

Chapter 2

The Application of Anthropomorphism in Marketing: Implications for Green Economy in a digital world

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ABSTRACT

From a psychological approach, brands are attached to human personality traits to make them more appealing and facilitate future consumption. Brand personality, however, cannot independently exist. In other words, it must be projected by and transferred through appropriate functional tools and activities. Nevertheless, a precise knowledge of anthropomorphic marketing from a functional approach is missing. In addition, the contribution of artificial intelligence or AI to the implementation of anthropomorphic marketing is unclear. This chapter aims to synthesize the existing literature about these functional practices of anthropomorphic marketing. The outcomes revealed that anthropomorphic marketing was apparent in commercial and social activities. However, the contribution of AI to these marketing practices is limited at present. Based on these observations, this chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications and the application of anthropomorphic marketing to build a greener economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings tend to give nonhuman agents humanlike characteristics and behaviors. On the one hand, this tendency is facilitated by related cues, such as characters, forms, objects, and symbols, among others (Epley et al., 2007; Lloyd and Woodside, 2013; Puzakova et al., 2009). On the other hand, it is motivated by the need to understand and explain the behaviors of the nonhuman agents (effectance motivation) and the desire for social contact and affiliation (sociality motivation) (Epley et al., 2007). Such a motivation is either implicit (totemic or spiritual) or explicit (fetishist or entertaining) (Lloyd and Woodside, 2013; Neal, 1985).

The tendency to humanize unhuman objects is often regarded as an anthropomorphic act. Due to its essential impact on human beings' perceptions and behaviors, anthropomorphism has been employed in many sectors of socioeconomic life, including marketing activities. For example, from a psychological approach, brands are often attached to human personality traits, such as friendly, happy, sincere, and sophisticated, to make them more appealing and to facilitate future consumption (Bairrada et al., 2019; Coelho et al., 2020; Lu and Siao, 2019; Shaari et al., 2019). A more thorough understanding of customers' perception of brand personality, the psychological aspect of anthropomorphism, can be found in the reviews of Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013), Lara-Rodríguez et al. (2019), MacInnis and Folkes (2017), Radler (2018), Saeed et al. (2021), and Yang et al. McGill (2020).

Brand personality, however, cannot independently exist. In other words, it must be projected by and transferred through appropriate tools and activities or anthropomorphic agents (De Gauquier et al., 2019; Grohmann et al., 2013; Hohenberger and Grohs, 2020; Luffarelli et al., 2019; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019). From this point of view, the projection or creation of anthropomorphic agents is a functional process, which is different from the perception of brand personality traits mentioned previously. Nevertheless, precise knowledge about the functional processes of anthropomorphic marketing is mainly missing.

In today's world, the projection and delivery of the psychological brand personality traits can be assisted by an additional force: Artificial Intelligence or AI (Martin, et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). However, due to its novelty, customers seem to be reluctant and skeptical regarding the acceptance of AI and AI-related products and services despite the appearance of anthropomorphic agents (Karimova and Goby, 2021; Pelau et al., 2021; Watson, 2019). An intensive understanding of the functional processes of anthropomorphic marketing, combined with state-of-the-art knowledge about AI, will help facilitate these specific marketing initiatives in the future.

This chapter aims to synthesize the existing literature about anthropomorphic marketing to identify the particular functional marketing practices that are creating or employing anthropomorphic agents, together with the conditions and effects of these practices. In addition, it also summarizes relevant research to determine the potential contributions of AIs to the operations of such functional marketing exercises. Furthermore, implications for building a greener economy using knowledge about anthropomorphic marketing are assessed. The outcomes of this review will enrich the literature about anthropomorphic marketing. They will also assist in bettering green anthropomorphic marketing practices in the future.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND MARKETING

Anthropomorphism is a phenomenon that “describes the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions” (Epley et al.,

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