



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEATURES OF SPOKES-CHARACTER AND  
BRAND TRUST OF CONSUMERS**

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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEATURES OF SPOKES-CHARACTER AND  
BRAND TRUST OF CONSUMERS**

By

**HERNANI BINTI BIDIN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

**July 2018**

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## DEDICATION

To my Mom & Dad, thank you. This is dedicated for you.  
I would also like to thank my families, especially my sister, Dr. Rosmiza Bidin  
for your patience and support as I finished my thesis.  
And not forgotten to all the lecturers and friends, thank you for listening when I  
needed to talk and for offering your opinions. I would have never made it without  
you and  
I am grateful for you.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEATURES OF SPOKES-CHARACTER AND BRAND TRUST OF CONSUMERS**

By

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**July 2018**

**Chairman : Mohd Nizam bin Osman, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The trend of using spokes-character has developed in various promotional campaigns over the past century. As an animated being or animated object that is used to promote a product, service, or idea, spokes-character must be used consistently in conjunction with a product over time. Spokes-character are used to create unique brand or company images, and to stand for the brand. To address this situation, organizations gain revenue by promoting more campaigns using potential spokes-character and keeping good relationship with consumers. Strategizing the features of spokes-character for brand trust is among the effective tools in promoting and maintaining relationship with consumers.

This research is developed to construct an understanding of the advantages of using spokes-characters advertising for communication in Malaysia. There are still some research gaps in the past studies and pointed out that popular spokes-character are capable of enhancing consumer preference for a brand but fail to describe the mechanism by which the features towards spokes-character influences the brand preference.

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between features of spokes-character and the brand trust of consumers. To achieve the said objective, six features of spokes-character are tested, namely Expertise, Relevance, Nostalgia, Personality, Physical Characteristics and Humor.

This study employed the quantitative method of data collection. The statistical analysis used includes descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis. Data were obtained through a survey questionnaire from 400 undergraduates from four high-

ranked local universities in Selangor. Self-administered questionnaires were sent and personally collected by the researcher. All data were gathered and coded using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 22.0), a statistical computer program.

The findings analysis throughout the multiple regression was found that there were only three features of spokes-character which most contributed towards brand trust, namely Personality, Physical Characteristics and Expertise. The results indicated that, Personality has given the significant results. So did the combination of Personality and Physical Characteristics, also provided the significant results. And lastly, when Personality, Physical Characteristics and Expertise were merged all together also contributed the significant results.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

## **HUBUNGAN DI ANTARA CIRI-CIRI *SPOKES-CHARACTER* DENGAN KEPERCAYAAN TERHADAP JENAMA OLEH PENGGUNA**

Oleh

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*Spokes-character* telah dibangunkan dalam pelbagai bentuk kempen dan promosi sejak berabad lama nya. Sebagai makhluk animasi atau objek animasi yang digunakan untuk mempromosikan produk, perkhidmatan atau idea, *spokes-character* perlu digunakan secara konsisten dari masa ke semasa untuk mendapatkan impak yang produktif. *Spokes-character* digunakan untuk memberi impak terhadap jenama atau imej syarikat yang unik. Bagi membincangkan mengenai perkara ini, organisasi perlu peka dalam mengatasi cabaran ini dan berusaha bagi mencapai keuntungan melalui lebih banyak kempen serta promosi yang melibatkan penggunaan *spokes-character* dan mengekalkan perhubungan yang baik dengan pengguna. Strategi penggunaan *spokes-character* dalam pembangunan kepercayaan terhadap jenama adalah antara cara yang paling berkesan untuk mempromosi dan mengekalkan hubungan dengan pengguna.

Kajian ini dibangunkan untuk memberi pemahaman tentang kelebihan penggunaan *spokes-character* dalam komunikasi pengiklanan di Malaysia. Terdapat beberapa jurang penyelidikan dalam kajian lepas yang menunjukkan bahawa ciri-ciri *spokes-character* yang terkenal mampu meningkatkan keutamaan pengguna bagi sesuatu jenama, tetapi gagal untuk menerangkan mekanisma di mana ciri-ciri terhadap *spokes-character* mampu mempengaruhi keutamaan terhadap jenama tersebut.

Objektif umum kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti perkaitan hubungan di antara ciri-ciri *spokes-character* dengan kepercayaan terhadap jenama oleh pengguna. Untuk mencapai matlamat tersebut, enam ciri-ciri *spokes-character* telah diuji, iaitu Kepakaran, Kerelevanan, Nostalgia, Personaliti, Ciri-ciri Fizikal dan Kelucuan.

Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dalam pengumpulan data kajian. Antara kaedah yang digunakan adalah statistik deskriptif, korelasi dan analisis regresi. Data kajian telah dikumpul melalui pengedaran soal selidik kepada 400 pelajar ijazah Sarjana muda di empat universiti awam di sekitar Selangor. Borang soal selidik telah diserahkan kepada responden berdasarkan kepada kaedah serah dan kutip dan borang soal selidik dilengkapkan sendiri oleh responden. Data di perolehi dan di proses menggunakan *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 22.0)*.

Hasil kajian melalui analisis regresi menunjukkan bahawa terdapat 3 ciri-ciri *spokes-character* yang banyak menyumbang terhadap kepercayaan jenama, iaitu Personaliti, Ciri-ciri Fizikal dan Kepakaran. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa, Personaliti telah memberikan hasil yang signifikan. Begitu juga kombinasi diantara Personaliti dan Ciri-Ciri Fizikal, juga memberikan hasil yang signifikan. Dan dapat disimpulkan bahawa apabila Personaliti, Ciri-ciri Fizikal dan Kepakaran apabila digabungkan bersama, turut menyumbangkan hasil yang signifikan.

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*In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful*

**Alhamdulillah with the Grace of the Almighty I have today achieved  
success in completing this study**

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Dear friends, thank you for granting me your precious time to listen and understand.

I owe the success of this study to all the above.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Dr. Akmar Hayati binti Ahmad Ghazali

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

3D	Three-dimensional
AMA	American Marketing Association
DV	Dependent Variables
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
IV	Independent Variables
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
TV	Television
UIAM	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UK	United Kingdom
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
VCD	Video Compact Disc
WPPP	Willingness to Pay a Price Premium

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

Throughout the past decade, spokes-character (also called brand mascots, brand icons, brand-equity or trade characters, non-celebrity spokes-character and advertising ambassadors) give the impression of being in many campaigns. A major segment of the research involving characters has appeared and evolved over time. For instance, cartoon media characters (such as SpongeBob Square Pants cereal) owned by entertainment corporation are licensed by contractual agreements that let characters to be used in over-promotions (e.g. programs, movie tie-ins and television), also product opportunities (e.g. prizes or giveaways, premiums such as toy replicas and displays) (Kraak and Story, 2015). By addressing their potential benefits to brands, media attention and consideration has received increase with the use and practice of spokes-character. This is not surprising, given their prevalence both in modern promotion campaigns and historical. Spokes-character used to promote a brand or a product and considered to be non-human characters (Garretson and Niedrich, 2013). This study examined non-celebrity characters but focus to a common type of spokes-character. According to Phillips and Lee (2012), most common types of spokes-character are animal characteristics and frequently are used to transfer meanings to products: for example, a frog was matched with the umbrella, a sheep was matched with the facial tissue because they symbolize " soft ", and a penguin was matched with the ice beverage. Spokes-character created are to help and promoting a product or brand. Garretson and Niedrich (2013) suggested these characters play to advantage brands by creating favorable brand associations and brand identity.

Spokes-character have been used in promotional campaigns and on product packages by marketers and advertisers for more than a century (Garretson and Niedrich, 2013). Consumers enjoy spokes-character and even tend to give their respect and trust for them, by exploratory research. A spokes character can offer unlimited opportunities to initiative consumer recognition and awareness (Kristopher, 2012). According to Yadav, Bisoyi, and Chakrabarti, (2017) the character's design and implementation is authoritative to its success. "To be visually effective, the vehicles or mascots must be properly designed and satisfying both the viewer's preferences and perceptions". A character might be an illustration of both an imaginary figure or a real, it represents the brand and increases life of it. It is great between a celebrity brand endorser and the brand's logo (Mohanty, 2014). Brand spokes-character is a key component of brand, like brand logos, design and punch line. They are characteristic features which can form an identity by provides graphic clues to the brand's consumers and assist to produce and express brand's personality. They similarly benefit target market to recognize, memorize and know the brand. Therefore, personified spokes-character and their design characteristics have an impact and increase the effectiveness of non-verbal communication with target consumers which enhance more favorable brand attitudes as well as they build a positive brand image (Yadav et al., 2017). Consumers appear

to judge characters and their standard just as they do people. Considered the information based on animism and animation, this is not surprising that spokes-character are like human beings and have feelings (Garretson and Niedrich, 2013). Nor should it be unexpected that consumers assume anthropomorphic characteristics, like spokesperson trust, from noticeable potentials of the characters. These characteristics can have meaningful effects. For instance, in their manuscript that shows the use of spokes-character, Garretson and Niedrich, (2013) suggest perception of trust create by characters which affect to consumers' attitude and behaviors.

