

**NIKE SAYS, "JUST DO IT", SO I DO. PERCEIVED
BRAND ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ITS EFFECTS
ON CONSUMERS' WELL-BEING**

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ABSTRACT

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Title Nike says, “Just do it”, so I do. Perceived brand anthropomorphism and its effects on consumers’ well-being.	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Consumers’ rising interest in well-being and their need for care and empathy is understandable when considering the recent global uncertainties and adaption to ever-changing surroundings. People are forced to cope and adjust to prevalent and future uncertainties that emphasize the need to address the consumers’ well-being in commercial fields. Brand anthropomorphism could be one of a brand’s means to respond to consumers’ urgent need to attend more to their well-being since uncertainties increase consumers' likelihood to anthropomorphize brands more and perceived brand anthropomorphism has beneficial consequences for consumers and their well-being.</p> <p>This study aims to contribute to the research of brand anthropomorphism and the objective is to study consumers’ tendencies to anthropomorphize brands, and how brand anthropomorphism affects consumers’ well-being. And more accurately: how perceived brand anthropomorphism affects consumer well-being, how consumers’ tendencies affect perceived brand anthropomorphism, and how brand anthropomorphism affects consumer-brand relationships.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this study was derived from previous theories of brand anthropomorphism and utilized quantitative research methods to conduct the study. This study used an online questionnaire to collect empirical data that was further analyzed with quantitative methods in SMART PLS 4.</p> <p>The results of the study revealed that self-brand congruence is an antecedent of brand anthropomorphism, whereas loneliness (i.e., sociality motivation) and desire to be in control (i.e., effectance motivation) were not found to be antecedents of brand anthropomorphism. Brand anthropomorphism was not found to affect consumers’ well-being or directly to consumer-brand relationship. Nevertheless, the results revealed that partnership fully mediated the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer-brand relationship. Indicating, that the brand partnership is a determinant of the consumer-brand relationship.</p> <p>The results of this study emphasize the importance of the congruence between a consumer and a brand, and brand partnership to create and maintain consumer-brand relationship.</p>	
Keywords Brand Anthropomorphism, Perceived Brand Anthropomorphism, Well-being, Self-brand congruence, Consumer-brand relationship, Brand Partnership	
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TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Kuluttajien kasvava kiinnostus hyvinvointia kohtaan sekä empatian tarve ovat ymmärrettäviä, kun huomioidaan viimeaikainen globaali epävarmuus ja mukautuminen jatkuvasti muuttuviin olosuhteisiin. Ihmiset joutuvat kohtaamaan epävarmuuksia sekä sopeutumaan niihin, joka korostaa kuluttajien hyvinvoinnin huomioimista kaupallisilla aloilla. Epävarmuus lisää brändi antropomorfismia, eli brändien ihmismäisyyttä. Brändi antropomorfismilla on puolestaan positiivisia vaikutuksia kuluttajien hyvinvointiin, jonka vuoksi brändi antropomorfismi voi olla yksi brändistrategia keinoista tulevaisuudessa.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus pyrkii edistämään brändi antropomorfismi tutkimusta ja keskittyy tutkimaan kuluttajien taipumuksia havaita brändi antropomorfisena sekä brändi antropomorfisuuden vaikutuksia kuluttajien hyvinvointiin. Tarkemmin: miten brändi antropomorfismi vaikuttaa kuluttajien hyvinvointiin, miten kuluttajien taipumukset vaikuttavat brändi antropomorfismiin, ja miten brändi antropomorfismi vaikuttaa kuluttajabrändisuhteeseen.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys perustuu aiempiin brändi antropomorfismi teorioihin. Tutkimuksen tekemisessä on hyödynnetty kvantitatiivisia menetelmiä ja tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto on kerätty online-kyselylomakkeella, joka myöhemmin analysoitiin kvantitatiivisin menetelmin SMART PLS 4 ohjelmalla.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella, brändi, joka sopeutuu kuluttajan minäkonseptiin, havaitaan antropomorfiseksi. Yksinäisyys (sosiaalinen motivaatio) ja halu kontrolloida (tehokkuusmotivaatio) eivät lisänneet brändin antropomorfisuutta. Brändi antropomorfismi ei vaikuttanut kuluttajien hyvinvointiin eikä suoraan kuluttajabrändisuhteeseen. Tulosten perusteella partneribrändi toimii mediaattorina brändi antropomorfismin ja kuluttajabrändisuhteen välillä. Tämä osoittaa, että partneribrändi on ratkaiseva tekijä kuluttajabrändisuhteessa.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat kuluttajan ja brändin välistä yhteensopivuutta sekä partneribrändin merkitystä kuluttajabrändisuhteen luomisessa ja ylläpitämisessä.</p>	
Asiasanat Brändi antropomorfismi, Koettu brändi antropomorfismi, Hyvinvointi, Brändi-minäkonsepti, Kuluttajabrändisuhde, Partneribrändi	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Consumers' rising interest in well-being and their need for care and empathy is understandable when considering the recent global uncertainties and adaptation to ever-changing surroundings. People are, for example, forced to cope, and adjust to post Covid-19 era, rising living costs, energy crisis, and inflation. These uncertainties increase consumers' likelihood to anthropomorphize brands more, as according to Epley et al. (2007) human motivation to solve uncertainty and seek meaning influence anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism, at its essence, is infusing the imagined or real behavior and actions of non-human agents with human-like characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions.

This indicates that anthropomorphism could be one of a brand's means to respond to consumers' urgent need to attend more to their well-being, since perceived brand anthropomorphism may have beneficial consequences for consumers and their well-being. Anthropomorphized brands may alleviate pain and unhappiness (Reimann et al., 2017; Sharma & Rahman, 2022), encourage healthy lifestyle choices such as fitness and nutrition, facilitate performance on an examination (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012), create a sense of safety, facilitate coping, enhance subjective well-being (Epley et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2021), and ease the feelings of loneliness (Epley et al., 2007, 2008).

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that considers several areas of an individual's daily life and can be affected by various events daily. Well-being is often defined as an individual's evaluation of his/her well-being. The World Health Organization, WHO (2021) defines well-being as a positive state that is experienced by individuals and societies. And well-being can be considered as an individual resource for daily life, such as health. Well-being is determined by social, economic, and environmental conditions, and comprehends quality of life, individuals' abilities to contribute to the world with a sense of purpose and meaning, and overall thriving. Since well-being is a multidimensional concept, it offers brands a great number of possibilities to address and enhance consumers' well-being, for example, help them to make healthier choices, cope during challenging times, facilitate them to perform better, and thrive in everyday life.

The more pragmatic, definition of well-being has also developed in recent years and considers overall well-being, including areas such as nutrition, sleep, mental health, exercising, work-life balance, and social life. Well-being is a consumer megatrend, and the wellness industry is booming. In addition, consumers' interest in wellness-related goods, such as mood-boosting foods and drinks, goods to support sleep, and reduce stress and anxiety have increased, which confirms the need to address the consumers' well-being, and consider the phenomenon in commercial fields and consumer-faced environments. (Callaghan et al., 2021; Chopra et al., 2021; *WGSN Future Consumer 2024*, 2022).

Some consulting companies, such as WGSN, an Ascential Company, and Accenture have addressed the prevalent and future consumer sentiments and emotions that address the consumers' and employees' need for empathy and care, and emphasize how consumers should be treated as humans first. (*Accenture Fjord Trends 2022*, 2022; *WGSN Future Consumer 2024*, 2022). In addition, Deloitte, for example, emphasizes putting people at the center of every Marketing activity to succeed in today's and future business environments. (Veenstra et al., 2022). Also, another consulting company, McKinsey & Company offers insights into how wellness is trending among consumers globally, especially: health, fitness, nutrition, appearance, sleep, and mindfulness are the categories that interest the consumers the most. In addition, McKinsey & Company forecasts that the wellness industry will be growing globally by 5-10 % annually. (Callaghan et al., 2021; Chopra et al., 2021). Some consumer-faced companies have even employed Chief Health Officers (CHOs) recently to attend to and improve employees' and consumers' health-related issues. CHOs have been integrated more thoroughly into companies' strategies and they have more power in the C-suite to ensure that health is incorporated into the overall business. (Callaghan et al., 2022).

1.1 Research background

Brand anthropomorphism and consumers' well-being are both separately trending topics among academics and practitioners. Most of the research done in the field of brand anthropomorphism focuses on anthropomorphizing brands, and less research is devoted to studying consumer-focused consequences of perceived brand anthropomorphism. A recent study by Sharma and Rahman (2022) states that there is a research gap in studies that address the consumer-focused consequences of brand anthropomorphism.

This study focuses on perceived brand anthropomorphism and its consumer-focused consequences to address the research gap in the field and the phenomenon. In addition, Sharma and Rahman (2022) encourage research to address anthropomorphized brands' therapeutic benefits which is why this study focuses on the consumer-focused consequences of brand anthropomorphism and its effects on consumers' well-being.

Brand anthropomorphism and consumers' social well-being (e.g., relationships and social life), is an interesting subtopic of the phenomenon, which

is a relevant issue for marketing practitioners to consider. Since consumers may create close human-like relationships with anthropomorphized brands they are enthusiastic about (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020), which may lead to reciprocal consumer-brand-relationships. The consequences of anthropomorphism involve treating a non-human agent, such as a brand, as a moral entity, that has a mind of its own, can take actions, and can have a normative social influence on a perceiver (Waytz et al., 2010). This confirms how consumers may treat their loved brands as human-like entities. And again, this type of consumer-brand engagement may lead to an interactive relationship between the two parties, and for example, ease the feelings of social pain aroused by isolation or loneliness (Epley et al., 2007).

1.2 Objectives of the research

This study is designed to explore the consumer-focused consequences of the wellness and fitness brand Nike Run Club by Nike Inc. and to study whether consumers perceive the focal brand as an anthropomorphic one. The main objective is to study the antecedents and outcomes of perceived brand anthropomorphism. And especially, does perceived brand anthropomorphism affect consumers' subjective well-being and consumer-brand relationships. In addition, this study offers managerial implications to consider brand anthropomorphism as a brand strategy.

The main objective is to study how perceived brand anthropomorphism affects consumers' subjective well-being:

RQ1: How does perceived brand anthropomorphism affect consumer well-being?

This study also considers consumer-based antecedents for perceived brand anthropomorphism and individual tendencies to anthropomorphize brands, and how various consumer characteristics affect perceived brand anthropomorphism:

RQ2: How do consumer-based-antecedents and individual tendencies affect perceived brand anthropomorphism?

This study also considers how brand anthropomorphism effect consumer-brand relationships:

RQ3: How does brand anthropomorphism affect consumer-brand relationships?

