

Consumer Brand Advocacy among Generation Z: The Roles of Brand Anthropomorphism, Consumer Brand Engagement, and Social Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines the significance of consumer brand advocacy and how it relates to brand anthropomorphism, consumer brand engagement, and social self-efficacy. Advocacy encompasses defending, recommending, or appealing for a specific individual or cause. Advocacy is important in marketing since it influences consumers' brand loyalty, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay a price premium. This article proposes a framework to investigate the impacts of brand anthropomorphism on consumer brand advocacy in the electronics industry. Brand warmth, competence, and mind perception have been identified to represent anthropomorphism through a literature review. The proposed model examines the consumer brand engagement as the mediator and social self-efficacy as the moderator in the relationships between anthropomorphism and brand advocacy. The framework integrates theories and concepts from marketing and psychology, including the Stereotype Content Model, the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework, the Mind Perception Theory, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model. The knowledge obtained from the empirical study will assist brand managers effectively target adults and educated Generation Z interested in the consumer electronics brand in Bangladesh.

Keywords: consumer brand advocacy, brand anthropomorphism, consumer brand engagement, social self-efficacy, and generation Z

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Brand advocacy is considered a critical success factor in marketing (Wilk et al., 2021) since

the former influences purchase intentions (Choi et al., 2021) and brand loyalty (Quaye et al., 2022) of consumers. Advocacy involves defending, recommending, and appealing for an individual or cause (Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010). Brand advocacy includes positive word-of-mouth (PWOM), positive referrals, favorable recommendations, defending the brand against criticism, and forgiving service failures (Leal, 2021). Despite the importance of brand advocacy, there is limited conceptual and empirical research on the topic (Sweeney et al., 2020; Wilk et al., 2021). Research on advocacy has mainly focused on PWOM; however, PWOM does not fully capture the nuances of advocacy (Wilder, 2015). Therefore, this research investigates the process through which anthropomorphism leads to brand advocacy.

Brand anthropomorphism is the consumers' belief that brands have human attributes, such as thoughtful behavior, emotions, and feelings. Brand anthropomorphism can significantly influence consumer-brand relationships (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012; Golossenko et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Despite the inherent appeal of this concept for marketers, more research is necessary to comprehend how anthropomorphism affects human behavior (Chen et al., 2023; Li & Suh, 2022; Yang et al., 2020), its fundamental mechanisms, and its psychological impacts on individuals (Li & Sung, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). Researchers have found the processes of anthropomorphism to be "contextually complicated" and influenced by situational factors (Lee & Oh, 2021, p. 455). Sharma and Rahman (2022) opined that brand anthropomorphism can be explained by integrating theories on the mental capabilities of brands, e.g., Mind Perception Theory, the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), and Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF). According to Liu et al. (2022), two major types of brand anthropomorphism are warmth and competence. Additionally, ascribing a humanlike mind and spirit to a brand, known as mind perception, is a crucial and sophisticated form of anthropomorphism (Sharma & Rahman, 2022; Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010).

Research indicates that brand anthropomorphism positively influences brand advocacy (Ferreira, 2020; Nguyen & Trinh, 2023) and encourages positive word-of-mouth (Sheehan, 2018; Chen et al., 2023; Konya-Baumbach et al., 2023). These studies suggest that anthropomorphism improves consumer attitudes toward a brand and enhances brand performance; however, inconsistent results have been noted regarding the usefulness of brand anthropomorphism in marketing. Anthropomorphism might lead to adverse outcomes under conditions when consumers have strong distinctiveness motives (Puzakova & Aggarwal, 2018) or when a brand is facing unfavorable publicity for its wrong activities (Puzakova et al., 2013). Anthropomorphism in artificial intelligence assistants (AIA) can potentially threaten users' identities and reduce authority and control (Uysal et al., 2022). Extensive research in cognitive science, psychology, philosophy, and animal behavior has also shown that anthropomorphism has more negative than positive impacts (Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, the effect of attributing human traits to brands for positive consequences remains inconclusive.