Instead of concentrating on the antecedents for such results, many studies regarding the spokes-character use has discovered the attitude-connected consequences of presenting characters with brands. These studies also suggest indication as to the general policy effects of spokes-character use (Hoy, Young, and Mowen, 1986; Henke, 1995; Garretson and Burton, 1998; Fox, Richard J., Dean M. Krugman, James E. Fletcher, and Paul M. Fischer, 1998; Kelly, Kathleen J., Michael D. Slater, David Karan, and Liza Hunn, 2000; Mizerski, 1995; Garretson and Niedrich, 2013). The focus was whether spokes-character symbolize signs to tempt younger customers to adult products. For instance, Macklin's work (1994, 1996) in what way spokes-character concentrates on graphic clues among children, in increase memory of the brand-connected information towards brand attitudes. In reality, lots of effort in this part contribute benefits to firms targeting children and teenagers in their product advertisements.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Although there a so many positive look relationships concerning the practice of spokes-characters and favorable brand attitudes, a several researches have started exclusively and practically recognize the styles of character qualities in control of the relationship. That is, a big concern how does qualities for example trust, relevancy and expertise recognized in related depth-interviews and content analyses distress brand perceptions. Spokes-characters varies in form and appearance.

In Malaysia, the lack of research regarding the features of spokes-character and how its influence on consumers behavior and purchase intention. What kind of features of the spokes-character are Malaysian looking when it comes to purchase the product or brand. The results of the study hopefully can provide guidance for organizations and marketers in their selection of the features of spokes-character and help consumers understand the product or brand better.

Very few categories of features of spokes-character have been tested in the communication marketing to empower and enhancing the brand. Because of its increasing use it becomes extremely essential to understand how the selection of such features take part in the progression of signification or meaning making in the minds of the consumers. The selection of the six features of spokes-character hopes to be inspiring for the organizations, marketers and the creative agencies if there could be a

greater understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of using these six features given. Thus, it would be informative to understand the features of spokes-character throughout the findings based on the six features given, namely Expertise, Relevance, Nostalgia, Personality, Physical Characteristics and Humor.

Callcott et al (1994) found out majority spokes-character are humans, product personifications and animal personifications. This argument supported by Phillips (1996) of animal character in his experimental study. He has confirmed that mutual cultural implications are personified in animals and this feature could be transferred to efficient product image, by using term association task to analyze people's cognition of some animals. Therefore, it seems to be a practical approach in the use of spokes-character in animal format in achieving product promotion. However, it is not clear that whether meaning is the crucial factor in animal personification of spokes-character. There might exist other factors that are more critical for a successful animal spokes-character. In other words, this should be more research, if animal that is not related with product concept could still be attractive to consumers. Besides, the investigation is needed, if meaning is not the determining factor, why and what features make people accept the spokes-character.

According to Spencer (2003), the practice of spokes-character animated still could not achieve and succeed in all conditions. Choosing an effective and successful spokes-character are complicated. Those characters may not be good in communication. Choosing the well spokes-character to endorse a product or service can be specifically challenging, as well as matching the brand or companies' appearance with feature of spokes-character, based on critical considerations (Stafford, Stafford and Day, 2002). The limitations of the communication technology and software may irritate customer while using an animated spokes-character (Spencer, 2003).

There are still some research gaps in the past studies and pointed out that popular spokes-characters are capable of enhancing consumer preference for a brand but fail to describe the mechanism by which the attitude towards spokes-character influences the brand preference and could not offer a suitable theoretical foundation for this concept. Besides, previous researches on spokes-characters have primarily focused on exploring the most appropriate appearance or personality of a spokes-character; however, they have not addressed the most important issue for a firm: whether consumers' emotional connection to a spokes-character contributes to patronage of the brand and whether that connection translates into real profits for the firm. With this issue unresolved, firms may hesitate to expend resources to promote spokes-characters and spokes-character extension products (Chiu and Lin, 2012). According to the unidimensional model of attitudes (Lutz, 1991), the past researches sought to discover what special characteristics a spokes-character should possess in order to influence consumer preference or attitude (Chiu and Lin, 2012).

Brand characters have discernible life cycles which similar to products (Brown, 2010). Classic characters require resurrection, for instance, Elsie the Cow and Speedy Alka-Seltzer (Callcott and Lee, 1994). Other characters have not succeeded the same level

of success, such as Taco Bell Chihuahua and Levi's Flat Eric (Brown, 2010). Despite being universal in marketing, limited studies have observed the management of brand characters over their life time (Hosany, Prayag, Martin and Lee, 2013). Therefore, because of the limitation above, it is important for researcher to re discuss the role of spokes-character features and its influence on brand trust.

## **Research Questions**

The following are research questions addressed by this study:

1. What are the consumers' perception of the features of spokes-character?
2. What are the consumers' perception of brand trust?
3. What is the relationship between the features of spokes-character and brand trust?
4. Which are the features of spokes-character most contributing towards brand trust?