1.3 Research structure

This research is divided into five chapters. Chapter one introduced the research topic and presented the backgrounds and objectives of the study and provided

justification for the study. Chapter two provides a theoretical framework and hypotheses development and considers key concepts of the study more thoroughly. Chapter three presents the methodologies of the study, data collection, development of measurement scales, and online survey. Chapter four provides the results of the study, and data analysis in detail. Chapter five provides the discussion and the conclusions of the study, theoretical - and practical implications, evaluation of the research, and suggestions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this study and key concepts from the domain of brand anthropomorphism. This chapter also presents the hypotheses of this study that are derived from the previous theory. The research structure of this study is also presented at the end of this chapter with the developed hypotheses.

2.1 Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is a debated topic in science, and it has been questioned whether anthropomorphic illustrations about non-human objects have a place at all in scientific discourse and whether anthropomorphism represents only a fallacy, not accurate thinking. Notwithstanding, several disciplines have noted for a long time that people tend to perceive non-human objects as human-like agents, as anthropomorphic ones, such as Hume (1757), Darwin (1872), Feuerbach (1873), and Freud (1930). In addition, disciplines have found for a long time that it's useful to use anthropomorphism and anthropomorphic descriptions as a means to better understand, guide, and explain the behavior of non-human agents around us (Epley et al., 2007).

Debates about anthropomorphism may continue, and our imaginations shall continue living their own life. And anthropomorphism can be only an anthropomorphic fallacy, but the author encourages each reader to consider those events when one is talking to and stroking the steering wheel of one's precious car and encouraging him/her (the car) to go a few more kilometers to make it to the gas station. Or those days when any of our dear electronic devices don't function properly and we are so sure they are scheming against us and want us to have a screen-free day. Or those 'funny' days when we are wearing our best outfits and are happily going to attend a special event, and then our special event gets canceled right after we have arrived at the site, and then we

note, how great it was to take our lovely outfit paired with shiny shoes out after all. And we wonder if we should take our shiny shoes out more often – fancy dates with our beloved shiny shoes.

2.2 Brand anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism within marketing literature is often defined by the work of Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2007) who define anthropomorphism as “imbuing the imagined or real behavior of non-human agents with human-like characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions”. The definition of anthropomorphism has been implemented within the brand context since brands today have multiple human-like characteristics. For example, wearable sports devices “speak” to the user, motivating and rewarding the user for progress. And a consumer wearing Nike running shoes, may imagine and think of Nike’s brand slogan “*Just do it*” and consider Nike is motivating him/her to perform better.

One of the reasons anthropomorphism has been integrated into brand strategies is to succeed in today’s overly connected world since human-like brands are more likely to succeed in today’s business environments than those brands that lack human likeness. This is the reason why multiple brands today have anthropomorphic characteristics such as personalities, values, purposes, human-like communication – and interacting styles and techniques. Not to mention how today's brands keep creating and developing human-like relationships with consumers and other brands. (Marshall & Glynn, 2019; Sharma & Rahman, 2022).

Seeing brands as human-like entities refers to the process of anthropomorphic thinking, that is, humanizing brands (Sharma & Rahman, 2022). Anthropomorphism can be considered as an automatic process of attributing human-like characteristics, motivations, behavior, emotions, and state of mind to non-human objects (Epley et al., 2007), (e.g., “Nike is happy because I have improved my exercising and tracked more runs to my run app”) but it also considers the ability to perceive a non-human object as human-like, (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017) that is, perceiving brand as an anthropomorphic one, (e.g., “Nike is athletic and full of energy”).

In this light, brand anthropomorphism has two dimensions. First, brand anthropomorphism refers to a brand’s properties which are perceived as human-like properties (Guido & Peluso, 2015), and second, to the individual tendencies to attribute human-like traits and characteristics, such as emotions and behavior to a brand (Epley et al., 2007). This study focuses on studying consumers’ anthropomorphic perceptions of brands but also considers how brands’ properties are perceived as human-like properties, and how anthropomorphic brand is constructed in the minds of consumers.

2.3 Antecedents for brand anthropomorphism and individual tendencies to anthropomorphize brands

Tendencies to anthropomorphize non-human objects are individual, and several drivers motivate and increase the likelihood to anthropomorphize non-human objects such as brands. In addition, anthropomorphic perceptions of brands are constantly alternating and dynamic, and one consumer may perceive a brand as an anthropomorphic one and a non-anthropomorphic one (Sharma & Rahman, 2022), and the variance can be explained for example by dispositional -, situational -, developmental -, and cultural factors (Epley et al., 2007).

Drivers to anthropomorphize brands can be categorized according to SEEK model by Epley et al. (2007). SEEK model identifies three types of motivations to humanize brands: Sociality Motivation, Effectance Motivation, and Elicited Agent Knowledge, in which variance can be predicted in four main categories: Dispositional, Situational, Developmental, and Cultural. (Epley et al., 2007; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). This study focuses on studying consumers' Sociality Motivations to anthropomorphize brands, such as loneliness and lack of social connections. Consumers' Effectance Motivations to anthropomorphize brands, such as the need for control, desire to avoid uncertainty, and need to be self-efficient. And consumers' Elicited Agent Knowledge to anthropomorphize brands, such as how brands are perceived as similar to humans (i.e., perceived brand anthropomorphism). The table below presents the SEEK model by Epley et al. (2017) and MacInnis and Folkes (2017) in more detail.

TABLE 1 Motivations to anthropomorphize brands (adapted from Epley et al., 2007; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017)

Motivations to anthropomorphize brands			
Types of motivations	Sociality Motivation	Effectance Motivation	Elicited Agent Knowledge
Dispositional	Chronic loneliness Low self-esteem Public self-consciousness	Need for power Need for control Regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention focused)	Trustworthiness of others Chronic trait accessibility Entity orientation
Situational	Situational loneliness Self-enhancement motivations Brand reflects in group status Nostalgia Intimacy-enhancing strategies Brand enriching benefits	Shaken self/Self-esteem/Self-efficacy threats Brand enhancement benefits Fear	Schema congruity (perceived similarity to humans) Longer brand relationships

Continues

Developmental	Attachment styles Abstract reasoning skills	Desires for autonomy Desires for competence	Experiences Availability of alternative theories
Cultural	Cultural orientation (individualism and collectivism)	Desires for uncertainty avoidance	Experiences Norms Ideologies

MacInnis and Folkes (2017) refer to the work of Epley et al. (2007) and review the humanization of brands by consumers. They present three perspectives from the domain of humanizing brands, which is based on the work of Epley et al. (2007). These perspectives are Human-Focused Perspective, Self-Focused Perspective, and Relationship-Focused Perspective. These three perspectives consider various subdomains: The Human-focused perspective focuses on consumers' tendencies to perceive a brand as having human-like features, personality traits, and intentions. The Self-focused perspective focuses on the congruence between the brand and the consumer, and the connection between the brand and the consumer. The Relationship-focused perspective focuses on consumers' human-like relationships with brands, and the humanization of brands as relationship partners. (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). This study adopts the Human-focused perspective of humanizing brands, such as how brands are perceived as similar to humans. The Self-focused perspective of humanizing brands, such as how a brand is connected to consumers' self-concepts. The Relationship-focused perspective of humanizing brands, such as how brands are human-like relationship partners to consumers. The table below presents the Domain of Humanizing Brands by MacInnis and Folkes (2017) in more detail.

TABLE 2 The Domain of Humanizing brands (adapted from MacInnis & Folkes, 2017)

The Domain of Humanizing Brands		
Human-focused perspective (anthropomorphism):	Self-focused perspective:	Relationship-focused perspective:
Brand having human-like... Features/physiognomy Mind Personality/traits	Brand as like me/connected to me: Brand-self congruity Brand self-connections	Brand as relationship partners: Brand relationship types Brand attachment and aversion from betrayal Brand relationship norms

According to Epley et al. (2007), individual knowledge about humanness is the primary determinant to anthropomorphize objects. This knowledge influences an individual to attribute human-like characteristics to non-human objects and explains how human knowledge can be applied to an object. This process is defined as Elicited Agent Knowledge. In this light, it is assumed that

knowledge about humanness (i.e., Elicited Agent Knowledge) explains the humanization of a brand (i.e., brand anthropomorphism).

Also, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) present that when a brand is presented in a way that a brand activates a human schema in consumers, the brand is then perceived as a more anthropomorphic one. In this light, it is assumed that brand presentations may also explain the humanization of a brand (i.e., brand anthropomorphism).

Golossenko, Pillai, and Aroean (2020) have recently identified four dimensions of brand anthropomorphism that present the components of brand anthropomorphism. The components of brand anthropomorphism are appearance (e.g., the brand looks like a human), moral virtue (e.g., the brand is honest) cognitive experience (e.g., the brand is capable of reasoning), and conscious emotionality (e.g., the brand can experience guilt when it hurts someone with its behavior). In this study, brand anthropomorphism is considered to be a construction of these four components. And it is assumed that a brand that possesses these characteristics is perceived as a more anthropomorphic one.

According to Epley et al. (2007, 2008) individual motivation to anthropomorphize an object increases when an individual is willing to interact effectively with a focal object, and when a focal object can serve as a way to satisfy one's need to feel efficacious in one's environment. That is defined as, seeking meaning in one's environment, and controlling and explaining one's environment to avoid uncertainty. This motivation is defined as Effectance Motivation. To build on this theory, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 1: A consumer's tendency to be in control increases perceptions of brand anthropomorphism.*

According to MacInnis and Folkes (2017) brand that is more congruent and connected to the consumer, is perceived as "like me" and "close to me" and is therefore incorporated into the consumer's self-concept increases the consumer's likelihood to anthropomorphize a brand. Guido and Peluso (2015) also identify that self-brand congruity is one of the major dimensions underlying brand anthropomorphism. And a brand that reflects the consumer's perception of self is more congruent to the consumer and increases brand anthropomorphism. To build on these theories, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 2: Self-brand congruity increases perceived brand anthropomorphism.*

According to Epley et al. (2007), individual motivation to anthropomorphize an object increases when a focal object can serve as a way to satisfy one's need to increase a sense of social connection. In other words, a lack of social connections or loneliness increases the likelihood to anthropomorphize an object. This motivation is defined as Sociality Motivation. To build on this theory, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 3: Consumer loneliness increases perceptions of brand anthropomorphism.*

2.4 Perceived brand anthropomorphism

Perceived brand anthropomorphism is influenced by several motivations and drivers as presented above, and various variables affect these and alter the perceptions, which indicates how fluid brand anthropomorphism can be depending on motivations, drivers, and variables.

Perceiving and considering a brand as a human-like entity fulfills three psychological consumer motivations; effective interaction, self-expansion, and social connection (Epley et al., 2007; Sharma & Rahman, 2022), which indicates that human-like brands are not only the creations of marketers. Even though marketers' efforts to encourage the humanization of brands can be done by evoking consumers' imagination, and fostering them to see the brand as a person (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020).

