape, adjusting the horse's stance, and placing it against a yellow background representing Modena), Ferrari was able to: (1) leverage pre-existing positive associations: The Prancing Horse was already recognised as an elite symbol of Italian excellence, bravery, and speed; (2) create immediate emotional resonance: consumers and motorsport fans were more likely to engage with a brand whose logo carried historical and cultural significance; (3) enhance authenticity and credibility: unlike generic branding symbols, Ferrari's logo carried a sense of historical

legitimacy, reinforcing the brand's identity as a true embodiment of Italian craftsmanship and prestige.

The Ferrari Prancing Horse is not merely an emblem; it embodies human-like characteristics that enhance its effectiveness as an anthropomorphic logo. Much like a standing human figure, a rearing horse conveys energy, dynamism, and determination—qualities that seamlessly align with Ferrari's core brand values of passion, speed, and competitive excellence. The adoption of the Prancing Horse was far from an arbitrary aesthetic decision; rather, it was a deliberate act of cultural branding that capitalised on an already iconic symbol imbued with deep historical significance, prestige, and heroism. By incorporating such a design element, Ferrari strategically borrows from established iconic imagery to enhance its brand value through its logo. This exemplifies how a well-designed brand logo can serve as a powerful semiotic tool, communicating positive brand attributes that resonate not only with consumers but also with the cultural context in which the brand operates. Ferrari's approach highlights the effectiveness of leveraging culturally and historically significant symbols, particularly for emerging brands. Instead of introducing an entirely novel logo that may be unfamiliar or disconnected from consumer perceptions, the strategic 'borrowing' of an iconic visual element facilitates greater brand acceptance and recognition.

This branding strategy underscores the potency of leveraging pre-existing cultural codes to construct a brand identity that is both meaningful and culturally embedded. By anchoring the brand in familiar and esteemed imagery, Ferrari ensures its logo not only signifies excellence but also fosters a deeper psychological and emotional connection with consumers. This example underscores the effectiveness of logo anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perceptions and brand associations. According to Daryanto et al. (2022), logo anthropomorphism enhances consumer-brand relationships when consumers see aspects of themselves in the brand's identity. Ferrari's Prancing Horse, through its human-like stance and

its historical legacy, allows consumers—especially those who identify with elite performance and daring innovation—to perceive the brand as an extension of themselves.

The Ferrari case illustrates that successful logo anthropomorphism is not solely about making a brand's visual identity resemble human traits—it is equally about strategic repurposing of familiar cultural symbols to enhance brand storytelling, authenticity, and credibility. The use of the Prancing Horse demonstrates that logos with pre-existing cultural significance are more likely to elicit emotional responses, build trust, and strengthen consumer loyalty. Many brands today attempt logo anthropomorphism without leveraging cultural familiarity, leading to weaker brand engagement. In contrast, Ferrari's case highlights the importance of embedding anthropomorphic elements within a symbol that consumers already recognise and admire.

As brands seek to differentiate themselves in saturated markets, the strategic use of anthropomorphic logos grounded in familiar cultural icons can be a highly effective branding approach. Ferrari's Prancing Horse exemplifies how brands can achieve strong consumer identification by drawing upon historical, cultural, and nationalistic sentiments. This case also reinforces the idea that icon familiarity amplifies the effects of anthropomorphism, making brands not just recognisable but emotionally compelling. Future research in brand anthropomorphism should explore how cultural branding and strategic repurposing can be integrated into branding strategies across industries, particularly in contexts where authenticity and heritage are crucial for brand differentiation. By borrowing culturally embedded, human-like imagery, brands can create deeper consumer-brand relationships—an insight that is not just relevant to Ferrari, but to any brand seeking to establish a timeless and emotionally resonant identity.

## **Logo Association**

Understanding logo association begins with an understanding of brand association, which refers to the connections and perceptions consumers develop regarding a brand and its alignment with brand efforts, attributes, values, and experiences (Barroso, Viniegra, & Gracia, 2022; Erjansola, Lipponen, Vehkalahti, Aula, & Pirttilä-Backman, 2021). These associations are shaped by various brand identity elements, including brand logos (Sanchez, Perez, & Luces, 2022).

Specifically, logo association refers to the cognitive and emotional connections consumers establish with a brand logo, influencing how a logo evokes specific images, values, and perceptions related to a brand's products or services (Barroso et al., 2022). Logos serve as powerful semiotic tools, acting as visual identifiers that encapsulate brand meaning, offering consumers a shortcut for recognition, recall, and emotional engagement (Daryanto et al., 2022). Strong logo associations allow brands to differentiate themselves from competitors, effectively communicate brand messages, and foster deeper consumer engagement. Logos do not function in isolation; rather, they activate rich networks of symbolic and mythic associations, reinforcing the brand's identity within cultural and promotional contexts (Permana, 2022; Scott, 1993). Logo association is therefore a subset of brand association, contributing to overall brand perception and identity while influencing consumer loyalty and brand recognition (Rahardjo & Farida, 2006). Research highlights that strong logo associations enhance brand positioning, facilitate self-brand connections, and play a pivotal role in shaping consumer trust and loyalty (Daryanto et al., 2022; Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). Consequently, logo design and its ability to elicit positive brand associations in consumers' minds are crucial strategic considerations for companies seeking to differentiate themselves and strengthen consumer relationships (Wu & Yuan, 2009).

The effectiveness of logo association is contingent on several critical factors, with logo design and aesthetic appeal being among the most influential. The visual components of a logo—shape, colour, typography, and symmetry—serve as fundamental drivers of consumer perception, shaping both cognitive and affective brand associations. Empirical research underscores that visually appealing logos not only elicit positive emotional responses but also enhance memorability and brand recall (Luffarelli, Mukesh, & Mahmood, 2019). Brand logos that strike a balance between simplicity and distinctiveness, such as Apple's bitten apple or Nike's swoosh, are particularly effective in fostering instant recognition and long-term retention (Van Grinsven & Das, 2016). Beyond facilitating brand recognition, aesthetically compelling logos wield significant psychological influence, triggering specific emotional responses that ultimately drive brand preference and awareness. In the context of the craft beer industry, for example, research has shown that strategic colour and shape selection in logo design can actively shape consumer perceptions of inclusivity and representation (Frankel, Benjamin, & Stephens, 2020). This underscores the role of aesthetic cues not only in consumer identification but also in the broader socio-cultural positioning of brands.

However, the positive effects of an aesthetically pleasing logo do not emerge solely from its visual appeal; rather, they are dynamically shaped by consumer perception over time. Research by Erjansola et al. (2021) highlights that logo associations are not static but evolve, often encountering initial resistance due to perceived incongruence. In such cases, visual congruence—the extent to which a logo aligns with pre-existing brand and consumer identity expectations—becomes a pivotal determinant of acceptance. As consumer familiarity with a new logo increases, so too does the likelihood of positive associations forming, particularly when the logo is perceived as both visually appealing and congruent with the brand's identity. This evolving nature of logo associations underscores the complex interplay between aesthetics and consumer expectations. While a well-designed logo can serve as a powerful vehicle for



brand meaning, its effectiveness ultimately depends on how well it integrates into consumers' cognitive and cultural frameworks. Thus, brands must not only prioritise aesthetic considerations but also strategically manage the transition and reception of new logos, ensuring alignment with consumer identity and fostering long-term positive associations.

Another factor influencing logo association is brand familiarity and exposure. Repeated exposure to a logo facilitates memory encoding, reinforcing consumer recognition and strengthening their familiarity with the brand (Robertson, 1989). Brand familiarity refers to the extent to which consumers possess prior knowledge of and experience with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Empirical research indicates that well-established and easily recognisable logos cultivate greater consumer trust and preference, as they are intrinsically linked to cohesive brand narratives and identities (De Marchis, Reales-Avilés, & Rivero, 2018; García-Madariaga & Sandoval, 2023).

Recent research highlights that brands can enhance consumer familiarity with their logos by integrating visual and auditory elements into their branding strategies. These sensory stimuli have been shown to positively influence consumer perceptions of brand credibility and quality, further strengthening brand associations. The impact of this familiarity, driven by multisensory elements, extends beyond perception—it plays a significant role in increasing purchase intentions and fostering positive consumer behaviours toward the brand. In their study, Li, Xu, Fang, Tang, and Pan (2023) present compelling evidence demonstrating the importance of adopting a holistic approach to brand design, particularly within the framework of sensory marketing in logo development. This finding suggests that if a brand seeks to captivate consumers and influence purchase decisions, it should not rely solely on a single sensory stimulus but rather leverage multiple sensory cues to create immersive brand experiences. By engaging consumers on multiple sensory levels, brands can strengthen feelings

of familiarity, thereby fostering deeper emotional connections and reinforcing long-term logo associations.

The significance of brand familiarity is particularly crucial when brands consider redesigning or altering their logos. While rebranding is often essential for maintaining relevance in evolving markets, an abrupt or unfamiliar logo change can risk disrupting established consumer associations. A study examining Burger King's logo redesign found that consumers' familiarity with the previous logo positively influenced their loyalty toward the new design, reinforcing the importance of maintaining recognisable visual elements in rebranding efforts. Furthermore, research suggests that brand attitude serves as a key mediating factor in this process. When consumers hold favourable perceptions of a brand, they are more likely to embrace and remain loyal to a new logo iteration (Maree, Halim, & Hamdy, 2024). This underscores the necessity for brands to carefully balance innovation with continuity, ensuring that logo modifications do not undermine the psychological and emotional connections consumers have built over time.

Beyond mere aesthetics and familiarity, a logo's cultural and symbolic meanings significantly enhance its associative power. In the postmodern era, branding strategies frequently involve the creation of cultural myths that resonate deeply with consumers. Logos, as visual symbols, represent these myths, evoking strong emotional and cultural connections (Pineda, Sanz-Marcos, & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022). Within consumer cultures, brand logos function as more than just visual identifiers; they embody cultural narratives and values that align with consumer identities. This association strengthens brand identity and fosters emotional bonds, as logos can evoke feelings of patriotism and cultural pride, particularly in the context of Spanish branding. Consequently, logos carry profound cultural and symbolic meanings that shape consumer perceptions and behaviours (Pineda et al., 2022).

Prior research has extensively examined how cultural factors influence consumer associations with logo design and their interpretative processes. Notably, logos incorporating culturally significant symbols generate deeper emotional resonance and stronger cognitive connections than generic logos (Daryanto et al., 2022). For instance, Ferrari's Prancing Horse derives its symbolic meaning from Italian aviation history, reinforcing Ferrari's brand identity as an emblem of speed, power, and prestige (Aversa, Schreiter, & Guerrini, 2021). Such culturally embedded symbols enhance brand relatability, making logos more impactful in evoking emotions and fostering consumer engagement. Additionally, cultural factors also shape consumer associations with brand logos in the context of country-of-origin perceptions (Torelli, Rodas, & Stoner, 2017). The increasing cultural diversity in global markets, driven by globalisation, presents both opportunities and challenges for logo design. Brands must navigate the complexities of cross-cultural consumer behaviour, where cultural variations in values, aspirations, and perceptions influence how logos are interpreted (Torelli & Rodas, 2016). This underscores the importance of culturally sensitive design strategies that account for these differences, ensuring that brand logos remain relevant and resonant across diverse consumer groups.

Another key mechanism shaping logo association is brand anthropomorphism, which enhances consumer engagement by infusing logos with human-like characteristics. Anthropomorphic logos—such as Geico's Gecko, Michelin's Bibendum (Michelin Man), and Amazon's smile-like arrow—create perceptions of approachability, warmth, and trust (Luffarelli et al., 2019). These human-like traits foster brand likability and emotional connection (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011). When anthropomorphic logos incorporate human-like cues from culturally iconic figures (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), they further amplify perceptions of competence and reliability (Daryanto et al., 2022). Research suggests that competence-driven anthropomorphism strengthens consumer

confidence in a brand's ability to deliver high-quality products, reinforcing positive logo associations.

Closely related to anthropomorphism, icon familiarity also plays a significant role in shaping logo associations. In this context, icon familiarity refers to consumer recognition and prior exposure to an iconic character or symbol associated with a brand (Daryanto et al., 2022). Logos that integrate historically or culturally iconic symbols gain instant recognition and elicit stronger emotional responses (Holt, 2004). For example, Ferrari's Prancing Horse, originally associated with Italian aviation history, reinforces Ferrari's image as a performance-driven luxury brand (Aversa et al., 2021). Similarly, logos inspired by familiar competence-related icons, such as Sherlock Holmes, enhance perceptions of intelligence, expertise, and trustworthiness (Daryanto et al., 2022). These logos cultivate stronger brand associations, increasing perceived functional brand value. Brands that incorporate culturally embedded, widely recognised icons into their logos strengthen brand identity, boost recall, and enhance consumer trust (Robertson, 1989). By strategically repurposing iconic imagery, brands reinforce storytelling narratives, positioning logos as semiotic tools that evoke deep-seated associations (Rossolatos, 2018).

Collectively, these insights highlight that logo association is a powerful determinant of brand perception, trust, and consumer relationships with the brand. The interplay of aesthetic appeal, familiarity, cultural meaning, emotional significance, anthropomorphism, and icon familiarity creates stronger brand connections, reinforcing brand recognition and long-term loyalty. In highly competitive markets, brands must strategically design logos that leverage both visual and symbolic elements to cultivate distinctive, emotionally resonant, and culturally meaningful associations with consumers.

## Brand Disappointment

Brand disappointment and brand betrayal are two distinct forms of brand wrongdoings that fall under the broader framework of *"the discipline of negative events in marketing"* (Khamitov, Grégoire, & Suri, 2020). However, this section will focus first on discussing what brand disappointment is, its causes, and how brand anthropomorphism also influences brand disappointment.

Consumers experience disappointment when they perceive that a brand's offerings and performance fail to meet their expectations, resulting in what is known as below-expected brand performance (Zafrani, White, & Riemer, 2023; Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). These expectations are shaped by strategically designed marketing messages and continuous brand interactions, which in turn influence the consumer-brand relationship. Such experiences of brand disappointment can occur across a wide range of branded products, services, and experiences, including food brands, fashion, travel destinations, and sports teams (e.g., Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Kaynak et al., 2008; Zafrani, White, & Riemer, 2023). According to Haase et al. (2022), brand disappointment is the most frequently experienced negative brand emotion, surpassing more extreme emotions such as hate, anger, or rage. While disappointment is considered less intense than anger or rage, it remains a significant negative emotion that brand owners must acknowledge and understand, as it often serves as the catalyst for negative consumer behaviours, such as negative word-of-mouth, online complaining, and brand switching (Haase et al., 2022; Zafrani et al., 2023). Consequently, a deeper understanding of brand disappointment is crucial in managing consumer expectations and mitigating potential negative outcomes that may impact consumer-brand relationships.

The primary driver of consumer disappointment with a brand is unmet expectations. Consumer disappointment arises from a variety of factors, each shaping a negative perception

and experience with the brand. These factors can be broadly classified into psychological, strategic, and contextual elements. Firstly, the psychological factors; Psychological mechanisms play a crucial role in shaping consumer disappointment, particularly through self-construal and emotional appraisal. Individuals with an independent self-construal tend to experience greater disappointment when their expectations are unmet. Unlike interdependent individuals, who may adopt a more relational perspective and appraise the situation positively, independent consumers prioritise personal goals, making them more prone to negative emotional reactions (Zafrani et al., 2023). Additionally, emotional appraisal significantly influences the intensity of brand disappointment. Negative emotions mediate the perception of an experience as unpleasant, particularly when prior expectations are not met (Zafrani et al., 2023). Secondly, the strategic factors. Brand disappointment can also stem from strategic decisions that inadvertently compromise consumer trust and satisfaction. One such factor is brand imitation, where imitation strategies create consumer confusion. Consumers may mistakenly purchase an imitator brand and subsequently attribute their dissatisfaction to the original brand, ultimately eroding brand trust and equity (Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990). Another strategic misstep is overextension and quality compromise. When brands excessively expand their product lines or prioritise advertising over product quality, they risk diluting brand equity, leading to consumer disappointment (Khaqan et al., 2016). The third factor comes from within the brand management; Internal factors such as lack of innovation, poor leadership, and inadequate quality assurance can lead to brand disappointment. These factors contribute to performance-related and value-related crises, which can ultimately harm brand reputation and stakeholder perceptions. Additionally, failures in maintaining product quality standards, such as design issues and manufacturing problems, can also lead to negative consumer experiences and disappointment. These issues highlight the importance of a human-centred strategy and effective crisis prevention measures to maintain brand integrity (Do, Nham, & Nguyen, 2019).

Lastly, the contextual factors. External environmental influences, including cultural and societal expectations, also shape brand disappointment. For example, a lack of coherent national branding can contribute to fragmented brand identity and unmet consumer expectations. For instance, in India sub-brands have sometimes overshadowed the main brand, leading to a disjointed brand perception and consumer dissatisfaction (Garg & Bansal, 2004). While these factors highlight key drivers of brand disappointment, it is important to recognise that consumer expectations and perceptions are dynamic, shaped by both internal and external influences. Brands must continuously adapt and align their strategies with evolving consumer needs and market trends to minimise disappointment and foster long-term brand loyalty.

Furthermore, as this study aims to examine the effects of brand anthropomorphism—specifically in the form of icon familiarity—on brand logo design, this section also explores the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand disappointment. Existing research suggests that brand anthropomorphism influences consumer emotions and perceptions of a brand. Brand disappointment may arise when a brand fails to meet the human-like expectations set by its anthropomorphic traits (Jin & Qian, 2021; Sharma & Rahman, 2022). A recent study by Yang and Aggarwal (2025) highlights how brand anthropomorphism, when implemented by assigning a gender to a brand, can shape consumer expectations regarding brand performance. However, when a brand engages in behaviours that contradict its assigned gender, it can lead to disappointment due to perceived violations of expectations. This effect is particularly pronounced for female-gendered brands, which are more susceptible to strong stereotypes and face lower fit perceptions when exhibiting gender-incongruent behaviours. As a result, consumers may react negatively, experiencing brand disappointment when their expectations are unmet. Similarly, research by Puzakova and Aggarwal (2018) finds that brand anthropomorphism can contribute to brand disappointment under specific conditions. When distinctiveness motives are salient, anthropomorphising a brand can have a negative impact on

consumer attitudes, as it reduces their sense of agency in identity expression. This diminished sense of agency can lead to disappointment if consumers feel that the anthropomorphised brand fails to support their need for distinctiveness.