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) is proposed to mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer brand advocacy. CBE represents a process through which

consumers develop their associations with brands and become brand advocates. Marketing practitioners and researchers are interested in exploring this topic further due to its economic and social benefits (Obilo et al., 2021). Existing literature shows a positive relationship between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and CBE (Festerling & Siraj, 2022; Moriuchi, 2021; Tuškej & Podnar, 2018a). Research has also revealed that consumer brand engagement can lead to brand advocacy (Bousba & Arya, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).

There is a concern among researchers whether the hypothesized relationships apply equally to all respondents. The effects may vary for individuals with specific characteristics (Malär et al., 2011). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model is the underpinning theory for the current research. It shows how personal traits significantly impact the psychological process from stimulus to response; it also demonstrates how a stimulus influences an organism's development (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Earlier research has shown that adults and adolescents possessing high self-efficacy are more prone to exhibit prosocial behaviors (Wentzel, 2014; Salado et al., 2024). Social self-efficacy has been examined as a moderator in the proposed model to identify individual differences engaged in advocacy behaviors.

This study examines the brand advocacy behavior of Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers. The Pew Research Center has defined Generation Z as individuals who were born between 1997 and 2012. This cohort comprises approximately 30% of the world population. They have the potential to significantly influence global consumer sales (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Wolf, 2020). They hold unique beliefs and interests compared to their predecessors (Rana et al., 2024; Thangavel et al., 2022). The present research focuses on the consumer electronics industry in Bangladesh. A significant segment of the population in the country comprises young, tech-savvy individuals. A quantitative research method has been applied to test the hypotheses developed for this research. The data was collected from Generation Z students studying in leading public and private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh, through a cross-sectional survey.

In this research, purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling technique, has been applied to select samples from each university. In purposive sampling, respondents are deliberately selected based on specific criteria that have the most relevance to the study's purpose and objectives (Memon et al., 2024). Respondents conform to two main criteria. First, they must be between 18 and 27 to represent Gen Z consumers. Second, they must have used local consumer electronics brand(s) in the previous year. Consumers in a collectivist society (e.g., Bangladesh) anthropomorphize brands as they have more access to human knowledge (Epley et al., 2007; Ghuman et al., 2015). Therefore, it is a highly relevant and timely research agenda to explore the key factors that impact the behaviors of Gen Z consumers in the electronics industry in Bangladesh.

1.2 Research Objectives

To address the problems and research gap identified, this research has focused on the following research objectives:

RO1: To determine if brand anthropomorphism (brand warmth, brand competence, brand mind perception) significantly affects consumer brand advocacy among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

RO2: To determine if brand anthropomorphism (brand warmth, brand competence, brand mind perception) significantly affects consumer brand engagement among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

RO3: To examine if consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism (brand warmth, brand competence, brand mind perception) and consumer brand advocacy.

RO4: To examine if social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism (brand warmth, brand competence, brand mind perception) and consumer brand advocacy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Brand Advocacy

The word "advocacy" originates from the Latin verb *advocare*, meaning to justify, avow, or vouch; it denotes persuasive communication that can influence others (Sweeney et al., 2020). Word-of-mouth (WOM) frequently serves as a proxy for brand advocacy (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Wragg, 2004). However, consumer behavior researchers have opined that brand advocacy has its foundation in consumer-brand relationships, while positive WOM does not adequately capture the evangelistic brand communications customary of brand advocates (Fournier et al., 2012; Wilder, 2015). For many years, firms have utilized customer satisfaction and loyalty as "key indicators of performance and effective customer management" (Lowenstein, 2010, p. 9). However, Lowenstein (2010) opined that customer satisfaction was not dependable as it was transient and did not represent any lasting relationship; although brand loyalty indicates a long-term relationship between consumers and firms, it does not incorporate the strength of WOM communication. In contrast, brand advocacy considers not only a unique purchase relationship but also an emotional brand-based kinship and positive WOM on behalf of a supplier (Lowenstein, 2010).