It's crucial to differ perceived brand anthropomorphism and designed brand anthropomorphism. Designed brand anthropomorphism refers to marketers' attempts to humanize brands, and perceived brand anthropomorphism refers to the extent to which consumers perceive the brand as human-like. The distinction between the two is important for marketing practitioners since marketers' attempts to create anthropomorphic brands may differ from the consumers' perceived brand anthropomorphism. The differences in designed brand anthropomorphism and perceived brand anthropomorphism may lead to negative outcomes if marketers' attempts aren't similar to consumers' perceptions. (Sharma & Rahman, 2022). This study focuses on perceived brand anthropomorphism, antecedents for brand anthropomorphism, and consequences of brand anthropomorphism. This study is fruitful for marketers and marketing practitioners and encourages marketers and marketing practitioners to study more thoroughly consumers' brand perceptions when practitioners are aiming to design human-like brands.

2.5 Consumer-focused consequences of perceived brand anthropomorphism on well-being

According to Sharma and Rahman (2022), only a small number of studies have been devoted to studying how brand anthropomorphism affects consumers' lives (i.e., to study the consumer-focused consequences of brand anthropomorphism). This field of research could be beneficial for marketers and brands who are operating in the well-being fields (Sharma & Rahman, 2022) since several consequences of brand anthropomorphism are related to consumers' subjective well-being.

The study of Reimann et al. (2017) finds that close brand relationships alleviate pain, as close brand relationships create feelings of social connectedness, which in turn can alleviate pain. They also show that especially loved and anthropomorphized brands are the most effective brands in alleviating pain, as

brands' human-like characteristics create feelings of social connectedness. For example, a favorite pillow can create a sense of sleeping next to one's spouse.

The study of Aggarwal and McGill (2012) discovers that consumers who like the anthropomorphized brand are more likely to engage more with the anthropomorphized brand and behave in accordance with the focal brand, (i.e., consumers are more likely to cooperate with the brand). These anthropomorphized brands have a stronger effect on consumer behavior than non-anthropomorphized ones. Indicating that anthropomorphized brands can encourage healthy lifestyle choices and increase greater engagement in difficult tasks.

The study of Epley et al. (2008) shows that people who feel disconnected from the social world and lack social connections or who are chronically lonely (i.e., consumers who are missing social connections and/or networks), are more likely to anthropomorphize objects to satisfy the need to feel socially connected. Indicating that anthropomorphized objects can be seen as substitutes for actual human connections and ease feelings of loneliness.

The study of Epley et al. (2008) suggests that people who have a high desire to control their environment, seek understanding, and meaning in one's environment, and explain it are more likely to anthropomorphize objects to satisfy the need to be in control of one's environment. Indicating that anthropomorphizing objects can be a way to cope during uncertain and challenging times.

Considering the studies of Epley et al. (2008) and Reimann et al. (2017) it could be stated, in the same notion as Ma et al. (2021) that anthropomorphism facilitates coping, create a sense of safety, and ease feelings of loneliness, and therefore anthropomorphism can affect well-being. In addition, it could be stated that anthropomorphism can affect well-being by encouraging a greater engagement in challenging tasks and motivate to behave in accordance with the brand, such as performing better and helping to make better and healthier choices (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012) for example about nutrition, exercising, mindfulness, or sleeping. To build on these theories, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 4: Brand anthropomorphism positively affects consumers' subjective well-being.*

Well-being is a multidimensional concept, that considers several areas of an individual's daily life and can be affected by various events in mundane life. Well-being often refers to one's own experiences and evaluations of his/her state of well-being. Well-being can be defined as a positive state that is experienced by individuals and societies. And well-being can be considered as an individual resource for daily life, such as health. Well-being is determined by social, economic, and environmental conditions. It comprehends quality of life, individuals' abilities to contribute to the world with a sense of purpose and meaning, and overall thriving (WHO, 2021).

However, it should be noted that the definition of well-being can be debated topic since there is no global explicit definition of well-being. This is why well-

being can be defined and captured in various ways based on context. Recent research, for example, proposes a more operational and inclusive definition of well-being that emphasizes how well-being is a state of positive feelings and meeting full potential in the world. Research suggests that the definition should be more universal and inclusive and free from context-specific biases. (Simons & Baldwin, 2021)

According to Davis (2018), well-being is a construction of many different areas, and each of these areas can be enhanced to some point by an individual's actions and choices. Davis (2018) defines well-being as a sense of vitality and health that arises from an individual's thoughts, emotions, actions, and experiences. She argues that having well-being means feeling happy, being healthy, being socially connected, and having a purpose in one's life. She divides well-being into five main areas: emotional -, physical -, social -, workplace -, and societal well-being. According to her emotional well-being refers to feelings of happiness, and abilities to manage stress, be resilient, and generate emotions that eventually lead to positive feelings. Physical well-being refers to feeling healthy, and abilities to improve the overall functioning of one's body by exercising and nutritious food. Social well-being refers to feelings of connectedness, and abilities to communicate, develop intimacy, and create supportive networks. Workplace well-being refers to feelings of fulfillment at work, and abilities to pursue one's interests, purpose, skills, meaning, and enrichment in one's career path. Societal well-being refers to feelings and senses of community, and abilities to participate in community, culture, and environment. (Davis, 2018)

Definitions of well-being emphasize the multidimensionality of well-being, and how it considers various areas of an individual's life. The definition of well-being also accentuates the individual's own experiences of his/her state of being well (i.e., subjective well-being). Nevertheless, whether the definition of well-being is more universal or context-specific definition it indicates the applicability of the definition for different areas of life, such as emotional -, physical -, social -, workplace -, and societal well-being.

As presented earlier, anthropomorphism can enhance subjective well-being in various ways, such as improving emotional well-being (e.g., easing the feelings of unhappiness, and facilitating coping in challenging situations), physical well-being (e.g., motivation to make healthier choices in everyday life), social well-being (e.g., ease the feelings of loneliness), workplace well-being (e.g., improve performance), and societal well-being (e.g., create a sense of belonging and connectedness). Therefore, it is proposed that brand anthropomorphism positively affects consumers' subjective well-being (H4).

2.6 Consumer-focused consequences of perceived brand anthropomorphism on consumer-brand relationship

Consumer-focused consequences of brand anthropomorphism are beneficial for all marketing practitioners since some level of brand anthropomorphism can be

considered to be a presupposed condition to create a relationship between a brand and a consumer (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). In addition, brand anthropomorphism itself has positive effects on certain components of brand love, indicating that consumers who like the anthropomorphized brand show more brand love (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020). Furthermore, brand anthropomorphism increases consumers' emotional brand attachment, especially when consumers are feeling socially excluded (Ma et al., 2021), indicating that consumers who exhibit feelings of loneliness are more likely to create emotional attachments to anthropomorphized brands. Brand attachment and brand love are important aspects for marketers and marketing practitioners since the more consumers are attached to a brand the more they are willing to forsake personal resources to maintain an ongoing relationship with the focal brand. (Park et al., 2010).

According to MacInnis and Folkes (2017), consumers may relate to brands as human-like counterparts in relationships and treat a brand as a human by attributing and perceiving it as human-like. In addition, Fournier (1998) presents that a certain amount of anthropomorphism is an essential condition for brand relationships to exist. The anthropomorphic precondition for the consumer-brand relationship can be explained since legitimizing a brand as a relationship partner is associated with the humanization of a brand, which facilitates the interaction between the brand and the consumer. To build on these theories, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 5: Brand anthropomorphism positively affects the consumer-brand relationship.*

The consumer-brand relationship is central to brand anthropomorphism within marketing literature as presented earlier. This is reasoned, since anthropomorphic encounters trigger similar cognitive responses as actual human encounters do, even when it's known that a focal object (i.e., brand), is not a living entity (Epley et al., 2007). The consumer-brand relationships within brand anthropomorphism research are often defined by the work of Fournier (1998), whose conceptual work can be considered as a theoretical foundation to better understand the relationships between consumers and brands. Fournier's (1998) framework about consumer-brand relationships argues that brands do and can serve as viable relationship partners to consumers. Which emphasizes how brands can be and act as human-like relationship partners for consumers. Humanization, personalization, and animation of a brand (i.e., brand anthropomorphism) are predeterminants to legitimize the brand as a partner. And legitimizing a brand as a partner facilitates the interaction between the brand and the consumer (Fournier, 1998). To build on this theory, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *Hypothesis 6: Anthropomorphized brands are considered partners.*

The nature of the consumer-brand relationship affects antecedents to anthropomorphize brands: such as accepting a brand as a legitimate relationship partner (i.e., sociality motivation), and willingness to engage efficaciously with

the brand (i.e., effectance motivation). (Epley et al., 2007, 2008). The nature of the relationship also affects on consequences of brand anthropomorphism: such as pain alleviation (closeness of brand-relationship), a sense of being less lonely (brand as a relationship partner, brand attachment), greater engagement and performance, and likelihood to make better choices (willingness to engage with and by a brand). (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Epley et al., 2008; Reimann et al., 2017).

Since consumers' interactions with anthropomorphized brands are more similar to interpersonal interactions than with brands that are non-anthropomorphized, it should be noted that consumer-brand relationships in anthropomorphic conditions may take several different forms just as human relationships can. A brand can be and act for example, as a friend, as a caretaker, or as a trainer to a consumer. (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016)

When focusing on consumer consequences of brand anthropomorphism, it is crucial to differentiate two types of consumer-brand relationship types: brand as a partner, and brand as a servant. Since Alvarez and Fournier (2016) present that when a brand is perceived as a human-like partner, consumers are more likely to behave in accordance with the brand. On the other hand, when the brand is perceived as a servant, who does the work for the consumer, it is not likely that consumers behave in accordance with the brand since the brand does the work for consumers, not with the consumer. This indicates that if the brand is perceived as a human-like partner, it is more likely that consumers play along with the brand (e.g., "Nike thinks I should *Just do it* - so I will just do my workout"). And if the brand is perceived as a servant, the consumer doesn't need to do the work, as the brand does the work for the consumer (e.g., "I don't have to think whether my house stays clean, since my robot vacuum-cleaner keeps my home dust-free."). To build on these theories, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- *Hypothesis 7.1: The positive effect of brand anthropomorphism on well-being is mediated through partnership.*
- *Hypothesis 7.2: The positive effect of brand anthropomorphism on relationship is mediated through partnership.*

2.7 Research model

The research model of this study has its foundation in a theoretical framework and is built on literature, theories, and generally accepted definitions that are presented earlier in this chapter. To better illustrate the studied phenomenon, the research model of this study is presented below (FIGURE 1).

The research model includes hypotheses that are developed and proposed earlier in this chapter. The literature that supports the proposed hypotheses are also presented earlier in this chapter and are in line with the objectives of this study, and they predict potential and possible outcomes.