We can conclude that brand disappointment is an inevitable yet complex aspect of consumer-brand relationships, influenced by a dynamic interplay of psychological, strategic, internal, and contextual factors. As brands continuously evolve to meet consumer demands, they must recognise that disappointment is not merely a byproduct of unmet expectations but a critical determinant of consumer trust, engagement, and long-term loyalty. The emotional weight of disappointment, though often perceived as less intense than anger or betrayal, has profound implications for consumer behaviours, leading to negative word-of-mouth, brand switching, and reputational damage. In an era where brands rely heavily on anthropomorphic strategies to humanise their identity, the risks of brand disappointment become even more pronounced. Assigning human-like traits to a brand—especially through gendered anthropomorphism—can heighten consumer expectations, making any perceived inconsistencies or contradictions even more damaging. While anthropomorphism has the potential to strengthen consumer-brand relationships, it also demands careful execution to avoid setting unrealistic or conflicting expectations that may lead to consumer backlash.

To mitigate brand disappointment, brands must proactively manage consumer expectations through transparent communication, strategic consistency, and a consumer-centric approach to branding. This includes maintaining authenticity in messaging, aligning product quality with brand promises, and understanding the cultural and psychological contexts that shape consumer perceptions. Additionally, brands leveraging anthropomorphism must ensure that the human-like characteristics they adopt align with consumer expectations and societal norms to prevent identity conflicts that could result in disappointment. Ultimately, brand disappointment is not solely a negative phenomenon but an opportunity for brands to



refine their strategies, enhance consumer trust, and reinforce brand resilience. By acknowledging the factors that contribute to disappointment and addressing them through strategic brand management, brands can foster deeper consumer relationships, turn disappointment into brand recovery, and cultivate long-term loyalty in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

### **Brand Betrayal**

Brand betrayal is a deeply emotional and psychological consumer response that occurs when a brand is perceived to have violated consumer trust, engaged in misleading or unethical behaviour, or acted in a way that is morally unacceptable (Reimann, MacInnis, Folkes, Uhalde, & Pol, 2018). Unlike dissatisfaction, brand betrayal elicits a profound sense of psychological loss, indignation-focused anger, and persistent rumination, leading to strong negative behaviours such as brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and even retaliatory actions (Rasouli, et al., 2023; Rehmat & Wasim, 2021; Reinmann, et al., 2018; Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2016). The intensity of brand betrayal is particularly pronounced in high-quality consumer-brand relationships, where emotional attachment amplifies the perceived violation (Bugg, Wang, & Beatty, 2009). In some cases, brand betrayal can lead to a “love becomes hate” effect, in which consumers' previous emotional investment heightens their negative reactions (Robertson, Botha, Ferreira, & Pitt, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) provides a strong framework for understanding brand betrayal. EVT posits that when brands fail to meet ethical and relational expectations, consumers react more intensely than they would to performance failures alone. Brand betrayal arises when a brand's actions deviate from expected moral, ethical, or relational norms, leading

consumers to perceive a breach of trust with long-term reputational consequences (Reimann et al., 2018).

Several factors contribute to brand betrayal, particularly those that involve violations of ethical, symbolic, or relational norms. These include moral violations, brand inauthenticity, symbolic incongruence, values-related crises, and product-related influences. Moral violations are one of the most significant causes of brand betrayal. When brands engage in deceptive practices, exploitative labour, environmental harm, or social irresponsibility, consumers with strong self-brand connections feel personally deceived, intensifying their sense of betrayal (Reimann et al., 2018). Similarly, brand inauthenticity and corporate wrongdoing create a crisis of trust, especially when there is a perceived misalignment between a brand's projected values and its actual behaviour. For example, corporate scandals, misleading advertising, and leadership failures can severely damage consumer trust and provoke strong emotional reactions, including demands for accountability and reparation (Ittefaq, Akhtar, Siddiqi, Islam, & Kuzior, 2024). Symbolic incongruence further deepens brand betrayal, particularly for consumers who have identity-based connections with a brand. When a brand shifts its core messaging, target audience, or political stance, consumers may feel that their values and identity are no longer aligned with the brand, leading to brand alienation and a decline in purchase intentions (Sayın & Gürhan-Canlı, 2024). Similarly, values-related crises occur when a brand's actions conflict with a consumer's ethical or ideological beliefs, often leading to consumer boycotts and active efforts to discourage others from supporting the brand (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2021).

The type of product and the way consumers discover a brand betrayal also shapes consumer reactions (Sameeni, Ahmad, & Fillieri, 2022). Utilitarian products—such as financial services, healthcare, or durable goods—tend to elicit stronger betrayal responses, as consumers rely on these products for trust and long-term security, compared to hedonic products. When

a brand in these categories fails to meet expectations or engages in misconduct, consumers experience a heightened sense of loss and frustration (Sameeni, Ahmad, & Fillieri, 2022). Additionally, the way in which consumers discover a brand's betrayal affects their reaction—personal experiences provoke immediate and intense responses, whereas learning about misconduct through media or social networks results in a gradual but equally damaging erosion of trust.

Although brand betrayal and brand disappointment share some similarities, they are fundamentally distinct psychological states with different causes, emotional intensities, and behavioural consequences (Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1999). The key distinction lies in perceived intent. Brand betrayal occurs when consumers believe a brand has acted with negative motives, such as engaging in unfair practices (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), unethical behaviour (Schmalz & Orth, 2012), or deceptive communication (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015). Betrayed consumers perceive the brand's actions as a deliberate breach of trust, making the experience deeply personal and emotionally charged. In contrast, brand disappointment arises from performance failures, where the brand fails to meet consumer expectations without necessarily being perceived as deceptive or unethical (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). Disappointed consumers may see the brand as incompetent or unreliable, but they do not feel personally wronged at an ethical level. The emotional response to each construct further differentiates them. Brand betrayal triggers a “hot” effect, characterised by personal violation, resentment, and self-reproach, leading to rumination and retaliatory behaviours (Reimann et al., 2018). In contrast, brand disappointment is a “cold” effect, meaning consumers evaluate the brand's failure rationally rather than emotionally, often resulting in brand disengagement rather than active retaliation (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). These differences also lead to distinct consumer behaviours. Betrayed consumers struggle with ambivalence—they may still desire brand rewards as a form of compensation, but they simultaneously seek revenge to

restore their psychological self-worth (Reimann et al., 2018). In contrast, disappointed consumers are more pragmatic, showing less emotional attachment post-disappointment and are more likely to switch brands without seeking reparation (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004).

Brand anthropomorphism—the practice of attributing human-like characteristics to brands—can amplify both consumer trust and brand betrayal. While anthropomorphism strengthens brand engagement and self-brand connection, it also magnifies betrayal responses when a brand fails to meet expectations. This occurs because consumers attribute moral agency and intentionality to anthropomorphised brands, judging them as social entities rather than mere corporate actors (Patrizi, Šerić & Vernuccio, 2024). When anthropomorphised brands engage in misconduct, ethical violations, or fail to uphold their perceived persona, consumers experience stronger emotional distress, similar to interpersonal betrayal (Puzakova et al., 2013). Entity theorists—who view personality traits as fixed—are particularly prone to devaluing anthropomorphised brands following a transgression, as they believe the brand's human-like traits cannot change, making recovery efforts more challenging. Conversely, incremental theorists, who believe that brands can evolve, may be more forgiving, but their expectations for corrective actions are significantly higher for anthropomorphised brands (Puzakova, Kwak, & Roccereto, 2013). Additionally, brand anthropomorphism can fuel brand hate and consumer backlash in online anti-brand communities, where consumers see anthropomorphised brands as intentionally deceptive or hypocritical, leading to greater moral outrage and public denunciation (Brandão & Popoli, 2023)

Brand betrayal is a unique and intensely emotional consumer response, distinct from brand disappointment, and driven by perceived moral violations, inauthenticity, and symbolic incongruence. The humanisation of brands through brand anthropomorphism further amplifies these reactions, making betrayal more personal and emotionally charged.

### 6.3 Hypotheses development

The theoretical framework proposed in this study highlights the complex mechanisms underlying the effects of designing brand logos using a logo anthropomorphism strategy. Specifically, it examines whether logos designed in this manner influence how consumers perceive and evaluate brand mistakes. In this research, the concept of logo anthropomorphism is explored through the incorporation of elements from iconic characters (e.g. Sherlock Holmes), which is captured by the variable of icon familiarity. Therefore, the theoretical framework proposed in this study underscores the relationships between icon familiarity, logo association, brand disappointment, and brand betrayal. The following are the hypotheses we have developed for this study.

#### **Icon Familiarity and Logo Association**

A brand's logo is more than a mere visual representation—it serves as a critical tool in shaping brand associations and consumer perceptions (Sanchez, Perez, & Luces, 2022). Research highlights that effective logo design fosters both cognitive and emotional connections between consumers and brands, influencing positive brand perceptions and enhancing brand meaning beyond mere differentiation (Barroso et al., 2022; Daryanto et al., 2022). Through carefully crafted design, logos become a conduit for building strong, meaningful brand associations. Several factors contribute to the formation of these associations, including aesthetic appeal (Luffarelli, Mukesh & Mahmood, 2019; Van Grinsven & Das, 2016), brand familiarity and exposure (Robertson, 1989; De Marchis et al., 2018; García-Madariaga & Sandoval, 2023; Maree, Halim, & Hamdy, 2024), cultural and symbolic meanings (Pineda et al., 2022; Daryanto et al., 2022; Aversa, Schreiter & Guerrini, 2021; Torelli & Rodas, 2016), brand

anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011; Luffarelli et al., 2019), and icon familiarity (Daryanto et al., 2022).

Strong logo associations enhance brand positioning, strengthen consumer-brand relationships, and drive trust and loyalty (Daryanto et al., 2022; Kervyn, Fiske & Malone, 2012). When consumers form strong emotional and cognitive associations with a logo, it becomes a key driver of brand differentiation and engagement (Wu & Yuan, 2009). Among the many strategies that strengthen logo associations, one of the most impactful is logo anthropomorphism, where logos incorporate human-like characteristics to foster consumer trust and emotional connection (Nguyen, Bui, & Ha, 2024; Daryanto et al., 2022). This effect is further amplified when anthropomorphic logos integrate culturally iconic figures, reinforcing warmth, reliability, and credibility (Daryanto et al., 2022).

This study focuses on the mechanism of logo anthropomorphism and its representation through icon familiarity, examining how it influences positive and negative brand associations based on logo design. The key question explored is: How do consumer perceptions shift when brands that utilise iconic symbols in their logos fail to meet expectations? Does the presence of culturally iconic elements maintain positive brand associations, or does it amplify negative consumer reactions? Previous studies suggest that brands can strategically design their logos using elements from well-known cultural figures or symbols (Daryanto et al., 2022). For example, the Prancing Horse emblem—originally associated with Italian WWI flying ace Francesco Baracca—became a globally recognised symbol when Ferrari adopted it as its logo (Daryanto et al., 2022; Aversa et al., 2021). Ferrari's ability to repurpose an already prestigious and nationally significant emblem allowed the brand to establish strong associations with speed, performance, and heritage. This highlights how integrating historically and culturally iconic symbols into logo design can enhance brand credibility, storytelling, and consumer

engagement (Holt, 2004). Beyond simple visual identity, logos embedded with iconic figures become powerful semiotic tools that reinforce brand narratives (Rossolatos, 2018).

In conclusion, icon familiarity significantly enhances logo association by increasing consumer recognition, facilitating cognitive fluency, and evoking strong emotional responses. Based on this theoretical foundation, it is expected that icon familiarity will positively influence logo association, reinforcing the importance of strategic cultural branding in logo design. Understanding the interplay between anthropomorphism, icon familiarity, and consumer expectations is essential for brands seeking to maximise positive associations while mitigating the risks of brand disappointment. We therefore introduce the first hypothesis:

***H1: Icon familiarity is positively related to logo association.***

## **Logo Association and Brand Disappointment**

Consumers develop expectations based on their associations with a brand's logo, making logo association a critical determinant of brand perception and consumer engagement. However, while strong logo associations foster brand recognition and loyalty, they can also intensify consumer disappointment when brands fail to deliver on their implicit promises (Barroso, Viniegra, & Gracia, 2022; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). Brand disappointment occurs when consumers perceive that a brand's offerings or actions deviate from their expectations, leading to frustration and negative brand evaluations (Zafrani, White, & Riemer, 2023; Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022). This study examines how logo association, particularly when linked to iconic character design, influences consumer disappointment by shaping expectations that may not always be met.

Previous research suggests that even a single brand element—such as its logo—can be a source of consumer disappointment. Logos are powerful semiotic tools that encapsulate brand

meaning and influence consumer judgments (Daryanto et al., 2022). When brands design their logos using iconic characters or culturally significant symbols, they aim to evoke strong positive associations. However, these associations create expectations that consumers use as reference points to evaluate brand behaviour. If the brand's actions contradict these expectations, consumers may transfer their disappointment to the brand logo, reinforcing negative perceptions of the brand itself. For example, the use of an iconic character, such as Sherlock Holmes, in a brand logo signals intelligence, reliability, and problem-solving ability. If the brand subsequently engages in unethical practices, the perceived violation of these attributes intensifies consumer disappointment (Jin & Qian, 2021).

The literature highlights that logo association contributes to brand disappointment through various design elements, including shape, colour, and symmetry. Research indicates that specific logo shapes evoke different brand attributes; for example, circular logos are associated with warmth and approachability, whereas angular logos convey strength and premium status (Jiang, Gorn, Gali, & Chattopadhyay, 2016; Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, colour psychology plays a crucial role in brand perception, with cool colors such as blue fostering trust and calmness, while warm colours like red evoke excitement and urgency (Trehan & Kalro, 2024). Furthermore, symmetry and asymmetry in logo design influence consumer expectations. Symmetrical logos are typically linked to stability and tradition, whereas asymmetrical logos convey innovation and dynamism (Luffarelli, Stamatogiannakis, & Yang, 2019). If a brand fails to align its performance with these implicit messages, consumer disappointment may arise. For instance, a brand with a symmetrical logo that undergoes a drastic repositioning or rebranding may elicit consumer resistance, as the visual change contradicts previously established expectations (Grobert, Cuny, & Fornerino, 2016).

Radical logo changes are another key factor that can elicit consumer disappointment. When a brand significantly alters its logo, consumer reactions can be highly emotional.



Research shows that brand attachment and familiarity play critical roles in how consumers perceive logo redesigns. While some consumers may appreciate the novelty of a refreshed logo, others may feel a sense of loss or betrayal, particularly if the new design is perceived as a departure from the brand's core identity (Grobert, Cuny, & Fornerino, 2016). The element of surprise associated with logo changes can either enhance or diminish consumer acceptance. If the redesign aligns with consumer expectations, it can reinforce brand loyalty; however, if it disrupts familiar brand cues, it can lead to disappointment and reduced consumer trust.

Brand anthropomorphism further amplifies brand disappointment, as consumers attribute human-like traits and moral responsibility to anthropomorphised brands (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Anthropomorphism shapes consumer expectations, making any brand transgression more personal and emotionally charged. Research indicates that brands with highly recognisable and iconic logos are particularly vulnerable to disappointment when they fail to meet consumer expectations (Jin & Qian, 2021). For example, a brand that assigns a gender to its anthropomorphic identity may create implicit behavioural expectations. When the brand acts in ways that contradict these perceived traits, consumers experience heightened disappointment due to perceived violations of trust and authenticity (Yang & Aggarwal, 2025). Similarly, studies show that when distinctiveness motives are salient, anthropomorphising a brand can reduce consumers' sense of agency, leading to negative brand evaluations when expectations are unmet (Puzakova & Aggarwal, 2018).

Given the intricate relationship between logo association and consumer expectations, it is evident that strong logo associations can intensify disappointment when brands fail to align their actions with the perceptions shaped by their logos. Logos that incorporate iconic characters or culturally significant elements serve as anchors for brand expectations, reinforcing cognitive and emotional associations that shape consumer evaluations. When

brands fail to uphold the implicit promises embedded in these logos, disappointment is likely to ensue, damaging brand equity and weakening consumer trust. Therefore, we hypothesise:

***H2: Logo association is positively related to brand disappointment.***

### **Logo Association and Brand Betrayal**

Beyond disappointment, brands can also elicit brand betrayal, a more intense negative response characterised by feelings of deception, moral violation, and psychological loss (Reimann, MacInnis, Folkes, Uhalde, & Pol, 2018). Brand betrayal differs from brand disappointment in that it involves a perceived breach of trust, rather than merely an unmet expectation (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) suggests that when brands fail to align their actions with consumer expectations, particularly those based on moral or ethical considerations, the resulting reaction is stronger and more punitive (Reimann et al., 2018).

Brand betrayal is a distinct and highly aversive psychological state that extends beyond mere disappointment, involving perceptions of deception, moral transgression, and psychological loss (Reimann, MacInnis, Folkes, Uhalde, & Pol, 2018). Unlike brand disappointment, which stems from an unmet expectation, brand betrayal signifies a perceived violation of trust, fundamentally reshaping consumer-brand relationships (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) suggests that consumers develop expectations regarding a brand's behaviour, particularly concerning ethical and moral standards, and when a brand deviates from these expectations—such as engaging in unethical practices or failing to uphold its promises—the resulting response is disproportionately negative, often manifesting in punitive behaviours such as brand avoidance, retaliatory word-of-mouth, and public condemnation (Reimann et al., 2018; Rasouli, Alimohammadirokni, Rasoolimanesh, Momayez, & Emadlou, 2023; Smaeeni et al., 2022).

Prior research has identified two primary antecedents of brand betrayal: failure severity and inferred negative motive (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Failure severity refers to the magnitude of the brand's transgression, determining how intensely consumers react (Finkel et al., 2002; Rehmat & Wasim, 2021). The severity of betrayal escalates when the brand fails to provide adequate customer support during crises or when it repeatedly neglects consumer concerns (Grégoire et al., 2009), leading to stronger retaliatory behaviours such as vindictive complaints, social media activism, and boycotts (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2021). Meanwhile, inferred negative motive captures the extent to which consumers perceive the brand's actions as intentionally exploitative, manipulative, or deceptive (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998), a factor particularly relevant in assessing how logo association intensifies betrayal, as logos serve as symbolic representations of a brand's integrity, values, and identity.

