



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Mascots vs Celebrities

Attitudes towards the Brand

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Católica Porto Business School
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Aos meus pais, por toda a vontade e condições que me proporcionam.

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Resumo

Este estudo explora várias atitudes relativamente às marcas, potencializadas por duas abordagens diferentes, no mercado. Analisando e comparando mascotes, como representação da marca, e promoções, através de celebridades, foi possível compreender a resposta afetiva dos consumidores, derivada destas duas estratégias. Começando com estudos e artigos, de outros autores, é explicado o “fit” das mascotes e celebridades nos planos de uma marca e o respetivo impacto criado, não só no lado da empresa, mas também nas reações dos consumidores. Com base nisto, desenvolveu-se uma pesquisa quantitativa para investigar diferentes respostas, dadas pelos participantes. A maioria dos resultados foi clara e em conformidade com pesquisas anteriores, mas houve, também, alguns casos de incerteza ou discordância, comparando com os autores estudados. De uma forma geral, as mascotes das marcas e as promoções de celebridades têm impactos diferentes nos consumidores. Portanto, gerentes e marketers, devem definir os seus objetivos e perceber como é que estas estratégias os podem ajudar. Surgiram algumas limitações, relativamente às respostas obtidas. Apesar disto, os resultados ajudam a compreender melhor algumas questões, para o futuro, reforçando-as ou contra-argumentando-as.

Palavras-chave: Mascotes das Marcas; Promoções de Celebridades; Resposta Afetiva; Identity Mix; Marketing Mix; Response Mix; Resposta dos Consumidores; Personificação da Marca.

Abstract

This study explores various attitudes towards brands, enhanced by two different strategies of market approaches. Analysing and comparing mascots, as brand's identification, and celebrities, as brand's endorsement, it was possible to understand the impact on consumers' affective response, related to these implementations. Firstly, based on theoretical background, presented by previous authors, it is explained where mascots and celebrities "fit" in a brand's plans and what it generates, not only on the company side, but also on consumers' perceptions. With this, it was developed a quantitative research to investigate the different responses, by the audience. The majority of the results were clear and in congruence with past research, but there were some cases of inconclusion, or disagreement, related to the studied authors. In an overall evaluation, brand mascots and celebrity endorsements have different impacts on consumers. Therefore, managers and marketers, should define their goals and comprehend how these strategies can help them. There were some limitations related to the data collected, from the surveys. Despite this, results could lead, future researchers, to better understand some topics, reinforce or counter argument them.

Keywords: Brand Mascots; Celebrity Endorsements; Affective Response; Identity Mix; Marketing Mix; Response Mix; Consumers Response; Brand Personification.

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1. Introduction

In the last two decades, brand personification has been growing, gaining interest and attention, in terms of market research. In agreement, Radler (2018), also concluded that this dimension has moved from a business-oriented perspective to a psychologic-based meaning, including a complex interdisciplinary method, converging theories such as branding, consumer behaviour, human personality and sociology. In addition, not only brand identity management has been getting more popular (Heine et al., 2018), but also, managers are shifting the focus from a product-driven approach to a consumer-driven, so, engaging with the market (Sihvonen, 2019). LeBel & Cooke (2008) explained that, in the food market, consumers go beyond the nutrients the brand is offering, and find an emotional connection to the brand, which can be triggered by tactics applied by marketers and managers. This can serve as an example to gain competitive advantage in, nowadays, markets. Brands, following this consumer-based perspective, are in the right path to succeed, due to the loyalty, commitment, positive Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) and interactions, enhanced in costumers or potential market share (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Kelly et al., 2019).

Recognising mascots as part of brand's identification (identity mix) and knowing that this approach has been growing (Heiser et al., 2008), based on theoretical background, it will be explained how this strategy is implemented.

Also, in the next chapter, will be discussed celebrities as endorsement brand's communication tool (marketing mix), admitting that managers are willing to spend money to associate the famous star to the brand (Lee & Thorson, 2008; Mishra et al., 2015; Malodia et al., 2017). So, based on these two types of brand personification and the business shift, mentioned before, the main goal of this research is to understand what effects each of these two strategies generate and, more important, detach their differences. To be more exactly, the core focus is related to the affective response of the market, hence, the attitudes that mascots and celebrities enhance, among consumers, towards brands.

The topic comes up because of two main reasons, one related to previous studies and the other due to consumers' interpretations. The majority of past research was focused in one specific strategy, brand mascots or celebrity endorsements, evaluating only one implementation, neglecting comparisons to the effects of other possible approaches. Secondly, as it will be detailed throughout this study, the audience has different reactions and understandings when it comes to mascots and celebrities, when connected to markets. That's why this study was developed, to comprehend the differences generated by the two brand's strategies and how can managers and marketers take advantage of these implementations. Therefore, reinforcing previous assumptions but, more important, analysing which one could bring more positive effects or help brands to achieve their goals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand

According to Lencastre & Côte-Real (2010, p. 403), a “brand is not just a label, not just a product or an organisation, not just its customers or stakeholders, but rather the interaction of all of these”, creating a complex network all interconnected, and defining their core/heart with the vision, mission and values. Therefore, a brand can be consistent and remain the same, even if there are changes in any of the different components, for example CEOs, stakeholders, or even their products because a product can be quickly outdated, while a successful brand is timeless. In agreement, Lencastre & Côte-Real (2010) also recognise “branding myopia” as a limited vision of branding, when the focus is only in one of the components underestimating or neglecting the others, such as the label (label-branding myopia), the product (product-branding myopia), and the customers (customer-branding myopia). Related to product-branding myopia, a simple way to comprehend it is that a product can be copied by a competitor, while a brand is unique. In order to achieve a distinctive character, brands are graphically represented by different signs, like letters, numbers, designs and shapes (European Union Regulation 40/94/EEC on the Community Trade Mark, article 4). Complementing this, there are internal and external factors that can strengthen the brand. In terms of internal factors, there’s a need to have a level of commitment and governance, inside the

organisation, capable of clarifying their position and proposition and always being ready to respond to market changes, opportunities and threats. Related to external factors, the costumers value authenticity, differentiation and consistency in a brand, developing a level of engagement due to the fit between the two parts, and in a next step the continued presence of the brand in the relationship will be important (<https://interbrand.com>).

2.1.1 Brand Concept

Based on the triadic sign developed by Peirce, in Lencastre & Côte-Real (2010), it's possible to define three pillars all connected, but each one composed with a different mix of elements: the identity mix, related to the brand and their representations; the marketing mix, related to the product and involving all the actions that impact sales and brand's destiny and communication (the case of celebrity endorsements will be developed in this research); and finally, the response mix, related to the market and the cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of the public.

The identity mix is everything that is associated with the brand and may warrant legal protection, starting form the name and logotype but covering much more, such as a slogan, a label, a packaging, a character, or a sound (Lencastre & Côte-Real, 2010). It's possible to distinguish three types of brand's identity:

- Nominative, composed by letters forming a pronounceable set, not necessarily with meaning;
- Graphical or figurative, like drawings, figures or tridimensionality forms, detaching their colours and shapes;
- Mixed identity of nouns and figures.

Plus, there's a difference between simple brands, represent by a single element, and complex brands, formed by several elements. It is essential to not

consider only the name and the logotype as priorities of the brand but give the same importance to all the other components, in order to avoid label-brand myopia (Lencastre & Côte-Real, 2010). Besides all this, there are three levels of identity mix:

- Core identity, which is the sign that is firstly and immediately associated to the brand, usually is the name;
- Actual identity, referring to the graphic representation, in other words the logotype, in his various shapes, letters and colours;
- Augmented identity including all the others brand's signs associations, for example a slogan, a shape, a sound, or a mascot that will be deeply approached in this research.

Focusing, now, on the response mix, hence, the market and, more specifically, in customers it's important to understand what influence their brand choices. So, Keller (1993) presented the concept Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller 1993, p.2), which can be different in each individual and/or different groups, resulting in various reactions and meanings (Lencastre & Côte-Real, 2010), such as the personal case of familiarity (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Starting from brand awareness that is related to the strength of consumers' memory to identify a brand under different conditions (Keller, 2008) and can lead to a favourable brand attitude and positively influence consumers evaluations (Kim & John, 2008). It's possible to distinguish two different types:

- Brand recognition, as the lowest level, happens when using the brand as a cue;
- Brand recall exists when a consumer associates any other cue to the brand itself, in some cases generate a top-of-mind recall.

Considering brand awareness as cognitive, in a posterior phase enters the affective response, namely brand associations, that is how individuals interpret different brands, attributing meaning in a personal and unique way, therefore developing attitudes towards the brand, in an evaluative positive or negative judgment (Engel et al., 1995). Similar to the identity mix, in this topic there are also three levels of associations:

- Core response, related to the first word that is associated with the brand (top-of-mind);
- Actual response, covering other spontaneous associations;
- Augment response, gathering all the quantified cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Lencastre & Côte-Real, 2010).

There are several studies regarding brand attitudes measures, the following examples are some of the most common items, perceived by consumers, presented by previous authors:

- Unpleasant/Pleasant (Bouten et al., 2011);
- Uninteresting/Interesting (Bouten et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2010);
- Unfavourable/Favourable (Aggarwal, 2004);
- Dislike/Like (Aggarwal, 2004; Walsh et al., 2010);
- Good/Bad (Walsh et al., 2010);
- Good quality/Bad quality (Walsh et al., 2010).

In some cases, the level of attachment is so powerful that reaches a “brand love” status, where consumers have a strength and very positive relationship with the brand, therefore being fully satisfied (Loureiro et al., 2012).

2.1.2 Brand Personification

Being one of the pioneers to study brand personification, Aaker (1997) has defined it as the set of human characteristics associated with the brand that

contributes for brand equity. The author defined the Big 5 theory, which implies that consumers perceptions of brand personification are based on sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Years later, Davies et al. (2018), with their study, obtained a total of 23 measures of brand personality, detaching sincerity and competence as the most common identified, by consumers. Plus, added sub-categories to the Big 5 theory such as: honest, genuine and cheerful (sincerity); daring, imaginative and up-to-date (excitement); reliable, dependable and efficient (competence); glamorous, charming and romantic (sophistication); tough, strong and rugged (ruggedness).

According to Cohen (2014), there are two strategies of brand personification:

- a character who personifies the brand, representing the whole brand, being congruent with its personality and what it represents, as a “spokes-character”;
- based on anthropomorphic techniques of personification, approaching cartoons, celebrities and real people, plus brand avatars and mascots (Patterson et al., 2013).

This second strategy is explained because people tend to associate human characteristics, not only to objects but also to people and fictional characters (Delbaere et al., 2011), humanising brands based on their human-like features and with different minds and personalities, resulting in perceiving brands as being “like us” (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017, p. 358). These anthropomorphic techniques applied by managers to build brand’s personality, in a direct way, will enhance the consumer’s association of human characteristics, but also the environment created inside the firm for the staff, impacting all the decisions (Caufield, 2012). In an indirect way, the company can influence the process through brand design, communications and behaviour, so it’s essential for managers to define the brand’s vision and “to encode the brand’s DNA” (Heine

et al., 2018, p. 486) before creating the personality of the brand. In addition, Coelho et al. (2020) confirmed that innovativeness and quality, in terms of brand personality, bring positive outcomes due to the emotional and symbolic effects that impact the customers, hence, benefitting the firm.

Besides the anthropomorphic perspective, MacInnis & Folkes (2017), additionally, concluded that it's possible to humanise brands by a self-focused or by a relationship-focused perspective. In these cases, consumers tend to assume the brand as "like me" or as "close to me" (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017, p. 363), establishing a connection with the brand due to identification to themselves. Following Sihvonen (2019) assumptions, these self-brand connections are based in three different identity forms:

- the need for distinctiveness and self-enhancement, focused on personalities, where people tend to connect with brands that share similarities with them, and the social context goal is to distinguish from others or to affiliate with others;
- the principle of identity relevance, related to lifestyle, consumers' lives and interests have a direct impact in their choice of brands;
- the need for self-continuity, dependable on each one values, brands try to stay consistent over time in order to fulfil the intention of individuals "for being true to oneself" (Sihvonen, 2019, p. 587).

Although, the author presented this schema, she doesn't underestimate the fact that a person's identity can change, or one single person could have multiple identifies, or even the alterations that a brand personality could have (Mishra et al., 2015). In the relationship-focused perspective, the direct way used by marketing managers via brand anthropomorphic techniques (Heine et al., 2018) purpose is to achieve the "brand love" status, in other words, to generate a positive consumer-brand relationship, an exchange of positive emotions (Zhou et al., 2020). Contrary, Kucuk (2020) presented the reverse

brand anthropomorphism, which is the opposite of brand love (brand hate), it happens when consumers have negative strong emotions towards a brand, hence, everything the brand is represented by or it represents is automatically evil or bad.