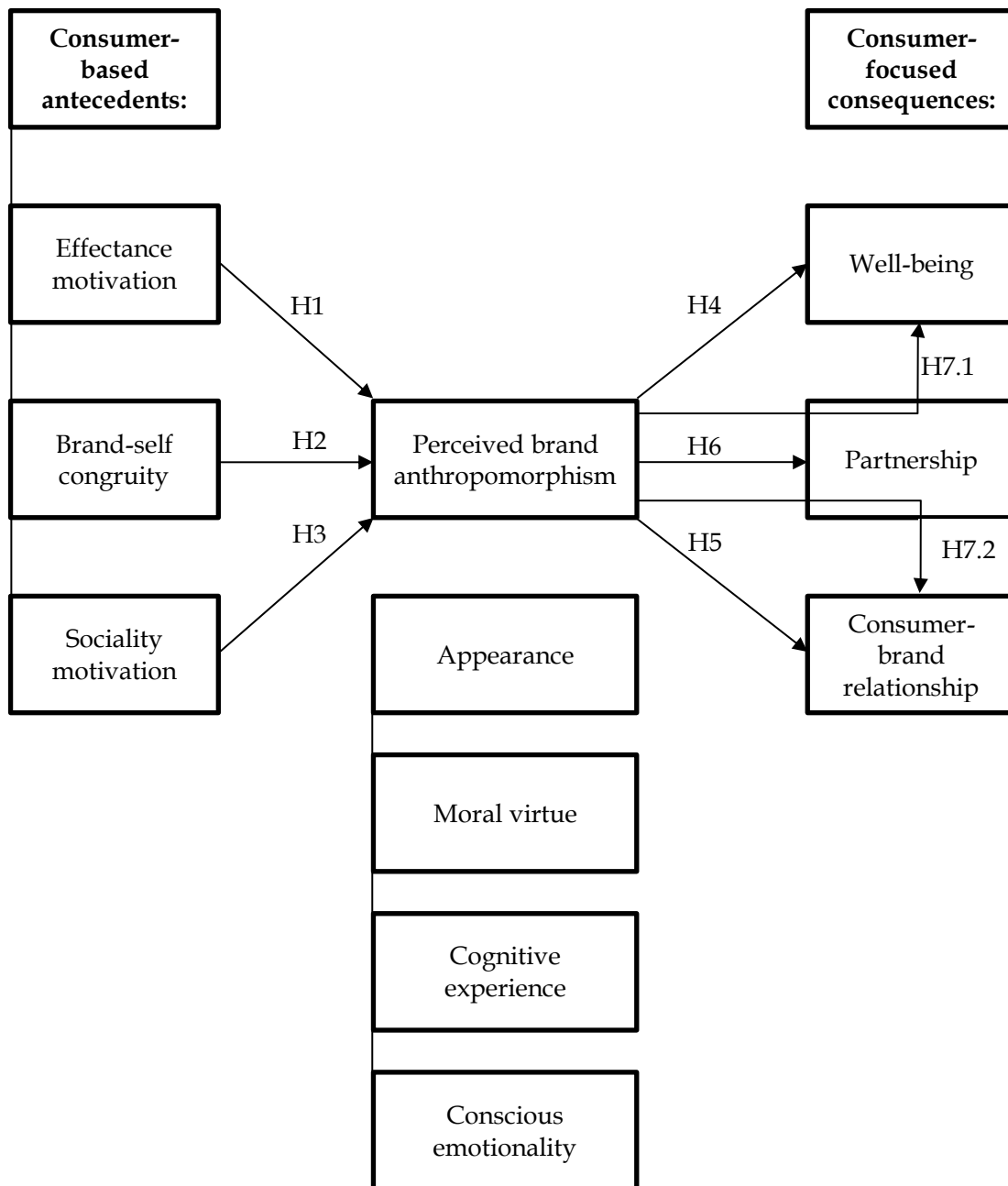


FIGURE 1 Research model

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of this study. This chapter describes the quantitative approach to conducting focal research, the survey method, measurement scales, the online questionnaire, and the brand that is used in this study. This chapter also presents the data collection of the study and the processes of data analysis briefly.

3.1 Quantitative research and survey method

This study has approached the studied phenomenon firstly with theories about anthropomorphism, brand anthropomorphism, and consumer-brand relationships, and considered key concepts of well-being. The hypotheses of this study are developed and derived from the previously presented literature and theories. This kind of approach to conducting research is typical for quantitative social science research which commences with a theory about the studied phenomenon and then derives testable hypotheses from it (Taheri et al., 2015). Previous theories also derive the research problem of the study (i.e., hypotheses), which are later utilized to find and measure the relationships between two or more studied phenomena (Vilkkä, 2007).

To accomplish the objectives of this study as discussed in chapter one, this study uses quantitative approaches to study the relationship between consumers and a focal brand in an anthropomorphic condition. This study measures the relationships between various variables simultaneously (i.e., antecedents and outcomes of brand anthropomorphism) in terms of numbers. In quantitative research, various variables and their relationships are measured simultaneously in numerical terms. The use of a quantitative research approach enables the measurement of the amount of relationships between various variables, and to study how variable(s) affect one another(s). In quantitative research, the relationships between two or more phenomena are measured in terms of

numbers, which is why quantitative research can also be defined as correlation research. (Taheri et al., 2015; Walliman, 2006).

This study concerns several variables that contribute to the studied phenomenon, and this study aims to explain the relationships between those variables. Therefore, this study looks for causal relationships and aims to finally derive explanatory results of the studied phenomenon. Causal relationships explain how studied variables affect one another, and how they are related to one another enabling the research to derive explanatory results of the studied phenomenon (Vilkka, 2007).

This study quantified the research questions to collect numerical data and measure the relationships in terms of numbers. Quantifying the research questions is essential for quantitative research to measure the amount of relationships (Taheri et al., 2015; Walliman, 2006). In quantitative research, the information is also examined, analyzed, presented, and described in terms of numbers, which requires turning written text into measurable numerical units (i.e., operationalization), and again turning numerical data results into written explanations and conclusions that the study derives (Vilkka, 2007).

This study utilized an online survey for data collection, which is one of the most suitable methods to gather explanatory data in quantitative research. The survey is a standardized questionnaire, that can be used when the observational units are persons, and when the questionnaire concerns, for example, persons' opinions, attitudes, qualities, or behavior (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). With the use of an online survey, this study can remain objective throughout the data collection and gather a large enough sample to derive reliable quantitative results. The survey can be considered to be an objective method to gather data as the researcher cannot affect the observational units (i.e., studied persons) or their responses because the researcher remains distant from the respondents throughout the data collection. The survey research also enables the researcher to achieve larger samples for research (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009), which makes the results of the quantitative study more reliable. As results of the quantitative research can be considered more reliable the larger the sample is (Vilkka, 2007).

3.2 Measurement scales

The survey (Appendix) included socio-demographic questions, such as age, gender, size of household, employment, occupation, and lifestyle. They were used to categorize respondents and to describe the demographic backgrounds of the respondents.

The survey also included questions about brand awareness, impressions of the brand, and brand use. The questions concerning the brand were used to better understand the respondents' comprehension, perceptions, and general considerations of the focal brand.

Most of the survey questions concerned the research phenomena itself (i.e., brand anthropomorphism). Research questions were drawn from the

measurement scales of previous research. The use of robust, validated, and reliable measurement scales ensures the robustness of this study.

To measure brand anthropomorphism, or to what extent a brand is perceived as having human-like attributes and characteristics this study adopts a brand anthropomorphism scale (BASC) by Golossenko et al. (2020). BASC is based on theoretical grounds and combines existing perspectives of brand anthropomorphism. BASC scale has four dimensions: appearance, moral virtue, cognitive experience, and conscious emotionality. These dimensions are found to be interdependent, which indicates they are manifestations of higher-order constructs of brand anthropomorphism. The applicability of the BASC is verified by consistently demonstrating adequate psychometric properties for reliability, dimensionality, convergent -, discriminant -, and predictive validity, and test-retest reliability, and is, therefore, a robust measurement scale to measure brand anthropomorphism. Brand anthropomorphism was measured using a 7-point Likert scale. (1 = "Totally disagree", 7 = "Totally agree").

To measure consumers' effectance motivation to anthropomorphize a brand, and to what extent individual desires to be in control (i.e., avoid uncertainty) this study adopts shortened Desirability of Control measurement scale by Burger and Cooper (1979). The original Desirability of Control measurement scale includes 20 items to measure to what extent an individual has the desire to have control in one's life. The 20 items of the scale are self-descriptive statements that identify five different types of desires to be in control. In this study, the Desirability of Control measurement scale is shortened, and only 6 of the measurement scale items are used to measure the desire to be in control. The 6 items are chosen as they have the highest factor loadings ($r > 0.5$) to similar factors in two different samples. The chosen 6 items show the highest loadings for factors 1, 2, and 3. Other items showed weaker loadings to these factors and are therefore excluded from this study. Items that have loadings into the factors 4 and 5 are insignificant ($r < 0.4$) and alternating in two different samples (Burger & Cooper, 1979) and are therefore also excluded from this study.

The Desirability of Control measurement scale can be considered a robust measurement scale to use in studies that consider effectance motivations to anthropomorphize since Epley et al. (2008) also used The Desirability of Control measurement scale in their research to study effectance motivations to anthropomorphize. The effectance motivation was measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Number 1 indicated the most negative value (1 = "Does not apply to me at all", 7 = "Applies always to me"). Two of the items were reverse-scored, and at the end, the responses were summated. A higher value indicated a higher desire to be in control.

To measure consumers' brand-self congruity and to what extent the brand is connected to consumers' self-concepts, this study adopts one dimension of the brand anthropomorphism scale by Guido and Peluso (2015). The dimension is used to assess to what extent a brand reflects consumers' perceptions of themselves. The use of one dimension of the scale can be justified since the scale differentiates three different dimensions, and every three dimensions positively

correlate with the direct measure of brand anthropomorphism, and therefore it can be considered as a robust measurement to measure brand-self congruity. The brand-self congruence was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree, 7 = "Totally agree").

To measure consumers' sociality motivation to anthropomorphize a brand, and to what extent an individual feels lonely and/or lacks social connections, this study adopts a short version of The UCLA Loneliness Scale originally by Daniel Russell (1996). The UCLA Loneliness Scale is a widely used scale to measure general loneliness and is applicable for research among adults. The UCLA Loneliness scale is often modified and/or shortened for different research purposes. The short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale includes 3 items to measure general loneliness and lack of companionship. Three-Item Loneliness Scale displays satisfactory reliability and both concurrent and discriminant validity and therefore can be considered a robust measurement scale. This study adopts the Three-Item-Scale since it is proven to be an efficient measurement scale in the surveys that are conducted via online surveys. (Hughes et al., 2004; Maes et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2011; Steptoe et al., 2013). The UCLA Loneliness Scale and its modified version can also be considered as a robust measurement scale to use in studies that consider sociality motivation to anthropomorphize since Epley et al. (2008) also used the UCLA Loneliness Scale in their research to study sociality motivation to anthropomorphize. The sociality motivation was measured using a 3-point scale (1 = Hardly ever, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Often). The responses were summated, and the sum indicates not being lonely or lonely (sum 3-5 = "Not lonely", sum 6-9 = "Lonely").