Brand logos act as powerful cognitive and emotional anchors in shaping consumer-brand relationships. A strong logo association embeds the brand into consumers' self-concept (Belk, 1988), reinforcing emotional attachment and perceived trustworthiness. However, when the brand is perceived to have violated ethical or moral expectations, this deep-seated association amplifies emotional backlash, transforming a logo from a symbol of trust into a painful reminder of betrayal. Consumers frequently integrate brand logos into their personal identity, and because logos visually represent a brand's values, they play a critical role in shaping self-brand relationships. When a brand transgresses, particularly in a way that contradicts its core values, the betrayal feels deeply personal, leading to heightened anger, disappointment, and moral outrage. This phenomenon is consistent with identity-based consumption theories, which suggest that brands that align with consumers' self-concept elicit stronger emotional responses when they fail (Reimann et al., 2018). For example, imagine a brand such as Patagonia, widely associated with environmental sustainability, would experience a disproportionately intense backlash if exposed for engaging in environmentally

harmful practices. The strong consumer-brand identification, reinforced through Patagonia's logo and branding, would magnify the sense of deception, making the betrayal feel not just commercial but ideological and personal. Logos also function as trust signals, continuously reinforcing a brand's commitment to its promises. When a brand transgresses, its logo serves as a constant visual trigger of the violation, making it difficult for consumers to disassociate the brand from its betrayal. This aligns with associative network theory, which posits that frequently activated brand associations become dominant in consumer memory (Pullig, 2000). For instance, Nike's "swoosh" logo is deeply ingrained as a symbol of innovation, empowerment, and activism. However, past allegations of sweatshop labour and unethical supply chain practices have led to severe backlash, with consumers perceiving the brand's social justice messaging as hypocritical. The strong logo association exacerbates the sense of betrayal, as the brand's visual identity contradicts its perceived unethical behaviour.

Logo anthropomorphism, facilitated through logo association, plays a pivotal role in intensifying perceptions of brand betrayal. As MacInnis and Folkes (2017) argue, consumers feel more deeply betrayed when a brand that intentionally violates relationship norms is anthropomorphised. The underlying mechanism behind this heightened betrayal response lies in how consumers develop relationships with anthropomorphised brands, perceiving them as entities with human-like characteristics and intentions. When consumers attribute human-like qualities to brands, they tend to naïvely assume their relationship with the brand is fundamentally positive, leading them to view the brand as a trusted companion (Fournier, 1998), a committed partner (Aggarwal, 2004), or even a loyal servant (Kim & Kramer, 2015).

This naïveté can be explained by Kahneman's (2011) concept of "optimistic bias," which suggests that individuals tend to recall events associated with heightened emotional states and indulge in pleasant recollections of past experiences (Tan, 2018). As a result, consumers who have frequently experienced positive interactions with a brand perceive

themselves as being at lower risk of encountering a negative event with that brand in the future. Consequently, when an anthropomorphised brand—whether as a brand strategy or consumers' natural tendency to anthropomorphise brands—commits a transgression, consumers experience a deeper sense of disappointment, and it can intensify emotional response to the betrayal. The perceived violation is no longer merely a commercial failure but an affront to the relational trust they had unconsciously placed in the brand.

This argument is further supported by Freund and Jacobi (2013), who introduce the concept of *doppelgänger* brand images, wherein anthropomorphised brand symbols—such as mascots or logos with human-like features—become targets of consumer resentment and moral outrage during times of crisis. The betrayal is not merely cognitive (dissatisfaction with performance) but also affective (emotional pain and a sense of deception). For instance, McDonald's Ronald McDonald mascot, originally designed to evoke warmth and trust, has been co-opted into activist imagery that critiques corporate irresponsibility. If McDonald's were implicated in an ethical scandal, such as labour exploitation or misleading advertising, consumers would not simply criticise the company; they would also direct their anger toward Ronald McDonald as a symbolic betrayer—a transformation from a beloved figure into an emblem of corporate deceit. This phenomenon illustrates how anthropomorphised brand imagery amplifies the perceived severity of betrayal by making the violation feel more personal and emotionally charged.

When brands attain cultural significance, their logos extend beyond their commercial function and take on broader socio-political meaning. Freund and Jacobi's (2013) study of Goldman Sachs and the "vampire squid" metaphor demonstrates how brands with strong cultural identities are particularly vulnerable to negative reinterpretation in times of crisis. For example, the Starbucks mermaid logo, a globally recognised symbol of ethical sourcing and corporate responsibility, could quickly become a symbol of hypocrisy if the brand were

exposed for engaging in environmentally harmful practices. Consumers might then repurpose the logo in activist materials, reinforcing public perceptions of betrayal.

The strength of logo association plays a crucial role in amplifying consumer perceptions of brand betrayal. Drawing from theories of self-brand connection, associative memory, visual trust cues, and cultural branding, this argument highlights how logos transition from being symbols of trust to becoming emblems of deception when a brand fails to uphold its promises. Brands with strong logo associations, particularly those built on culturally familiar symbols, are more susceptible to intense consumer backlash when their behaviour contradicts their established identity (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). Consumers internalise the symbolic meaning of a logo, developing a psychological investment in the brand's perceived values (Fournier, 1998). When a brand violates these values, the breach of trust is perceived as deliberate, triggering strong betrayal responses. For instance, if a brand utilises a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo, which implicitly conveys competence, ethical judgment, and reliability, but is later exposed for engaging in deceptive pricing or misleading advertising, consumers may feel personally betrayed. The contrast between the brand's symbolic representation and its actual behaviour heightens the sense of deception, leading to retaliatory behaviours such as brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and public denouncement (Einwiller, Lis, Ruppel, & Sen, 2019). Because logos serve as trust anchors, any perceived deviation from the brand's implied moral and ethical standards intensifies consumer backlash.

Brands with strong logo associations, especially those derived from culturally familiar icons, are particularly susceptible to brand betrayal if they engage in behaviours that contradict their established brand identity (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). Consumers internalise the symbolic meaning of a logo, leading to a sense of psychological investment in the brand (Fournier, 1998). When a brand fails to uphold the values associated with its logo, the violation of trust is perceived as intentional, triggering betrayal responses. For example, if a brand uses

a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo—which inherently signals competence, ethical judgment, and reliability—but later engages in price deception or misleading advertising, consumers may feel personally betrayed. This betrayal can lead to brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and retaliatory behaviours (Einwiller, Lis, Ruppel, & Sen, 2019). Since strong logo associations create a sense of trust and reliability, any perceived deviation from this trust amplifies the sense of betrayal. Thus, we hypothesise that the stronger the logo association, the greater the potential for brand betrayal.

***H3: Logo association is positively related to brand betrayal.***

### **The Mediating Role of Brand Disappointment**

Empirical studies reinforce the notion that brand disappointment plays a mediating role in the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. Consumers form strong emotional and psychological connections with a brand's logo, which acts as a visual representation of its values, identity, and trustworthiness (Sayın & Gürhan-Canlı, 2024; Baghi & Gabrielli, 2021). When a brand fails to uphold these expectations, the initial emotional response is often brand disappointment rather than immediate betrayal (Zarantonello et al., 2016). However, disappointment can escalate into betrayal when consumers perceive the failure as recurring, severe, or driven by deceptive intent (Reimann et al., 2018).

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999) suggests that consumers first evaluate a brand's failure through the lens of disappointment before determining whether it constitutes a deeper violation of trust. If a brand merely underperforms on a functional level, consumers may experience dissatisfaction or disappointment but still retain some level of trust (Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022). However, when the disappointment is repeated, extreme, or contradicts the brand's symbolic and moral values, consumers may reinterpret their

experience as a profound betrayal. This aligns with expectancy violation theory, which posits that when a brand's transgressions starkly contrast with its established values, consumer reactions become more intense and punitive (Reimann et al., 2018; Rasouli et al., 2023).

The intensity of brand disappointment and its progression into betrayal is further amplified when logos are anthropomorphised, as consumers perceive human-like intentions behind the brand's actions (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Anthropomorphised brands cultivate stronger relational expectations, leading consumers to assume that the brand will behave like a responsible, trustworthy partner (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004). When such brands violate consumer trust, the emotional response is heightened, as the transgression is perceived not merely as a corporate failure but as a personal betrayal (Kim & Kramer, 2015).

Brand disappointment is the emotional foundation upon which betrayal develops. While disappointment reflects a milder emotional response, betrayal implies a deeper, moral violation (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). The severity and interpretation of brand disappointment determine whether it escalates into betrayal. Grégoire & Fisher (2008) highlight two key antecedents of brand betrayal: failure severity and inferred negative motives. Failure severity refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand's mistake as harmful, while inferred negative motive captures the perception that the brand intentionally acted dishonestly or exploitatively (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Rehmat & Wasim, 2021). A consumer experiencing mild disappointment may still trust the brand to improve. However, when disappointment accumulates over multiple interactions, or if consumers perceive that the brand knowingly violated their trust, their emotional response shifts toward betrayal, triggering retaliatory behaviours (Zarantonello et al., 2016). This aligns with research on self-brand connection, which suggests that consumers who feel deeply connected to a brand's visual identity experience a stronger sense of regret and self-castigation when the brand betrays them (Reimann et al., 2018). Consumers may feel ashamed for having trusted the brand and



experience self-directed blame for their misplaced loyalty (Joskowicz-Jablonek & Leiser, 2013; Rachman, 2010). This emotional shift is particularly evident in brands that establish themselves as ethical or socially responsible through their logos and branding. If a brand markets itself as environmentally conscious through its logo but is later exposed for unethical environmental practices, the disappointment initially felt by consumers will likely transform into betrayal, as they interpret the failure as a deliberate act of deception (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). This betrayal, in turn, fuels boycotts, negative word-of-mouth, and reputational damage (Reimann et al., 2018).

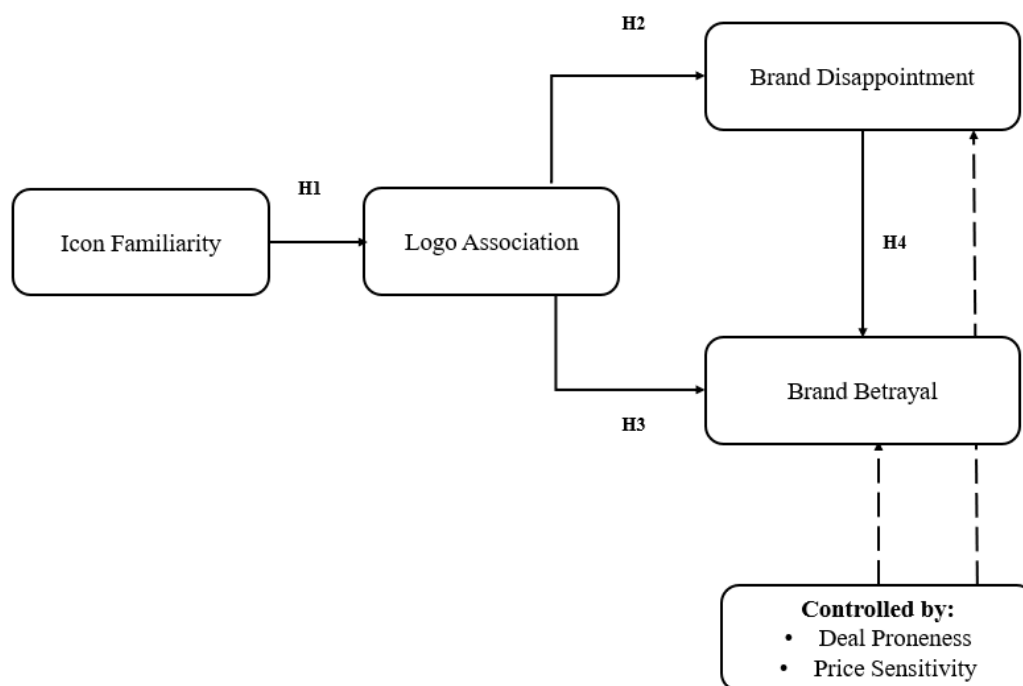
Empirical studies support the hypothesis that brand disappointment mediates the effect of logo association on betrayal. Zarantonello et al. (2016) find that repeated or severe disappointment substantially increases the likelihood of betrayal, particularly when consumers perceive the failure as part of a broader pattern of misalignment with the brand's identity. Similarly, Reimann et al. (2018) demonstrate that even minor disappointments can escalate into betrayal when consumers feel that the brand's actions represent an ongoing violation of trust. This aligns with research on the escalation of negative brand emotions, which suggests that minor disappointments accumulate over time, leading to more extreme emotional reactions (Puzakova et al., 2013). For instance, brands that anthropomorphize their logos with figures such as Sherlock Holmes inherently signal intelligence and reliability (Daryanto, et al., 2022). If such a brand fails to deliver on these expectations, consumers first experience disappointment but later reinterpret this experience as betrayal, particularly if the failure is perceived as intentional (Reimann et al., 2018).

Taken together, these explanations suggest that brand disappointment is a critical mediator in the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. While logos serve as visual anchors for brand trust and expectations, disappointment represents the initial reaction when these expectations are violated. However, when disappointment is intense, repeated, or

perceived as intentional deception, it transforms into betrayal, leading to severe retaliatory behaviours such as boycotts, negative word-of-mouth, and public condemnation. Brands that incorporate anthropomorphic logos or culturally significant symbols must recognise that these elements heighten consumer expectations, making any failure to uphold brand values particularly damaging. Therefore, when a brand logo is anthropomorphised using an iconic character, it carries positive associations that elevate consumer expectations and encourage a stronger identification with the brand. However, if the brand fails to meet these expectations, these positive associations intensify consumer disappointment and can amplify the emotional impact, potentially escalating brand disappointment into betrayal—even at the mere sight of the brand’s logo. We therefore hypothesise:

***H4: Brand disappointment mediates the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal.***

**Figure 1.** The research framework



## 6.4 Method

This study extends prior research titled “The Anthropomorphic Brand Logo and Its Effect on Perceived Functional Performance” (Daryanto, Alexander, & Kartika, 2022), by examining the role of anthropomorphic brand logos in the context of negative brand experiences. Specifically, it investigates the influence of anthropomorphic brand logos designed using iconic characters on two negative brand constructs: brand disappointment and brand betrayal. These constructs, as highlighted in prior research, frequently arise in consumer-brand relationships and are critical factors in explaining why consumers may engage in negative behaviours toward brands (Tan et al., 2021).

This study retained the same research scenario, fictional brand, and anthropomorphic brand logo design as the previous study to ensure consistency and provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of anthropomorphic brand logos on consumers' perceptions of brands. Similar to the prior research, this study developed a survey questionnaire to measure the focal constructs and collected data through an online survey administered via Prolific Academic, a crowdsourcing platform. Data were obtained from 642 participants in the United Kingdom using a convenience sampling method. Despite employing convenience sampling, the study implemented a rigorous screening process to ensure data quality. Specifically, participants who failed to correctly respond to a modified Instructional Manipulation Check (IMC) were excluded from the final dataset. Participants received monetary compensation (£1) and were informed that the survey would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey introduced participants to a fictional brand and fictional scenario of a price comparison website, called PriceInvestigate.com, along with its anthropomorphic brand logo. Participants were asked to imagine interacting with the service provided by this fictional brand and then read the following scenario:

*“Please imagine that you want to buy an insurance policy to cover your next holiday trip. You decide to use PriceInvestigate.com, which is a price comparison website. PriceInvestigate.com is a well-established company that has millions of visitors each month. PriceInvestigate.com promises customers **better** insurance deals. You visited the PriceInvestigate.com website, and you saw on the top left of the website the brand logo of the company as you can see below.”*



To distinguish this study from prior research and to contribute to the research objectives, an additional scenario was developed. This scenario was designed to capture a phenomenon that illustrates situations where consumers encounter a negative brand experience. The developed scenario provides a detailed depiction of such occurrences, ensuring alignment with the study's focus on negative brand constructs.

#### 6.4.1 Scenario development

Unlike previous studies, this research introduces a new condition where participants are exposed to a scenario in which the fictional brand commits a negative brand experience after the initial setup. This study seeks to elucidate how participants perceive the designed brand misstep within the scenarios as a source of disappointment or betrayal—providing a nuanced

understanding of the emotional and cognitive processes triggered by a brand's negative act towards consumers.

To achieve the research objectives, participants were introduced to PriceInvestigate.com, a fictional price comparison website featuring an anthropomorphic logo resembling Sherlock Holmes. This logo was intentionally designed to evoke perceptions of competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness. Participants were presented with an initial scenario in which they imagined interacting with the brand to find an insurance policy for an upcoming holiday. The company positioned itself as a trusted provider, emphasising its promise of "better insurance deals" and prominently showcasing its logo to reinforce its credibility. However, in this study, participants are further exposed to a scenario in which PriceInvestigate.com violates its brand promise to consumers, creating an opportunity to investigate their reactions to such a breach.

### **Designing the scenario**

To ensure that the scenarios used in the research survey are clear, engaging, and capable of producing valid and reliable data aligned with the research objectives, a pretest was conducted. The purpose of the pretest was to identify the threshold (in percentage terms) at which participants perceive that the brand has committed a brand transgression by failing to deliver on its promise of offering consumers the best insurance deals, instead providing higher-priced options. Among 100 participants, the results, analysed using a chi-square test, revealed that 54% selected the 40% price option. The statistical analysis showed a significant deviation from a uniform distribution, indicating that participants did not select price options randomly but rather exhibited clear preferences. The chi-square test results were as follows:  $\chi^2 = 249.2$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < .001$ . This highly significant result ( $p = 1.47 \times 10^{-48}$ ) suggests that participants exhibited

strong non-random preferences for certain price options, reinforcing the importance of the 40% price threshold as a meaningful condition in the main study. Based on this finding, we selected the 40% price option for use in the actual study as the threshold at which consumers perceive a brand transgression. Thus, the scenario was designed as follows.

### **Negative brand experience, scenario:**

*“Now, please imagine that you are reading the following news about the company: It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com **does not deliver** its brand promise. It **does not** provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **40% higher** than they should be.*

*Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).”*

### **Measures**

As in the previous study (Daryanto, et al., 2022), after reading the provided scenario, participants were asked to indicate their perception of whether the brand logo of PriceInvestigate.com could be associated with the fictional character Sherlock Holmes. This association was measured using two item semantic differential scales (e.g. “not at all associated (1) – strongly associated (11) and not at all associated (1) – very much associated (11)). Following these questions, participants proceeded to questions assessing logo association, which was measured using a four-item scale developed by Daryanto et al. (2022). Icon familiarity was then measured using a three-item scale from Daryanto et al. (2022). To measure brand disappointment, we utilised a three-item scale developed by Tan, Balaji, Oikarinen, Alatalo, and Salo (2021). To measure brand betrayal, we employed a three-item scale

developed by Grégoire, and Fisher (2008), which was used to capture participants' feelings of being deceived by the fictional brand.

To control for potential factors that might explain the variance in consumers' motivation to perceived brand wrongdoings as brand disappointment or brand betrayal two control variables were included: Price sensitivity and Deal Proneness. To ensure the robustness and validity of this study's findings, price sensitivity and deal proneness were controlled in the analysis of logo association's effects on brand disappointment and brand betrayal. These variables were chosen due to their well-documented influence on consumer expectations, price-related evaluations, and emotional responses to brand negative constructs (Ramirez & Goldsmith, 2009; Kwak, Puzakova, & Rocereto, 2015; Zrelli & Rahmoun, 2020). Therefore, controlling for these factors allows the study to isolate the unique impact of logo association while mitigating the risk of confounding effects.