Instead of assuming that consumers perceive brands as people and make their own associations, Oklevik et al. (2020) highlighted a specific approach of brand personification, which goes in congruence with Cohen (2014) strategies, by adopting brand representatives (employees, CEO, board members), or brand characters (mascots, celebrities), or stereo-typed users (consumers who represent the brand values) to give a personality to the brand. Naming this concept Human Brand Association (HBA), the author assumed that managers could influence the consumers' perceptions, in a direct way, similar to what Heine et al. (2018) had concluded. In fact, this is not a new approach because Aaker (1997), since the beginning, consider user's imagery, employees or CEOs, and product endorsers as the representation of the brand's personality traits. In addition, Gilal et al. (2020) did a study to compare the three types of personification of the HBA's approach, based on consumers' perceptions, and the results proved that although brand characters were rated more attractive, CEOs and experts (brand users) were rated higher in trustworthiness and credibility, due to their expertise and inside knowledge. Managers should establish their personalities and use the HBA approach to reach the consumers, in order to avoid different associations and perceptions, plus to promote it to others (Davies et al., 2018), or even to solve or diminish the negative relationship that could exist with some people (Kucuk, 2020).

To conclude brand personification background, it's essential for managers to comprehend that, in a global marketplace, different countries, regions, cities, or cultures humanise brands in various ways because of their social distance and differences (Radler, 2018; Sihvonen, 2019).

2.1.2.A Brand Mascots

Supported by Heine et al. (2018) theory, marketers create human-like features and associate it to brands, this strategy of “human” schema will facilitate the consumer’s perceptions of a brand’s personification (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). For instance, the Michelin Man, similar to a human form, represents the brand mascot (Patterson et al., 2013). A simple way to define a brand mascot is to associate it to a team mascot, both of them are there to win, one in the world of sports while the other wants to triumph in the more complex marketing world, hence needs to be more strategic and carefully implemented (Cohen, 2014). Having this in mind and recognising that mascots are powerful marketing tools (Caufield, 2012), the main goal of a brand mascot is to generate attention, likeness, product recognition and attractiveness, contributing to increase sales, brand awareness and loyalty (Hosany et al., 2013). Following this reasoning, costumers play an active role in the acceptability and likability of mascots, and marketers are counting that these anthropomorphic techniques could build trust and satisfaction between the audience and mascots, hence, the brand (LeBel & Cooke, 2008; Caufield, 2012). In some cases, consumers develop deep bonds and a level of attachment that the characters become the core of the brand, providing stability and congruence, allowing managers for changes, for example in the design or packaging (Orth et al., 2019), hence innovation in the aesthetics to enhance brand’s experience and personality (Coelho et al., 2020). Emotions are the most important influential factor of brand mascots (Malik & Guptha, 2014), such as attraction, trustworthiness and nostalgia (Trivedi, 2018). LeBel & Cooke (2008) affirmed that personality traits and emotions are important ingredients to create an effective spoke-character, detaching that animated and “humorous” as the more interesting and engaging qualities to consumers.

According to Brown (2010), the match strategy could be a way to achieve a successful brand character. It's important to have a congruence between the product and the brand character, enhancing a quick association (Hosany et al., 2013), a "*close fit*" (Patterson et al., 2013, p. 78). Marketers should focus on consumers' preferences, in terms of aesthetic and symbolic values (Zhou et al., 2020). Related to this, Malik & Guptha (2014), concluded that mascots have higher success in the food segment market, and Heine et al. (2018) figured that brand animism is easier for people to engage with brands. The case presented by Hosany et al. (2013), of Hello Kitty's mascot being more predominant in the female market, goes in agreement with Trivedi (2018) and Caufield (2012) studies, confirming that a mascot should be attractive to the target audience. In addition, LeBel & Cooke (2008) stated that the creation of the mascots should be based in traits the target audience will identify, highlighting the fact that men and women have different preferences. Another important feature to be considered in brand mascots is the different cultural meanings and social perceptions of the consumers (Hosany et al., 2013), hence the need for evolution in the spoke-characters will be needed (LeBel & Cooke, 2008).

Due to mascots being considered the most influential people who never lived, this has a lot of benefits, but also could generate negative effects (Patterson et al., 2013). For instance, tobacco companies could have negative consumers' responses when using mascots because they are promoting a bad behaviour for human health (Cohen, 2014). In these cases, companies value profit over consumers' welfare which could generate reverse brand anthropomorphism (Kucuk, 2020), as already mentioned. Another example of these type of approaches are the fast-food companies that use mascots, such as Ronald McDonald and Coronel Sanders, to attract consumers, young children specifically, neglecting their health and focusing only on the company's success (Kelly et al., 2019). But, as reinforced by Patterson et al. (2013), marketers are

not forcing anyone to purchase their products, consumers have the final decision in the process. Other problems managers could face, with this strategy, are the personal associations different consumers could have, related to mascots, going beyond brand's communications and ideas. Therefore, there's a constant need to correct and avoid these situations in order to maintain the congruency between the brand and the audience (LeBel & Cooke, 2008).

Main Findings

- ⇒ Facilitate consumers' perceptions of a brand's personality;
- ⇒ Generate attention, likeness, product recognition and attractiveness, contributing to increase sales, brand awareness, loyalty, trust and satisfaction;
- ⇒ Trigger emotions, such as attraction, trustworthiness and nostalgia;
- ⇒ Should be in congruence with the brand's products and targets;
- ⇒ Could lead to negative interpretations, hence reverse brand anthropomorphism.

2.1.2.B Celebrity Endorsements

Related to celebrity endorsements, the goal is similar to the mascots' purpose, managers take advantage of celebrities' skills, talent and social image to promote the brand (Gilal et al., 2020), create brand recognition, brand recall and influence in the purchase decision, hence, profit (Pradhan et al., 2016), plus attention to brand products and "boosting sales" (Malik & Guptha, 2014, p. 129). A celebrity gives credibility to the brand, using its influencing power to reach the consumers, that's why some of them associate, connect and transferred their personal opinion of the celebrity directly to the brand (Lee & Thorson, 2008; Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Malodia et al., 2017; Ford, 2018). Therefore, consumers buy, more easily, something that is endorsed by a celebrity, not only because they appreciate them, but also because they

automatically assume that it's a product with good quality and different from the given variety (Malik & Guptha, 2014), overcoming the need for distinctiveness defended by Sihvonen (2019).

Following the studies of Knoll & Matthes (2017) and Mishra et al. (2015), the authors focused on a path of three basic psychological dimensions in celebrities' endorsements effects:

- Cognitive, including awareness and knowledge;
- Affective, related to the likability and attitude;
- Conative, which is based in the purchase intention.

Although, Knoll & Matthes (2017) results didn't confirmed their theory of the dimensions, other studies proved that the attractiveness and recognition of celebrities have a direct impact on consumers' attention (cognitive) and engagement (affective) towards the endorsement and the brand (Trivedi, 2018; Zhou et al., 2020), especially compared to CEOs and expert endorsers (stereotyped users), addressed in the HBA theory, presented in the previous chapter. According to Malik & Guptha (2014) and Malodia et al. (2017), the first two dimensions, eventually, influence the purchase intention of consumers and their buying decisions, which goes in congruence with Mishra et al. (2015) idea that the conative dimension is a subsequence of the cognitive and affective ones, and Cohen & Reed (2006) suggestion that the three are directly related.

Pradhan et al. (2016) stated that if consumers want to be like celebrities they will immediately associate with the brand, this is a case of a self-focused perspective (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017), where consumers make a connection to the brand based on themselves (Sihvonen, 2019). The need to be like their idols lead consumers to imitate them, therefore if a celebrity is endorsing a brand, their followers will be persuaded and will engage with the brand too, which is the goal of marketers when using this communication strategy (Awasthi & Choraria, 2015; Belk, 2019). Additionally, Malik & Guptha (2014) found that

trustworthiness is a key feature to attract consumers to a certain brand because if they like a specific celebrity, they will identify with the brand and feel that it is the “right” choice (Malik & Guptha, 2014, p. 128), so the celebrity plays the role of “influencer” (Malik & Guptha, 2014, p. 137). With that in mind, Knoll & Matthes (2017) found that male celebrities have stronger effects when compared to female celebrities, and more specifically actors, due to the fact that consumers are exposed to them audio-visually and multiple times over their lifetime. Ford (2018) confirmed actors have higher impact because of their glamorous profession and aspirational motives. By the other hand, Zhou et al. (2020) concluded that highly famous sport stars can be very persuasive too, their aesthetics attract consumers’ attention, and they can achieve a cultural convergence worldwide because of their global popularity. Malik & Guptha (2014) results showed that actors are the best performers as endorsers, but sportspeople with their winning personality comes next, in the type of celebrities that have higher influence power. Finally, Knoll & Matthes (2017) agree with the previous authors and also recognise models and musicians as the third type of celebrities to succeed in persuading consumers. In terms of frequency, studies proved that although celebrities’ endorsements can be seen by a consumer multiple times via various channels (TV, billboards, radio, internet, ...), this does not mean that it will appeal consumers’ attention and affection, in fact it can have negative effects, such as saturation (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Ford, 2018).

There’s a need to have sync between consumers, brand and celebrity, in order to achieve a positive impact in awareness, attitudes and intentions, plus gain competitive advantage. Managers and marketers should choose wisely who’s going to represent the brand, search for suitability between the two personalities, instead of focusing only on popularity and attractiveness, to match and be congruent to gain credibility. (Mishra et al., 2015; Pradhan et al.,

2016; Malodia et al., 2017). This process takes time and is very expensive (Malik & Guptha, 2014), but a poor fit could have significant negative impacts for companies (Gilal et al., 2020). At the same time, celebrities should carefully select what brands to endorse too because it is their credibility and image that is at stake (Mishra et al., 2015). Working as a mutual benefit relationship (Malodia et al., 2017), where endorsers promote the brand and buyers, somehow, believe that they are supporting them, when purchasing from the brand (Zhou et al., 2020). There's an exchange of benefits between the two parts, like a brand alliance (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). Lee & Thorson (2008) did a more specific study focusing on the match between the brand's products and the endorser celebrity. The results showed that a moderate mismatch is the best strategy, in terms of purchase intentions, when compared to a complete match, followed by an extreme mismatch. In addition, when evaluating the results of consumers' attitudes towards the brand, the complete match hypothesis didn't turn out to be more effective than the moderate match. The authors confirmed that "moderately incongruent endorsements boost interest and curiosity" (Lee & Thorson 2008, p. 446), while extremely congruent endorsements, in some cases, are not enough to generate excitement and interest due to the typicality and normality. George Clooney endorsing Nespresso's coffee is the perfect example of a well-effective moderate match, alternatively a model endorsing personal care items is an extreme match, and an athlete selling a guitar is an extreme mismatch (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

The celebrity endorsement strategy has disadvantages, it can transfer negative effects to the brand, and evoke negative outcomes such as erosion in sales and brand image (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Malodia et al., 2017). Ford (2018) detached the cases of Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, Martha Stewart and O.J. Simpson as examples of these type of situations, where brands were automatically affected by the negative

attitudes, behaviours and scandals of the famous endorsers. It happens because, sometimes, consumers focus their attention on the celebrities rather than the brand (Knoll & Matthes, 2017), neglecting the full potential of the promotion (Gilal et al., 2020). Another disadvantage is the instability and variation of celebrities' personality over time (Mishra et al., 2015), which can be related to the doubt that people have if celebrities really use the products, they endorse on account of their multi-brand advertisements (Malik & Guptha, 2014; Trivedi, 2018).

Main Findings

- ⇒ Promote the brand and give credibility to the products;
- ⇒ Generate brand recognition, brand recall and attention;
- ⇒ Influence the purchase decision;
- ⇒ Indirectly, persuade consumers to engage with the brand;
- ⇒ Should be in sync with the brand and the target;
- ⇒ Related to products, a moderate match is the most effective;
- ⇒ Can transferred the negative outcomes, generated by the celebrities' behaviours, directly to the brand;
- ⇒ There is an uncertain, in consumers' minds, if celebrities really use the products they endorse;
- ⇒ Actors are considered the most efficient type of celebrities, when endorsing.

2.1.2.C Mascots vs Celebrities

Brand personification can have a powerful impact without the use of words (Delbaere et al., 2011), especially mascots that can be "mute and inanimate, soulless, and nondescript" (Patterson et al., 2013, p. 81) and still achieve a top-of-mind recall status. In the case of brand mascots, there's a need of licensing to grant the rights and take maximum advantage of the strategy (Hosany et al.,

2013), while in celebrity endorsements, companies are willing to spend more money in order to associate the brand with the endorser (Malik & Guptha, 2014). An example of this happens when sports marketers carefully choose international sports stars to represent the brand, breaking borders and reaching fans and consumers all over the world (Zhou et al., 2020).