Scholars have defined brand advocacy in many ways. Professor Johan Arndt of Columbia University demonstrated that positive word-of-mouth had increased the likelihood of purchase, while negative exposure decreased it (Arndt, 1967). According to Park and MacInnis (2006), advocacy occupies the highest level of the consumer behavioral hierarchy as it signifies consumers' commitment of time, money, and credibility in the brand. Chell et al. (2024) define brand advocacy as favorable feedback or enthusiastic brand recommendations, a willingness to forgive a brand, and proactive brand defense. Researchers have distinguished between customer advocacy, which is initiated by organizations, and consumer advocacy, which is initiated by customers (Jayasimha & Billore, 2016; Quaye et al., 2022). Many

researchers prefer the definition of *consumer advocacy* due to its organic nature.

2.2 Brand Anthropomorphism

The word anthropomorphism is derived from the Greek terms “anthropos” (meaning human) and “morphe” (meaning shape or form) (Li, 2021). Xenophanes first used the term anthropomorphism in the 6th Century BC to explain the link between religious entities and their believers (Li & Sung, 2021). In social psychology, anthropomorphism refers to attributing humanlike qualities, motivations, intents, or emotions to the imagined or actual behavior of non-human agents (Epley et al., 2007). This definition serves as the basis for our understanding of anthropomorphism in marketing, highlighting the psychological mechanism of brand anthropomorphism (Sharma & Rahman, 2022). This propensity to anthropomorphize non-human objects provides a sense of camaraderie, enhances people's understanding of their surroundings, and functions as a perceptual and cognitive strategy that is likely to yield greater success than failure (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Guthrie, 1993, 2014).

Consumers follow social norms when they interact with anthropomorphized brands, and this interaction resembles their engagement with humans (Li & Sung, 2021). Brand anthropomorphism (BA) is characterized as a “psychological and perceptual phenomenon” (Golossenko et al., 2020, p. 740). The concept has attracted significant interest from marketing professionals for product design, commercial production, and the study of consumer behavior (Sohail et al., 2022). Consumer research has shown that if brands are humanized, they actively contribute to the consumption experience; these brands are perceived and treated differently from those regarded as objects only (Yang et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Brand Warmth and Brand Competence

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) includes two dimensions: warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). Warmth represents the perceptions of kindness, thoughtfulness, trustworthiness, and honesty (Aaker et al., 2012; Fiske et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2022). Competence indicates the extent to which individuals are capable of carrying out their intentions and are characterized by traits like intelligence, creativity, skill, and efficacy (Fiske et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2022). Kervyn et al. (2012) subsequently proposed the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) to evaluate brand perceptions. According to their framework, customers assess brands on two dimensions: intentions and ability. Brand researchers termed these dimensions as “brand warmth” and “brand competence” (Astvansh et al., 2024).

Based on a review of prior research, Güntürkün et al. (2020) posed an important question: which dimension is more important—warmth or competence? Some research indicates that competence is more significant (e.g., Aaker et al., 2012), while Andrei et al. (2017) have found mixed evidence suggesting that warmth may be more dominant. These inconclusive results hinder our theoretical understanding of warmth and competence in brand-consumer

relationships. Kolbl et al. (2019) have found that brand warmth is the key factor to drive consumer-brand identification (CBI), and CBI, in turn, influences brand ownership and purchase intentions; however, brand competence does not have a significant influence on consumer-brand identification. Their findings suggest that not all aspects of the stereotype content model have relevance to the consumer-brand relationship.

2.2.2 Brand Mind Perception

Morewedge et al. (2007) have defined mind perception as "a psychological process that occurs with the attribution of mental states such as desire, thought, emotion, planning, reasoning, or consciousness to target objects" (p. 1). The most impressive capability of human brains is perhaps to understand the minds of others; the fundamental mechanisms governing the activation and use of mind perception provide an understanding of the related phenomena of anthropomorphism and dehumanization, forecast systematic accuracy and error in judgments of others, and additionally reveal both ineffective and successful approaches to understanding others better (Epley & Kardas, 2021).