Price sensitivity plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer reactions to brand experiences, as it determines whether consumers assess a brand based on its perceived value proposition or purely on cost considerations. Highly price-sensitive consumers are more likely to evaluate brands through a cost-benefit lens rather than emotional engagement, making them particularly vulnerable to brand disappointment when a brand fails to deliver value that aligns with their expectations (Low, Lee, & Cheng, 2013; Khudair, Jusoh, Mardani, & Nor, 2019). If consumers perceive that a brand's pricing is unjustifiably high compared to competitors, their dissatisfaction is likely to be heightened, leading to negative emotional and behavioural responses (Zrelli & Rahmoun, 2020). This phenomenon is evident in multiple consumer contexts. For example, in the low-cost airline industry, price sensitivity significantly influences brand disappointment. Consumers choosing budget airlines expect lower fares as part of the value exchange, and when a carrier such as Citilink charges higher-than-expected prices,

consumers react negatively, experiencing disappointment and erosion of trust in the brand (Sihite, Harun, & Nugroho, 2016). A similar trend is observed in the beauty care industry, where brand experiences influence price sensitivity in shaping consumer evaluations. Research suggests that positive brand experience can mitigate the negative impact of price sensitivity—consumers who perceive high value and satisfaction from beauty products are less likely to experience brand disappointment due to pricing factors (Ulfat, 2013). This indicates that while price sensitivity is an important determinant of brand disappointment, it does not operate in isolation—factors such as brand attachment and perceived product quality moderate its effects. Controlling for price sensitivity is particularly relevant in the context of this study, given the economic conditions currently affecting consumers in the United Kingdom. The UK is experiencing economic instability and rising costs of goods and services (Chester & Jarvis, 2024; Kumar & Bouri, 2024; Zhong, Braga, McKernan, Hayward, Millward, & Trepel, 2024) which may significantly influence participants' price sensitivity. Prior research suggests that during economic downturns, consumers tend to become more price-sensitive, often shifting their preferences toward lower-cost alternatives (Valls, Andrade, & Arribas, 2011). By controlling for price sensitivity, this study ensures that the effect of logo association on brand disappointment is not confounded by participants' predisposition toward price evaluation. Instead, it isolates the cognitive and emotional reactions triggered by brand logos, independent of pricing concerns. This methodological rigor strengthens the validity of the study, ensuring that the observed effects are genuinely linked to the symbolic power of logo association rather than external economic factors influencing price-sensitive behaviours.

Similarly, deal proneness, which refers to a consumer's tendency to be attracted to promotional offers and discounts, has been linked to heightened expectations and increased susceptibility to disappointment (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Consumers who are highly deal-prone often develop expectations of preferential pricing or continuous discounts when



engaging with brands. When these expectations are not met—such as when a previously available promotional offer is discontinued—consumers may experience disproportionate disappointment (Dastidar, 2016). This emotional reaction is distinct from disappointment arising from brand identity or logo associations, making it critical to control for deal proneness to ensure that its influence is separated from the primary effects under investigation. Additionally, deal-prone consumers may react differently to perceived brand negative constructs; for instance, if a brand is found to be misleading in its promotional strategies, these consumers may be more likely to escalate their disappointment into brand betrayal, perceiving the act as an intentional breach of trust (Gázquez-Abad & Sánchez-Pérez, 2009; Tsordia, Lianopoulos, Dalakas, & Theodorakis, 2024)

Therefore, by including price sensitivity and deal proneness as control variables, this study accounts for variations in consumer expectations and decision-making processes that could otherwise distort the observed relationships. This ensures that any significant findings regarding logo association's role in brand disappointment and brand betrayal can be confidently attributed to the symbolic and cognitive connections fostered by the brand logo, rather than external factors related to pricing or promotional expectations. This approach enhances the study's theoretical rigor and empirical validity, allowing for a more precise understanding of how brand logos influence consumer perceptions and emotional responses

Price sensitivity was included as a control variable and measured using a five-item scale adapted from established measurements in prior studies (i.e., Awad, Kortam & Ayad, 2024; Gao, Zhang, & Mittal, 2017; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Kim, 2010; DelVecchio, 2005; and Kim, Srinivasan, & Wilcox, 1999; Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993). This approach ensured the scale captured the multifaceted dimensions of price sensitivity relevant to the current context. Second, deal proneness was controlled using a five-item scale developed by

adapting scales from prior research (Sharma, Jayasimha, & Srivastava, 2024; Cheah, Shimul, & Hart, 2023; Vakeel, Sivakumar, Jayasimha, & Dey, 2018; Martínez & Montaner, 2006; DelVecchio, 2005). The selection of instruments was guided by (1) the recency of the articles, (2) the relevance and compatibility of the instruments with the current research objectives, and (3) the adaptability of the scales to include branding scenarios. The research instruments to measure each construct are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1 Construct Measurements**

Constructs	Items
<b>Logo Association</b>	<p>The logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes the fictional detective character</p> <p>The logo can easily imagine the Sherlock Holmes character</p> <p>I associate the logo with Sherlock Holmes.</p> <p>I am aware that the logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes</p>
<b>Icon Familiarity</b>	<p>I have read Sherlock Holmes novels.</p> <p>I have seen the Sherlock Holmes films.</p> <p>I am a fan of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.</p> <p>I am familiar with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes</p> <p>I am not familiar at all with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes</p>
<b>Brand disappointment</b>	<p>PriceInvestigate.com broke the promise</p> <p>PriceInvestigate.com let you down in a moment of need.</p> <p>PriceInvestigate.com failed to support you.</p>
<b>Brand betrayal</b>	<p>I feel cheated by PriceInvestigate.com</p> <p>I feel betrayed by PriceInvestigate.com</p> <p>I feel lied to by PriceInvestigate.com</p>
<b>Control Variables</b>	
<b>Price Sensitivity</b>	<p>I actively compare prices across brands before deciding what to purchase.</p> <p>A slight increase in price would significantly affect my choice of brand.</p> <p>I often switch brands to take advantage of lower prices.</p> <p>I pay close attention to the price of products to ensure I get the best value.</p> <p>Price plays a significant role in my decision to purchase products even if I like the brand.</p>
<b>Deal Proneness</b>	<p>Participating in promotional deals makes me feel good.</p>

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Beyond the savings, taking advantage of promotional offers brings me joy.  
I often look for and actively participate in promotional campaigns.  
I am more likely to choose a brand that provides promotional offers, even if it is not my first choice.  
When I participate in a deal, I feel I am making smart decision.

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## **Assessment of measures**

### **Screening procedure**

While many studies have utilised various crowdsourcing platforms such as Prolific and MTurk, recent discussions have raised significant concerns about the quality of attention participants from these platforms give to study materials, such as survey questions and responses (Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2013). Participants completing tasks on these platforms often work without supervision or monitoring and receive minimal compensation. Research has shown that this lack of oversight can lead to participants skimming study materials and failing to adequately follow instructions, resulting in data with low reliability and validity (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko, 2009; Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2013).

To address these issues, this study incorporated a modified Instructional Manipulation Check (IMC) (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) within the questionnaire as part of the screening process. An irrelevant question was included in each measurement to assess whether participants paid attention, carefully read the questionnaire and followed the instructions. For example, ‘Cooking should be taught at school’, and ‘A cup of coffee is better than a cup of tea’ were added in logo association and deal proneness. Two questions were also added to test our participants attentiveness to the instructions. These questions were: ‘Please tick ‘Agree’ and

‘Please tick ‘Disagree’’. The participants were asked to respond to these questions with 7-Likert Scale (i.e. Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (7)).

### **Confirmatory factor analysis**

We estimated the measurement model via a confirmatory analysis approach (CFA) (Using AMOS version 27.0). In conducting this analysis, we tested the reliability and validity of the psychometric properties of the scale used in the study (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). **Table 2** lists the standardised factor loadings and the composite reliability for the measurement model. We examined the standardised factor loadings of all items. All exceeded the Bagozzi and Yi (2012) recommended threshold of 0.5 or higher, so convergent validity is confirmed. **Table 2** also presents the composite reliability of each construct. We used the recommendation by Bagozzi and Yi (2012) that the cut-off values for composite reliability should be above the threshold of 0.70. The composite reliability for all measures exceeded the cut-off values. We also examined the discriminant validity by assessing the square root value of the average variance extracted (AVE). All the estimated values as shown in **Table 3** exceed the threshold recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which is 0.50. The data in **Table 3** suggests good internal consistency and convergent validity for all constructs, as evidenced by CR and AVE values.

After verifying the reliability and validity of the psychometric properties, we proceeded to assess the goodness-of-fit for the measurement model. The fit indices demonstrate that the model effectively represents the data, meeting or exceeding established thresholds for a well-fitting model. Specifically, the chi-square divided by degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df = 2.17$ ) falls

within the acceptable range of 1 to 3, indicating a balance between model complexity and fit. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.97) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.97) both exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.90, signifying excellent incremental fit and strong comparative performance against a null model (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.04) is below the cutoff of 0.06, reflecting a close fit between the hypothesised model and the observed data while accounting for model complexity. Furthermore, the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.04) is well within the threshold of 0.08, confirming a low average discrepancy between observed and predicted correlations. Together, these indices provide clear evidence of the model's adequacy and appropriateness for the dataset.

The results reinforce the validity of the constructs and their interrelations, supporting the notion that the chosen indicators effectively represent the theoretical dimensions. This level of model fit is critical for the integrity of subsequent structural equation modelling, as it ensures that any observed relationships between constructs are not confounded by measurement issues. This well-fitting measurement model establishes a solid foundation for exploring how iconic elements, such as those inspired by Sherlock Holmes, shape consumer perceptions of brand stereotypes and influence evaluations of brand-related dimensions like competence, warmth, disappointment, and betrayal. The fit indices confirm that the model sufficiently captures the dynamics of how these iconic elements evoke associations, familiarity, and stereotypes, which are critical in understanding brand perception. This thorough assessment ensures that any subsequent hypothesis testing and structural modelling are reliable, enabling precise and meaningful insights into the branding implications of iconic representations in the context of brand transgression.

**Table 2.** Construct measures and results of second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

<b>Construct/ Items</b>	<b>CR/Loadings</b>
<b>Logo Association</b>	CR = 0.95
The logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes the fictional detective character.	0.93
The logo can easily imagine the Sherlock Holmes character	0.88
I associate the logo with Sherlock Holmes.	0.91
I am aware that the logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes	0.88
<b>Icon Familiarity</b>	CR = 0.77
I have seen the Sherlock Holmes films.	0.76
I am a fan of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes.	0.84
I am familiar with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes	0.55
<b>Brand Disappointment</b>	CR = 0.90
PriceInvestigate.com broke the promise	0.86
PriceInvestigate.com let you down in a moment of need.	0.90
PriceInvestigate.com failed to support you.	0.86
<b>Brand Betrayal</b>	CR = 0.94
I feel cheated by PriceInvestigate.com	0.89
I feel betrayed by PriceInvestigate.com	0.91
I feel lied to by PriceInvestigate.com	0.92
<b>Control Variables</b>	
<b>Price Sensitivity</b>	CR = 0.83
I actively compare prices across brands before deciding what to purchase.	0.71
I often switch brands to take advantage of lower prices.	0.67
I pay close attention to the price of products to ensure I get the best value.	0.86
Price plays a significant role in my decision to purchase products even if I like the brand.	0.70
<b>Deal Proneness</b>	CR = 0.87
Participating in promotional deals makes me feel good.	0.84
Beyond the savings, taking advantage of promotional offers brings me joy.	0.82
I often look for and actively participate in promotional campaigns.	0.77
When I participate in a deal, I feel I am making smart decision.	0.74

\*These items were measured using 7-point Likert-Scales. Fit indices:  $\chi^2 = 1130.67$ ,  $df = 347$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.17$ ; TLI = 0.97; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR=0.04.

**Table 3** Latent construct correlation

	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>IF</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>BW</b>	<b>BD</b>	<b>BB</b>	<b>PS</b>	<b>DP</b>	<b>LA</b>
<b>IF</b>	0.77	0.53	<b>0.73</b>							
<b>BC</b>	0.95	0.83	0.206***	<b>0.91</b>						
<b>BW</b>	0.91	0.72	0.259***	0.637***	<b>0.85</b>					
<b>BD</b>	0.90	0.75	0.07	0.075†	0.01	<b>0.86</b>				
<b>BB</b>	0.94	0.83	0.091*	0.075†	0.02	0.806***	<b>0.91</b>			

<b>PS</b>	0.83	0.55	0.07	0.198***	0.165***	0.275***	0.321***	<b>0.74</b>		
<b>DP</b>	0.87	0.63	0.07	0.368***	0.362***	0.222***	0.209***	0.507***	<b>0.80</b>	
<b>LA</b>	0.95	0.82	0.300***	0.175***	0.125**	0.129**	0.161***	0.152***	0.07	<b>0.90</b>

Values in main diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE)|\*IF = Icon Familiarity; BC = Brand Competence; BW = Brand Warmth; BD = Brand disappointment; BB = Brand Betrayal; PS = Price Sensitivity; DP = Deal Proneness; LA = Logo Association|\*Significance of Correlations: † p < 0.100; \* p < 0.050 \*\*; p < 0.010; \*\*\* p < 0.001(Hu & Bentler, 1999)

## Common Method Bias

Building upon the earlier discussion on addressing potential concerns associated with self-report survey instruments, this research adheres to the recommendations of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) by conducting a comprehensive assessment of common method bias (CMB). As emphasised in prior literature, such an assessment is critical to ensure that the findings derived from self-reported measures are not compromised by CMB.

We employed Harman's one-factor test (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) to evaluate the extent of this potential bias. The one-factor model demonstrated a poor fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ , CFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.039), suggesting minimal risk of common method bias. Furthermore, a Harman's single-factor test conducted using SPSS revealed that a single factor accounted for 22.4% of the total variance, well below the critical threshold of 50%. These statistical findings collectively confirm the absence of substantial CMB in the present study.

To further mitigate CMB risks, we incorporated non-statistical techniques during the survey design phase. For instance, irrelevant questions were interspersed throughout the questionnaire to enhance participant engagement and minimise response bias. An example of such a question is, "Cooking should be taught at school," which served as a check for inattentive responses. Additionally, instructional manipulation checks (IMCs) were included

to ensure participants thoroughly read and adhered to the provided instructions. By combining rigorous statistical tests with strategic non-statistical interventions, this study adopts a robust, multi-pronged approach to addressing CMB. These efforts underscore the reliability and validity of the survey results, strengthening the credibility of the research findings.

## 6.5 Findings

### Demographic Information and Its Influence on Study Results

The demographic composition of the study sample plays a critical role in shaping the findings, particularly in the context of brand anthropomorphism, logo association, brand disappointment, and brand betrayal. By analysing gender, education level, and age distribution, we can better understand how different consumer segments interpret and react to brand transgressions, ultimately influencing the results of this research. This analysis is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Analysis of the demographics of respondents

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	359	55.9%
Male	281	43.8%
Rather not say	2	0.3%
<b>Education Level</b>		
Bachelor's Degree	267	41.6%
Master's Degree	121	18.8%
High School diploma or equivalent	96	15.0%
Some Colleges	80	12.5%
Vocational/technical school (2 years)	52	8.1%
Doctoral Degree	17	2.6%
Less than high school diploma	9	1.4%
<b>Age</b>		
	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>
Minimum = 19 - Maximum = 83	41.7	12.4



## **Gender Distribution and Its Implications**

The sample consists of 55.9% female, 43.8% male, and 0.3% who preferred not to disclose their gender. Prior literature suggests that gender differences impact emotional responses to brand-related experiences, particularly in brand anthropomorphism and trust-based relationships (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013; Reimann et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that women tend to develop stronger emotional connections with brands and are more sensitive to violations of brand trust (Jin & Qian, 2021). This aligns with the brand betrayal construct, where consumers who feel deeply connected to a brand experience more intense emotional reactions when the brand fails to meet expectations.

Given the slightly higher proportion of female respondents in the dataset, the reported brand betrayal effects may be more pronounced due to women's stronger tendency to anthropomorphise brands and perceive brand wrongdoing as a relational betrayal (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Additionally, previous research has found that men tend to focus on functional attributes when evaluating brands, whereas women place greater emphasis on emotional and symbolic meanings (Fournier, 1998). This could explain why logo association and brand betrayal were significant in the study, as the sample skews towards individuals who are more likely to respond emotionally to brand violations.

## **Education Level and Cognitive Processing of Brand Information**

The sample is predominantly highly educated, with 41.6% holding a bachelor's degree, 18.8% a master's degree, and 2.6% a doctoral degree. Additionally, 15.0% of respondents completed high school, while 12.5% attended some college, and 8.1% completed vocational/technical education. The presence of a well-educated sample has important implications for the

interpretation of brand transgressions, as education level influences information processing, critical thinking, and expectations toward brand performance (Khamitov, Grégoire, & Suri, 2020). Research suggests that consumers with higher education levels are more sceptical and analytical in their assessments of brands, meaning they may be less likely to rely on heuristic cues such as brand anthropomorphism alone when forming judgments (Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022). However, they are also more likely to experience brand betrayal when they perceive deceptive marketing tactics, ethical violations, or inconsistencies between brand promises and actions (Zarantonello et al., 2016). This aligns with the study findings, where logo association positively influenced brand disappointment and brand betrayal, suggesting that highly educated consumers critically evaluate brand behaviours and respond strongly to perceived brand wrongdoings.

Furthermore, consumers with higher education levels often have more exposure to brand storytelling and semiotics, making them more attuned to the symbolic meanings behind logos (Holt, 2004). This could explain why icon familiarity significantly influenced logo association, as educated consumers may be more familiar with culturally iconic figures (e.g., Sherlock Holmes) and be more adept at recognising the strategic intent behind anthropomorphic branding.

### **Age Distribution and Its Effect on Brand Perceptions**

The sample's average age is 41.7 years, with a standard deviation of 12.4 years, ranging from 19 to 83. Age is a key determinant of brand expectations, trust, and emotional resilience in response to brand transgressions (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). Prior studies indicate that younger consumers (18-35 years old) are more likely to anthropomorphise brands and engage

with brand personalities, whereas older consumers (40+) are more pragmatic and assess brands based on functional performance (Puzakova et al., 2013; Jin & Qian, 2021).