To measure the consumer-brand relationship, this study adopts shortened version of the brand relationship quality (BRQ) measurement scale by Kim et al. (2005). The BRQ measurement scale has its theoretical foundations in the conceptual framework of Susan Fournier (1998) and is elaborated to measure dimensions underlying the brand relationship quality. The BRQ measurement scale has five dimensions: self-connective attachment, satisfaction, behavioral commitment, trust, and emotional intimacy, and it includes 21 items overall. The BRQ can be used to measure brand relationship quality in product or service domains. The BRQ measurement scale developed by Kim et al. (2005) shows significant coefficient values and indicates convergent - and discriminant validity (Kim et al., 2005). This study adopts a shortened version of the BRQ measurement scale and uses only 10 items of the scale (i.e., 10 items are excluded, and one of the items is used only in product domains). The items that are chosen for the survey are used to measure the brand relationship quality in service domains and show the highest factor loadings to each dimension of the scale. The items that have lower loadings are excluded to maintain respondent friendly questionnaire that doesn't include too many questions. The brand relationship quality was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree", 7 = "Totally agree").

To measure to what extent consumers are likely to perceive and consider a brand as a partner, this study adopts a three-item scale from previous research.

The measurement scale used in this study has its theoretical foundations in implicit theories of the self and others (Levy et al., 1998). The modified version of the three-item measurement scale is used in previous research to measure to what extent a brand is perceived and considered as a servant or as a partner in anthropomorphic brand conditions (Han et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be considered an acceptable measurement scale to measure to what extent consumers perceive and consider a brand as a servant or as a partner. The brand partnership was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree", 7 = "Totally agree").

To measure consumers' subjective well-being in general this study adopts The Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (RLSS). The RLSS is an updated version of the frequently used Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The RLSS retains the favorable qualities of the SWLS but brings additional benefits. The RLSS retains favorable psychometric properties of the SWLS (e.g., test-retest reliability and one-dimensionality) and both of the scales show nearly identical levels of internal consistency. The RLSS improves the SWLS by including more negative, indirect items, and reflects the more meaningful conception of life satisfaction, such as the absence of envy, regret, and desire to change one's life path. (Diener et al., 1985; Margolis et al., 2019). The subjective well-being was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree", 7 = "Totally agree"). Three of the items were reverse scored.

The questionnaire is presented in more detail at the end as an appendix. All of the survey questions and response options are also presented in detail (Appendix).

3.3 Data collection

This study is survey research and used Webropol 3.0 for empirical data collection. The research questions of the survey were drawn from the measurement scales that are used in previous studies measuring similar constructs as this study.

The data collection commenced in March 2023, and the data collection period was 11 days. The data was collected first at the University of Jyväskylä. The survey link was shared via email among the students and faculty members at The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences and at The Faculty of Business and Economics. The survey link was also shared at the closed Facebook forum of Academic Sports uMove, which is a closed Facebook forum for students and faculty members of the University of Jyväskylä. There was also a lottery among university students and faculty members of the University of Jyväskylä. The lottery was used to encourage recipients to participate in the survey. The lottery was voluntary, and recipients could participate in the lottery by submitting an email to another Webropol survey. The lottery was fully separate from the survey to maintain fully anonymous survey research. The winners were contacted by email after the survey was closed.

The survey was also shared in two different Facebook groups to collect the last data units and meet the objectives of the sample size. The objective was to have at least 100 responses, as it is the preferred sample size for a survey (Vilkka, 2007). The survey link was shared to Survey Exchange and Dissertation Survey Exchange Facebook groups which are global Facebook groups for University students who are collecting research data for theses, dissertations, and for other study-related purposes, such as university courses. The link was shared among Facebook groups and members of those groups were requested to participate in the survey.

The focal sample of students and faculty members was chosen for this study as it was supposed that the focal sample would have an interest to participate in the survey research as they engage within the research field themselves as well. The benefits of the chosen sample are diversity, and more accurately respondents who have different and various scientific interests (i.e., all of the respondents presumably do not engage within a similar scientific field as the study topic). On the other hand, the sample most likely represents only students and/or faculty members and therefore is a mere representation of the population.

The sample consists of 106 respondents and the final sample consists of 101 respondents. The 5 respondents that were excluded from the final sample were speeders, and/or their open-ended questions were inappropriate, and/or they stated that they don't use the brand and didn't familiarize themselves at all with the material that was provided. To use quality data only these respondents were excluded.

3.4 Online questionnaire

This study was conducted as survey research. The survey was standardized for every respondent and the online questionnaire included 21 questions in total. The survey commenced with a brief introduction to the research. The first question concerned the importance of different well-being areas. Then the studied brand was introduced to the respondents only by name, and the respondents were asked questions regarding their brand awareness, brand familiarity, and brand use. After this, the focal brand was presented in more detail with images, text, and a link to the brand's website. After the brand introduction, the respondents were asked about their impressions of the brand, and how well they familiarized themselves with the provided brand material. The opening questions of the study were simple, and they were designed to raise interest in the topic and activate the respondents. As it is important to use opening questions that gain the respondents' attention and stimulate their interest in the topic before presenting more complex questions (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015).

Then the actual research questions were presented. Socio-demographic questions were at the end of the questionnaire. The questions and the response

options of the online questionnaire are presented in more detail at the end (Appendix).

The online questionnaire included scale questions, single-choice – and multiple-choice questions, and one open-ended question. The open-ended question was used to better understand respondents' first impressions of the brand since the open-ended question is useful to get “top-of-mind” responses and provide rich information and insights from responses (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). Every question of the survey was presented to each respondent. Only one question: “Which of the following best describes your occupation?” was asked only if the respondent had answered “Employed” in the question “What is your current employment status?”.

The respondents from the University of Jyväskylä were able to participate in the lottery, and they had a chance to win a present card by participating in the survey. The lottery was created with the use of a separate questionnaire to keep survey responses anonymous. Participation in the lottery was optional, and respondents were able to participate in the lottery by submitting an email address. The lottery was used to encourage more respondents to participate in the survey. After the data was collected and the survey was closed, the winners were contacted by email.

3.5 Brand selection for the survey: Nike Run Club by NIKE Inc.

To study whether a focal brand is perceived as an anthropomorphic one and whether it has an impact on consumers' well-being this study used Nike Run Club (NRC) as an example brand. The Nike Run Club is used in this study as the brand operates in the sports, wellness, and fitness industry.

The Nike Run Club (NRC) is a running club by Nike Inc. The NRC is an app that can be downloaded to mobile devices and connected to other wearable sports devices, such as Apple Watch. The NRC is an online running club that motivates members to run consistently. Members of the NRC can join and connect with the global NRC community and discuss with other members. The NRC offers members various running programs such as Mindful Running Pack, Recovery Run Pack, Short Runs, Long Runs, Speed Runs, Distance Based Runs, Treadmill Runs, and Get Started Collection. The NRC offers also training plans, playlists that are matching to a member's running workout, tools to improve running, guided runs with voice assistance, coaching, possibilities to join global and local running challenges, and for example possibilities to run with a friend(s).

The members of the NRC are also able to plan their running workouts to maintain their running routines and practices. The NRC app tracks the user's running progress and statistics, such as pace, location, distance, elevation, mile splits, heart rate, and cadence. The NRC app constantly aims to keep members motivated and gives credits to members when they achieve a new goal and reminds them to celebrate new PRs and run-day streaks. In addition, the NRC offers general wellness tips that are always available for members via the NRC

app. The NRC app also has an explore page where members can find and explore featured stories for example about athletes, wellness, running, and sports. There are also events hosted by NRC in which the members can participate (NIKE, Inc., 2023).

The NRC app emphasizes overall well-being and covers various well-being areas, such as physical, mental, social, and societal. Members can for example have 'recovery runs', which are guided runs by Headspace. The recovery runs are guided practices that combine mindfulness and running, through calming conversation and guidance during the recovery run (NIKE, Inc., 2023).

3.6 Data analysis

The data analysis of this study was conducted in Microsoft Excel, IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0, and SMART PLS 4. First, the data was exported from the survey and reporting tool Webropol 3.0 to Microsoft Excel. Then the data was modified in Excel. The modification included reversing scores for values that needed to be reverse scored, summarizing the values of the questions concerning loneliness (i.e., sociality motivation), and desire to be in control (i.e., effectance motivation). After this, all the variables were given short and descriptive names to facilitate further analysis. The data was also examined for possible speeders, and for other problems that would cause any problems in further analysis. After processing the data in Excel, the data was exported to IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 software. The initial data analysis was conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 which included analysis of descriptive statistics. After initial analysis, the data was exported to SMART PLS 4 software. The actual analysis was conducted in SMART PLS 4 which included the assessment of the measurement model and structural model (i.e., hypothesis testing).

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of this study in detail. This chapter describes the background information of the respondents, the measurement model of the study, hypotheses testing, and finally presents the results of the study.

4.1 Socio-demographic and background information

The survey was shared among the University of Jyväskylä via email (The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences and The Faculty of Business and Economics), shared on a closed Facebook forum of University of Jyväskylä's Academic Sports uMove (Facebook forum of Academic Sports uMove), and shared on two different open Facebook groups (Survey Exchange and Dissertation Survey Exchange).

The overall sample included 106 respondents, and the final sample was 101 respondents (N = 101). Five respondents were excluded from the final sample as their responses were recognized to be problematic. These responses were identified to be problematic due to speeding, inappropriate open-ended responses, and/or respondents stating that they didn't familiarize themselves at all with the material that was provided at the beginning of the survey.

The survey included five socio-demographic questions: gender, age, household size, employment, and occupation. The socio-demographic questions were not mandatory to answer except for the question concerning age, as the study concerned adults only (i.e., over 18-year-olds). Respondents were not forced to disclose other socio-demographic information to maintain an anonymous survey.

The majority of 67.3 % of the respondents were female (N = 68) and 29.3 % were male (N = 30). Two respondents (N = 2) preferred not to disclose their gender and one respondent (N = 1) didn't respond to the question. The majority of the respondents were under 30-year-olds. And the largest group by age was 18-24-year-olds at 48.5 %, followed by 25-29-year-olds at 30.7 %. The

demographic information of the sample is presented in detail in the table below. (TABLE 3).