Reflecting on the authors Trivedi (2018) and Malik & Guptha (2014), despite the agreement that brand mascots have more brand loyalty than celebrities because they are associated to more and different brands, the second reference believes that a mascot is more successful due to the higher brand recall and popularity, while Trivedi (2018) defends that a celebrity has a higher influence in the purchase decision. By the other hand, Heiser et al. (2008) proved that consumers display more positive attitudes towards the brand and positive purchase intentions when cartoon spokes-characters are used as communication strategy, compared to human spokes-characters. Although a human spokes-character is not necessarily a celebrity, there could be cases where a celebrity, endorsing some brand, could be mistaken by a common human spokes-character, if a consumer didn't recognise them. These types of situations are out of brand's control. In addition, the author also concluded that creativity brings higher positive attitudes and purchase intentions towards the ads when compared to simpler ones, which is in agreement with Caufield (2012), adding that "every detail matter" (Caufield, 2012, p. 8).

It is essential for brands to study their target audience in order to reach their customers in the most effective way (Sihvonen, 2019), and knowing different preferences such as mascots in the food segments have higher success and celebrities are favourites in personal care items because they transmit a genuine evidence and a sense of trust (Malik & Guptha, 2014). Complementing, Heine et al. (2018) reinforced the need for a "special character" (Heine et al. 2018, p. 486) to succeed in brand differentiation, so Malik & Guptha (2014), due to qualities

such as friendliness and uniqueness, assume that a strong mascot is more successful than celebrities. There are mascots that become engaged by consumers to a point of reaching a celebrity status, even becoming objects of desire (LeBel & Cooke, 2008), that's why a merchandising strategy could be approach by brands in a next phase.

Main Findings

- ⇒ Both strategies require expenses, mascots to grant the legal rights and celebrities to associate their image to the brand;
- ⇒ Mascots have more loyalty, higher brand recall and are more popular;
- ⇒ Celebrities have more influence in consumers' purchasing decision;
- ⇒ A cartoon spokes-character enhance more positive attitudes;
- ⇒ Mascots have higher success in the food market, while celebrities have more impact in personal care items;
- ⇒ Friendless and uniqueness are two main features related to mascots.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The main goal of the study is to better understand consumers' attitudes towards brands, that use mascots and celebrity endorsements as a marketing strategy. Being essential to differentiate both personification approaches, it's important to begin with two main research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of brand mascots on consumers' attitudes towards the brand?

RQ2: What is the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumers' attitudes towards the brand?

After a deep and separated analysis of the two different approaches, the next step it's to compare and to evaluate them, having in mind the brand's products, targets, plans, goals and desired effects.

RQ3: Which strategy has more positive effects on consumers' attitudes towards the brand?

Recognising mascots and celebrities as the independent variables and the attitudes enhanced as the dependent variable, is possible to structure the research questions, as explained before. Therefore present, explain and, mainly, compare the results obtained, when changing between the two strategies, is the key to this research.

3.2 Method

The method used was action research, in order to compare attitudes towards brands, based on brand mascots and celebrity endorsements. Firstly, analysing the results obtained with the two different strategies, then to understand which one is more effective and in which way, by comparing them. It has been done a quantitative research, more specifically two different surveys, a conceptual approach and other related to brand's signs. The first one was based in the impact of mascots and celebrities, in general, while the second survey was more concrete and focused on individual meanings, regarding specific signs. The target of both questionnaires were the Portuguese common millennials consumers (20 - 40 years old), chosen randomly. Differing from generation Z because they have a more complex and mature interpretation of the market,

and, comparing to generation X, they have shorter brand-relationships or lifetime preferences. With this quantitative research, it was possible to collect a large and diversify sample, therefore comprehending different perceptions.

3.3 Surveys

The first survey (images 1 – 9, appendix) was divided in four different parts, starting with six questions (7-point Likert scale) identical to Trivedi's questionnaire (2018), in order to reinforce his position related to emotions enhanced by brand mascots. Similar to the first part, and entering in the celebrity endorsement strategy, other authors' approaches were used, more specifically, three questions (7-point Likert scale) made by Malik & Guptha (2014) and two 5-point scale used by Awasthi & Choraria (2015). Plus, both these phases had an additional question where participants could choose which type of brand mascot and celebrity endorser is their personal favourite, based on previous studies, as it will be detailed ahead. In the following step, I developed six statements, based on the literature review, with the same purpose, of analysing past theories. Measured by a 5-point scale, going from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", participants were asked to respond. With the primary goal of comparing brand mascots (A) and celebrity endorsements (B) strategies, the questions made were the same for both cases. In addition, and continuing the focus on the previous studies, three multiple choice questions were prepared, where respondents could choose one or both of the strategies. The final part, similar to the anterior, had four 5-point scale questions, but now related to purchase intentions, and also identical to some of Malik & Guptha (2014) questionnaire parts, plus two questions that were aboard by Awasthi & Choraria (2015), in their survey, to complement.

The second survey (images 10 – 15, appendix) was separated by four stages, also. Beginning with questions related to brand mascots, and focusing on their taxonomy, presented by Côté-Real (2008), it was shown a picture of a mascot of each type and asked what brand they represent. When it comes to celebrities' endorsers, the same method was used in this stage, with the same criteria selection of the second part of the conceptual approach, to choose the type of the endorser. In the third stage, the study was wider, instead of focusing only in the two strategies, the questions were related to brands and the personal opinion of each respondent. The first three statements were the same as used in Orth et al. (2019) research, and the other two were approached by Gilal et al. (2020), in a total of five questions. Finally, the same method of the conceptual approach third part was used, to better understand the strategies of brand mascots (A) and celebrity endorsements (B). Three statements were developed, based on authors discussed in the literature review, and participants had a 5-point scale to give their personal thought, regarding to agreement or disagreement.

3.4 Conceptual Approach

Over a period of one week, during January 2021, the online survey was sent, randomly, via social media networks, to various Portuguese millennials and asked if they could share it with their contacts, that fit in the required target. This study gathered a total of 105 responses, in the participants there were a balance related to gender (54% male - 46% female), but a slight advantage in the younger group (20 - 25 years old) with 64%, followed by 30% in the 26 - 31 age range, and yet 6% of the participants have more than 32 years old.

3.5 Brand Signs Approach

In a different week, of January 2021, was available this online questionnaire, in social media networks, where respondents were invited to participate, only if they fulfil the requirements (Portuguese and 20 – 32 years old). A completely different sample, with 106 respondents was collected, but, this time, there was an unbalance related to gender (74% females - 26% male), and a balance in the two younger groups (20 - 25 years old; 26 - 31 years old), registering 49% and 46%, respectively, with the remaining participants being older than 32 years old.

4. Results and Discussion

After a deep analysis of both approaches, it was possible to confirm some of the theories presented by the different authors, mentioned before, but also find some disagreements related to their results. In addition, some questions were focused on the gaps, based on the literature review, with the goal to find new contributions.

4.1 Conceptual Approach

4.1.1 Brand Mascots

The first two questions had very similar results, the majority of the respondents ($\approx 60\%$) agreed (≥ 5) that animated brand mascots attract their attention and enjoyed them because they are funny. Related to these questions,

Hosany et al. (2013) also assumed that generating attention and likeness are two of the primary goals, when using brand mascots. In addition, LeBel & Cooke (2008) add “humorous” as a main quality of mascots, which can be reinforced by chart 2.

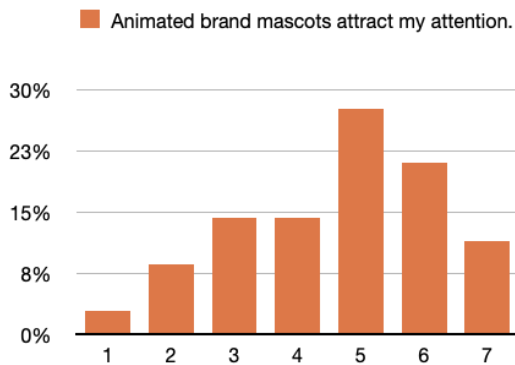


Chart 1: mascots question 1

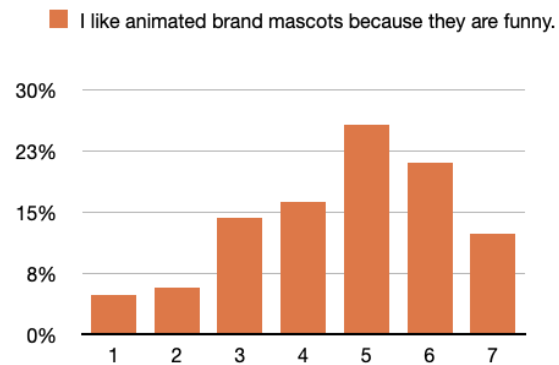


Chart 2: mascots question 2

Assuming that happiness is another emotion contributing to the likeability of a mascot, nostalgia has other impact, the memorability. Therefore, contributing for a top-of-mind recall status (Patterson et al., 2013), which is an advantage comparing to celebrities, as mentioned by Malik & Guptha (2014).

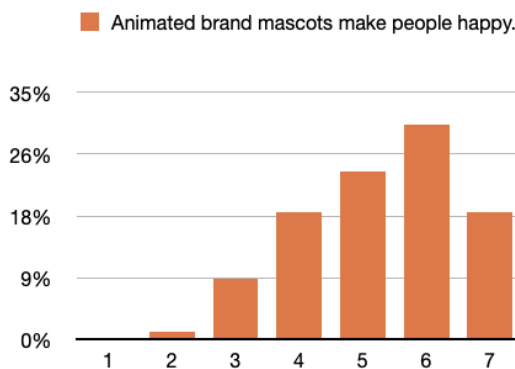


Chart 3: mascots question 3

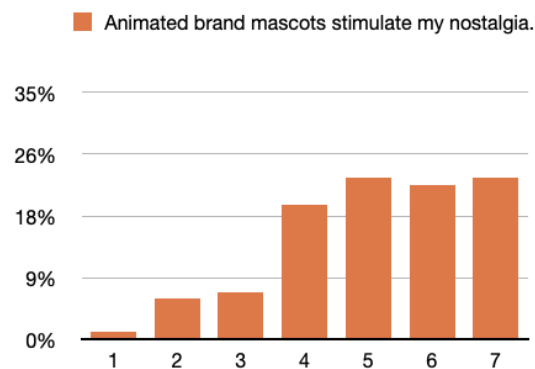


Chart 4: mascots question 4

In the last two questions, taken from Trivedi’s study (2018), despite the agreement tendency (≥ 5), it’s visible a majority of neutral responses (4), in chart 5, and it’s observable a balance between disagreement and agreement, in chart

6. With that said, it's not possible to back-up this author theory, that trustworthiness is one of the key emotions to influence consumers. Plus, LeBel & Cooke (2008) and Caufield (2012) believe that marketers use brand mascots to build trust with the audience, which also can't be proven by these responses, especially by chart 6, that is directly related to trust.

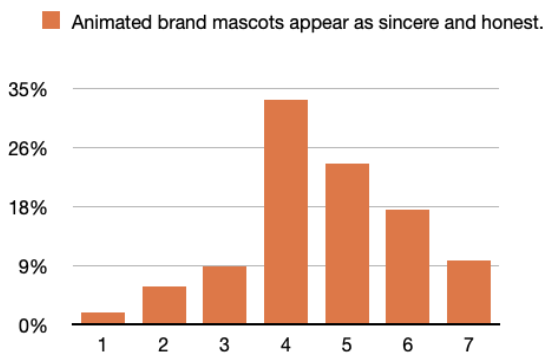


Chart 5: mascots question 5

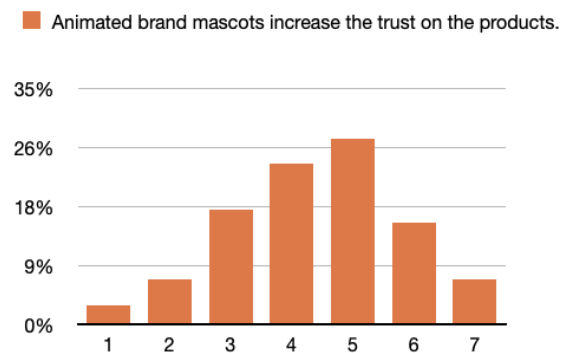


Chart 6: mascots question 6

Based on the mascots' taxonomy presented by Côté-Real (2008), the respondents had to choose their personal favourite type of brand mascot, between the three possible types: product-based (the Michelin Man and the red M&M's mascot was presented as examples), animal-based (Quiky and Tony the Tiger, as example) and humanoids (e.g., Ronald McDonald and Fido Dido).

Observing chart 7, more than a half of the consumers clearly prefer mascots that are created from what the brand sells and/or is known for. It can work as a strategy of presenting the products without the use of words (Delbaere et al., 2011). Around 30% choose animals-based mascots, in these cases, instead of using human-like features (Heine et al., 2018), marketers opt to animate animals, which is an effective way to engage with consumers, defended by LeBel & Cooke (2008).