Given the relatively mature average age of the sample, the study findings suggest that respondents may have evaluated brand disappointment and brand betrayal through both emotional and rational lenses. While younger consumers tend to exhibit heightened emotional responses to brand failures, older consumers are more likely to assess betrayal through the lens of brand consistency, fairness, and corporate responsibility (Reimann et al., 2018). The presence of a broad age range (19-83) strengthens the external validity of the findings, ensuring that both emotional and cognitive processing mechanisms were represented in brand betrayal responses.

### **How Demographics Influence the Study's Findings**

The demographic composition of the sample provides valuable insights into how different consumer groups interpret brand transgressions, particularly in the context of logo association and brand anthropomorphism. Several key takeaways emerge from the analysis:

- **Stronger Emotional Responses to Brand Betrayal:** The slightly higher proportion of female respondents may contribute to more intense brand betrayal responses, as women are more likely to experience relationship-based disappointment and moral transgressions in branding (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Consumers with higher education levels demonstrated greater sensitivity to perceived brand dishonesty, reinforcing the role of cognitive processing in shaping betrayal responses.
- **Heightened Perceptions of Logo Association and Icon Familiarity:** Educated consumers are more familiar with cultural icons (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) and are more likely to

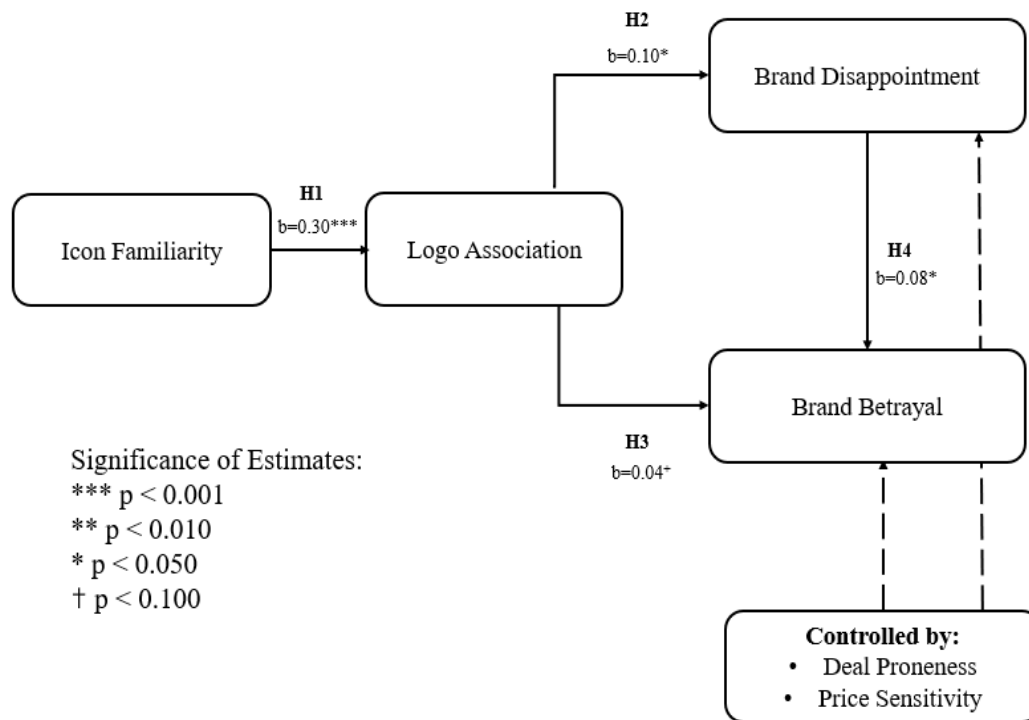
recognise the semiotic meaning behind brand logos (Holt, 2004). This may have strengthened the relationship between icon familiarity and logo association, making anthropomorphic branding a powerful brand positioning tool among this demographic.

- **Age-Driven Differences in Brand Evaluation:** Younger respondents (18-35) may have evaluated brand betrayal through an emotional and identity-driven lens, whereas older respondents (40+) likely focused on functional performance, fairness, and ethical accountability. The broad age range (19-83) increases the generalizability of the findings, as it captures both heuristic-based and rational-based consumer reactions to brand transgressions.

## **Results**

The results of the study are overlaid on the research framework model in **Figure 2** and are produced with more detail in **Table 5**.

**Figure 2** The research framework including the results



**Table 5** Results of SEM model

Hypothesis	Relationship	b	t-value	Result
<b>Control Variables:</b>				
	PS → BD	0.21	4.65***	
	DP → BD	0.13	2.97*	
	PS → BB	0.11	3.517***	
	DP → BB	-0.01	-0.428	
<b>Main effect:</b>				
H1	IF → LA	0.30	6.59***	Supported
H2	LA → BD	0.10	2.32*	Supported
H3	LA → BB	0.05	1.75	n.s
<b>Mediation effect:</b>				
H4	LA → BD → BB	0.075*	CI: 0.02; 0.17 p-value = 0.029	Supported

PS = Price Sensitivity; DP = Deal Proneness; BD = Brand Disappointment; BB = Brand Betrayal; IA = Icon Familiarity; LA = Logo Association. For testing mediation effect, bootstrap samples=5000, 95% CI is the bias-corrected confidence intervals; SEM fit indices:  $\chi^2=599.654$ ;  $df = 181$ ; SRMR= 0.10, RMSEA= 0.060; CFI= 0.954; TLI = 0.946.

## 6.6 Discussion and Implications

This research shows that icon familiarity serves as a crucial antecedent of logo association, reinforcing the role of cultural branding in shaping consumer perceptions. Brands that incorporate iconic elements into their logos can capitalise on existing cultural narratives, fostering stronger brand identification and loyalty. Specifically, our findings provide empirical support for these theoretical propositions. The results indicate that icon familiarity positively influences logo association ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $t = 6.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that logos incorporating culturally iconic figures generate stronger cognitive and emotional associations. This effect underscores the importance of semiotic branding strategies, where cultural resonance amplifies logo meaning beyond mere visual identity (Aversa et al., 2021). By leveraging familiar symbolic imagery, brands can reinforce trust, enhance recall, and create deeper psychological connections with consumers.

Similarly, logos inspired by culturally renowned figures, such as Sherlock Holmes, as employed in this study, can significantly enhance brand perception by evoking competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness (Daryanto et al., 2022). Sherlock Holmes, a character deeply ingrained in British cultural history, serves as an emblem of logical reasoning, problem-solving, and reliability—qualities that consumers naturally transfer to brands adopting similar visual cues. The familiarity of such icons facilitates effortless cognitive processing, reinforcing positive logo associations and strengthening consumer engagement (Torelli & Rodas, 2016; Pineda et al., 2022). These findings further support previous research that suggests a brand's logo is more than a mere visual representation—it serves as a critical tool in shaping brand associations and consumer perceptions (Sanchez, Perez, & Lucas, 2022). Logos function as semiotic anchors, encapsulating a brand's identity and evoking specific cognitive and emotional connections that influence consumer attitudes (Barroso et al., 2022; Daryanto et al., 2022). These associations play a pivotal role in fostering brand differentiation, trust, and

loyalty, enabling brands to cultivate deeper relationships with their audiences (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012).

However, the strategic use of icon familiarity requires careful management. While embedding culturally significant figures into brand logos enhances recognition and affinity, it also raises consumer expectations. Brands that fail to align their performance with the perceived attributes of their anthropomorphised logos risk intensifying negative consumer reactions, such as brand disappointment or betrayal (Daryanto et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the interplay between anthropomorphism, icon familiarity, and consumer expectations is critical for brands aiming to maximise positive logo associations while mitigating potential risks.

Additionally, the data from this study also confirms the hypothesis that logo association positively influences brand disappointment. The empirical findings demonstrate that logo association is positively related to brand disappointment ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $t = 2.32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the stronger a consumer's connection to the associations they perceive from a brand logo design, the more likely unmet expectations will result in brand disappointment. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that logos serve as powerful semiotic tools, shaping brand meaning and influencing consumer expectations (Daryanto et al., 2022). When consumers develop deep-seated associations with a brand logo, they interpret it not merely as a visual identifier but as a symbolic promise of the brand's values, quality, and consistency (Barroso, Viniegra, & Gracia, 2022). However, if the brand fails to uphold these expectations, disappointment emerges as a natural consequence of violated brand trust (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999).

This relationship is grounded in expectancy violation theory, which posits that the strength of consumer expectations directly influences the intensity of their emotional reactions

when those expectations are not met (Reimann et al., 2018). Consumers rely on logos as cognitive heuristics to infer brand attributes, and logos that incorporate culturally iconic figures, such as Sherlock Holmes, carry pre-existing connotations of intelligence, trustworthiness, and problem-solving ability. When brands fail to deliver on these perceived attributes—whether through product failure, misleading claims, or poor service—consumers experience a stronger sense of disappointment than they would with brands that do not employ such semiotic cues (Jin & Qian, 2021). The use of cultural and symbolic meaning in logo design further intensifies consumer expectations, as logos containing historical or culturally significant elements amplify perceived brand credibility and reliability (Aversa et al., 2021). However, these associations can also backfire if the brand fails to align with the perceived meaning of the logo. For instance, if a Sherlock Holmes-inspired brand is perceived as misleading or unethical, the mismatch between expectation and reality triggers a stronger negative response than it would for a neutral brand logo. Strong logo associations also contribute to emotional attachment, making consumers more sensitive to inconsistencies in brand behavior (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012).

Brand disappointment is not merely a reaction to brand underperformance but rather a violation of an implicit emotional contract between the consumer and the brand. Furthermore, anthropomorphised logos amplify this effect, as consumers tend to attribute human-like agency to brands (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). This means that when an anthropomorphised brand fails to meet expectations, it is judged more harshly than non-anthropomorphised brands (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). Our data therefore supports these theoretical propositions and suggests that even subtle shifts in logo association can influence consumer disappointment. This aligns with prior studies that demonstrate how brand disappointment is not merely a function of product failure but also a consequence of cognitive dissonance caused by logo-embedded brand meanings (Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022; Zafrani, White, & Riemer,



2023). Given that logos act as emotional and cognitive anchors, brands with highly recognisable or anthropomorphised logos must carefully align their messaging and performance with the associations embedded in their visual identity. While leveraging cultural and symbolic meanings in logo design can enhance consumer trust, engagement, and differentiation, failing to uphold these associations can lead to intensified consumer disappointment, negative brand evaluations, and weakened brand equity. These findings provide valuable insights for brand managers, emphasising the need for expectation management, consistent brand messaging, and proactive crisis communication strategies to mitigate the risks associated with strong logo associations and heightened consumer expectations.

However, the empirical findings of this study reveal that logo association is not directly and significantly related to brand betrayal ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t = 1.75$ , n.s.). This suggests that while brands may design their logos with specific associations intended to shape consumer expectations and foster emotional connections, this alone is not sufficient to make consumers perceive a brand's mistakes as acts of betrayal. This finding challenges the assumption that stronger logo associations necessarily lead to more intense negative brand evaluations and instead highlights the critical role of mediating factors, particularly brand disappointment, in the process of betrayal. While brand disappointment arises from an unmet expectation, brand betrayal occurs when consumers perceive a brand's actions as an intentional violation of trust (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). This aligns with Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), which suggests that when brands fail to meet consumer expectations, particularly in ethical or moral matters, consumer reactions become more extreme and punitive (Reimann et al., 2018). However, our results indicate that merely forming a strong cognitive and emotional connection with a brand logo does not automatically translate into brand betrayal unless additional negative

experiences, such as perceived deception, ethical misconduct, or repeated violations of consumer trust, occur.

One key reason why logo association alone does not directly lead to brand betrayal lies in the multi-dimensional nature of brand betrayal, which requires both failure severity and an inferred negative motive (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Failure severity refers to how significantly a brand's transgression affects consumers, with major failures—such as unethical behavior or deception—being more likely to trigger betrayal (Finkel et al., 2002; Rehmat & Wasim, 2021). Inferred negative motive, on the other hand, reflects whether consumers perceive the brand's actions as intentional and exploitative rather than accidental (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). For logo association to directly contribute to brand betrayal, consumers must not only have strong associations with the logo but must also perceive the brand as deliberately violating their trust. Without this perceived intentionality, a negative brand experience is more likely to result in disappointment rather than outright betrayal. This helps explain why our results did not find a significant direct relationship between logo association and brand betrayal—while logos create strong brand meanings and emotional connections, these alone are insufficient to generate betrayal unless additional factors, such as repeated brand misconduct or deception, intervene.

Furthermore, brand betrayal is a highly aversive psychological state that requires a deeper level of consumer-brand identification and a stronger sense of personal harm than disappointment does. Consumers often integrate brand logos into their self-concept, and when a brand contradicts the values represented by its logo, the betrayal feels deeply personal (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). However, this process is not automatic. Prior research shows that even when consumers strongly associate with a brand's visual identity, betrayal only occurs if the brand engages in actions that contradict its core identity or moral positioning (Reimann et al., 2018). For example, a brand like Patagonia, which is widely associated with environmental

sustainability, would experience severe backlash if it were exposed for engaging in environmentally harmful practices. However, this betrayal reaction would not stem solely from Patagonia's logo association but rather from the perceived violation of the brand's ethical positioning and consumer trust. This distinction underscores why logo association alone does not directly drive brand betrayal—betrayal is a relational construct that emerges when a brand's actions fundamentally contradict its perceived values (Grégoire et al., 2009).

Another factor explaining the non-significant direct effect of logo association on brand betrayal is the role of associative memory and visual trust cues. Logos serve as trust signals, reinforcing consumer confidence in a brand's identity and reliability. However, research suggests that logos do not inherently trigger negative reactions unless paired with brand misconduct (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). In cases of brand transgressions, logos act as cognitive reminders of the betrayal, reinforcing the negative emotions associated with the brand. This explains why brands such as Nike have faced intense backlash when their actions are perceived as hypocritical, particularly regarding social justice messaging (Einwiller, Lis, Ruppel, & Sen, 2019). Yet, Nike's logo alone did not cause brand betrayal—rather, it was the contrast between the brand's public messaging and its reported unethical practices that intensified consumer responses.

Moreover, logo anthropomorphism, facilitated through logo association, plays a key role in intensifying perceived betrayal, but it does not directly cause it. When logos take on human-like characteristics, consumers develop stronger relational expectations toward the brand, making any brand misconduct feel more personal (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). This can lead to heightened betrayal responses, particularly when the brand is perceived to violate relationship norms (Aggarwal, 2004). However, this process requires both expectation formation and violation, reinforcing why brand betrayal cannot be directly predicted by logo

association alone. Consumers may feel a deeper emotional attachment to anthropomorphised logos, but this does not guarantee betrayal unless the brand actively engages in perceived deceptive or unethical behaviour (Freund & Jacobi, 2013).

Given these findings, our study suggests that while logo association is an important factor in shaping brand expectations and emotional attachment, it does not directly cause brand betrayal in isolation. Instead, brand betrayal is more likely to emerge when disappointment escalates into a perceived violation of moral or ethical expectations. This is supported by the non-significant relationship between logo association and brand betrayal ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t = 1.75$ , n.s.), which implies that betrayal is contingent on additional mediating factors, particularly brand disappointment. Consumers may develop strong cognitive and emotional ties to a brand through its logo, but unless the brand is perceived as engaging in severe transgressions with intentional negative motives, betrayal remains unlikely.

This distinction is crucial for brand managers, as it highlights that strong logo associations do not automatically put brands at risk of consumer betrayal. Instead, betrayal is more likely to occur when brands engage in ethical violations or deceptive practices that contradict the values their logos represent. Managing expectations through transparent brand communication, ethical consistency, and authentic engagement can reduce the risk of betrayal, even for brands with highly recognisable and culturally embedded logos. Furthermore, brands must be mindful that logos serve as cognitive triggers—if a brand's actions contradict its established brand identity, the logo can become a symbol of betrayal rather than trust. This reinforces the need for strategic crisis management and reputation repair efforts to align brand actions with consumer expectations and prevent disappointment from escalating into betrayal.

Thus, while logo association plays a foundational role in shaping brand meaning and expectations, it does not directly cause brand betrayal. Betrayal is a relational and ethical

construct, requiring a perceived moral transgression or intentional violation of trust for it to occur. Strong logo associations may intensify consumer disappointment, but only when disappointment is coupled with a perceived ethical breach does it escalate into brand betrayal. This finding contributes to the broader literature on consumer-brand relationships, brand transgressions, and trust recovery, emphasizing the complex interplay between brand meaning, visual identity, and consumer trust

As previously discussed, this study also examines whether brand disappointment mediates the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. The empirical findings support this hypothesis, demonstrating that brand disappointment significantly mediates the effect of logo association on brand betrayal ( $\beta = 0.075$ , CI: 0.02–0.17,  $p = 0.029$ ). This suggests that while strong logo associations shape consumer expectations and foster emotional connections with a brand, they do not directly cause betrayal. Instead, brand disappointment serves as the critical psychological mechanism through which logo association influences betrayal. This aligns with prior research indicating that consumers first experience disappointment when a brand fails to uphold its perceived values, and only when this disappointment intensifies—through repeated failures, perceived deception, or moral transgressions—does it escalate into betrayal (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Reimann et al., 2018). Our findings reinforce the notion that betrayal is not an immediate response to unmet expectations, but a deeper emotional reaction triggered by accumulated disappointment and the perception of intentional brand misconduct.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999) provides a valuable framework for understanding this mediating effect. When consumers evaluate a brand's failure, their initial emotional response is disappointment rather than outright betrayal. If the failure is perceived as a minor lapse or an isolated incident, consumers may forgive the brand and retain

some level of trust (Haase, Weidmann, & Labenz, 2022). However, when disappointment becomes severe, recurrent, or contradicts the brand's established moral or symbolic values, consumers begin to reinterpret their emotional response as a deeper violation of trust, leading to betrayal. Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) further supports this process, suggesting that when a brand's transgressions sharply contrast with its established values, consumer reactions become more intense and punitive (Reimann et al., 2018; Rasouli et al., 2023). This explains why logo association alone does not directly trigger betrayal—betrayal requires more than unmet expectations; it necessitates a perception of trust violation, shaped by the intensity of disappointment.

The role of logo anthropomorphism further amplifies this process. Research indicates that brands with anthropomorphised logos cultivate stronger relational expectations, leading consumers to assume that the brand will behave like a responsible, trustworthy partner (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004). When such brands violate consumer trust, the emotional response is heightened, as the transgression is perceived not merely as a corporate failure but as a personal betrayal (Kim & Kramer, 2015). Freund and Jacobi's (2013) concept of *doppelgänger* brand images illustrate how anthropomorphic brand symbols—such as mascots or human-like logos—can become targets of consumer resentment and moral outrage during crises. For instance, Ronald McDonald, initially designed to symbolise warmth, joy, and trustworthiness, has been repurposed by activists as a symbol of corporate deception and manipulation in response to criticism of McDonald's corporate practices. Similarly, logos with culturally significant imagery, such as Starbucks' mermaid logo, which is associated with ethical sourcing, could be reframed as a symbol of hypocrisy if the company were accused of greenwashing (Freund & Jacobi, 2013). This process demonstrates that brand betrayal does not emerge directly from logo association but is instead mediated by the severity and persistence of brand disappointment.