Anthropomorphism does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes only (Puzakova & Aggarwal, 2018; Uysal et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2020). Sehgal et al. (2023) presented a novel perspective on unfavorable consumer behavior concerning the repeat purchase of green brands. Consumers do not consider the human characteristics of a green brand only to accept it. Resemblance to humans can elicit emotions of discomfort or detachment. Despite its detrimental effects in certain contexts, scholars have opined that brands adopting human-like traits are more likely to succeed (Portal et al., 2018).

2.3 Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) is an essential aspect of consumer-brand relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Kaur et al., 2020), addressing the extent of a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment to specific brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011). CBE is defined as "a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Their research identified three components of CBE: cognitive processing, affection, and activation. These dimensions are related to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, respectively. Currently, CBE is an essential research topic in marketing and consumer behavior (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Razmus, 2021). Brodie et al. (2011) defined engagement as "a psychological state," Bowden (2009) as a "psychological process," Gambetti et al. (2012) as "a dynamic and multi-phase process," and Calder et al. (2013) as a "motivational state." Engagement is a concept that extends beyond purchase, and hence, many scholars prefer the term 'consumer engagement' over 'customer engagement,' since purchasing behavior is not a prerequisite for engagement to occur (Rissanen & Luoma Aho, 2016).

Scholars have recently reflected on consumer engagement's positive and negative sides. Consumers dissatisfied with a brand due to its poor service quality or unethical conduct can

express dissatisfaction through negative WOM online and offline. According to Islam and Rahman (2016), customer engagement is a customer's willingness to actively participate and interact with a brand, which can be either positive or negative. Although negative interactions and engagement are more important when making decisions, positive consumer engagement has received more attention in the academic research (Do et al., 2020; Yadav et al., 2023).

2.4 Social Self-efficacy

Social self-efficacy (SSE) is an individual's view of his or her own competence, efficacy, and causal agency in a social context; therefore, it assists in engaging others in meaningful dialogue, feeling happy while interacting with others, and establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationships (Gecas, 1989; Smith & Betz, 2000; Zamudio et al., 2020). Muris (2001) relates social self-efficacy to perceived assertiveness and capacity for bonding with peers. According to theory, social self-efficacy beliefs should impact social approach versus avoidance behavior, performance in social settings, and persistence in those settings (Anderson & Betz, 2001). However, past research on self-efficacy concentrated on general self-efficacy while disregarding the social element of self-efficacy. Due to its linkage with the social domain and social interaction, SSE is now recognized as essential for psychological adjustments and effective social behavior (Hossain et al., 2024).

2.5 Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model has been utilized in this research for constructing the conceptual framework and comprehending the relationships among the variables. The S-O-R model explains the influence of perceived brand anthropomorphism on consumer brand advocacy by emphasizing the roles of the mediator and the moderator. The model is rooted in Thorndike's (1898) Law of Effect or Stimulus-Response theory, which suggests that behaviors leading to favorable outcomes are more likely to be repeated when exposed to similar stimuli (S) (Sultan et al., 2021). Later, Woodworth (1918) extended the S-R model of behavior and introduced an active organism that intervened between stimulus and response (Sultan et al., 2021). The main idea of Woodworth's model is that several internal transformation processes within the organism mediate how stimuli affect behavior (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Adopted from environmental psychology, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the S-O-R framework (Figure 2.1). It has received wide acceptance among scholars to investigate links between inputs (stimulus), processes (organism), and outputs (response) (Kim et al., 2020).