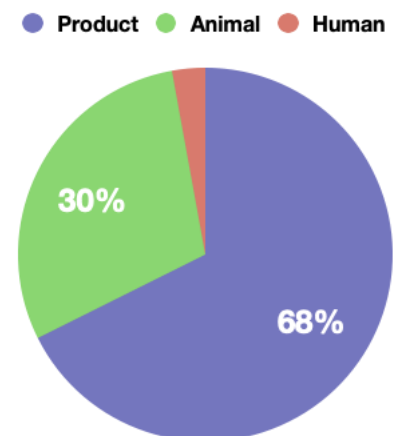


Chart 7: mascots question 7

Finally, and despite this “human” schema being a facilitation for consumers to percept the brand’s personification, (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017) it does not have the same impact of the order two types.

Main Findings

- ⇒ Brand mascots enhance emotions on consumers, that generate attention, likeness and contribute to their memorability.
- ⇒ There is an uncertain if mascots transmit trust to the audience, related to the brand and their products.
- ⇒ In terms of preference types, product-based mascots have higher impact.

4.1.2 Celebrity Endorsements

In the first question, although around 54% of the participants agreed with the statement (≥ 5), it’s difficult to assume something because there was, around, 46% of doubt and disagreement (≤ 4). Especially for this, in a general evaluation, it’s possible to conclude that there is a doubt in consumers’ minds if celebrities really use the products they endorse, exactly what the authors had concluded too.

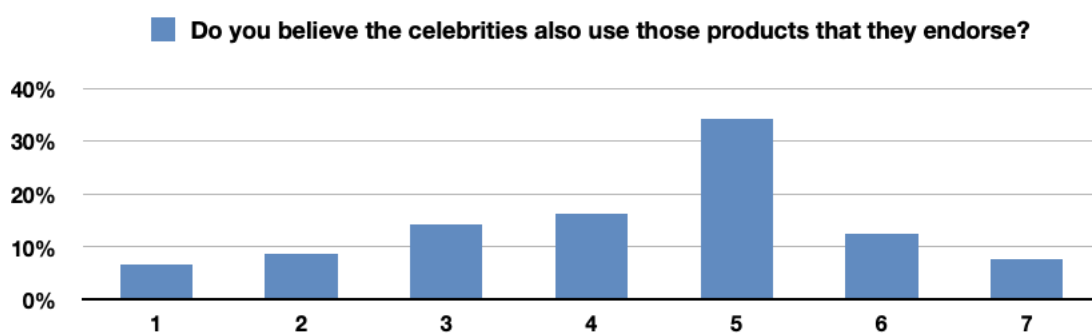


Chart 8: celebrities question 1

Related to chart 9, Malik & Guptha (2014) and Trivedi (2018) understood that a possibility of the uncertain could be due to the multi-brand endorsements that

a single celebrity is connected to, leading to overexposing. This theory can be proven, only around 19% disagrees with the statement (≤ 3). Hence, the majority believe that multi-brand celebrities don't generate a positive effect to brands, like Knoll & Matthes (2017) and Ford (2018) predicted, frequency can lead to saturation.

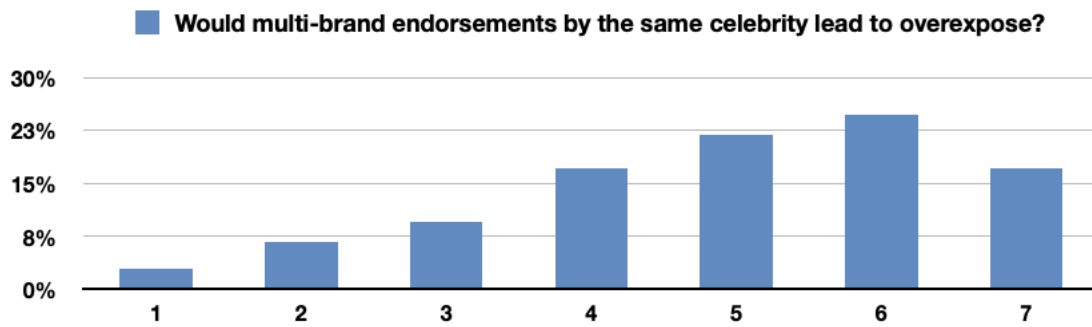


Chart 9: celebrities question 2

It's possible to conclude that more than 60% agrees with the statement (≥ 5), evaluated by the authors (chart 10), and, more specifically, 50% of the participants had a "stronger" opinion (≥ 6). So, here is another contribution to the fact that celebrities can transferred their negative outcomes to brands they endorse (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Malodia et al., 2017).

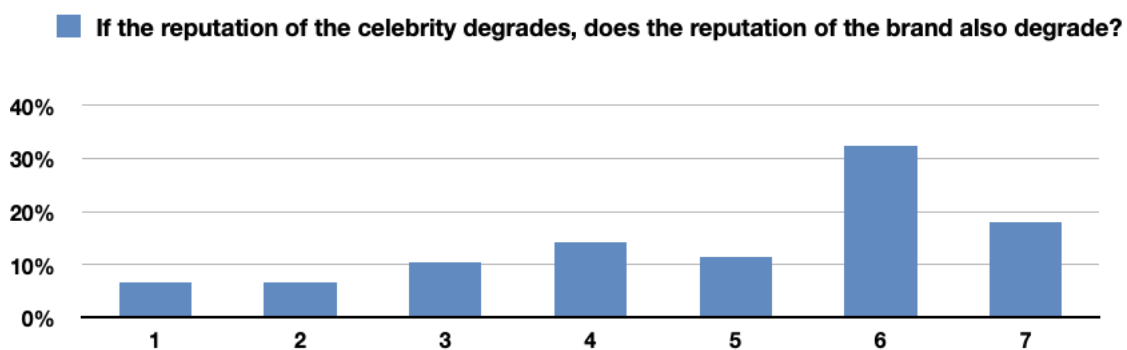


Chart 10: celebrities question 3

Using the same method as the anterior part, participants had the opportunity to choose which type was their favourite celebrity endorser. Being a multiple-

choice question, there were defined three possible options, based on the results of past studies, analysed in the literature review, plus an additional choice where respondents were free to write the type of celebrity they prefer.

Results were clear and detach athletes as the favourite type of celebrity, with a substantial advantage, comparing to actors, the second most voted. This was contradictory to the theory of Knoll & Matthes (2017), Ford (2018) and Malik & Guptha (2014), saying that actors are the type of celebrity with higher impact, but reinforced Zhou et al. (2020) conclusion

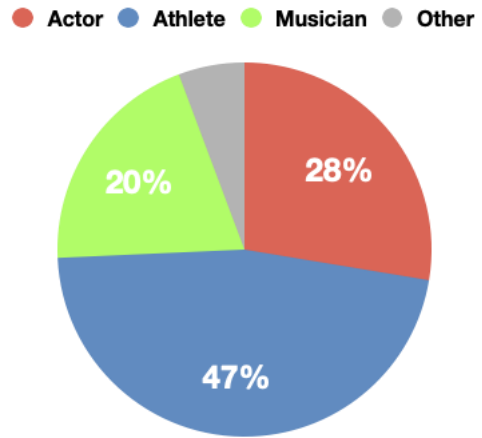


Chart 11: celebrities question 6

that famous sports stars can be very effective, in fact, more effective, as chart 11 demonstrate. Knoll & Matthes (2017) also recognise musicians as powerful celebrity while endorsing, which can be agreeable by this survey results. Only about 6%, a weak hint, opted by other celebrity type, than the pre-established presented, referring influencers and tv hosts as other possible endorsers.

Main Findings

- ⇒ Multi-brand endorsements, by the same celebrity, lead to the doubt, in consumers' mind, if they really use the products, they endorse.
- ⇒ The negative outcomes, of celebrities' reputation, are transferred to the endorsed brand.
- ⇒ In terms of celebrities' types of preferences, athletes overcome actors and musicians, respectively.

4.1.3 Mascots vs Celebrities

First of all, based in one of Cohen's strategies of personification (2014), by anthropomorphic techniques, it was asked if respondents associate a personality to a brand mascot or celebrity endorsing. Although more than 60%, in chart 12, attribute this human feature to fictional characters, what goes in congruence with what Delbaere et al. (2011) assumed, the other participants are neutral or don't agree (≤ 3). In chart 13, the results were closer, with a 55% agreement (≥ 4) and a 45% of disagreement or neutral (≤ 3). This means that the respondents with a 3- or lower-point answer don't perceive brands as "like us" (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017, p. 358), not even with the strategic creation of mascots by managers or the use of celebrities to transfer their personality. It's important to highlight the significant difference in the 5-point answer, comparing the charts, meaning that people are more secure to associate a personality to a mascot than to a celebrity. This unbalance could be explained due to the continuous variation of celebrities' personality, bringing confusion to the brand and to consumers (Mishra et al. 2015).

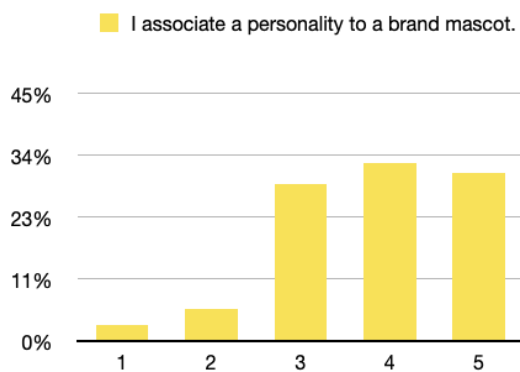


Chart 12: mvc question 1A

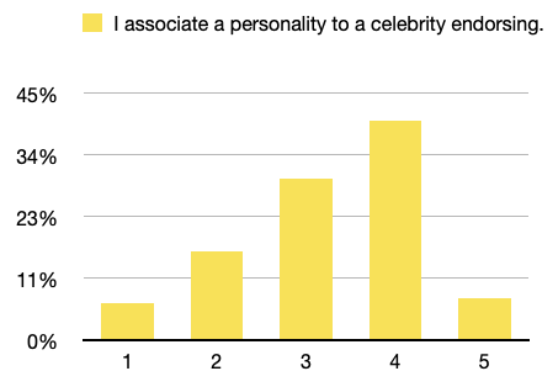


Chart 13: mvc question 1B

Next, the complete statement was "I consider brand mascots/celebrity endorsements as distinctive factors, gaining a competitive advantage", for respondents to focus their thoughts into the market. Surprisingly, the two charts are very similar to each other, with a clear tendency to agreement,

therefore both mascots and celebrities are considered a competitive advantage. The results, in this study, devalue the principle of loyalty, defended by Malik & Guptha (2014) and Trivedi (2018), hence the possibility that a multi-brand celebrity is weaker than a brand mascot single representation of a brand. In addition, the first authors assume mascots' uniqueness as a different and, especially, stronger quality comparing to celebrities, which cannot be verified by these two charts.

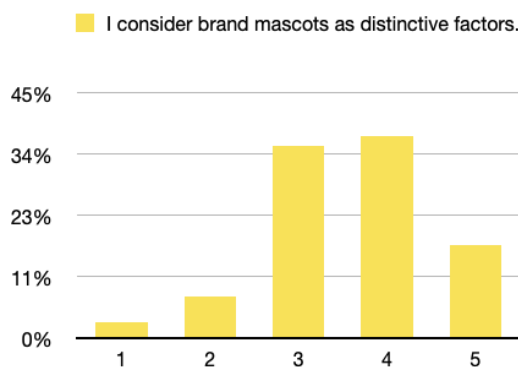


Chart 14: mvc question 2A

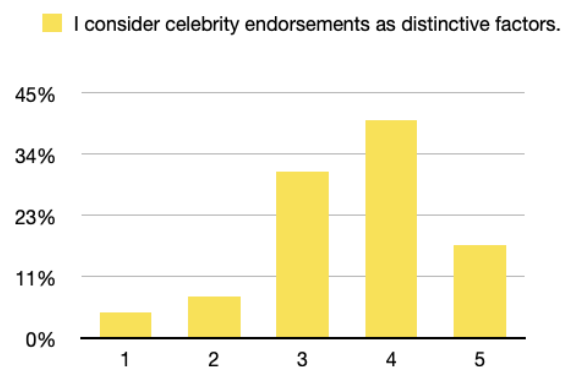


Chart 15: mvc question 2B

After a careful analysis and despite the similarities of the charts, the general conclusion is that a celebrity endorser has a slightly higher probability of overshadowing a brand. But in each case, the agreement rate (≥ 4) was lower than 55%, and many participants don't agree or don't have certain (≤ 3), related to both strategies. Although it is an inconclusive result, marketers should interpret this as a warning, to avoid personal associations (LeBel & Cooke, 2008) and misleading of the focus from the brand to the mascot or celebrity (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). On both approaches, the tendency should be in disagreement, which is not observed, so it matches Gilal et al. (2020) prediction that these strategies could neglect the promotion full potential.

