ROLE OF HOLISTIC AND ANALYTIC THINKING ON EVALUATION OF ANTHROPOMORPHIZED BRANDS:

AN EXAMINATION UNDER NEGATIVE INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Marketers through their communication, as a part of their positioning strategy, have often encouraged consumers to perceive human-like characteristics in brands and products (e.g., Sprite by Coca-Cola, Appy Fizz by Parle, Riki CFL by Anchor). Extant literature on consumer-brand relationship identifies effectiveness of anthropomorphized brands in generating positive perception of consumers' towards a brand, leading to improved brand performance. However, examining negative effects of an anthropomorphized brand remains largely under-explored.

Consequently, the thesis investigates the influence of negative information on consumers' evaluation of an anthropomorphized brand. The reason for exploring this aspect is precisely because consumers pay keen attention to negative information, which is in turn, found to alter their attitude towards market offerings (Pullig et al. 2006). The literary evidence (Puzakova et al., 2013, Gretry et al., 2016) suggests that the negative effects are more detrimental in case of anthropomorphism on consumers' brand impressions. Thus, the present research examines the effect of negative information on the evaluation of an anthropomorphized brand.

In addition, the thesis studies the role of consumer's thinking style (holistic vs. analytic) in moderating the effect of negative information towards an anthropomorphized brand. The thinking styles are specifically relevant in the present study as they affect the way consumers infer a brand's actions, especially the ones they infer negatively. Further, while investigating negative occurrences for such brands, it's important to consider the contextual factors at play that are vital to consumers, as negative incidents do not arise in isolation. Based on the distinctive thinking style of the consumer, significance given to

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contextual factors varies. Thus, the thesis makes an attempt to explore the role of contextual factors on negative effects of anthropomorphism.

The thesis adopts experimental research design to test the hypothesized relationship of brand anthropomorphism and its evaluation. Two main studies are conducted explaining the differences in evaluation of holistic and analytic thinking consumers towards anthropomorphized and non-anthropomorphized brands. The findings of the first study showed that the evaluation of non-anthropomorphized brand by holistic thinking consumers was perceived to be more unfavorable as compared to anthropomorphized brand with no significant difference. Whereas, for analytic thinking consumers, significant difference was found between anthropomorphized and non-anthropomorphized brands, with the evaluation of anthropomorphized brands perceived to be less unfavorable and non-anthropomorphized brands perceived to be more unfavorable. Further, in the second study, we didn't find support for the additional contextual information with regard to holistic and analytic thinking styles, possibly due to the selective attention given by the individuals to situational variable.

The thesis will help researchers and practitioners to better understand the effect of anthropomorphization on consumers and its evaluation under negative information. The study will not only strengthen the knowledge of anthropomorphization by exploring the notion of anthropomorphized brands in marketing but will also contribute to understand how holistic and analytic thinking styles of consumers impact brand evaluation.

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