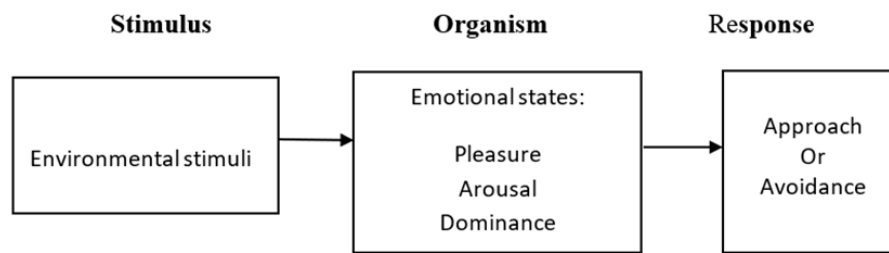


Figure 2.1. Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)

According to the Mehrabian-Russell model, environmental stimuli shape an individual's cognitive and affective reactions, thereby affecting their responses. A person's response can have two distinct aspects: an approach response, in which the person is prone to act positively toward the environment, e.g., a willingness to stay, explore, desire to communicate with others and affiliate with the environment; and an avoidance response, in which the person is likely to act negatively, e.g., a desire to leave the environment, reluctance to explore, or affiliate (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). These behaviors result from the emotional states that customers experience while in the environment. According to the model, approach-avoidance behaviors in environmental circumstances are mediated by three core emotional states: pleasure, arousal, and dominance.

3. Conceptual Framework

Within the framework of the present research, the brand's perceived mental states and humanlike warmth and competence are considered as stimuli. Mind perception theory and SCM/BIAF can help explain the fundamental mechanisms of brand anthropomorphism (Sharma & Rahman, 2022). Pilgrimienė et al. (2020) have opined that engagement is a consumer's internal state (organism) that can be aroused through external as well as internal stimuli. Aljuhmani et al. (2023) have incorporated the cognitive and affective dimensions to measure CBE, excluding the behavioral component, since previous researchers defined the organism as the consumers' cognitive and affective states of mind (Teangsompong & Sawangproh, 2024). Besides, Li and Nan (2023) have stated that brand perception can be viewed as stimulus according to the logic of the S-O-R paradigm, dividing brand perceptions into brand warmth and brand competence. This research investigates consumer brand advocacy as the consequence of brand anthropomorphism and consumer brand engagement (Figure 3.2). Previous studies used personality traits, self-efficacy, and health self-efficacy as moderators. The current research incorporates social self-efficacy as a moderating variable to broaden the scope of the S-O-R model (Figure 3.1).

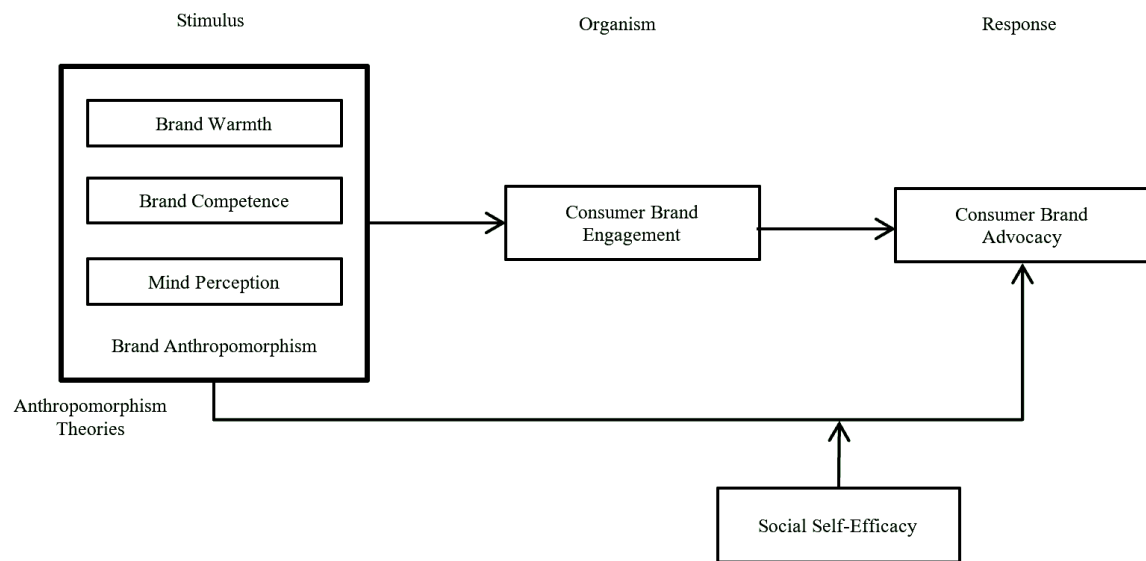


Figure 3.1. Theoretical Model

Based on the above theoretical model, the following conceptual framework (Figure 3.2) has been developed.