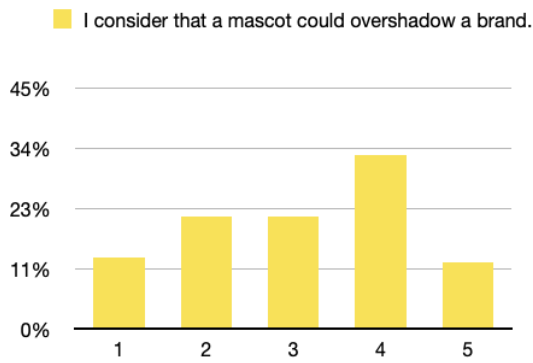


Chart 16: mvc question 3A

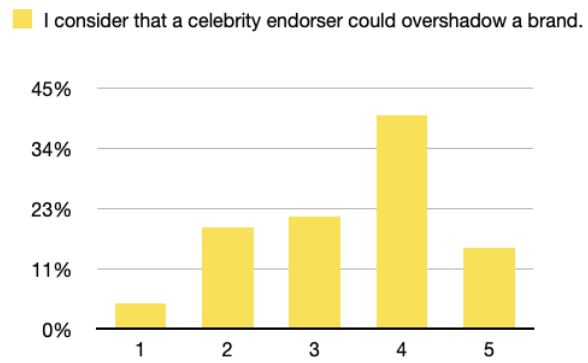


Chart 17: mvc question 3B

Following Keller (2008) reasoning, the question was to comprehend the awareness of brands through mascots and celebrities. With an overwhelming agreement (≥ 4) from the participants (about 65%), in chart 19, there's no doubt that celebrities endorsing have a higher performance in personal meanings, specifically familiarity (Campbell & Keller, 2003). In fact, the results defy one of the assumptions by Hosany et al. (2013), the contribution to brand awareness by mascots, because more than a half of the respondents aren't familiar with brands, exclusively due to their mascots (chart 18). By the other hand, the responses, were in line with the results presented by Mishra et al. (2015), defending that celebrities create a positive cognitive response on consumers, generating awareness and knowledge towards brands.

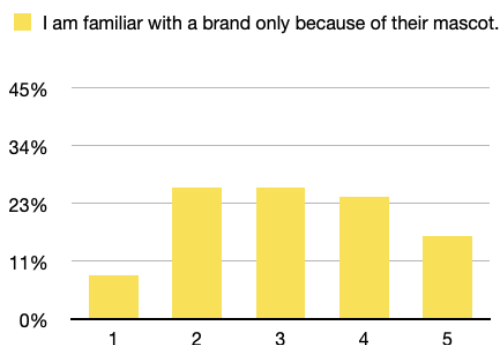


Chart 18: mvc question 4A

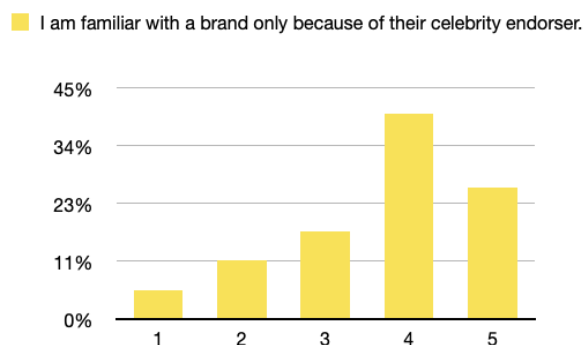


Chart 19: mvc question 4B

Malik & Gupta (2014), study of comparison between the two different strategies, attributed an advantage to celebrities, related to product quality, affirming that products they endorsed differ from the others because

consumers assume them as good quality. This was not proved in this research, as it is demonstrated (chart 21), only 23% connect celebrities to quality (≥ 4), in terms of endorsement. The same question was made for the case of mascots, and the responses were negative too. So, we can assure that product quality is not a differentiate factor between the two marketing tools, neither one has advantage in terms of quality relation.

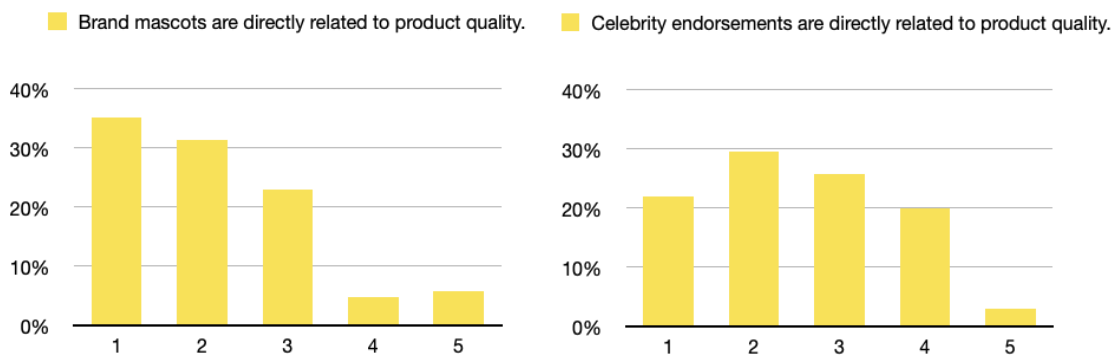


Chart 20: mvc question 5A

Chart 21: mvc question 5B

Focusing now on emotions, in the case of mascots, around 55% agreed with the statement (≥ 4), converging to the theories of LeBel & Cooke (2008), Malik & Gupta (2014) and Trivedi (2018), supporting that emotions are a key factor of mascots to engage with the audience. By the other hand, the celebrities' chart is more inconclusive, with the majority being neutral (3) and only 40% of the participants agreeing (≥ 4). With that said and recognising the difference in the 5-point answer, it's possible to define emotions as an advantage provoked more by mascots, comparing to celebrity endorsements, and possibly assume that this second strategy is more related to personal judgements as explained by other authors (Lee & Thorson 2008; Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Malodia et al., 2017; Ford, 2018).

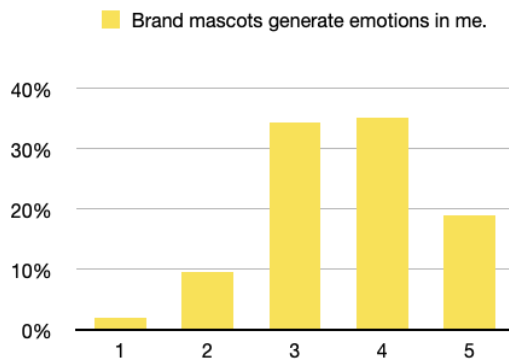


Chart 22: mvc question 6A

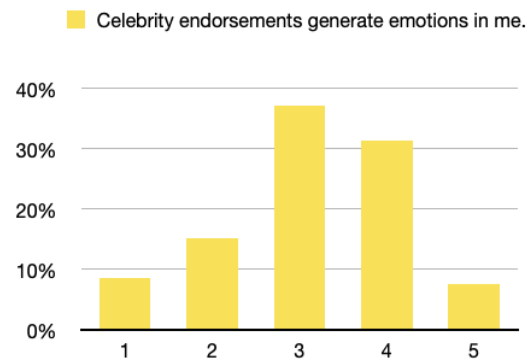


Chart 23: mvc question 6B

Finalizing this part, with a different method, as already explained, there were three additional multiple choice questions, where participants had to choose between “celebrity endorsement”, “brand mascot” or “both”. The factors evaluated here were credibility, memory and influence, more specifically to understand which one of the two (if not both) had more votes.

Chart 24 (“Who has higher influence power?”) is very easy to interpret, with a clear favouritism to celebrities, when it comes to influencing. Pradhan et al. (2016) clarified that this characteristic is one of the main reasons for managers to use celebrity endorsements, and this survey contribute to that idea. In addition, Trivedi (2018), in his comparative study, assume celebrities having higher influence in consumers, what is verified in the chart too.

Analysing chart 25 (“Who has more credibility?”), again, it’s possible to observe a significant advantage to celebrity endorsements, this can be easily understandable by the case of personal care items, as explained before. A celebrity is a real person and not an animation, like a mascot, so transmits a genuine and visible evidence of the brand, that’s why 69% see a celebrity as more credible.

Although, in the previous charts, mascots had very low values it’s important to highlight that influencing consumers and gaining credibility are not the marketers’ goals, when using this approach. As Hosany et al. (2013) defend, the

primary goal of a brand mascot is to create brand awareness therefore, to facilitate people of remembering the brand, providing a memorable way (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). As it can be seen, in chart 26 (“Who has higher memorable factor?”), the mascots’ choice secure 50% responses (reinforcing the author argument), competing with a 28% of celebrity and 22% of indecision, which can be explained to the fact that consumers are exposed to celebrities, multiple times and with frequency in their lives, as Knoll & Matthes (2017) concluded. Plus, another factor, that can contribute to this advantage for mascots, was provided and detailed earlier in chart 4.

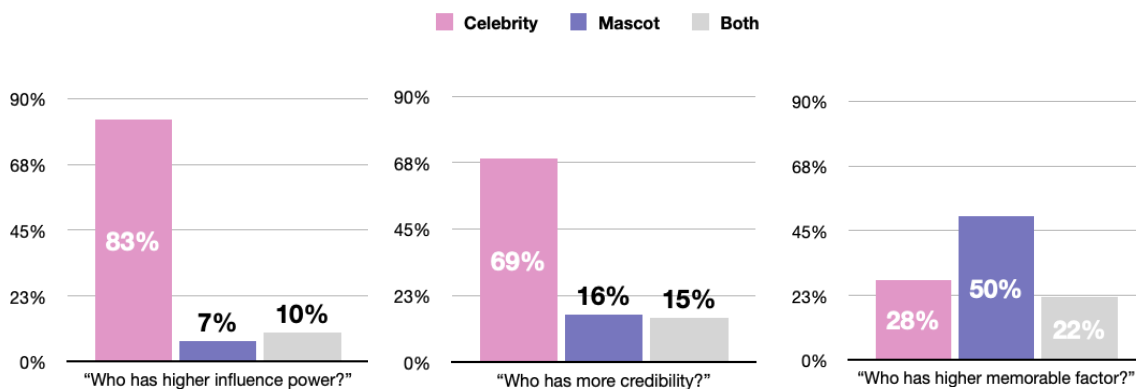


Chart 24: mvc question 7

Chart 25: mvc question 8

Chart 26: mvc question 9

Main Findings

- ⇒ Mascots are easier associated to a personality.
- ⇒ Celebrities have higher probability of overshadowing, the endorsed brand.
- ⇒ A celebrity endorsement could familiarise a consumer, with a brand, more effectively than a brand mascot.
- ⇒ Neither mascots nor celebrities are, directly, related to the quality of the brand’s products.
- ⇒ In a general perspective, emotions are quicker generated by mascots than by celebrities.

⇒ Although, celebrities have higher influence power and more credibility, brand mascots are easier to be memorise by the audience.

4.1.4 Purchase Intentions

When it comes to the purchasing decision, consumers always have in mind two different factors, the price and quality of the products. In this research this was no exception, when asked “I consider the price when purchasing a product.” (chart 27) and “I consider the quality when purchasing a product.” (chart 28), more than 90% agreed in each of the statements (≥ 4).

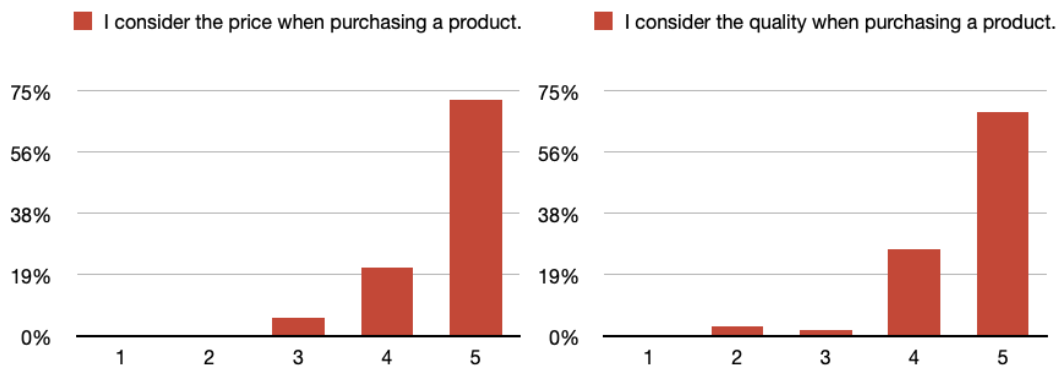


Chart 27: purchase intentions question 1

Chart 28: purchase intentions question 2

Based in Malik & Guptha (2014) survey, another statement was made, in order to understand if the brand, in general, was also considerate in this decision. The results provided a 77% ratio of agreement (≥ 4) and less than 5% of disagreement (≤ 2), assuring that the brand is also a purchasing criteria. Being mascots and celebrity endorsements, without a doubt, part of the brand, in various aspects (discussed during this study), it is implicit that the two strategies really have influence in the buying process. And, despite the main focus of this study are the attitudes towards the brand, it's important to reinforce Cohen & Reed (2006) and Mishra et al. (2015) idea, that the affective response, directly, impacts the behavioural response, specifically the purchasing intention. Understandably, chart 29, leads to an indirect and

implicit conclusion, as already explained, but it's important not to neglect some of the reasons for managers to use mascots and celebrities, that are to increase sales and generate profit, as defended by Hosany et al. (2013) and Pradhan et al. (2016).