The intensity of brand disappointment and its progression into betrayal depends on two key antecedents: failure severity and inferred negative motive (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Failure severity refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand's mistake as harmful, while inferred negative motive reflects whether consumers believe the brand's actions were intentional and exploitative (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Rehmat & Wasim, 2021). A mild disappointment may allow the brand to recover, but repeated or extreme failures—especially those perceived as intentional—cause consumers to escalate their response from disappointment to betrayal (Zarantonello et al., 2016). This aligns with self-brand connection theory, which suggests that consumers who strongly identify with a brand's visual identity experience a deeper sense of regret and self-directed blame when they realise they have been misled (Reimann et al., 2018). In these cases, consumers may experience shame for having trusted the brand, leading to stronger emotional reactions, including self-castigation and retaliatory behaviors (Joskowicz-Jablonek & Leiser, 2013; Rachman, 2010).

A particularly salient example of this process occurs when brands use logos to communicate ethical or social responsibility. If a brand markets itself as environmentally conscious through its logo but is later exposed for engaging in environmentally harmful practices, the initial disappointment felt by consumers will likely transform into betrayal, as they interpret the failure as a deliberate act of deception (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). This aligns with research on negative brand emotions, which suggests that minor disappointments accumulate over time, eventually leading to extreme emotional responses (Puzakova et al., 2013). Consider brands that anthropomorphise their logos with figures such as Sherlock Holmes—these brands inherently signal intelligence, trustworthiness, and reliability (Daryanto et al., 2022). If a brand using a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo fails to meet these expectations, consumers initially experience disappointment but may later reinterpret this experience as

betrayal, particularly if the failure is perceived as intentional or deceptive (Reimann et al., 2018).

Empirical research supports the mediating role of brand disappointment in the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. Zarantonello et al. (2016) find that repeated or severe disappointment significantly increases the likelihood of betrayal, particularly when consumers perceive the failure as part of a broader pattern of misalignment with the brand's identity. Similarly, Reimann et al. (2018) demonstrate that even minor disappointments can escalate into betrayal when consumers feel that the brand's actions represent an ongoing violation of trust. This supports research on the escalation of negative brand emotions, suggesting that disappointments accumulate over time, leading to more extreme consumer reactions (Puzakova et al., 2013). Taken together, these findings indicate that brand disappointment serves as the psychological bridge between logo association and brand betrayal—it is the emotional mechanism that determines whether an unmet expectation leads to momentary dissatisfaction or full-scale consumer rejection.

Therefore, brand disappointment is a necessary precursor to brand betrayal, acting as a psychological and emotional filter through which consumers evaluate brand transgressions. When brands fail to meet expectations, the initial disappointment may remain contained if the transgression is seen as minor or reparable. However, when disappointment accumulates, is perceived as intentional, or involves violations of moral and ethical standards, it is reinterpreted as betrayal, leading to severe consumer backlash. This reinforces the argument that logo association alone does not directly cause betrayal but instead heightens consumer expectations, making any failures more emotionally impactful. This finding provides compelling evidence that brand betrayal emerges indirectly through brand disappointment. In other words, when consumers develop strong associations with a logo, they hold high expectations for the brand.



When the brand fails to meet these expectations, it first leads to disappointment before escalating into brand betrayal. This mediation effect aligns with Expectancy Violation Theory (Burgoon, 1993), which posits that unmet expectations trigger negative emotions, which in turn influence long-term attitudes and behaviours toward the brand.

## 6.7 Theoretical contributions

First, this study contributes to the development of the brand anthropomorphism concept, specifically by enriching the discussion on logo anthropomorphism. The findings highlight the critical role of the iconic effect in the process of humanising brands, particularly when brands anthropomorphise their logo designs. This contribution is particularly significant because existing brand anthropomorphism literature has rarely explored how the process of humanising a brand should also incorporate macro-level factors, such as cultural influences.

Our study reveals a significant relationship between icon familiarity and logo associations, demonstrating that when a brand designs its logo using an iconic character—a well-known cultural symbol that holds strong significance and relevance for consumers—the brand can effectively "borrow" from this symbol to enhance its brand identity. This borrowing effect manifests in the form of positive associations in consumers' minds when they encounter a brand logo featuring an iconic character with which they are familiar. For example, the logo of PriceInvestigation.com, which incorporates elements of the iconic character Sherlock Holmes, influences how participants construct positive associations with the brand. By integrating such design elements into its logo, the brand strategically leverages established cultural imagery to reinforce its brand value. This finding aligns with prior research, which suggests that brands can strategically design their logos using elements derived from well-known cultural figures and symbols. Such an approach can positively influence consumers'

perceptions and behaviours, including their willingness to pay for the brand (Aversa et al., 2021; Daryanto et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Ho, Tarabashkina, & Liu, 2024).

Second, this study also contributes to the development of the brand anthropomorphism concept, specifically by explaining the effects of logo anthropomorphism through brand logos that incorporate elements from iconic characters. The findings shed light on how such design choices influence logo associations and, in turn, shape consumers' perceptions of brand wrongdoings. More precisely, this research explains the mechanism by which consumers, simply by looking at a brand's logo, may interpret the brand's transgressions either as brand disappointment or brand betrayal. The study finds that logo associations positively influence brand disappointment—while strong logo associations enhance consumer attachment, they also make consumers more vulnerable to disappointment when brand expectations are not met. This aligns with previous research, which emphasises the importance of brand-consumer relationships, demonstrating that even a single brand element—such as a brand logo—can become a source of consumer disappointment. Logos serve as powerful semiotic tools, encapsulating brand meaning and shaping consumer judgments (Jin & Qian, 2021; Daryanto et al., 2022).

As the French author Voltaire famously said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” In this context, we propose that “With great brand associations come great expectations.” In other words, brands must recognise that the strong, positive values they aim to embed in their logos also create expectations—expectations that consumers use as reference points when evaluating brand behaviour. Thus, if a brand's actions contradict these expectations, consumers may transfer their disappointment to the brand logo itself. This paradox is particularly relevant in the context of brand anthropomorphism, where human-like logos strengthen consumer-brand relationships but also increase susceptibility to emotional

backlash when expectations are violated (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Yang & Aggarwal, 2025).

This study provides an important and novel contribution to the brand disappointment literature, particularly within the context of brand logos. While most previous research has primarily focused on how consumer disappointment towards brand logos arises due to design-related factors—such as logo shape, color, and symmetry (Jiang et al., 2016; Li, Wang & Zhang, 2023; Trehan & Kalro, 2024; Luffarelli, Stamatogiannakis, & Yang, 2019) or radical logo changes (Grober, Cuny & Fornerino, 2016)—there has been little exploration of how logos designed with brand anthropomorphism and iconic character borrowing can influence consumer disappointment. Rather than solely examining how aesthetic design elements or new vs. old logos shape consumer responses, this study shifts the focus to the idea that a brand logo is more than a mere visual representation. Instead, it serves as a critical tool in shaping brand associations and consumer perceptions. Importantly, the integration of historically and culturally iconic symbols into logo design can enhance brand credibility, storytelling, and consumer engagement (Holt, 2004). This finding reinforces prior research, which suggests that beyond simple identity, brand logos embedded with iconic figures become powerful semiotic tools that reinforce brand narratives (Rossolatos, 2018).

Third, this study further contributes to brand anthropomorphism research by demonstrating the indirect effects of brand disappointment in the relationship between logo associations and brand betrayal. The findings reveal that consumers do not immediately perceive a brand's failure as betrayal; rather, they first experience brand disappointment, which, if unresolved, escalates into betrayal. This progression underscores the emotional trajectory of negative brand experiences, emphasising the need for brands to proactively manage consumer disappointment to prevent severe backlash. Drawing on Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999) and Expectancy Violation Theory (Reimann et al., 2018),

this study explains how consumers initially assess brand failures as disappointing before reinterpreting them as violations of trust. When disappointment is perceived as severe, repeated, or intentional, it transforms into betrayal, leading to punitive behaviours such as boycotts and negative word-of-mouth. The risk is particularly pronounced for brands with anthropomorphised logos, as consumers attribute human-like intentions to the brand, making failures feel more personal and morally unacceptable (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Kim & Kramer, 2015).

This research advances the brand disappointment literature by shifting the focus from aesthetic design elements and radical logo changes to the emotional and symbolic power of logos. While prior studies have examined logo aesthetics (Jiang et al., 2016; Li, Wang & Zhang, 2023) and identity shifts (Grober, Cuny & Fornerino, 2016), this study highlights how logos, particularly those incorporating iconic characters, set consumer expectations that intensify disappointment when unmet. Logos function as semiotic tools that shape consumer trust and identity alignment (Rossolatos, 2018); thus, their misuse can amplify consumer disillusionment and crisis response.

## 6.8 Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this research provide valuable insights for brand owners and managers regarding the role of logo anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly in the contexts of brand disappointment and brand betrayal. These insights have significant implications for brand logo design strategy and crisis management. This study suggests that brand owners and managers must carefully consider how anthropomorphised logos—especially those incorporating elements from culturally iconic characters—impact consumer expectations and perceptions, particularly when the brand makes

mistakes or fails to meet expectations. The research highlights that integrating culturally iconic figures (e.g. Sherlock Holmes) into logo design can help brands establish stronger, more persuasive positive associations. By ‘borrowing’ the symbolic value of an iconic character, brands benefit from the pre-existing positive associations that consumers already have with the figure. This strategy enhances brand recognition and trustworthiness, reinforcing prior research on cultural branding, which emphasises the power of familiar symbols in generating immediate consumer trust and credibility. For instance, in this study, a brand that incorporated elements of Sherlock Holmes into its logo design became associated with the character’s positive attributes, which were relevant to the brand’s value proposition. This strategy is particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or newly established brands seeking to convey a sense of quality and a positive consumer experience. Consumers are more likely to feel assured when encountering a logo that feels familiar and culturally relevant rather than one that is entirely new and unfamiliar. Therefore, brand owners and managers should consider this strategy when designing their brand logos. However, this must be done with careful alignment to the brand’s core values and overall communication strategy to avoid setting unrealistic expectations that could ultimately lead to consumer disappointment or backlash.

Additionally, brands utilising anthropomorphised logos featuring iconic characters must ensure consistency between their brand promises and the actual value they deliver. The use of such characters in logo design is not merely an aesthetic choice; rather, it represents an implicit commitment to consumers that the brand will fulfil the expectations associated with the chosen character. This necessitates a proactive approach to managing consumer expectations, including: transparent and honest communication in marketing materials; realistic and truthful advertising to avoid exaggerated claims; fair pricing and consumer policies to prevent perceptions of exploitation; clear terms of service to minimise misunderstandings; swift and transparent responses to consumer complaints to mitigate

dissatisfaction before it escalates into brand betrayal. Additionally, brands should reinforce positive interactions through customer-brand relationship programs to buffer against potential damage caused by unmet expectations. Establishing a strong, ongoing dialogue with consumers can help sustain trust and prevent negative consumer sentiment from escalating.

While logo associations significantly influence brand disappointment, this study also reveals that disappointment can escalate into brand betrayal. The research further confirms that anthropomorphised brands are particularly vulnerable to consumer backlash during crises due to the heightened expectations they create. When a brand with an anthropomorphised logo fails, consumers may interpret this as a personal betrayal, intensifying their negative reactions. Therefore, brands that anthropomorphise their logos, especially those incorporating iconic characters, must develop pre-emptive crisis communication strategies. These strategies should include: humanised brand apologies that acknowledge consumer concerns empathetically; active social listening and rapid-response teams to detect and address emerging issues promptly; and corrective actions that demonstrate a commitment to rectifying the problem and rebuilding trust. By implementing these measures, brands can mitigate the potential reputational damage caused by consumer backlash and maintain long-term consumer loyalty.

This research underscores the dynamic nature of consumer expectations in response to brand logos, particularly those featuring culturally iconic characters. As market conditions evolve, brands must adapt their positioning to remain relevant to their consumers while preserving the associations their logos evoke. Brands should conduct regular brand perception audits to assess whether their anthropomorphic logos continue to align with shifting consumer expectations. Additionally, rather than implementing abrupt changes to logo designs, brands should opt for a gradual evolution approach. This ensures that consumer relationships with the brand remain intact while allowing for strategic repositioning of brand values and associations. Finally, brands should engage in consumer education initiatives to reinforce the intended

meanings behind their anthropomorphic logo designs. By doing so, brands can ensure alignment between their values, communication strategies, and consumer interpretations, ultimately fostering stronger brand-consumer relationships.

## 6.9 Limitations and future research directions.

This study has several limitations, which provide avenues for future research. First, the study employed hypothetical conditions, including both the brands and logos examined as well as the brand failure scenarios. As Bernard (2012) suggests, controlled experimental conditions, while useful for isolating variables, may not fully capture the complexities of real-life brand interactions. Future research could extend this study by investigating actual brand failures to better understand consumer responses in real-world settings. Additionally, future studies could explore this topic across different business sectors, as prior research has shown that brand disappointment can occur across a wide range of branded products, services, and experiences (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Kaynak et al., 2008; Zafrani, White & Riemer, 2023). Further research should also consider how product type and the way consumers experience brand betrayal influence consumer reactions, as both factors have been shown to shape responses to brand failures (Sameeni, Ahmad, & Fullieri, 2022).

Second, the iconic character used in this study is limited to a single cultural context—Sherlock Holmes, a well-known figure in the United Kingdom. Future research could conduct comparative studies to explore how different iconic characters within the same cultural setting, such as Paddington Bear, influence consumer perceptions. Although Paddington Bear has not yet been widely used in brand logo designs, numerous brands in the UK have incorporated this character into their packaging and promotional campaigns. For instance, Robertson's Marmalade leveraged Paddington Bear in its branding (Bamford, 2014), while Warburtons

temporarily rebranded itself as “War-bear-tons” and redesigned its packaging to feature the character (Mileham, 2014; Brownsell, 2014). More recently, in 2024, Jo Malone collaborated with Paddington Bear to promote a limited-edition series of scented gifts (Barger, 2024). Future research could further extend this study by investigating how iconic characters from different cultural contexts influence brand perceptions. A comparative approach examining Eastern versus Western cultural settings could provide valuable insights into whether consumer perceptions differ across cultural dimensions. For instance, future studies could examine iconic characters from East Asian cultures, such as Doraemon, Hello Kitty, and Pikachu from Japan, or Pororo the Little Penguin and the Mugunghwa Girl from Squid Game in South Korea.

Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to brand failures. Cultural meanings associated with brands can evoke strong emotional reactions, and cultural alignment or misalignment can significantly impact consumer perceptions. For instance, Western brands operating in conservative markets may face backlash due to cultural misalignment, as seen in Mango’s case in Iran, where cultural values led to mixed consumer reactions (Torelli, 2013). Additionally, consumers interpret brand failures through their cultural lens, leading to different expectations and reactions. Eastern consumers, for example, may experience greater brand dilution when their cultural identity is strongly tied to a brand, whereas Western consumers may be less affected under similar circumstances (Sharon, 2010).

Lastly, this study also focuses solely on how icon familiarity and logo association influence consumer perceptions of brand failures, without examining their impact on consumer behaviour. Future research should expand upon this by incorporating variables that explore how icon familiarity and logo association affect post-disappointment consumer behaviour. Prior research highlights the importance of investigating consumer behaviour following brand disappointment and brand betrayal, as these experiences can act as catalysts for not only negative but also intense consumer reactions. Such behaviours include negative word-of-



mouth, online complaints, brand avoidance, brand switching, and even retaliatory actions (Reinmann et al., 2018; Hase et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2022; Zafrani et al., 2023). Future studies could provide a more detailed examination of how icon familiarity and logo associations predict the likelihood of these negative consumer behaviours.

By addressing these gaps, future research can enhance our understanding of how brands can strategically manage consumer expectations, mitigate brand failures, and build resilience against brand betrayal across different cultural and market contexts.

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## Appendix

### A. Survey Questionnaire – Main Study

#### Introduction

Welcome

#### Dear respondent

My name is Gilang Widya Kartika.

I am a PhD student in the Marketing Department at Lancaster University Management School, and I am conducting a study about brand logo.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire.

Please answer all the questions. The questionnaire should **take around 10-15 minutes** to complete. Please note that it is not possible to return to a page once it has been completed.

When you arrive at the final 'thank you' page, you will know that your responses have been recorded in our database. Once you click the link below you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

### **Data Protection**

Before you start the survey, please read this privacy statement, which tells you how any personal data you submit with your responses to this survey will be utilized and protected, and the rights you have in relation to it.

The researcher will not identify any individuals when reporting the results both internally and externally and will ensure that no individual can be identified by implication. After you finish the survey, the result will only be used by the researcher and researcher's supervisory team. The researcher will keep all your personal information confidential, that is the researcher will not share it with others. The researcher will remove any personal information from the written record of the participant's contribution.

The participants' data will be stored in encrypted files and on password-protected computers. The researcher will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in her office. The researcher will keep data that can identify the participants separately from non-personal information (e.g. participant views on a specific topic). In accordance with university guidelines, the researcher will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. The data collected is completely anonymous and will be used only in aggregated form to complete my research. If you understand the above information and wish to participate, please click the arrow below to confirm that you consent to any personal data you provide being used in the way described (if you do not consent then please close this browser window to exit the survey).

You can contact me at **g.kartika@lancaster.ac.uk** for more information if you wish. If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

**Professor Alexandros Skandalis** as the Head of Marketing Department, Department of Marketing Lancaster University Management School

Email at : a.skandalis@lancaster.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your help with this.

To participate with this study, please click on the button below.

☐ Click **here** to go to the main survey

Please enter your Prolific ID:

---

### **Main Study**

Q1 Please **read the following scenario**

Please imagine that you want to buy an insurance policy to cover your next holiday trip. You decide to use PriceInvestigate.com, which is a price comparison website. PriceInvestigate.com is a well-established company that has millions of visitors each month. PriceInvestigate.com promises customers **better** insurance deals. You visited the PriceInvestigate.com website, and you saw on the top left of the website the brand logo of the company as you can see below.