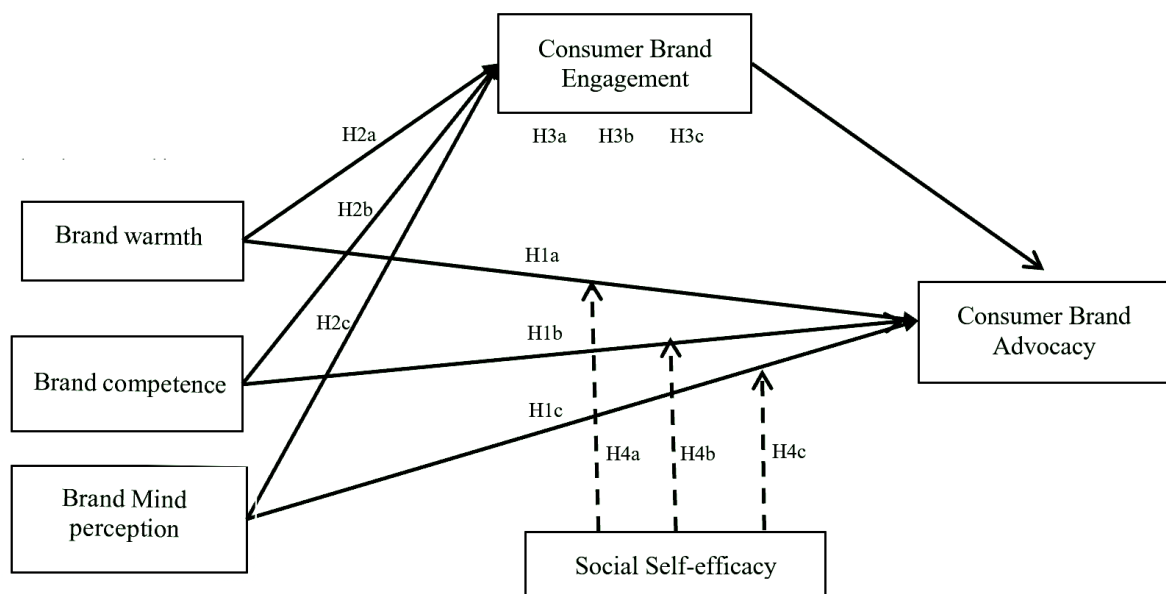


Figure 3.2 Conceptual Framework

4. Hypotheses Development

Drawing upon the literature review and the theoretical framework, several hypotheses have been developed for this study.

4.1 Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Brand Advocacy

The first set of hypotheses investigates the relationship between perceived brand anthropomorphism and consumer brand advocacy. Consumers express more favorable opinions about anthropomorphized brands, as these enhance their interpersonal impression (Chen et al., 2023). The humanization of brands influences consumers' emotional and cognitive behaviors (Chen et al., 2021; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012; Liu et al., 2022). Research has highlighted several benefits of brand anthropomorphism, such as customer loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009), consumer brand identification (Tuškej & Podnar, 2018b), consumer engagement (Tuškej & Podnar, 2018a), and positive word of mouth (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

Brand anthropomorphism is known as a tool for developing meaningful brand relationships with consumers. It results in brand identification, advocacy, and engagement (Ferreira, 2020). Huang and Ha (2020) showed that warmth-oriented service recovery messages were more effective than competence-oriented messages in improving observers' perceptions of service in the online environment. This positive perception leads to satisfaction with service recovery efforts and favorable word-of-mouth intentions. Hamdy et al. (2024) have found that destination brand gender, stereotypes, destination identification, and advocacy are interrelated.