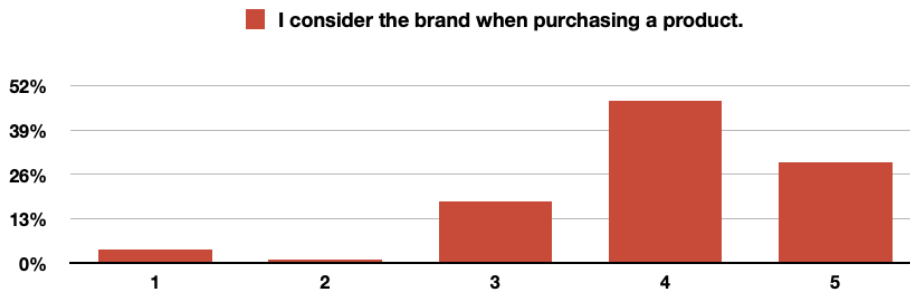


Chart 29: purchase intentions question 3

Also, in congruence with the same authors' study, it was done one more statement, specially dedicated to the celebrity endorsing strategy, the results are visible in chart 30. Observing this disagreement tendency, it's possible to counter argument, not only Trivedi's (2018) results of celebrities having higher influence in the purchasing decision, but also the unbalanced values obtained in charts 24 and 25 (charts 42 and 43, in appendix, also contribute to this assumption). Saying this is not undervaluing or underestimating celebrities when endorsing, but presenting a theory that a celebrity, on its own, is not enough to convince consumers (charts 44 and 45, in appendix, also reinforce this theory), there's a need to have good managers and marketeers, in a company, to succeed and to apply this strategy properly.

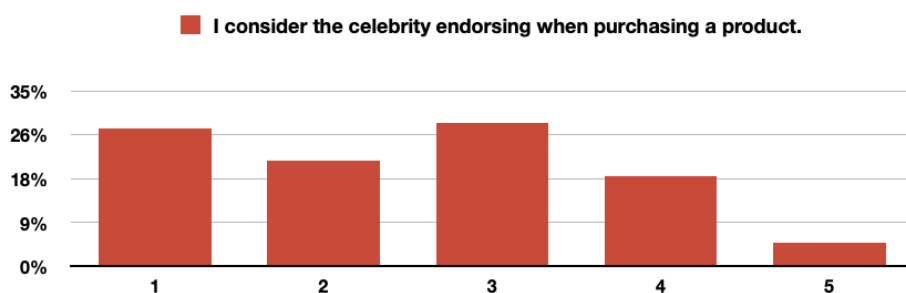


Chart 30: purchase intentions question 4

Main Findings

- ⇒ Price and quality are considered, in the purchasing moment.
- ⇒ The brand, in general, is also a powerful factor in consumers' purchasing moment.
- ⇒ The celebrity endorsement, on its own, seems to have less influence on consumers' buying process.
- ⇒ Mascots and celebrities, indirectly, could influence the final decision.

4.2 Brand Signs Approach

4.2.1 Brand Mascots

The main focus, of this study, was to test the brand awareness, more specifically brand attribution, by presenting a picture of a mascot and analyse if the respondents associate it to the correct brand. The selection criteria was based in notoriety and historic connection, so there were chosen three well-known mascots that are part of the brand's identification, since the beginning.

The first one was a picture of M&M's yellow and red mascot (image 10, in appendix), which is a product-based animation, and with no surprises, only 3 responses didn't associate them to the M&M's brand. Secondly, Quiky, the animated rabbit of Nesquik, (image 10, in appendix) had 96 correct answers, while the other 10 participants didn't do the correct association. The last picture was Ronald McDonald (image 10, in appendix), the famous human-based mascot, of the fast food "world", gather 103 correct associations. With these results, it's clear that mascots are very successful in brand attribution, in fact, these three examples achieve a top-of-mind recall status, as predicted by Patterson et al. (2013), due to their popularity (Malik & Guptha 2014).

4.2.2 Celebrity Endorsements

Using the same question method, as the previous part, in this case, celebrities were used as cue to understand which brand participants associate them. Based on chart 11, examples of the three most influential types of celebrities were presented in the survey, plus a picture of a fictional character created by a brand and based in a real person, which is a strategy of personification, as Cohen (2014) explained. Now, differing from the mascots, the idea was not to pick a famous star that is connected to the brand from the beginning but, instead, choose celebrities that are easily recognised due to their high status.

Following the order of chart 11, a picture of Cristiano Ronaldo (image 11, in appendix) was shown and then asked, "What is the brand this celebrity endorse?", and although the majority of the responses were "Nike" and "CR7", which is the sports star's personal brand, "Herbalife", "Head&Shoulders", "Linic" and "MEO" were also mentioned. Next, George Clooney (image 11, in appendix) was the example of an actor, used in the questionnaire, and despite around 33% didn't associate him to any brand, the only brand mentioned by participants was "Nespresso". The musician chosen, for the survey, was Beyoncé (image 11, in appendix), interestingly more than 80% didn't knew to each brand she was connected, by the other hand some respondents wrote "Adidas", "Chanel", "Ivy Park", "L'Oréal" and "Pepsi". Finally, a character named "Marta" (image 11, in appendix) developed by Ok Teleseguros was approached, and only 7% of participants recognised her.

After analysing the results of this part, the brand loyalty situation it's clear and, contrary to chart 14 and 15, in congruence with Malik & Guptha (2014) and Trivedi (2018), defending that celebrities are less loyal because they are associated to more and different brands, this happened in Cristiano Ronaldo and Beyoncé cases. Another theory that can be observed, in the Cristiano Ronaldo's example, is the one tested in chart 17. Cristiano Ronaldo was a Linic

endorser, but never endorsed Head&Shoulders, in fact the two brands are competitors, in the shampoo market. This can be explained by Knoll & Matthes (2017) and Gilal et al. (2020) predictions, that a celebrity could overshadow a brand and “steal” the attention. Assuming George Clooney’s question as the most successful for the brand, compared to the other three tested, this can support Lee & Thorson (2008) theory that a moderate mismatch is the most impactful one, but also contradict the previous results obtained and represented in chart 11, giving again the first place to actors, as assumed by the studied authors. At last, “Marta” fictional character was very successful, during some time, but this was a few years ago, so it’s comprehensible that nowadays people have forgotten about her. In addition, if “Marta” was a cartoon spokes-character, instead of a human spokes-character, there is a possibility that she had enhanced more positive attitudes, hence easier to be memorised by people, as Heiser et al. (2008) proved and is supported by Caufield (2012).

Main Findings

- ⇒ Mascots have higher success in brand attribution, comparing to celebrity endorsements.
- ⇒ A mascot has more loyalty, comparing to a multi-brand celebrity endorser.
- ⇒ A celebrity could overshadow a brand, due to their popularity.
- ⇒ M&M’s, Nesquik and McDonald’s have very effective mascots, they are easily associated to the brand.
- ⇒ George Clooney in Nespresso is an effective moderate mismatch endorsement.
- ⇒ “Marta”, an example of a fictional celebrity, does not have the same efficacy that a real celebrity.

4.2.3 Brands

The first question was related to personal attachment to brands, around 65% agrees with the statement (≥ 5), so it's possible to assume, a general, engagement. In congruence with these results is MacInnis & Folkes (2017) theory, of self-perspective ("like me") and/or relationship-perspective ("close to me"). Chart 31 can reinforce Awasthi & Choraria (2015) and Belk (2019) idea, of marketers using celebrity endorsements to attract their followers to the brand, therefore enhancing the level of attachment. In addition, LeBel & Cooke (2008) assumptions can also be explained by these responses, meaning that mascots' qualities of building trust and satisfaction with the audience are transferable to the brand. In a general way, the engagement verified in the chart could be triggered by both strategies, which is the goal of the managers when use this type of approaches.

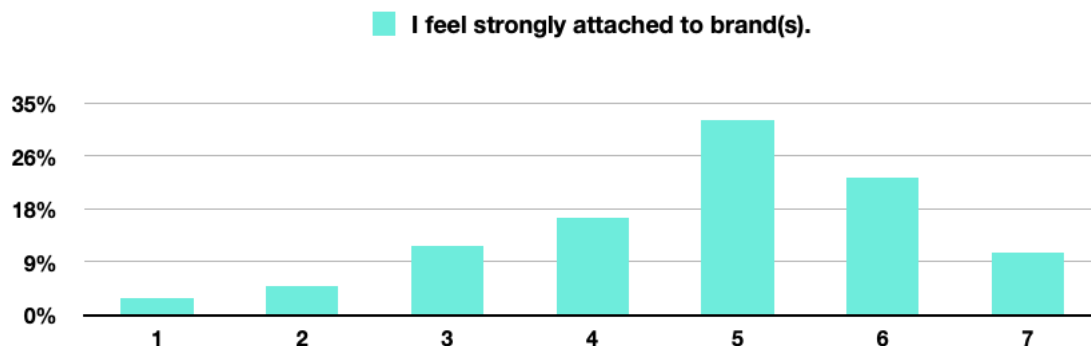


Chart 31: brands question 1

The next two questions were to comprehend emotional connections of consumers with brands, in general. Similar results were obtained in the two charts, with 28% and 24%, respectively, opting for the middle (4). The analyse of emotions provoked by mascots and celebrities was already detailed previously, now the aim is to understand if the interpretation of emotions is transferred to the brand. Due to the balance observed in both charts, especially in chart 33, it's difficult to take any conclusion. But a visible situation is that

there's 39% of "emotional connected" (≥ 5 , chart 32) and a 44% disagreement of "not feel any emotional bond" (≤ 3 , chart 33), therefore a tendency to connect emotionally to brands. This uncertain devalue most the mascots' strategy because, as mentioned by LeBel & Cooke (2008), Malik & Guptha (2014) and Trivedi (2018), enhancing emotions is essential for managers when creating mascots, it also neglects the small advantage gained by mascots, in the results of chart 22 and 23.

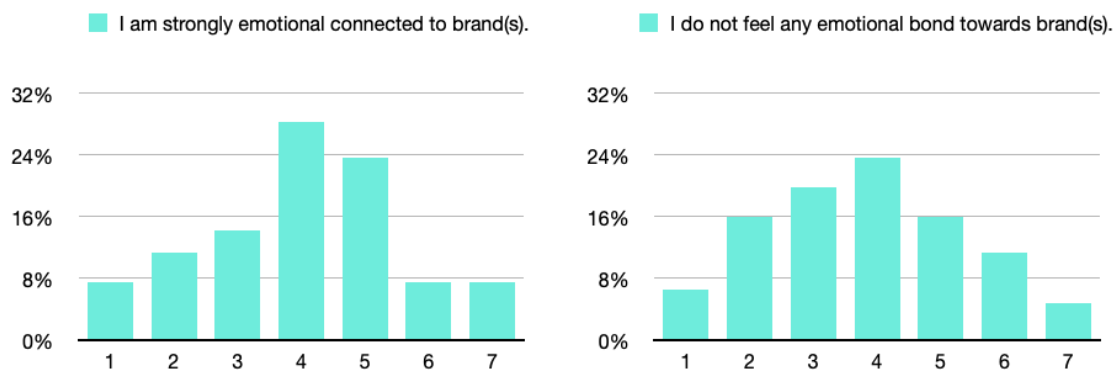


Chart 32: brands question 2

Chart 33: brands question 3

Concluding this stage, using a 5-point scale, the majority of the participants (62%) identifies with a brand (≥ 4 , chart 34), but only 48% have a bond with a brand (≥ 4 , chart 35). To understand these results it's important to consider both perspectives, presented by MacInnis & Folkes (2017). Starting from the self-focused perspective (chart 34), it's secure to assume that people tend to consider the brand as "like me" so, indirectly, the possibility presented by Malik & Guptha (2014), that celebrities have influence in consumers can be verified. By the other hand, when the relationship-focused perspective (chart 35) is tested the results aren't so convincing, therefore the "close to me" situation is jeopardised. This means that mascots aren't enough to achieve the "brand love" status (Loureiro et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2020) and/or celebrities aren't making the connection between the brand and their followers, contrary to Awasthi &

Choraria (2015) and Belk (2019) point of view, and the results observed in chart 31.