Please indicate the extent to which the company’s logo can be associated with Sherlock Holmes.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all associated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly associated
Not at all associated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much associated

**Q2 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below: (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

The logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes, the fictional detective character. (1)

The logo can easily imagine the Sherlock Holmes character. (2)

Cooking should be taught at school. (3)

I associate the logo with Sherlock Holmes. (4)

I am aware that the logo reminds me of Sherlock Holmes. (5)

**Q3 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

I have read the Sherlock Holmes novels. (1)

I have seen the Sherlock Holmes films. (2)

I am a fan of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes (3)

I am familiar with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes (4)

I am not familiar at all with the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes (5)

Please tick 'Agree' (6)

**Q4 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

The logo is alive (like a person). (1)

The logo has humanlike qualities. (2)

The logo has a mind of its own. (3)

The logo has the ability to experience emotions. (4)

Please tick 'Disagree'. (5)

The logo has consciousness. (6)

The logo looks human-like. (7)

The logo is life-like. (8)

The logo has human-like appearance. (9)

**Q5 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

- The logo represents a capable brand. (1)
- The logo represents a competent brand. (2)
- I love to use social media every day. (3)
- The logo represents an efficient brand. (4)
- The logo represents an intelligent brand. (5)

**Q6 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

- The logo represents a friendly brand. (1)
- The logo represents a good-natured brand. (2)
- I like to run, even when its rains. (3)
- The logo represents a kind brand. (4)
- The logo represents a warm brand (5)

**Q7 Below is the PriceInvestigate.com logo**



Now, please imagine that you are reading the following news about the company:

It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com **does not deliver** its brand promise. It **does not** provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **40% higher** than they should be.

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

PriceInvestigate.com broke the promise (1)

PriceInvestigate.com let you down in a moment of need. (2)

I believe setting goals helps me stay focused. (3)

PriceInvestigate.com failed to support you. (4)

**Q8 As you can read in the previous item**

PriceInvestigate.com **does not** deliver its brand promise. It **does not** provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **40% higher** than they should be.

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).

I feel cheated by PriceInvestigate.com (1)

I find it easy to adapt to unexpected changes in my daily routine. (2)

I feel betrayed by PriceInvestigate.com. (3)

I feel lied to by PriceInvestigate.com (4)



**Q9 Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).**

I actively compare prices across brands before deciding what to purchase. (1)

A slight increase in price would significantly affect my choice of brand. (2)

I often switch brands to take advantage of lower prices. (3)

I pay close attention to the price of products to ensure I get the best value. (4)

Detective characters are better than superhero characters. (5)

Price plays a significant role in my decision to purchase products even if I like the brand. (6)

**Q10 Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the statements listed below (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree).**

Participating in promotional deals makes me feel good. (1)

Beyond the savings, taking advantage of promotional offers brings me joy. (2)

I often look for and actively participate in promotional campaigns. (3)

A cup of coffee is better than cup of tea. (4)

I am more likely to choose a brand that provides promotional offers, even if it is not my first choice. (7)

When I participate in a deal, I feel I am making smart decisions. (8)

**Q11 Respondent Characteristics    What is your gender?**

☐ Male (1)

☐ Female (2)

☐ Rather not say (3)

**Q12 Please indicate the year in which you were born: eg. 1980**

---

**Q13 What is the highest level of qualification you have completed?**

- ☐ Less than high school diploma (1)
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent (2)
- ☐ Vocational/technical school (2 year) (3)
- ☐ Some college (4)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (5)
- ☐ Master's degree (6)
- ☐ Doctoral degree (7)

**Q14 In which country do you currently reside?**

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (195)

Thanks for your participation in this study.

## B. Survey Questionnaire – Pre-Test

Welcome

**Dear respondent**

My name is Gilang Widya Kartika.

I am a PhD student in the Marketing Department at Lancaster University Management School, and I am conducting a study about brand logo.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. Please answer all the questions. The questionnaire should **take around 5 minutes** to complete. Please note that it is not possible to return to a page once it has been completed. When you arrive at the final 'thank you' page, you will know that your responses have been recorded in our database. Once you click the link below you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

**Data Protection** Before you start the survey, please read this privacy statement, which tells you how any personal data you submit with your responses to this survey will be utilized and protected, and the rights you have in relation to it.

The researcher will not identify any individuals when reporting the results both internally and externally, and will ensure that no individual can be identified by implication. After you finish the survey, the result will only be used by the researcher and the researcher's supervisory team. The researcher will keep all your personal information confidential, that is the researcher will not share it with others. The researcher will remove any personal information from the written record of the participant's contribution.

The participant's data will be stored in encrypted files and on password-protected computers. The researcher will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in her office. The researcher will keep data that can identify the participants separately from non-personal information (e.g. participant views on a specific topic). By University guidelines, the researcher will keep the data securely for at least ten years.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. The data collected is completely anonymous and will be used only in aggregated form to complete my research. If you understand the above information and wish to participate, please click the arrow below to confirm that you consent

to any personal data you provide being used in the way described (if you do not consent then please close this browser window to exit the survey).

You can contact me at **g.kartika@lancaster.ac.uk** for more information if you wish. If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research you can also contact:

**Professor Alexandros Skandalis**

as the Head of Marketing Department, Department of Marketing  
Lancaster University Management School

Email at: **a.skandalis@lancaster.ac.uk**

Thank you very much for your help with this.

To participate in this study, please click on the button below.

☐ Click **here** to go to the main survey

Q1 Please enter your Prolific ID:

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**Q2 Please imagine that you are visiting this website**

You want to buy an insurance policy to cover your next holiday trip. You decide to use PriceInvestigate.com, which is a price comparison website. PriceInvestigate.com is a well-established company that has millions of visitors each month. PriceInvestigate.com promises customers **better insurance deals**.

**As you can read above, the insurance company promises to provide you the best insurance deal that they can find in the market. Now, please choose from the scenarios below the point at which you would decide not to buy the insurance deal offered by**

### PriceInvestigate.com.

- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **10% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **20% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **30% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **40% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **50% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **60% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **70% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **80% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **90% higher** than they should be.
- ☐ It has been discovered that PriceInvestigate.com does not deliver its brand promise. It does not provide customers with the best prices. Its prices are **100% higher** than they should be.

### Q3 Respondent Characteristics What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say

### Q4 Please indicate the year in which you were born: eg. 1980

---

**Q5 What is the highest level of qualification you have completed?**

- ☐ Less than high school diploma
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent
- ☐ Vocational/technical school (2 year)
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree

**Q6 In which country do you currently reside?**

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (195)

Thanks for your participation in this study.

## Chapter 7. General Conclusion

*“A symbol’s not just a picture. It’s a story. A history. A message.”*

— *The Batman* (2022)

This final chapter serves to conclude the discussions presented throughout this thesis. The opening quote has been deliberately selected to frame the key insights of this concluding section. While seemingly simple, this cinematic line effectively captures the central argument of the research: that logo anthropomorphism plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions of brands and in driving emotional responses when brands commit transgressions. The quote underscores the significance of anthropomorphised logos designed with elements derived from iconic characters embedded within the cultural context of the consumer. Though delivered in a fictional narrative, the symbolic weight of the quote resonates profoundly with the theoretical and empirical foundations of this thesis. In *The Batman*, the symbol—representing justice, fear, and legacy—transcends its visual simplicity. Similarly, in branding, a logo is not merely a graphic identifier; it serves as a condensed repository of meaning, emotion, memory, and cultural significance. It operates as a brand’s narrative shorthand. In sum, this quote succinctly encapsulates the core proposition of the thesis: that brand logos—particularly those that are anthropomorphised and culturally grounded—are not mere visual design choices. Rather, they are storied artifacts imbued with psychological significance, strategic intent, and symbolic meaning. The power of a logo lies not only in what it visually displays, but in the narrative it conveys.

## 7.1 From Conceptual Foundations to Brand Strategic and Consumers' Emotional Response: A Cumulative Exploration of Brand Anthropomorphism

As stated in the title of this thesis, the goal of this research is to advance the theoretical and empirical understanding of brand anthropomorphism, particularly by interrogating its conceptual clarity, operational relevance, and emotional implications. By conducting three studies, this thesis provides detailed responses to the three central research questions, which are intended to contribute to the ongoing development of brand anthropomorphism literature. Furthermore, the findings of the three studies are also expected to contribute to the literature on brand design and consumer psychology. Overall, the contribution offered by the three studies in this thesis lies in explaining the strategic value and the emotional impact of logo anthropomorphism on consumer perceptions, especially through the design of brand logos with culturally iconic characters. Comprehensively, the thesis also provides insight into the importance of logo anthropomorphism in both contexts: when consumers are in a positive relationship with the brand, and when brand failures occur, leading to consumer disappointment or feelings of betrayal.

### **Addressing the General Research Questions**

This thesis is structured around three interconnected research papers, each designed to answer a specific research question that collectively advances the theoretical and empirical understanding of brand anthropomorphism. The overarching aim is to move beyond the fragmented conceptualisation of brand anthropomorphism and investigate how strategically anthropomorphised logos—particularly those designed with culturally iconic characters—affect consumer responses in both positive and negative brand contexts. Through a sequential inquiry, the three studies collectively respond to the research questions, revealing a unified and



multi-dimensional narrative of how brand anthropomorphism operates across the conceptual, perceptual, and emotional spectrum of consumer-brand relationships.

**RQ1: How has brand anthropomorphism been conceptualised, operationalised, and thematically explored in the literature?**

The present review critically examines how brand anthropomorphism has been conceptualised, operationalised, and thematically explored in the branding literature. Drawing upon 157 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023, this study provides a comprehensive synthesis that addresses the fragmented state of the discourse and offers a unified conceptual and methodological foundation for future inquiry. Brand anthropomorphism—broadly defined as the attribution of human characteristics to brands—has been approached from multiple disciplinary angles, resulting in a multidimensional construct that is often inconsistently applied. Through systematic analysis, this review finds that conceptualisations of brand anthropomorphism have evolved along three interrelated yet distinct trajectories: psychological, strategic, and cultural. Early definitions predominantly emerged from consumer psychology, framing anthropomorphism as a cognitive heuristic through which individuals interpret brands as intentional, emotive, and social agents. This psychological perspective positioned anthropomorphism as a mechanism to reduce complexity, foster relational bonds, and elicit trust, especially in contexts of brand transgressions or uncertainty. Over time, scholars expanded this view by integrating strategic considerations, highlighting how marketers intentionally humanise brands through the use of mascots, avatars, anthropomorphic packaging, and communication styles. These strategic deployments serve as tools for emotional differentiation and symbolic engagement, helping brands create more compelling and relatable identities in saturated markets.

More recently, a cultural lens has begun to reshape the understanding of brand anthropomorphism. This perspective argues that anthropomorphic elements do more than simulate human traits—they encode cultural meanings, myths, and archetypes that align the brand with shared societal narratives. For instance, studies on logo anthropomorphism reveal how brands can appropriate culturally familiar symbols, such as mythical characters or literary icons, to trigger deeper symbolic associations and establish a stronger connection to consumer self-identity. This cultural embeddedness, as demonstrated in recent empirical work, elevates anthropomorphism from a tactical device to a socio-cultural strategy that helps brands become part of consumers' collective memory and aspirational frameworks. However, while this multidimensionality enriches the conceptual terrain, it also contributes to definitional ambiguity. The term “brand anthropomorphism” is often conflated with adjacent constructs such as brand personification, humanisation, and personality, leading to theoretical overlap and inconsistent usage across studies.

Addressing this ambiguity, the current study makes a significant contribution by offering conceptual clarity grounded in a rigorous systematic review. Unlike previous literature reviews that either aggregated general “humanisation” phenomena or examined anthropomorphism alongside broader constructs, this review focuses exclusively on studies that explicitly use the term “brand anthropomorphism” as a primary construct. By narrowing the scope and applying precise inclusion criteria, this study delineates the construct's boundaries, differentiating it from metaphorical frameworks like brand personality, and establishing brand anthropomorphism as a distinct lens through which brand meaning and consumer interaction can be examined.

In addition to conceptual clarification, this study also investigates how brand anthropomorphism has been operationalised in empirical research. Despite its growing popularity, the construct lacks standardised measures. Content analysis reveals that brand

anthropomorphism is most frequently referenced in literature reviews and conceptual discussions, while its presence in methodological sections is markedly limited. Only 39 of the 157 studies in the sample included any formal operationalisation of the construct, highlighting a significant gap between theoretical framing and empirical testing. Where measurement exists, it is highly heterogeneous. Some researchers adapt scales from social psychology, such as the Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism Questionnaire (IDAQ), while others have proposed bespoke instruments such as the Brand Anthropomorphism Scale (BASC) or Brand Anthropomorphism Questionnaire (BAQ). These scales vary in scope and dimensionality—some measure general human-like attributes, while others distinguish between emotional, cognitive, or moral traits. A smaller subset integrates constructs from the Stereotype Content Model, focusing on perceived warmth and competence. While such diversification reflects theoretical creativity, it also impedes the comparability of findings and the cumulative development of knowledge in the field.

By documenting the evolution and dispersion of measurement tools, this review identifies a critical need for methodological consolidation. In particular, the findings suggest that future research must prioritise the validation of multidimensional scales across diverse contexts, as well as the integration of manipulation checks in experimental designs. Such advancements will enable more consistent and meaningful testing of brand anthropomorphism's effects on consumer perceptions and behaviours. In doing so, they will also enhance the construct's practical utility for marketers seeking to deploy anthropomorphic strategies with greater precision.

Beyond conceptual and operational contributions, this study also maps the thematic terrain of brand anthropomorphism research. Through bibliometric co-occurrence analysis, five dominant themes emerge: consumer-brand relationships, strategic branding and differentiation, cultural symbolism, digital and AI-driven anthropomorphism, and

interdisciplinary extensions. The first theme—consumer-brand relationships—continues to be the central concern, with studies exploring how anthropomorphised brands generate emotional attachment, loyalty, and forgiveness. The strategic branding theme centres on how anthropomorphic elements create market differentiation and symbolic value. The cultural theme, as noted earlier, highlights the embeddedness of anthropomorphic cues in cultural narratives and iconography. The digital theme reflects the growing relevance of anthropomorphism in the context of AI, chatbots, and virtual brand agents, where human-like interaction is crucial for trust-building. Finally, the interdisciplinary theme reveals how brand anthropomorphism is increasingly examined in domains such as political science, law, and computational modelling—signalling a conceptual expansion that both broadens its relevance and raises new theoretical challenges. Importantly, this review demonstrates that the inconsistent use of the construct across these thematic domains’ stems in part from a lack of standardisation, definitional clarity, and theoretical anchoring. By consolidating findings across 25 years of research, this study addresses these challenges directly, providing a cohesive framework that connects disparate threads and charts a path forward for both scholars and practitioners.

In sum, this paper offers a robust and timely response to the question of how brand anthropomorphism has been conceptualised, operationalised, and thematically explored in the literature. Its contribution lies not only in mapping the intellectual evolution of the construct but in offering the clarity, structure, and direction necessary for advancing a more coherent and impactful research agenda. As brand anthropomorphism continues to gain traction in both academic and managerial domains—particularly in the digital era where human-like brand interfaces are increasingly common—this study serves as a foundational resource for grounding future inquiry in a theoretically rigorous and empirically actionable framework.

**RQ2: How does logo anthropomorphism, designed with iconic characters that consumers are familiar with (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), impact consumer perceptions of the brand?**

This study offers empirical evidence on how logo anthropomorphism—particularly when grounded in culturally familiar icons—can shape consumer perceptions of brand competence and influence perceived brand value. Through a controlled experimental design using logos inspired by the iconic figure of Sherlock Holmes, this research uncovers the psychological mechanisms through which consumers interpret anthropomorphic visual elements embedded within brand logos.

Drawing on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), the findings demonstrate that when brand logos incorporate visual elements associated with a culturally resonant figure like Sherlock Holmes, consumers are more likely to perceive the brand as competent, intelligent, and capable. The character's established associations with analytical thinking, reliability, and precision are transferred to the brand through the logo, illustrating how anthropomorphised branding functions as a rhetorical device that activates culturally embedded schemas. This activation facilitates quicker and more robust consumer-brand associations, a process referred to in cognitive psychology as schema congruity. Logos embedded with such iconic cues act as visual heuristics that allow consumers to make instantaneous judgments about brand attributes, particularly in relation to competence. The empirical model tested through structural equation modelling confirms that icon familiarity significantly enhances logo association, thereby reinforcing the strategic value of designing brand logos with iconic, culturally salient elements. Consumers' familiarity with the Sherlock Holmes character strengthens their ability to cognitively link the logo with the brand's identity. This association-building process is not merely symbolic—it becomes a perceptual shortcut through which consumers attribute specific traits to the brand. The findings show that logo association positively predicts perceptions of brand competence, which in turn mediates the relationship between logo anthropomorphism

and perceived value. In other words, consumers interpret the brand as more valuable when its logo is not only visually compelling but also symbolically resonant through the lens of competence.

Importantly, this research advances the literature by empirically validating competence—not warmth—as the key mediating mechanism in the relationship between logo association and perceived value. While previous studies have often emphasised the role of warmth in anthropomorphic branding (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Kervyn et al., 2012), this study provides a critical counterpoint by showing that warmth perceptions are not necessarily evoked through icon-based anthropomorphism alone. Logos referencing culturally familiar yet emotionally neutral or cognitively oriented figures—such as Sherlock Holmes—primarily activate competence-related perceptions. These findings suggest that not all anthropomorphic designs are equally effective in eliciting warmth, and that warmth may require additional relational or affective cues beyond iconic symbolism, such as narrative voice, human expressions, or prosocial brand messaging. Thus, this study contributes conceptually by clarifying that the type of character used in logo anthropomorphism matters significantly. It is not merely the presence of human-like elements that drives brand perception, but the cultural and symbolic weight those elements carry. By embedding design elements associated with a cognitively esteemed figure like Sherlock Holmes, the brand leverages pre-existing consumer knowledge to establish its functional credibility. This mechanism aligns with signalling theory, where brand symbols communicate unobservable brand qualities—such as competence or expertise—to consumers. The findings affirm that such visual signals, when anchored in culturally meaningful characters, are effective tools for shaping brand evaluations.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research extends the brand anthropomorphism literature by isolating logo anthropomorphism as a distinct and underexplored form of brand humanisation. While much of the extant work has focused on anthropomorphic spokes

characters, mascots, or chatbots, this study situates the logo itself as a strategic locus for anthropomorphic design. By demonstrating that visual cues embedded in logos can effectively transmit competence perceptions—without necessitating facial features or overt humanisation—this study broadens the operational understanding of anthropomorphism in branding.

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of icon familiarity as a strategic design principle. Familiarity not only enhances logo recognisability but also facilitates associative learning, enabling consumers to transfer the values of the icon to the brand. As such, logos designed with iconic characters function as semiotic bridges between cultural mythology and brand identity. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of logo anthropomorphism hinges on the interplay between visual design and cultural cognition, where symbols are decoded through consumers' prior experiences and cultural literacy.