Brand defense is a more authoritative form of brand advocacy than word-of-mouth (WOM) and extends beyond referrals and recommendations (Alnawas et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2015; Wilk et al., 2020). Previous studies indicate a link between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand warmth (Kervyn et al., 2021). The relationship between perceived CSR and brand advocacy has been proven in prior research (e.g., Alnawas et al., 2023; Castro-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Limbu et al., 2020). Ali et al. (2021) have examined the impact of brand anthropomorphism (brand mind perception) on brand love and brand defense in the hospitality industry. The authors found that brand anthropomorphism has a significant and positive influence on brand defense.

The present research proposes the following hypotheses relating brand warmth, competence, and mind perception with brand advocacy:

H1: Brand anthropomorphism significantly affects Consumer Brand Advocacy among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

- H1a: Brand warmth significantly affects Consumer Brand Advocacy among Gen Z in Bangladesh.
- H1b: Brand competence significantly affects Consumer Brand Advocacy among Gen Z in Bangladesh.
- H1c: Brand mind perception significantly affects Consumer Brand Advocacy among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

4.2 Brand Anthropomorphism and Consumer Brand Engagement

It is critical to develop meaningful relationships between consumers and brands (Aaker, 1997; Ferreira, 2020; Fournier, 1998). Consumers tend to form stronger bonds with warm brands more easily than with competent ones (Kervyn et al., 2021). Reimann et al. (2012) measured peripheral and central nervous system responses, providing scientific evidence that attachment to favorite brands and loved ones produces similar activity patterns. Drawing from the study, Barraza et al. (2021) highlighted that humans are social, and it is the role of the neuromodulator oxytocin that facilitates attachment to other humans, animals, and possibly objects. Anthropomorphism has become widespread in the modern marketplace. Product designers and brand managers often encourage consumers to perceive their products and brands as having human qualities, which leads to improved performance (Crolie et al., 2022). Anthropomorphism is identified as one of the three "relationship warmers" that our brains use to transform our cold interactions with objects into warmer, more humanlike relationships (Ahuvia, 2022, p.455). Ding et al. (2022) showed that anthropomorphism could be a powerful branding and destination marketing technique for engaging consumers and tourists. A study by Chen et al. (2018) revealed the favorable impact of anthropomorphism on consumers' psychological well-being by fostering vitality and self-control. Uysal et al. (2022) showed that consumers could form a relationship with artificial intelligence assistants if they perceive a mind in them. Therefore, the next set of hypotheses to be tested is:

H2: Brand anthropomorphism significantly affects consumer brand engagement among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

- H2a: Brand warmth significantly affects consumer brand engagement among Gen Z in Bangladesh.
- H2b: Brand competence significantly affects consumer brand engagement among Gen Z in Bangladesh.
- H2c: Brand mind perception significantly affects consumer brand engagement among Gen Z in Bangladesh.

4.3 Consumer Brand Engagement as Mediator

With time, satisfied customers eventually become brand evangelists. They feel intense loyalty to the brand and retain, repurchase, and recommend it to others. Previous research has established that consumer brand engagement drives the advocacy behaviors of consumers (Bilro et al., 2018; Bousba & Arya, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022). Bousba and Arya (2022) have found that affective brand engagement (ABEM) significantly and positively influences the anticipated brand advocacy in the Metaverse. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2022) revealed a positive association between intention to engage and brand advocacy among Millennials and Gen Z consumers on Online Luxury-Brand Self-Narratives (OLBSNs).