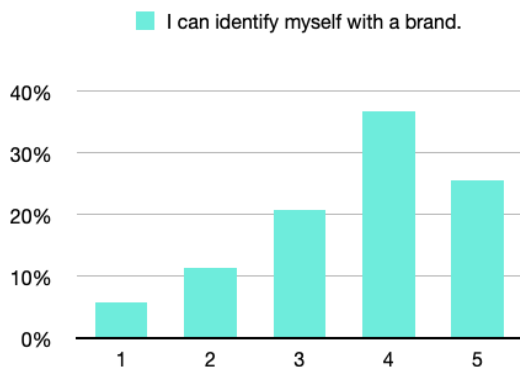


Chart 34: brands question 4

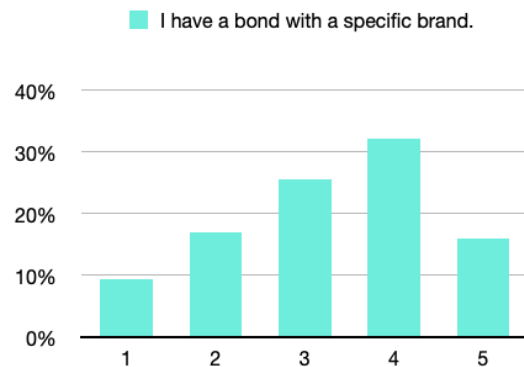


Chart 35: brands question 5

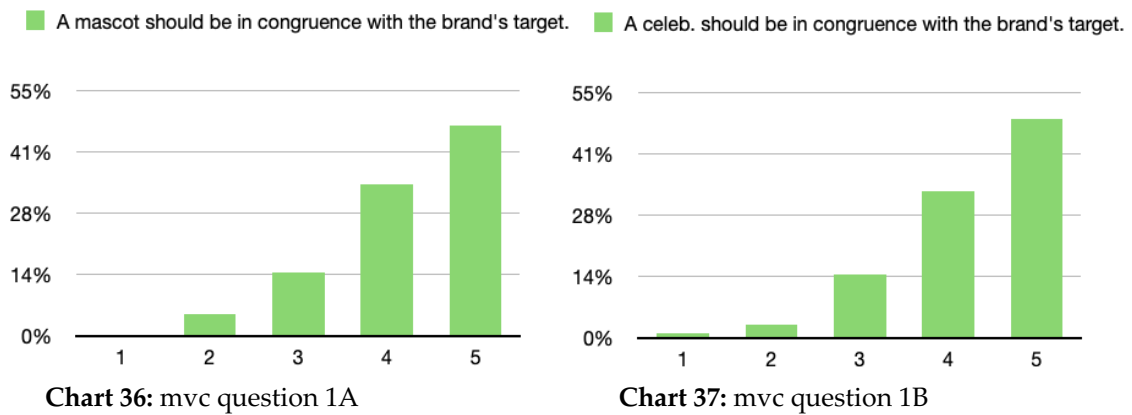
Main Findings

- ⇒ Related to consumers' attachment to brands, it's understandable that individuals opt for a self-focus perspective, rather than a relationship with the brand.
- ⇒ Consumers feel emotionally connected to specific brands and not in a general manner, or to all brands.

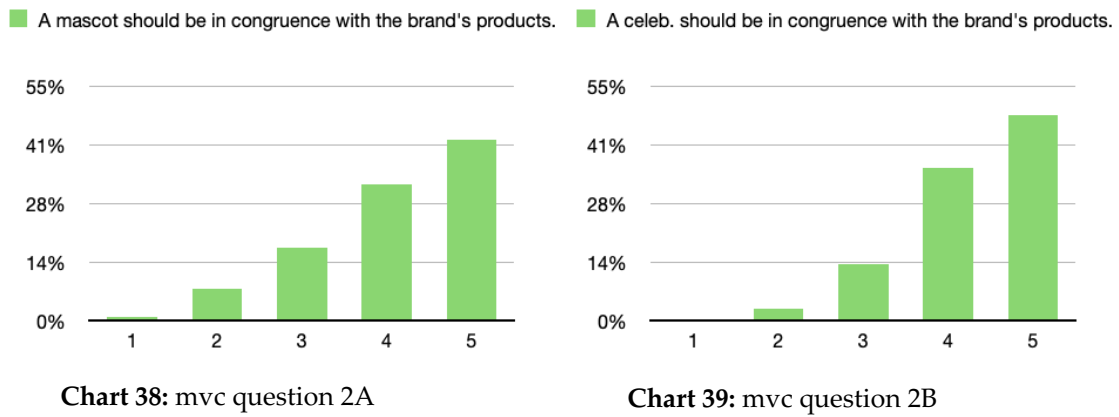
4.2.4 Mascots vs Celebrities

The statement "A brand mascot/celebrity endorser should be in congruence with the brand's target." was to prove and reinforce some theories presented by the studied authors. There is no doubt, when analysing chart 36, that a mascot should be created having in mind what the target audience identifies with (LeBel & Cooke, 2008), therefore being attractive to the brand's potential and actual market, as confirmed by Caufield (2012) and Trivedi (2018). In the celebrities' case, the results were the same, so the brand's manager should carefully choose the endorser, with the main goal to find suitability between the two, instead of focusing only on popularity (Mishra et al., 2015; Pradhan et al., 2016; Malodia et al., 2017). An example of this is the Beyoncé question (second

part of the brand signs approach), managers opt for Beyoncé to endorse their brand, due to her fame, but, as observed in the results, a lot of the participants didn't know what brand she represents. So, as Sihvonen (2019) predicted and as the charts show, it's essential to analyse the target audience, in order to find the most effective way to use these strategies.



Very similar results were obtained when the question was related to brand's products, a big advantage to agreement (≥ 4), as it can be seen in both charts, on the next page. This has already been predicted by Brown (2010) and Patterson et al. (2013), related to mascots. The responses represented, in chart 38, can explain chart 7, this agreement tendency is the reason the majority of people prefer brands that develop their mascots based on the brand's product, which also facilitate associations (Hosany et al., 2013). Related to celebrities, the agreement was even higher than mascots, assuming that there's a need to have a match between the endorser and the product. Contrary to Lee & Thorson (2008) and the George Clooney exercise (second part of the brand signs approach), in chart 39, respondents are migrating to the perfect match hypothesis. This can also explain the results obtained in the athlete example (second part of the brand signs approach), two of the most answered brands were related to sports (Nike and CR7), like Cristiano Ronaldo's popularity.



Finally, the last question was inspired by Cohen (2014) case of tobacco companies and Kelly et al. (2019) examples of fast-food mascots. The purpose was to understand if participants were aware of this misleading strategy, which can be verified partially in chart 40 (52% \geq 4) and mostly in chart 41 (70% \geq 4). With that said, and related to mascots, consumers' reaction can be the reverse brand anthropomorphism theory, presented by Kucuk (2020), or simply make their decisions, "ignoring" these types of approaches, as Patterson et al. (2013) explained. On the other hand, in celebrity endorsements, it can be more complicated and also affected the endorser, beyond the brand's image. As Mishra et al. (2015) detailed, celebrities should carefully choose which brands to promote because it can affect their image and credibility. Taking the example of fast-food companies, if an athlete is the endorser, the credibility can be negatively affected due to the fact that no one will believe they eat unhealthy food, converging to Malik & Guptha (2014) statements (chart 8). Plus, their followers will feel displeasure, as a result of being influenced to adopt incorrect behaviours and to do things that their idols don't do themselves, totally disagreeing with Awasthi & Choraria (2015) and Belk (2019) reasons of celebrity endorsements success, the consumers imitation of their idols.

■ I recognise inappropriate use of some brand mascots by a brand, only having in mind success and profit

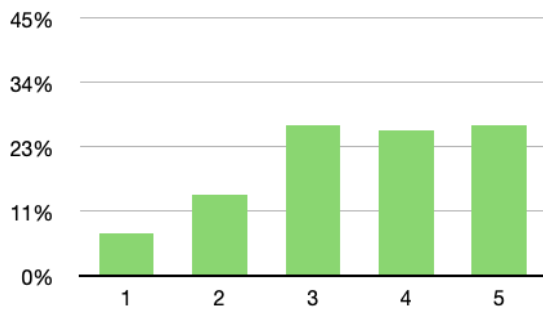


Chart 40: mvc question 3A

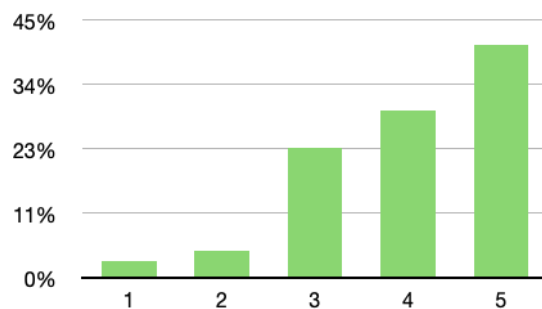


Chart 41: mvc question 3B

Main Findings

- ⇒ Brand mascots and celebrity endorsements should be developed, by managers and marketers, having in mind the brand's target.
- ⇒ Both strategies should be in congruences with the brand's products.
- ⇒ Mascots and celebrities can be interpreted in a negative way, by consumers, when brands take advantage of these strategies.
- ⇒ Is more common, for brands, to use inappropriately celebrity endorsements, when compared to the mascots' approach.

5. Conclusions

Being the main theme of the study to understand which strategy has more positive effects on consumers, conclusions are focused, firstly, on the impact of each approach (RQ1 and RQ2), then comparing and analysing the differences, between mascots and celebrities (RQ3).

Starting with the first research question, people quickly recognise a mascot, hence the brand, because this strategy of representation generate emotions and

is easily associated to a personality. So, brand personification is successfully achieved, by creating a character that represents the company.

Related to the second research question, due to the celebrities' popularity and followers/supporters, when a brand makes a connection to their image this generates interest, on viewers. With that said, it's comprehensible that consumers start to engage (or even more than before) with the brand, according to the self-focus perspective. In congruence with this, nowadays, there are celebrities titled "influencers", with the only purpose to advice the audience of specific brand's products. On the other hand, there are two major situations that disfavour the brands, when using these endorsements. The first one is the celebrities' reputation that could be, directly, transferred to the brand, which can be very negative (in the case of scandals, for instance). Secondly, is their high popularity that could lead to overshadow, hence consumers neglect the brand and only pay attention to the famous star.

Focusing now on the main research question, it's important to assume two different types of goals when developing these implementations. Therefore, managers and/or marketers should have in mind that a brand mascot is a simpler way for consumers to memorise the brand, and a celebrity endorsement is a plan to influence the audience. Brands that use these two approaches search for a competitive advantage, not only compared to others that don't use it, but also to their competitors that pursue the same or a similar strategy. Knowing that neither approach has a lead, in terms of product quality associations, there are two important categories that differ in each case. Firstly, is the brand loyalty, as already explained, a mascot is unique and only represents one brand, while a celebrity can be "the face" of multiple brands. It is very difficult to avoid this situation, in the second case, because an exclusivity contract (a legal protection, similar to mascots), if possible, it should be very expensive and difficult to afford. Secondly, in terms of credibility, there is no doubt that a

celebrity concedes more belief to the brand he/she endorse, when compared to a fictional character. A simple way to comprehend this is that a famous real person can use and/or transmit feedback of a brand's products or image, therefore transmitting a genuine opinion. By the other hand, there is an uncertain if the celebrities really use what they endorse, which can affect this trust advantage.

Arguably, more important than advantages are the disadvantages these strategies could generate on the brand. So, contrary to the positive effects detailed before, there are also negative effects that could outcome form mascots and celebrities. For example, when companies that sell unhealthy products (tobacco, fast food, ...) take advantage of these approaches to succeed and reach the audience, it can be interpret as an improper move, so not only the mascot and the celebrity gets affected, but also the brand.

In a general overview, it's very complex and difficult to assume one of the strategies as the most effective and impactful, but it's possible to conclude that a brand mascot is better, in terms of cognitive responses. Despite this and recognising that the main theme is the affective response (attitudes towards the brand), managers and marketeers should have in mind that a mascot or a celebrity by themselves are insufficient to succeed, in this matter. This means that a congruence with the brand's target and products is needed, plus a careful and detailed implementation, in order to be as efficient as possible. It's important to highlight the results obtained in chart 7 and 11, and, possibly, assume it as a starting point for the strategy development.

6. Limitations

This study had some limitations, especially related to the participants, hence, the data collected from the surveys. Based on studied authors (Aaker, 1997; Heiser et al., 2008; LeBel & Cooke, 2008; Mishra et al., 2015; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Malodia et al., 2017; Radler, 2018; Belk, 2019; Coelho et al., 2020; Gilal et al., 2020) and recognising cultural differences, in this research, only Portuguese were abroad, so it's understandable that the responses reflect, exclusively, this culture. In addition, Millennials were the generation chosen for the data collection, as already explained, but it's important to comprehend that results could have been different if other generations were approached, or added to the study, like previous authors had mentioned (Heiser et al., 2008, LeBel & Cooke, 2008; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Trivedi, 2018).