In practical terms, these insights carry substantial implications for brand managers and logo designers. In highly saturated visual environments, brands can no longer rely solely on abstract or generic design elements to capture attention or communicate brand values. Instead, they must consider how culturally resonant characters can serve as strategic assets within logo design. By integrating iconic figures that embody competence-related traits, brands can enhance perceived functional value and trustworthiness, which are critical drivers of consumer choice, especially in utilitarian or high-involvement categories such as financial services, technology, or healthcare.

In summary, this study offers a nuanced answer to the research question by demonstrating that logo anthropomorphism, when designed with culturally familiar and cognitively esteemed icons, significantly enhances brand competence perceptions, which in turn drive perceived brand value. Warmth, while theoretically relevant, is not automatically

elicited through icon-based logo design and may require more affective or narrative strategies. These findings refine our understanding of how anthropomorphic visual design—specifically through logos—functions within the broader ecosystem of brand communication and consumer psychology. As such, this research provides both theoretical advancement and practical guidance on the strategic deployment of logo anthropomorphism in modern branding.

**RQ3: How does logo anthropomorphism incorporating familiar iconic characters influence consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoing, including feelings of disappointment and betrayal?**

While Paper 2 investigates positive consumer responses, Paper 3 extends the inquiry into the emotional vulnerabilities of anthropomorphic branding. Specifically, it examines whether icon familiarity and logo association elevate consumer expectations and intensify negative emotional reactions in the event of brand failure. This study offers an important contribution to understanding how logo anthropomorphism—particularly when it leverages culturally iconic characters such as Sherlock Holmes—shapes consumer responses in the context of brand wrongdoing. By focusing on emotional outcomes like brand disappointment and brand betrayal, the research illuminates the double-edged nature of anthropomorphic branding: while it can enhance brand engagement and trust, it also elevates consumer expectations, rendering transgressions more psychologically damaging.

Drawing from theories of anthropomorphism, expectancy violation, and moral psychology, the study begins with the premise that logos designed with human-like qualities—especially those that borrow from widely recognized cultural figures—do more than capture attention; they encode a set of symbolic meanings and moral expectations. The anthropomorphic logo at the center of the study, inspired by Sherlock Holmes, implicitly



signals competence, ethical judgment, and problem-solving—qualities culturally associated with the iconic detective. Consumers, familiar with this character and its moral framework, transfer these expectations to the brand via logo association. The brand, therefore, is not perceived as a neutral service provider but as an intentional agent—a "character" that promises to act in the consumer's best interest.

Empirical findings from the study, which employed structural equation modelling on data from 642 UK participants, validate the psychological mechanism proposed in the theoretical model. Icon familiarity significantly enhances logo association, reinforcing how cultural recognition facilitates cognitive fluency and emotional resonance. This strong logo association, however, becomes a conduit through which consumers evaluate brand transgressions. The data reveals that when the brand fails to deliver on its promise—offering insurance deals that are 40% more expensive than competitors—consumers do not respond with indifference or simple dissatisfaction. Rather, the anthropomorphised, culturally resonant logo intensifies their disappointment. This aligns with the idea that logos function not only as aesthetic markers but as trust-signalling devices. When these visual markers fail to align with brand behaviour, the incongruity becomes emotionally salient.

Crucially, the study finds that logo association significantly predicts brand disappointment but not brand betrayal directly. Instead, brand disappointment serves as a key emotional bridge, mediating the relationship between logo association and brand betrayal. This finding is theoretically significant because it supports the notion of betrayal as a sequential emotional process, in which initial disappointment—when unresolved or perceived as intentional—evolves into moral indignation and a sense of personal violation. This emotional escalation underscores how anthropomorphic logos heighten vulnerability: the stronger the emotional investment fostered by the logo, the more painful the perceived breach of trust. This study refines the existing literature on brand betrayal by showing that betrayal does not occur

in a vacuum; it is conditioned by prior expectations rooted in symbolic branding. Anthropomorphised logos, especially those referencing culturally iconic characters, imbue brands with perceived moral agency. Consumers interpret the brand's misbehaviour not simply as a business failure, but as a moral failure, attributing intentionality and deception to what might otherwise be viewed as a functional lapse. This emotional attribution is amplified by anthropomorphism, echoing the interpersonal dynamics of betrayal: just as people feel betrayed by others they trust, consumers feel betrayed by brands that have cultivated human-like rapport through their visual identity.

This insight represents a meaningful extension of prior work on brand anthropomorphism, which has typically focused on its positive effects—such as increased warmth, trust, and perceived competence. By examining how anthropomorphic logos amplify negative affect when brand expectations are violated, this research shifts the conversation toward a more balanced view of anthropomorphism as both a strategic asset and a reputational liability. The inclusion of betrayal as an outcome adds further depth to our understanding of consumer-brand relationships. Where previous research has often conflated betrayal with dissatisfaction or disappointment, this study differentiates these constructs by highlighting the unique psychological and moral components of betrayal. While disappointment may result in consumer detachment or switching behaviour, betrayal triggers stronger retaliatory actions such as brand boycotts, negative word-of-mouth, and social media condemnation.

Importantly, the use of a Sherlock Holmes-inspired logo allows this study to connect with the broader discourse on cultural branding. The choice of character is not incidental—it reflects a deliberate effort to evoke culturally coded meanings around trustworthiness and intelligence. As such, the findings also contribute to cultural branding theory by demonstrating how icon familiarity enhances not only brand perception but also emotional accountability. In essence, the brand becomes a symbolic extension of the character it invokes; a failure to behave

consistently with that symbolism is not merely a commercial failure, but a violation of the brand's constructed moral identity.

For brand managers, this study offers a cautionary insight: the use of anthropomorphism, especially via culturally iconic figures, can be a double-edged sword. While it may deepen consumer engagement and accelerate brand association, it also elevates the moral stakes of brand conduct. The stronger the perceived human-like character of the brand, the more personally consumers will interpret brand failures. Thus, brands must exercise strategic alignment between their anthropomorphic visual identity and actual business practices, particularly in high-involvement or trust-sensitive categories.

In conclusion, this research provides a robust empirical answer to the question of how logo anthropomorphism—when anchored in iconic character design—shapes consumer perceptions of brand wrongdoing. The findings confirm that anthropomorphised logos intensify feelings of disappointment when expectations are unmet, and that this disappointment can escalate into betrayal when consumers perceive the failure as a violation of the brand's symbolic or moral contract. In doing so, the study advances theoretical understanding of negative consumer-brand dynamics and underscores the psychological complexity of anthropomorphised branding in culturally embedded contexts.

### **Extending Theoretical Understanding and Integrating Frameworks**

This thesis also contributes to theoretical development by synthesising brand anthropomorphism with complementary frameworks. In Paper 2, the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) is applied to decode consumer inferences of warmth and competence from anthropomorphic logos, offering a structured approach to assessing the psychological effectiveness of cultural symbols in brand design. Paper 3 further integrates emotion-based

theories by uncovering the mediating role of brand disappointment in escalating consumer reactions to perceived brand failures. This insight aligns with broader affective theories in consumer behaviour and contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of how brand anthropomorphism not only enhances brand attachment but also exposes brands to reputational risk when consumer expectations are violated. In this way, the thesis contributes to a more nuanced and multidimensional view of brand anthropomorphism that incorporates affective, symbolic, and cultural dimensions.

### **A Cumulative Response to the Research Agenda**

Taken together, these three papers present a coherent and layered response to the thesis's general research questions. Paper 1 clarifies the construct and establishes the need for precise conceptualisation. Paper 2 operationalises that clarity by showing how anthropomorphism functions strategically in logo design to shape perceptions of brand value. Paper 3 then complements this by revealing the emotional risks that arise when such anthropomorphic cues heighten consumer expectations in brand crises. This progression reflects a cumulative knowledge structure. Each paper builds upon the conceptual foundation of the previous one while extending the theoretical and practical implications into new domains—moving from definition to strategic application, and finally to emotional consequence. Together, they contribute to a comprehensive understanding of brand anthropomorphism as a construct that is at once psychological, strategic, and cultural, with significant implications for both branding theory and managerial practice.

## 7.2 Managerial Implications

This thesis offers several actionable insights for brand managers and marketing practitioners. First, it demonstrates that anthropomorphic branding, especially through logo design, is not merely a stylistic choice but a strategic decision that influences consumer perceptions of competence and trustworthiness. When brands use culturally familiar figures in their logo design, they can strengthen logo association and enhance brand value—provided that these associations are coherent with the brand's core identity. Second, the findings reveal that logo anthropomorphism may also elevate consumer expectations, making brands more susceptible to intense emotional reactions during brand failures. Practitioners should therefore carefully manage the consistency and authenticity of their anthropomorphic branding efforts, particularly in markets where cultural symbolism plays a central role in consumer meaning-making. Third, this thesis underscores the need for branding strategies that not only humanise the brand but also anticipate and mitigate emotional risks. For instance, using familiar cultural icons in logos may enhance brand storytelling and consumer connection, but when coupled with inconsistent brand actions, they may lead to stronger consumer backlash. As such, anthropomorphised logos require ongoing alignment between visual design, brand behaviour, and consumer expectation.

## 7.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis is not without limitations, which in turn open new avenues for future research. First, the empirical studies primarily draw on UK-based samples and culturally specific icons (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), which may limit generalisability across diverse cultural contexts. Future research should test whether the effects of logo anthropomorphism observed here hold across other regions and with other culturally embedded figures. Second, while this thesis highlights

the emotional consequences of brand failure (e.g., disappointment and betrayal), it does not fully explore the role of brand forgiveness, repair mechanisms, or long-term relationship recovery. Further studies could investigate how anthropomorphic brands might engage in apology or restitution, and whether anthropomorphism enhances or hinders forgiveness. Third, the focus of the empirical studies is limited to logos as the primary vehicle of anthropomorphism. Future research might examine other branding elements (e.g., mascots, AI agents, tone of voice, or advertising narratives) to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how different anthropomorphic cues interact and shape consumer-brand relationships. Finally, the integration of cultural semiotics into brand anthropomorphism opens exciting research possibilities. Future studies might delve deeper into how brand anthropomorphism intersects with local myths, collective memory, and national identity, particularly in cross-cultural settings.

## 7.4 Conclusion

By clarifying the concept, operationalising its strategic use through logo design, and exploring its emotional consequences, this thesis advances a multidimensional understanding of brand anthropomorphism. It positions brand anthropomorphism not only as a consumer heuristic or branding tool, but as a culturally embedded, emotionally consequential phenomenon. In doing so, the thesis contributes novel insights to theory and practice and provides a robust platform for future exploration in the humanisation of brands. Logo anthropomorphism, especially when grounded in iconic cultural figures, is more than a design feature—it is a storyteller, a moral symbol, and an emotional trigger. As *The Batman* (2022) suggests, “a symbol’s not just a picture. It’s a story. A history. A message.” The findings of this thesis confirm that, as in mythmaking, logo anthropomorphism shapes not only what consumers see, but how they interpret brand identity. Logos anthropomorphised with culturally iconic symbols make brands

appear more familiar, relatable, and human. More importantly, they signal a brand's intention to transcend transactional relationships, aiming instead to occupy a meaningful place in society—aligning the brand not just with consumer needs but with cultural values and collective identity.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to the ongoing evolution of brand anthropomorphism theory by foregrounding the brand logo as a central and underappreciated site of meaning-making, emotional resonance, and cultural embeddedness. While previous research has largely focused on mascots, spokes characters, or digital avatars as the primary agents of anthropomorphism, this thesis asserts the brand logo itself—when anthropomorphised through culturally familiar and iconic figures—as a potent symbolic medium through which consumers interpret brand identity, values, and intentions. The logo, often dismissed as merely a visual identifier, is reframed here as a semiotic artifact capable of eliciting complex psychological, emotional, and moral responses. This expanded conceptualisation of logo anthropomorphism advances a more holistic understanding of brand anthropomorphism—one that integrates its psychological underpinnings (how consumers cognitively and affectively respond to human-like cues), its strategic deployment (how firms embed human characteristics and cultural symbols into design), and its symbolic consequences (how meaning is generated, interpreted, and acted upon by consumers). In this view, anthropomorphism is not simply a tool to make brands seem relatable or trustworthy—it is a cultural strategy that invites consumers into a shared symbolic space, where logos become vessels of identity, history, values, and emotion.

By highlighting the logo as a locus of emotional attachment and cultural storytelling, this thesis challenges a purely transactional view of branding. It instead situates the logo as a narrative device—one that not only represents but actively constructs the relationship between consumers and brands. Anthropomorphised logos, especially when embedded with culturally

iconic references, operate as visual scripts through which brands speak, signal intent, and position themselves within societal narratives. These logos shape not only brand recognition and recall, but also the emotional texture of consumer experiences. They enable consumers to relate to brands not as abstract entities, but as meaningful others—entities that can inspire admiration, trust, and loyalty, but also evoke disappointment, resentment, and even betrayal when expectations are not met.

Ultimately, this thesis invites future scholars and practitioners to move beyond questions of what brands look like, and to interrogate more deeply what brands mean—psychologically, symbolically, and culturally. What values do they project? What stories do they tell? What kinds of moral contracts do they implicitly form with consumers through their visual and anthropomorphic cues? In an era defined by symbolism, semiotics, and identity politics, the anthropomorphised brand logo emerges as a site of profound influence—one that not only communicates, but connects, convinces, and occasionally condemns.

In this symbolic economy, the logo is no longer a passive design element but a performative cultural artifact. It carries weight not simply because of what it shows, but because of what it evokes—stories of competence and care, expectations of alignment with social values, and emotional investments that extend beyond the marketplace. As such, anthropomorphised logos become part of the cultural infrastructure through which consumers make sense of brands as agents in their personal and social lives. They are not merely recognised—they are remembered, loved, idealised, scrutinised, and, when they falter, even rejected. This expanded understanding sets the stage for future explorations of logo anthropomorphism as both an opportunity and a responsibility within the broader context of branding theory and practice.

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## Appendix

### Chapter 1: A Systematic Literature Review of 157 Peer-Reviewed Articles

Title	Authors	Journal	Year	Database
"I will always hate you"! An investigation of the impact of anthropomorphism in online anti-brand communities	['Brandão, Amélia', 'Popoli, Paolo']	European Business Review	2023	Emerald
Think versus feel: two dimensions of brand anthropomorphism	['Huang, Rong', 'Zhou, Xinyue', 'Ye, Weiling', 'Guo, Siyuan']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2020	Emerald
Reverse (brand) anthropomorphism: the case of brand hitlerization	['Kucuk, S. Umit']	Journal of Consumer Marketing	2020	Emerald
Unpacking the influence of anthropomorphism and stereotypes on consumer attitude towards luxury brand	['Malhotra, Gunjan', 'Dandotiya, Gunjan']	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	2023	Emerald
Consumers' identification with corporate brands: Brand prestige, anthropomorphism and engagement in social media	['Tuškej, Urška', 'Podnar, Klement']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2018	Emerald
"I'm hatin' it"! Negative consumer-brand relationships in online anti-brand communities	['Brandão, Amélia', 'Popoli, Paolo']	European Journal of Marketing	2022	Emerald
Brand anthropomorphism on Twitter: communication strategies and consumer engagement	['Wu, Linwan', 'Dodoo, Naa Ampomah', 'Choi, Chang-Won']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2023	Emerald
Anthropomorphized vs objectified brands: which brand version is more loved?	['Delgado-Ballester, Elena', 'Palazón, Mariola', 'Peláez, Jenny']	European Journal of Management and Business Economics	2020	Emerald
Impact of brand anthropomorphism on ethical judgment: the roles of failure type and loneliness	['Dalman, M. Deniz', 'Agarwal, Manoj K.', 'Min, Junhong']	European Journal of Marketing	2021	Emerald
A framework for transitioning brand trust to brand love	['Marmat, Geeta']	Management Decision	2023	Emerald
To donate or not to donate? How cosmopolitanism and brand anthropomorphism influence donation intentions for international humanitarian causes	['Dalman, M. Deniz', 'Ray, Subhasis']	Management Research Review	2022	Emerald
The matching effect of anthropomorphized brand roles and product messaging on product attitude	['He, Yuanqiong', 'Zhou, Qi', 'Guo, Shuojia', 'Xiong, Jie']	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	2021	Emerald

Brand entification as a post-anthropomorphic attribution among Twitter-using Millennials	['Sashittal, Hemant', 'Jassawalla, Avan']	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2019	Emerald
Exploring selected antecedents of consumer-brand identification	['Tuškej, Urška', 'Podnar, Klement']	Baltic Journal of Management	2018	Emerald
Developing voice-based branding: insights from the Mercedes case	['Vernuccio, Maria', 'Patrizi, Michela', 'Pastore, Alberto']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2021	Emerald
Application of the stereotype content model in marketing: a three-level review and future research	['Guo, Xiaoling', 'Liu, Hao', 'Zhang, Yicong']	Journal of Contemporary Marketing Science	2022	Emerald
Intertwined	['Avis, Mark', 'Aitken, Robert']	Journal of Historical Research in Marketing	2015	Emerald
Brand hate: a literature review and future research agenda	['Aziz, Rahila', 'Rahman, Zillur']	European Journal of Marketing	2022	Emerald
Preliminary evidence of brand acquaintancing on Snapchat	['Sashittal, Hemant', 'Jassawalla, Avan']	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2019	Emerald
Store love in single brand retailing: the roles of relevant moderators	['Sarkar, Abhigyan', 'Sarkar, Juhi Gahlot', 'Bhatt, Gaurav']	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2019	Emerald
Brands talking on events? Brand personification in real-time marketing tweets to drive consumer engagement	['Harrison, Ebenezer Nana Banyin', 'Kwon, Wi-Suk']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2023	Emerald
Appearance and media popularity affecting experiential gift-giving	['Chen, Tser Yieth', 'Wu, Hsueh-Ling', 'Tai, Zhi-Cheng']	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	2023	Emerald
The interplay between SME owner-managers and the brand-as-a-person	['Centeno, Edgar', 'Cambra-Fierro, Jesus', 'Vazquez-Carrasco, Rosario', 'Hart, Susan J.', 'Dinnie, Keith']	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2019	Emerald
The power to voice my hate! Exploring the effect of brand hate and perceived social media power on negative eWOM	['Sharma, Isha', 'Jain, Kokil', 'Gupta, Ritu']	Journal of Asia Business Studies	2022	Emerald
Warmth or competence: understanding the effect of brand perception on purchase intention via online reviews	['Li, Baoku', 'Nan, Yafeng']	Journal of Contemporary Marketing Science	2023	Emerald
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