In recent years, brand engagement and love have outweighed loyalty and satisfaction as key performance indicators. Verma (2021) examined the impact of love and engagement on purchase intent and brand equity in the context of mobile phone brands. Previous research has explored the mediating roles of brand engagement and love in the relationship between brand gender and consumer-based brand equity (Machado et al., 2019), between value co-creation and brand evangelism (Harrigan et al., 2021), and between brand coolness and consumer well-being and delight (Attiq et al., 2022). Khashan et al. (2024) used the stimulus-organism-response model to study the impact of customers' perception of restaurant innovativeness (CPRI) on brand evangelism. The authors have found that CPRI (stimulus) positively influences customer engagement (organism) and brand evangelism (response); engagement acts as a mediator between CPRI and evangelism. Hoo et al. (2023) reported that customer engagement served as a mediator in the relationship between brand image and purchase intention in the context of premium hotels in China. Research by Kautish et al. (2022) revealed that consumers' terminal and instrumental values impacted their engagement, which subsequently affected their behavioral intention to purchase fashion apparel online. This study examined the mediating role of consumer brand engagement in the relationship between perceived brand anthropomorphism and brand advocacy.

H3: Consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer brand advocacy.

- H3a: Consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand warmth and consumer brand advocacy.
- H3b: Consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand competence and Consumer Brand Advocacy.
- H3c: Consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand mind perception and consumer brand advocacy.

4.4 Social Self-Efficacy as Moderator

The conceptual model examines social self-efficacy (SSE) as a moderator. Although the beliefs or perceptions about one's ability to perform a task differ from the actual ability to do that task, efficacy beliefs can strongly influence performance and adaptive psychosocial functioning (Maciejewski et al., 2000, as cited in Grieve et al., 2014). A literature search reveals that social self-efficacy has been studied extensively among young generations across different disciplines. Previous studies have shown the linkage of SSE with emotional well-being (Yang et al., 2016). SSE was examined to assess its impact as a moderator in the relationship between social support and the academic performance of university students (Carmeli et al., 2021). A study by Oh et al. (2023) about the social benefits of Metaverse found that the number of supportive interactions in the Metaverse was positively associated with young users' (Millennials and Gen Z) perceptions of their social self-efficacy. According to previous research, college students with sufficient PSSE are more likely to succeed socially and

intellectually (Gnatowski, 2022; Friswold-Atwood, 2018). Following the above argument, the present study hypothesizes that the perceived social self-efficacy of consumers would influence consumer brand advocacy, provided the brands are designed (anthropomorphized) to enhance consumers' social interactions. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H4: Social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer brand advocacy.

- H4a: Social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between brand warmth and consumer brand advocacy
- H4b: Social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between brand competence and consumer brand advocacy
- H4c: Social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between brand mind perception and consumer brand advocacy

5. Theoretical and Managerial Significance

This interdisciplinary study applies the knowledge of marketing, social psychology, and environmental psychology to primarily address the concern of scholars of how "a knowledge of different disciplines be applied to improve our understanding of how branding might evolve in the future?" (Golob et al., 2020, p. 127). Research focusing anthropomorphism has grown in the recent years to better understand human-AI interactions (Alabed et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2022). The current research extends the phenomenon of anthropomorphism into the realm of human-brand interaction. This research aims to be one of the pioneering efforts to examine the potential role of consumer brand engagement in mediating the relationship between the perceived human qualities of a brand and consumer brand advocacy, offering novel and intriguing insights. The present study also expands the framework's scope by introducing social self-efficacy as a new moderator.

The propositions of this paper not only advance theories but also assist brand managers in focusing on brand components for crafting winning strategies. Understanding brand warmth, competence, and mind perception driving engagement and advocacy will aid managers in creating more relatable brand personas for young and educated consumers, i.e., Gen Z.

6. Conclusion

The research focuses on the brand advocacy behaviors of Gen Z in the context of consumer electronics. This paper proposes three brand anthropomorphism constructs, namely brand warmth, competence, and mind perception, influencing consumer advocacy. Additionally, it highlights the mediating role of consumer brand engagement and the moderating role of social self-efficacy in the relationship dynamics of this research. The study has developed a framework relating the variables to provide deeper insights into advocacy in the marketing domain.

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Authors contributions

Afsana Akhtar is a PhD candidate of Putra Business School, Malaysia. This article is a part of her PhD thesis. She has worked under the supervision of Professor Dr. Noor Azman Ali, the late Professor Dr. Hishamuddin Md. Som, and Dr. Risidaxshinni Kumarusamy of Putra Business School.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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