Most of the respondents were living in a household of two or more persons (Household size: 2-3: N = 41, 4-5: N = 21, <5: N = 2). And 36.6 % of the respondents were living in a household of one person (N = 37). A clear majority of 73.3 % of respondents were students (N = 74), and 20.8 % were employed (N = 21). Three respondents (N = 3) specified their employment situations as students and employed simultaneously (N = 2) and on sick leave (N = 1). Those respondents who answered that they were employed were asked about their occupations in more detail. The majority of the employed respondents described their occupation as an employee (N = 8) and as an intermediate (N = 7). The sociographic information of the sample is presented in detail in the table below. (TABLE 3).

TABLE 3 Demographic and sociographic information of the respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	30	29.7
Female	68	67.3
Prefer not to say	2	2.0
Missing	1	1.0
Total	101	100 %
Age	N	%
18-24	49	48.5
25-29	31	30.7
30-34	9	8.9
35-39	4	4.0
40-44	2	2.0
45-49	3	3.0
<50	3	3.0
Total	101	100 %
Household size	N	%
1	37	36.6
2-3	41	40.6
4-5	21	20.8
<5	2	2.0
Total	101	100 %
Employment	N	%
Employed	21	20.8
Student	74	73.3
Other	3	3.0
Missing	3	3.0
Total	101	100 %
Occupation	N	%
Entry-level	2	2.0
Employee	8	7.9
Intermediate	7	6.9
Middle-Management	3	3.0
Management	1	1.0
Executive	2	2.0

Missing	78	77.2
Total	101	100 %

The respondents were familiar with Nike but not so familiar with Nike Run Club. Over one of a third (36.6 %) of the respondents were very familiar with Nike, and only 4 % of the respondents were very familiar with Nike Run Club. Only 2 % of the respondents used the Nike Run Club, and the majority of 86.1 % of the respondents didn't use the Nike Run Club. Indicating that the results of this study are based on the imaginative use of Nike Run Club, and perceptions and impressions were made mostly by the material that was provided in the survey. And all the responses concerning Nike Run Club are then based on these provided materials as well. Most of the respondents familiarized themselves with the survey materials only (80.2 %), and only a few of the respondents visited the Nike Run Club's website. The information concerning brand use, brand familiarity, and familiarization with the survey materials are presented in detail in the table below (TABLE 4).

The respondents were asked what thoughts and feelings the Nike Run Club arouses in them after providing materials, and information about the Nike Run Club. The question was open-ended to gather rich qualitative data in addition to quantitative data. The open-ended responses were coded by hand and the data was coded by themes that were found in the data. The themes emerged from the data, and they were not predetermined. The coding followed the basis of the grounded theory which is a qualitative research approach that includes interpretive procedures, such as categorizing the data by themes emerging from the data during the analysis process (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015).

The majority of 27 % of respondents stated that NRC is motivating, followed by 14 % of respondents stating that NRC is a community. Open-ended responses indicate that Nike Run Club is mostly considered a motivating application, and an online community for users, nevertheless, the responses also indicate that respondents didn't consider the Nike Run Club useful. Open-ended responses indicate firstly that respondents familiarized themselves with provided materials since the NRC was described to be a motivational application and an online community for runners. Some responses indicate that the respondents are not interested in running and consider the app therefore redundant. Open-ended responses are coded and presented in more detail in the table below (TABLE 4).

TABLE 4 Brand Familiarity, brand use, and impressions of the brand (coded)

	Brand familiarity (Nike)	Brand Familiarity (NRC)
Mean	5.74	2.38
Std.	1.433	1.702
Total	101	101
Brand use (NRC)	N	%
Yes	2	2.0
No	87	86.1

Not at the moment, but I have used it	12	11.9
Total	101	100 %
Continues		
Familiarization with survey materials	N	%
Survey materials	81	80.2
Website	10	9.9
Survey materials and website	10	9.9
Total	101	100 %
Thoughts and feelings about the NRC (coded)	N	%
NRC is motivating	27	26.7
NRC is a community	14	13.8
NRC is not useful	7	6.93
NRC gives tools for running	6	5.94
NRC is like other sports applications	5	4.95
NRC interests me, and I could try it	5	4.95
NRC is useful	5	4.95
NRC helps to track performance	5	4.95
NRC makes me feel inspired and interested	5	4.95
NRC is for athletes only	5	4.95
NRC is versatile	4	3.96
No thoughts	3	2.97
NRC is for commercial purposes	3	2.97
NRC doesn't interest me	2	1.98
NRC creates positive thoughts, and/or is a good initiative	2	1.98
NRC gives sense of accomplishment and satisfaction	2	1.98
NRC encourages for well-being and healthy choices	1	0.99
Total	101	100 %

The respondents were also asked how important different well-being areas are to them. The question was used to raise interest in the study topic more broadly and in well-being in general. Five different well-being areas were briefly defined with examples to the respondents with the focal question. Emotional well-being was the most important area of well-being among respondents and the second most important was physical well-being, the least important well-being area was societal well-being. Overall, the results indicate that respondents

consider all the below-mentioned well-being areas to be important to them. The importance of each area of well-being is presented in detail in the table below (TABLE 5).

TABLE 5 Importance of well-being areas

	N	Mean	Std.
Emotional well-being	101	6.35	.910
Physical well-being	101	6.19	.924
Social well-being	101	5.75	1.108
Workplace - /University well- being	101	5.50	1.108
Societal well-being	101	5.37	1.309

4.2 Measurement model

In this study, the measurement model was assessed through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SMART PLS 4. Partial least squares equation modeling is a statistical procedure that can be used to estimate simultaneous systems of equations, and it enables the study of inter-relationships between one or more dependent and independent variables that can be latent or unobservable. PLS-SEM procedures can be used to assess a measurement model (i.e., the outer model) and a structural model (i.e., the inner model). In PLS both of the models are assessed simultaneously. The assessment of the outer model measures the quality of all constructs in terms of their reliability and validity. And the assessment of the inner model measures the relationships between the constructs of the model. The assessment of the inner model also enables hypothesis testing (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015).

In this study, the measurement model is a higher-order construct (i.e., the brand anthropomorphism has lower-order components as presented earlier in chapter two) and the PLS-SEM is used to assess, estimate, and validate the higher-order research structure. In this study, the higher-order construct represents a reflective-reflective higher-order construct, and the measurement model is assessed by the repeated indicators approach. And therefore, the evaluation of the measurement model considers the measurement models of lower-order components and the measurement model of the higher-order construct as a whole. Otherwise, the evaluation is done by similar criteria to any PLS-SEM model (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

First, the measurement model of the higher construct Brand anthropomorphism (BA) and its lower-order components Appearance (APP), Moral virtue (MV), Cognitive experience (CEX), and Conscious emotionality

(CEM) were assessed. When the higher-order construct represents a reflective-reflective model the measurement model is assessed by analyzing factor loadings (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Therefore the assessment was done first by analyzing the factor loadings, which should be over 0.7 (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). All of the loadings exceeded this value except three item loadings, which were removed for further analysis. Deleted items measured general well-being (WBG1, WBG2, and WBG3). To further assess the measurement model, the convergent validity was assessed in terms of average variance extracted (AVE) and internal consistency reliability in terms of composite reliability. The average variance extracted should be at least 0.5, and composite reliability needs to be above 0.7 to conclude that that construct is reliable (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). In addition, the HTMT values were evaluated to support the discriminant validity of lower-order components. The HTMT values should be below 0.85 to further support the discriminant validity of the lower-order components. However, it should be noted that discriminant validity is not considered between lower-order components (APP, MV, CEX, and CEM) and their higher-order component (BA). The discriminant validity between these constructs can be expected since the measurement model of the higher-order component repeats the indicators of its lower-order components. And the factor loadings of these constructs prove the reliability of the indicators. (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The measurement model was found reliable and valid, and the statistics are presented in detail in tables 6 and 7.

TABLE 6 Composite reliabilities, AVE, and factor loadings

	Composite reliability	AVE	Item	Standardized loadings
APP	.958	.885	BA1	.955
			BA2	.932
			BA3	.935
BA*	.932	.537		
CEX	.927	.808	BA7	.864
			BA8	.914
			BA9	.918
CEM	.957	.881	BA10	.909
			BA11	.962
			BA12	.943
MV	.928	.811	BA4	.922
			BA5	.918
			BA6	.860
PART	.949	.862	PART1	.877
			PART2	.954
			PART3	.952
REL	.963	.725	REL1	.735
			REL2	.804
			REL3	.862
			REL4	.866
			REL5	.792
			REL6	.851

			REL7	.902
			REL8	.890
			REL9	.880
			REL10	.916
SELF	.946	.814	SELF1	.903
			SELF2	.879
			SELF3	.907
			SELF4	.920
WBG	.876	.703	WBG4	.791
			WBG5	.846
			WBG6	.875

Note: Higher-order construct values in italics*

TABLE 7 Mean, standard deviations, and HTMT values

	Mean	Std.									
APP	4.347	1.495									
CEX	3.495	1.567									
CEM	2.489	1.456									
EMOT	30.13	4.347									
MV	4.604	1.284									
PART	3.673	1.758									
REL	2.654	1.435									
SELF	3.490	1.514									
SMOT	5.12	1.710									
WBG	4.640	1.448									
	APP	<i>BA*</i>	CEX	CEM	EMOT	MV	PART	REL	SELF	SMOT	WBG
APP											
<i>BA*</i>	-										
CEX	.704	-									
CEM	.501	-	.738								
EMOT	.142	<i>.154</i>	.132	.148							
MV	.590	-	.542	.268	.067						
PART	.429	.622	.528	.328	.045	.718					
REL	.343	<i>.565</i>	.503	.381	.069	.591	.797				
SELF	.574	<i>.702</i>	.610	.535	.082	.523	.638	.595			
SMOT	.085	<i>.076</i>	.028	.058	.122	.072	.216	.118	.115		
WBG	.079	<i>.235</i>	.182	.323	.190	.165	.268	.260	.121	.698	

Note: Higher-order construct values in italics*

4.3 Hypothesis testing

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed. The structural model was assessed by the structural model path coefficients (β), which present the strength of the relationship between variables. The significance of path coefficients (β) was measured by bootstrapping procedure with 1000 subsamples with a 5%

significance level as recommended. The path coefficients (β) can usually be found between -1 and 1, and to conclude that the path coefficients (β) are significant p-values should be below 0.05 ($p \leq .05$) and t-statistics above 1.96 ($t \geq 1.96$). (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). To further assess the path coefficients (β), the f squares and R squares were examined. The f squares present the explanatory power of each independent variable and the R squares measure the variance explained in the dependent variable by independent variables (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015).

In this study, brand-self congruence was found to be an antecedent for brand anthropomorphism. The path coefficient value (β) between brand-self congruence (SELF) and brand anthropomorphism (BA) was found to be positive ($\beta = .666$, $p = .000$, t value 10.608). Therefore, it can be concluded that a brand connected to a consumer's self-concept is perceived as a more anthropomorphic one, and H2 is supported. The explanatory power of the independent variable (SELF) for brand anthropomorphism (BA) was also found to be large (f square .795) (Cohen, 1988).