Analysing, now, the respondent's personal data, there were two situations that could have influenced the results: the first one was the fact that in both surveys, there were few participants with +32 years old (around 6% in the conceptual approach, and 5% in the brand signs approach); next, was the 75% of female respondents observed, in the second survey. This doesn't, necessarily, mean that the results would be different, if the personal data was more balanced, but it's important to detach this information. In a more specific analysis, and related to the examples used (image 2, 10 and 11, in appendix), it's possible to assume that the selected sample had an impact in the responses, as LeBel & Cooke (2008) also recognise.

7. Future Research

After a deep analysis and discussion of the results, there are two main themes that need to be approach, in detail, to complement previous studies and some of the results obtained, in this research: the match between the celebrity and the endorsed products (Lee & Thorson, 2008; Knoll & Matthes, 2017); and the major advantage that brand mascots registered, in cognitive responses (Patterson et al., 2013; Malik & Gupta, 2014). Although, the results reinforce the perfect match strategy (chart 38 and 39), the case of George Clooney and Nespresso (moderate mismatch) was, once again, proved to be very effective (second part of the brand signs approach), leading to the question if this was an exception, or if this should be an effective way to follow. Related to brand mascots, in terms of brand attribution (first part of the brand signs approach), it should be interesting to understand if this edge is easy and quick to achieve, or if it is due to the long years of connection that they have with the brand. The three examples used (image 10, in appendix) are historic and represent the brand, since we can remember, but is a “new” mascot so impactful as an “old” one, or it takes time to achieve this status?

Being the affective response the main objective of the study, for future research, is essential to confront and complement these responses, because, in these questionnaires, participants had plenty of time to reflect in their choices or answer in a way that they don't truly believe, or even have been influenced, somehow. With that said, two different studies could be developed to follow this reasoning: a qualitative research, such as individual interviews or focus groups, obtaining more detailed responses; and a neuroscience/neuromarketing research, where participants, with electric stimulus, automatically, respond to the various topics.

Another subject that can be developed, in continuous to these results and based on previous authors' theories (Cohen & Reed, 2006; Kim & John, 2008; Malik & Guptha, 2014; Mishra et al., 2015; Malodia et al., 2017), is the behavioural response of consumers, therefore, analyse if and how these attitudes towards the brand are transferred to the purchasing moment.

Finally, converging the arguments to a specific topic, the popularity could be discussed and investigated in the results, but there's a need to complement with more data, in order to comprehend, who is more popular, related to brands, or if, in fact, a mascot could achieve a celebrity status, as mentioned by LeBel & Cooke (2008). So, a challenging way to analyse this, could be by approaching fictional characters. Testing not only if the results are the same as real celebrities and mascots, but also which one is more popular, between the two strategies, ignoring personal meanings and connections.

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9. Appendix

Brand Mascots

In a scale (1-7), being 1 the lower and 7 the higher, please answer the following questions related to brand mascots.

Animated brand mascots attract my attention. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I like animated brand mascots because they are funny. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Animated brand mascots make people happy. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Animated brand mascots stimulate my nostalgia. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Animated brand mascots appear as sincere and honest. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Animated brand mascots increase the trust on the products they represent. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

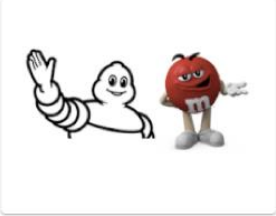
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 1: conceptual approach; mascots questions 1 - 6


Brand Mascots

In terms of personal preferences, please answer the following question.


Please choose your favourite type of mascot, from the three different options below. *



Product-based (examples in image)



Animal-based (examples in image)



Human-based (examples in image)

Image 2: conceptual approach; mascots question 7

Celebrity Endorsements

In a scale (1-7), being 1 the lower and 7 the higher, please answer the following questions related to celebrity endorsements.

Do you believe the celebrities also use those products that they endorse? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

If the reputation of the celebrity degrades, does the reputation of the brand also degrade? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Would multi-brand endorsements by the same celebrity lead to overexpose? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 3: conceptual approach; celebrities questions 1 - 3

Celebrity Endorsements

In a scale (1-5), being 1 the lower and 5 the higher, please answer the following questions related to brand mascots.

I have sometimes tried to change aspects of my personality in order to be more like the celebrity I admire. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I feel satisfied when I adopt the behaviour recommended by celebrities. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 4: conceptual approach; celebrities questions 4 & 5

Celebrity Endorsements

In terms of personal preferences, please answer the following question.

Please choose your favourite type of celebrity endorser, from the three different options below. *

Actor

Athlete

Musician

Other: _____

Image 5: conceptual approach; celebrities questions 6

Brand Mascots vs Celebrity Endorsements

In a scale (1-5), being 1 the lower and 5 the higher, please answer the following questions related to brand mascots.

I associate a personality to a brand mascot. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider brand mascots as distinctive factors, gaining a competitive advantage. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider that a mascot could overshadow a brand. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am familiar with a brand only because of their mascot. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Brand mascots are directly related to product quality. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Brand mascots generate emotions in me. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 6: conceptual approach; mvc questions 1A – 6A

I associate a personality to a celebrity endorsing. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider celebrity endorsements as distinctive factors, gaining a competitive advantage. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider that a celebrity endorsement could overshadow the brand. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am familiar with a brand only because of their celebrity endorsement. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Celebrity endorsements are directly related to product quality. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Celebrity endorsements generate emotions in me. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 7: conceptual approach; mvc questions 1B – 6B

Brand Mascots vs Celebrity Endorsements

Comparing the two different types of endorsing strategies used by brands, please answer the following questions.

Who has more credibility? *

- Brand Mascot
- Celebrity Endorsement
- Both

Who has higher memorable factor? *

- Brand Mascot
- Celebrity Endorsement
- Both

Who has higher influence power? *

- Brand Mascot
- Celebrity Endorsement
- Both

Image 8: conceptual approach; mvc questions 7 – 9

Purchase Intentions

Finally, in a scale (1-5), being 1 the lower and 5 the higher, please answer the following questions related to purchasing phase.

I consider the price when purchasing a product. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider the quality when purchasing a product. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider the brand when purchasing a product. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I consider the celebrity endorsing when purchasing a product. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Products recommend by celebrities are worth buying. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

It is possible that I first purchase the products that are endorsed by the celebrity than the non-endorsed one. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 9: conceptual approach; purchase intentions questions 1 – 6

Brand Recall - Mascots

Please answer the following questions based on the images provided.

What is the brand represented by these mascots? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

What is the brand represented by this mascot? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

What is the brand represented by this mascot? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

Image 10: brand signs approach; mascots questions 1 – 3

Brand Recall - Celebrities

Please answer the following questions based on the images provided.

What is the brand this celebrity endorse? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

What is the brand this celebrity endorse? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

What is the brand this celebrity endorse? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

What is the brand this celebrity endorse? (if you don't know write "no") *



Your answer _____

Image 11: brand signs approach; celebrities questions 1 – 4

Brands

In a scale (1-7), being 1 the lower and 7 the higher, please answer the following questions.

I feel strongly attached to brand(s). *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I am strongly emotional connected to brand(s). *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I do not feel any emotional bond towards brand(s). *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 12: brand signs approach; brands questions 1 – 3

Brands

In a scale (1-5), being 1 the lower and 5 the higher, please answer the following questions.

I can identify myself with a brand. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I have a bond with a specific brand. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 13: brand signs approach; brands questions 4 & 5

Brand Mascots vs Celebrity Endorsements

In a scale (1-5), being 1 the lower and 5 the higher, please answer the following questions.

A brand mascot should be in congruence with the brand's target. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

A brand mascot should be in congruence with the brand's products. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I recognise inappropriate use of some mascots by a brand, only having in mind their success and profit. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 14: brand signs approach; mvc questions 1A – 3A

A celebrity endorser should be in congruence with the brand's target. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

A celebrity endorser should be in congruence with the brand's products. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I recognise inappropriate use of some celebrity endorsements by a brand, only having in mind their success and profit. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Image 15: brand signs approach; mvc questions 1B – 3B

■ I have sometimes tried to change aspects of my personality in order to be more like the celebrity I admire.

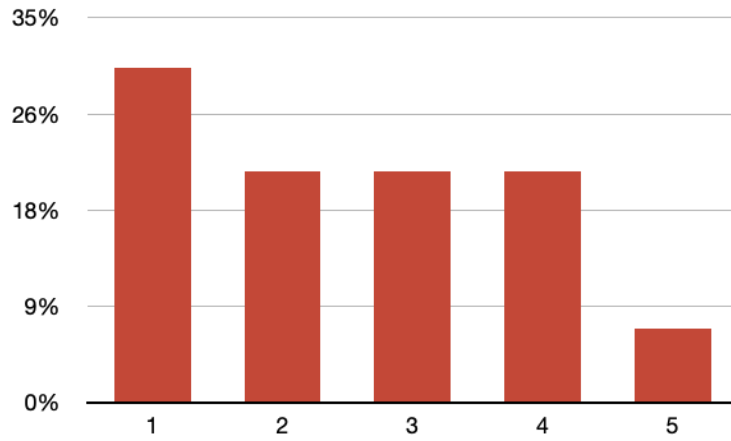


Chart 42: conceptual approach; celebrities question 4

■ I feel satisfied when I adopt the behaviour recommended by celebrities.

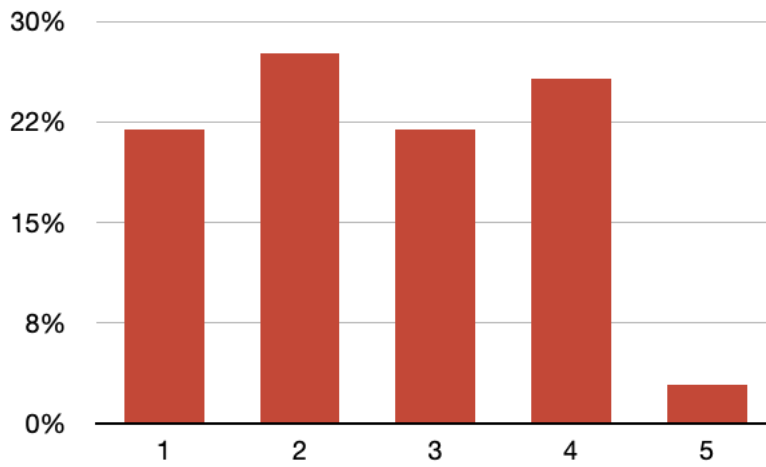
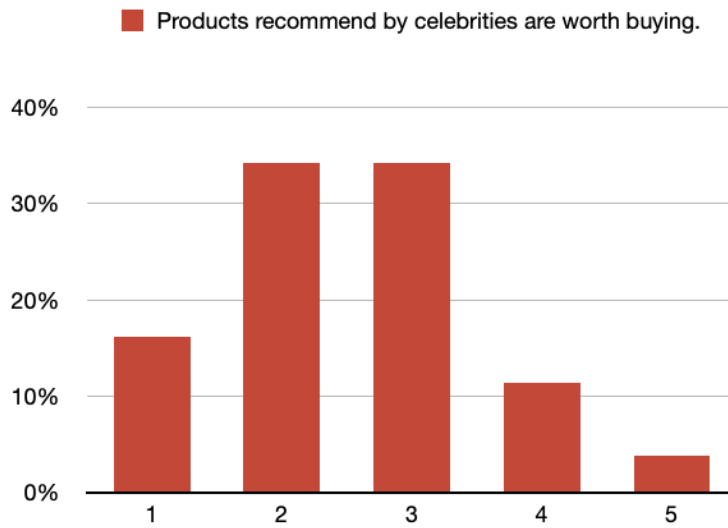


Chart 43: conceptual approach; celebrities question 5



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Chart 44: conceptual approach; purchase intentions question 5

■ It is possible that I first purchase the products that are endorsed by the celebrity than the non-endorsed one.

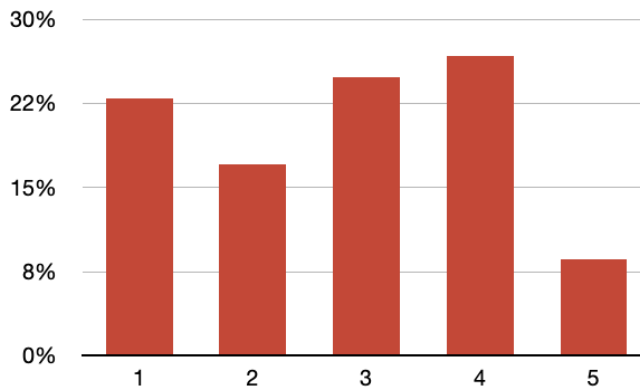


Chart 45: conceptual approach; purchase intentions question 6