The partnership was found to be a consequence of brand anthropomorphism in this study. The path coefficient value (β) between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and partnership (PART) was found to be positive ($\beta = .569$, $p = .000$, t value 7.274). Therefore, it can be concluded that anthropomorphized brands are considered partners, and H6 is supported. The explanatory power of brand anthropomorphism (BA) for partnership (PART) was also found to be large (f square .479) (Cohen, 1988), and brand anthropomorphism explains 32.4 % of the variance in partnership.

This study didn't find effectance motivation (EMOT), and sociality motivation (SMOT) to be antecedents for brand anthropomorphism (BA). The path coefficient value (β) between consumers' tendency to be in control (EMOT) and brand anthropomorphism (BA) was found to be negative ($\beta = -.160$, $p = .036$, t value 2.098). Therefore, the tendency to be in control doesn't increase perceptions of brand anthropomorphism but decreases (i.e., higher the desire to be in control lower perceptions of brand anthropomorphism), and H1 is not supported. However, the explanatory power of the independent variable (EMOT) for brand anthropomorphism (BA) was found to be small (f square .046) (Cohen, 1988). The path coefficient value (β) between consumer loneliness (SMOT) and brand anthropomorphism (BA) was found to be insignificant ($\beta = .049$, $p = .571$, t value 0.567). Therefore, consumer loneliness doesn't affect brand anthropomorphism and H3 is not supported.

Well-being (WBG) and relationship (REL) were not found to be consequences of brand anthropomorphism. The path coefficient value (β) between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and well-being (WBG) was found to be insignificant ($\beta = -.057$, $p = .744$, t value 0.327). Therefore, it can be concluded that brand anthropomorphism doesn't positively affect consumers' subjective well-being and H4 is not supported. The path coefficient value (β) between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and consumer-brand relationship (REL) was also found to be insignificant ($\beta = .148$, $p = .063$, t value 1.859). Therefore, it can be concluded that brand anthropomorphism doesn't directly affect the consumer-brand

relationship and H5 is not supported. However, mediation analysis shows that brand anthropomorphism affects consumer-brand relationship through partnership.

The mediation was analyzed between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and well-being (WBG) and between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and relationship (REL). The partnership (PART) was a mediator variable that intervened in the relationships between the above-mentioned constructs. The partnership (PART) was found to fully mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and relationship (REL) ($\beta = .383$, $p = .000$, t value 5.909). Full mediation occurs when the independent variable exerts its total influence via the mediating variable (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, the relationship between BA and PART was found to be significant ($\beta = .569$, $p = .000$, t value 7.274), and the relationship between PART and REL was found to be significant ($\beta = .673$, $p = .000$, t value 8.603), but the direct relationship between BA and REL was found to be insignificant ($\beta = .148$, $p = .063$, t value 1.859). Since the strength of the relationship between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and relationship (REL) was statistically insignificant, but with the inclusion of mediating variable (PART) the indirect effect of BA on REL through PART was found to be significant, it can be concluded that the relationship between BA and REL is fully mediated by PART (Hair et al., 2022), and therefore, H7.2 is supported. In addition, partnership (PART) and brand anthropomorphism (BA) was found to explain 58.8 % of the variance in the relationship (REL). These results emphasize the role of brand partnership in consumer-brand relationships in an anthropomorphic condition. Partnership (PART) was not found to mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism (BA) and well-being (WBG) ($\beta = -.124$, $p = .243$, t value 1.168), and H7.1 is not supported.

Path coefficients (β), p -values, t -statistics, f -squares, R -squares, and hypotheses acceptance are presented in detail in the table below (TABLE 8).

TABLE 8 Path coefficients (β), p -values, t -statistics, f squares, R squares, and hypotheses acceptance

	β	p -values	T -statistics	f squares	Acceptance
BA->PART	.569	.000	7.274	0.479	Yes
BA->REL	.148	.063	1.859	0.036	No
BA->WBG	-.057	.744	0.327	0.002	No
EMOT->BA	-.160	.036	2.098	0.046	No
PART->REL	.673	.000	8.603	0.743	
PART->WBG	-.218	.247	1.159	0.034	
SELF->BA	.666	.000	10.608	0.795	Yes
SMOT->BA	.049	.571	0.567	0.004	No
BA->PART->REL*	.383	.000	5.909		Yes
BA->PART->WBG*	-.124	.243	1.168		No
	R				
	squares				
APP	.706				
MV	.490				
CEX	.783				

CEM	.569
BA	.450
PART	.324
WBG	.065
REL	.588

*Specific indirect effects

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter discusses the empirical findings of this study and answers to the research questions of this study. This chapter presents the theoretical - and managerial implications that this study has derived. This chapter also provides suggestions for future research and presents the evaluation and limitations of the study.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study aims to contribute to the research on brand anthropomorphism and the main objective of this study is to discover the antecedents of brand anthropomorphism and its effects on consumers' lives. And more accurately, to study, how perceived brand anthropomorphism affects consumer well-being (RQ1), how consumer-based-antecedents and individual tendencies affect perceived brand anthropomorphism (RQ2), and how brand anthropomorphism affects the consumer-brand relationship (RQ3).

This study didn't find brand anthropomorphism to positively affect consumers' well-being, and the finding doesn't support previous studies in which brand anthropomorphism positively affected well-being. However, it should be noted that in previous studies, brand attachment and close brand relationship were determinants for positive consequences of brand anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Epley et al., 2008; Reimann et al., 2017; Sharma & Rahman, 2022). The majority of the respondents of this study were not brand users, and therefore brand attachment and close brand relationships are not assumed, which in turn explains the divergent results of this study.

In this study, brand-self congruence was discovered to be an antecedent for brand anthropomorphism. This finding adds to previous studies that have discovered the brand-self congruence to increase perceptions of brand anthropomorphism (Fournier, 1998; Guido & Peluso, 2015; MacInnis & Folkes,

2017). The finding indicates that a brand connected to the consumer's self-concept increases brand anthropomorphism. This finding also emphasizes the importance of brand integration into the consumer's self-concept and how a brand "like me" is perceived as more human-like. The finding also elaborates on the knowledge about humanness (i.e., Elicited Agent Knowledge) that is the primary determinant to anthropomorphize an object (Epley et al., 2007). Indicating, how consumer's knowledge about the self can be transmitted to the brands.

This study didn't find loneliness (i.e., sociality motivation) and desire to be in control (i.e., effectance motivation) to be antecedents for brand anthropomorphism. The findings don't support previous studies in which loneliness and desire to be in control were found to increase brand anthropomorphism. However, it should be noted, that previous studies have identified the alternation and variance in tendencies to anthropomorphize brands. Previous studies explain how anthropomorphic perceptions can vary by dispositional, situational, developmental, and cultural motivations (Epley et al., 2007, 2008). The different results of this study can be therefore explained by these fluctuating motivations. In addition, anthropomorphic perceptions can be constantly fluid and alternating as Sharma and Rahman (2022) present which can also explain the divergent results of this study.

This study discovered brand partnership to be a consequence of brand anthropomorphism. The partnership was also found to fully mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and the consumer-brand relationship. Suggesting that brand anthropomorphism affects consumer-brand relationships through brand partnership. These findings add to previous research that has discovered that human-like brands are considered partners and brand partnership fortifies the consumer-brand relationship. The findings also emphasize the legitimation of the brand as a relationship partner through brand humanization (i.e., anthropomorphizing a brand) (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier, 1998; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). The role of brand partnership is one of the key findings of this study. And the finding adds to another important finding of this study: brand-self congruence as an antecedent of brand anthropomorphism. These two findings together emphasize the consumer's knowledge about the self and others, the partnership between them, and how knowledge about the self is transmitted to brands and others.

5.2 Managerial implications

This study found brand-self congruence to be an antecedent for brand anthropomorphism and identified the partnership to fully mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer-brand relationship. These findings emphasize first the importance of brand fit for consumers' identities and second, the role of brand partners in order to create a meaningful consumer-brand relationship.

These findings were not surprising since consumers increasingly adopt and utilize brands that are suitable for them and their identities. Especially in cultures and societies in which identity and individuality are increasingly accentuated (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). The role of brand partnership in the consumer-brand relationship is neither a surprising result as the partnership indicates the mutual benefits for both parties of the relationship. The brand as a partner also accentuates the brand's role as an active and contributing party to the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998).

In this light, practitioners are first suggested to understand the different brand cues and attributes that fit consumers' identities. And further to understand whether these cues and attributes are perceived as human-like characteristics to better understand the level of brand anthropomorphism. And second, to remember the importance of partnership in consumer-brand relationships to create, maintain and nurture long-term consumer-brand relationships in ever-competing marketplaces.

Brand anthropomorphism as a whole is also accentuated to consider in the commercial fields, hence previous research has proven that brand anthropomorphism has several positive consequences, such as brand love (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2020), brand attachment (Park et al., 2010), enhanced consumers' subjective well-being (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Epley et al., 2007, 2008; Ma et al., 2021; Reimann et al., 2017; Sharma & Rahman, 2022), consumer-brand relationship and brand partnership (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Fournier, 1998; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

5.3 Research limitations and future research directions

The main limitations of this study are the majority of 86.1 % of respondents who were not Nike Run Club users, and the minority of 4 % of respondents who were very familiar with Nike Run Club. In this light, it's emphasized that the results of this study can be only generalized to the population that represents similar characteristics to the sample.

Regardless of limitations, this study is proven to be robust, valid, and reliable. The evaluation of the research is done by its validity and reliability. The validity of the study refers to whether the indicators of the study measure the concept it was intended to measure. The reliability of the study refers to the repeatability of the measurement results. Reliability is also considered in external and internal terms, which are overall generalizability and internal repeatability (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009).

This study adopted all measures from previous research that maximizes the validity and reliability of the measures. The sample size of this study (N = 101) also supports the reliability of the study, as the minimum sample size of 100 respondents can be considered acceptable for quantitative studies (Vilkka, 2007).

The reliability and validity of the higher-order measurement model were analyzed with SMART PLS 4. The evaluation was done by analyzing the factor

loadings, which should be over 0.7 (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). The loadings that didn't exceed the value were deleted for further analysis and the remaining indicators were considered to be reliable. To further evaluate the measurement model, the convergent validity was assessed in terms of average variance extracted (AVE) and internal consistency reliability in terms of composite reliability. Both exceed the acceptable values for all factors, indicating convergent validity and internal consistency reliability of the measurement model (Hair Jr. & Page, 2015). In addition, the HTMT values were evaluated to support the discriminant validity of lower-order components. All values were below the acceptable threshold and supported the discriminant validity of lower-order components (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Therefore, it can be concluded that this study exhibits validity and reliability and can thus suggest possibilities for future research. Even though this study couldn't identify the interplay between brand anthropomorphism and well-being future research is suggested to contribute to brand anthropomorphism and its effects on well-being since previous research has proven brand anthropomorphism positively effecting on the well-being (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Epley et al., 2007, 2008; Ma et al., 2021; Reimann et al., 2017; Sharma & Rahman, 2022). Future research is also suggested to study more thoroughly whether brand anthropomorphism has negative consequences for well-being if there is no close brand relationship and brand attachment. Future research is also suggested to address ethical concerns of brand anthropomorphism with the same notion as MacInnis and Folkes (2017). Thus, an anthropomorphic brand may act as a substitute for actual human connection and can hide the real issue such as loneliness behind artificial brand-relationship, eventually leading to decreased well-being. That said, it's crucial to identify when anthropomorphism can positively affect consumer well-being and when it can lead to negative outcomes.

This study found brand-self congruence to be an antecedent for brand anthropomorphism, and future research is suggested to study to what extent an anthropomorphic brand that is connected to the consumer's self, reflects the consumer's actual self, or acts as an extension of the self. Future research is therefore suggested to utilize more Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) in brand anthropomorphism research, as according to CCT, consumers utilize brands as an extension of the self and integrate brands as a part of identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2019). This study also discovered partnership to be a consequence of brand anthropomorphism and fully mediating the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and consumer-brand relationship. The finding highlights the role of self, others, and the partnership between them. Therefore, future research is suggested to study the role of self and partnership in consumer-brand relationships. Future research is suggested to utilize Implicit Theories of the Self and Others to explore the psychological point-of-views of consumer-brand relationships (Levy et al., 1998).

This study didn't find effectance motivation and sociality motivation to be antecedents for brand anthropomorphism, and therefore future research is

suggested to study more thoroughly antecedents and tendencies to anthropomorphize brands and explain the fluid motivations since previous research has identified specific motivations which increase brand anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2007, 2008; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). In this light, future research is suggested to conduct similar studies among different cultures simultaneously to better understand developmental - and cultural motivations, and longitudinal studies among the same sample to better understand situational - and dispositional motivations.

5.4 Discussion

This study has managed to address prevalent phenomena, such as loneliness in an overly connected world, brands' human likeness, and brands as substitutes for actual human connections and well-being. This study has also addressed the research gap within the field of brand anthropomorphism and its effects on consumers and their lives.

Loneliness can be a rising global challenge in the future as consumers who are challenged during a cost-of-living crisis or by other future crises are most likely to cut social activities to make ends meet. In other words, the prevalent cost-of-living crisis is most likely to increase loneliness (Curtis et al., 2022). Loneliness is a serious problem in Finland, and 69 % of Finns evaluate loneliness as a serious problem. The proportion has increased in recent years, and loneliness is considered a serious problem, especially among 25–34-year-old Finns. (Finnish Red Cross et al., 2023). In addition, loneliness has been identified to be one of the pull factors of the future to address the future well-being challenges of Finland (Dufva & Rekola, 2023). This study has addressed other prevalent and future consumer sentiments as well, such as how to cope during uncertain times, and consumers' desires to avoid uncertainty. Anxiety, especially among young generations has been increasing. Nevertheless, it is also identified how younger generations turn their anxiety and fears into opportunities for change (Buzasi, 13.1.2023). Considering these sentiments, feelings, and loneliness, and the problems they may cause, it is crucial to acknowledge them within commercial fields to better understand the consumers of today and the society in which brands operate.

Brands' human likeness (i.e., brand anthropomorphism) is a trendy topic when considering the brands of today, which possess increasingly human-like characteristics. Brands are also more and more under consumers' scope, and brands are being called for their actions. Indicating how today's brands must meet today's demands, lead by example, and cope during uncertainties and economically challenging times such as humans. But when it comes to brands' coping strategies, brands shouldn't behave similarly to a human (e.g., dropping the non-essentials). Instead, brands should focus on innovation during challenges and uncertainties (Curtis et al., 2022). In other words, brand anthropomorphism may be beneficial in the big picture, but when it comes to

coping, brands must be leading examples and nurture actual human beings rather than act like ones. Brand anthropomorphism is also important in the constantly evolving artificial intelligence (AI) era. As AI is conducting more and more human-like duties and is therefore incorporated into many peoples' daily life. And human encounters are increasingly replaced with AI encounters (Curtis et al., 2022). Not to mention how AI is also incorporated into brands and marketing activities. In this light, brands' human likeness is becoming an increasingly important topic among academics and practitioners in several fields.

Well-being is increasingly incorporated into global market environments and business strategies and is a crucial part of the consumers and societies of today. Well-being is central to working culture, lifestyle, aging generations, and especially during uncertainties and crises (*WGSN Future Consumer 2024*, 2022). Well-being is a concern for many, and well-being challenges are increasingly intertwined with nature's well-being that is increasingly challenged. Finland is facing well-being challenges such as the aging and diverse population that is concentrated in growth centers. In addition, the size of the working-age population, welfare state funding, sufficiency of social - and health services, the adaption of technology, and global and general uncertainty about the future that causes increasing mental health problems are the challenges that threaten the well-being of Finland (Dufva & Rekola, 2023). In this light, well-being is central to commercial fields as well, since nature, people, brands, societies, businesses, cultures, and other operators are increasingly intertwined. The well-being challenges affect each party, and therefore it must be addressed to increase the well-being of all.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY ITEMS

Question	Options
<p>LIFESTYLE: <i>How important following well-being areas are to you?</i> <i>Emotional well-being (e.g., feeling happy)</i> <i>Physical well-being (e.g., feeling healthy)</i> <i>Social well-being (e.g., feeling connected)</i> <i>Workplace -/University well-being (e.g., feeling fulfilment)</i> <i>Societal well-being (e.g., sense of community)</i></p>	<p>Not at all important-Very important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>BAND AWARENESS (NIKE): <i>How familiar are you with Nike?</i></p>	<p>Not familiar-Very familiar 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>BAND AWARENESS (NIKE RUN CLUB): <i>How familiar are you with Nike Run Club?</i></p>	<p>Not familiar-Very familiar 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>BRAND USE: <i>Do you use Nike Run Club?</i></p>	<p>Yes No Not at the moment, but I have used it</p>
<p>INFO TEXT: Brand presentation: Nike Run Club</p>	
<p>ACTIVATION AND IMPRESSIONS: <i>What thoughts and feelings NRC arouses in you?</i></p>	<p>Open-ended</p>
<p>ACTIVATION: <i>How well did you familiarize yourself with Nike Run Club?</i></p>	<p>Not at all I browsed through the materials here in the survey I visited the NRC website</p>
<p>INFO TEXT: <i>Please answer the following questions based on your own experience of Nike Run Club, or your current impressions of Nike Run Club that you have now.</i></p>	
<p>BRAND ANTHROPOMORPHISM: <i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</i> <i>It feels like..</i> <i>Nike Run Club looks human-like.</i> <i>Nike Run Club is life-like.</i></p>	<p>Totally disagree-Totally agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>

<p><i>Nike Run Club has human-like appearance.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is trustworthy.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is honest.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is principled.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club can engage in a great deal of thought.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club can imagine things on its own.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is capable of reasoning.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club can experience remorse over the actions which it deems to be shameful.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club can experience guilt when it hurts someone with its behaviour.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club can experience shame when people have negative views and judgements about it.</i></p>	
<p>BRAND-SELF CONGRUITY: <i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is congruent with the image I hold of myself.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is congruent with the image I would like to hold of myself.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is congruent with the image others hold of myself.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club is congruent with the image I would like to others to hold of myself.</i></p>	<p>Totally disagree-Totally agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>QUALITY OF CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP: <i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club goes so well with my lifestyle that I would feel empty without it.</i></p> <p><i>I like Nike Run Club because it makes me feel more special than other people.</i></p> <p><i>I really like Nike Run Club.</i></p>	<p>Totally disagree-Totally agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>

<p><i>I really enjoy using Nike Run Club.</i></p> <p><i>Whatever happens, I believe that Nike Run Club would help me.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club works hard for my well-being.</i></p> <p><i>I want to keep using Nike Run Club.</i></p> <p><i>I want to maintain a long-term relationship with Nike Run Club.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club makes me feel comfortable.</i></p> <p><i>Nike Run Club fits me naturally.</i></p>	
<p>BRAND AS A PARTNER: <i>To what extent you agree with the following statements?</i> <i>Through Nike Run Club, I feel that I can make a difference.</i></p> <p><i>Through Nike Run Club, I feel that I know how to enhance my well-being.</i></p> <p><i>Through Nike Run Club, I believe that I know what steps to take to enhance my well-being.</i></p>	<p>Totally disagree-Totally agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>GENERAL WELL-BEING: <i>To what extent you agree with the following statements?</i> <i>I like how my life is going.</i></p> <p><i>I am content with my life.</i></p> <p><i>I am satisfied with where I am in life right now.</i></p> <p><i>If I could live my life over, I would change many things.</i></p> <p><i>Those around me seem to be living better lives than my own.</i></p> <p><i>I want to change the path my life is on.</i></p>	<p>Totally disagree-Totally agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p>
<p>SOCIALITY MOTIVATION (1.1): <i>How often do you feel that you lack companionship?</i></p>	<p>Hardly ever Some of the time Often</p>
<p>SOCIALITY MOTIVATION (1.2): <i>How often do you feel left out?</i></p>	<p>Hardly ever Some of the time</p>

	Often
SOCIALITY MOTIVATION (1.3): <i>How often do you feel isolated from others?</i>	Hardly ever Some of the time Often
EFFECTANCE MOTIVATION: <i>To which extent following statements apply to you?</i> <i>I prefer a job where I have a lot of control over what I do and when I do it.</i> <i>I would rather run my own business and make my own mistakes than listen to someone else's orders.</i> <i>I like to get a good idea of what a job is all about before I begin.</i> <i>When I see a problem, I prefer to do something about it rather than sit by and let it continue.</i> <i>I wish I could push many of life's daily decisions off on someone else.</i> <i>There are many situations in which I would prefer only one choice rather than having to decide.</i>	Does not apply to me at all- Applies always to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
AGE: <i>What is your age?</i>	18-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50+
GENDER: <i>Which gender do you identify yourself with?</i>	Male Female Other Prefer not to say Other, please specify
HOUSEHOLD: <i>How many people live in your household?</i>	1 2-3 4-5 5+
EMPLOYMENT: <i>What is your current employment status?</i>	Employed

	At home parent Student Retired Unemployed Other, please specify:
OCCUPATION: *Visible only for those who responded Employed* <i>Which of the following best describes your current occupation?</i>	Entry-level Employee Intermediate Middle-Management Executive