## **Research Objectives**

### **General Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between features of spokes-character and the brand trust.

### **Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify consumers' perception of the features of spokes-character.
2. To identify consumers' perception of brand trust.
3. To determine the relationship between features of spokes-character and brand trust.
4. To determine which features of spokes-character most contribute towards brand trust.

## **Significance of the Study**

Naturally this study is important in several ways. First of all, this study will enhance to the existing body of research on spokes-character in brand trust. Since there are a number of researchers interested in this area of study, it is hoped that the current exploration would inform future research that will look into numerous variables under

study. Since previous studies have focused on the West, hopefully this study will contribute much to the literatures on Malaysia context, and even more in so in academia.

In addition, this study enlightens the organizations to increase the frequency of social campaigns by using spokes-character of their programs. This is intended to raise awareness how spokes-character would be able to contribute to the organizations in terms of targeting public audience and consumers to promote their brand or product generally.

This study is meant to provide a better understanding on how spokes-character influence widespread use of branding in organization. This is especially useful since there is an acute scarcity of empirical information regarding spokes-character use in Malaysia. The findings of this study might also provide researchers and organization with some features in the use and usefulness of spokes-character that needs to be probed further. It also provides some ideas and benefits to have better understanding with more information in this area and as reference as guideline for better interaction with consumer.

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

Among the biggest concern in this study centers on limitation to generalize across studies of the features of spokes-character because implementation features create uniqueness in situations that can make them non-comparable.

Even brands that use the spokes-character will have different features that may be customized for that brands as well as different characters, shapes and so on.

The present study examines only the features of spokes-character due to the objective of the researcher to examine the brand trust purely from an undergraduate student on four public universities in Selangor, namely UPM (Serdang campus), UKM, UIAM (Gombak campus) and UiTM (Shah Alam campus). This study only focused on the features of spokes-character which involves the expertise, relevance, nostalgia, personality, physical characteristics and humor.

According to Garretson and Niedrich (2004), since most undergraduate university students are between the ages 18-24, they are frequently exposed to spokes-character endorsement, hence the major of target customers. They are a suitable population for study in this case, since students are frequently exposed to the promotional.

Sujchaphong, Nguyen and Melewar (2017), asserted that most educational institutions employ some kind of marketing, albeit unsystematically. Hence, the branding programmes which includes universities, are also progressively implemented in the

whole public sector. Institutions in higher education, their interest in branding and image issues seems to be a sign that they are being revolutionize from social institutions into an industry.

Since this study involves features factor, strategy of methodological triangulation is suggested for further study, which used both quantitative and qualitative evidence. These strategies are expected facilitate the interpretation of results and to give richer data.

Not much study regarding spokes-character in Malaysia, especially in testing the adaptability of certain theories has been conducted and published. Therefore, related comparison and information could not have been done equally. Much of the information was taken from studies conducted in contexts outside Malaysia. Hopefully next time more related research will be conducted and published.

### **Keywords Definition**

**Brand** refers as “a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”. In other words, brands are a means to differentiate from the competitors (or future competitors) (Robert, 2013). According to Tevi & Otubanjo (2012), brand is stated as a group of functional and emotional values that allow a promise to be made concerning a unique and welcomed experience. Each one experience is a manifestation of the brand to the customer.

**Brand attitude** refers as consumer attitudes in a unidimensional sense as the sum of the products of attitudes times assessments (Borzooei and Asgari, 2014). While Krystallis & Chrysochou (2014), defined brand attitude as the consumer's generally negative or positive nature to the service brand, which likely to have a positive effect on brand loyalty. With regard to the different platforms in the relationship amongst the customer and the service contribution (pre-purchase, usage, post-purchase), brand attitude is acknowledged as a more stable global evaluation of the brand as compared to a customer's direct response to its implementation (i.e. satisfaction).

**Brand trust** refers as the readiness of a customer to consume confidence in the reliability and honesty of a particular brand. Consequently, “confident expectations and risk are critical components of a definition of [brand] trust”). Trust also varies “within a person and across relationships”, not only differ between people. Thus, organizations are capable to proactively influence brand trust of consumers (and also of potential and current employees). Trust in organizations contrast from trust between people, as the previous also covers “the organization’s institutionalized processes and principles”. Brand trust is well-known as essential for consumer behavior such as loyalty, brand purchase behavior, and brand equity in overall (Rampl & Kenning, 2014).

***Spokes-character*** described as “an animated being or animated object that is used to promote a product, service, or idea”, and must be used reliably in combination with a product over time. Spokes-character does not have legal trademark, which used to produce exclusive brand or company images, to stand for the brand – and, in some examples, even becomes the brand, to gain and hold consumer attention, to stand out of clutter, excellent ability to make believable and acceptable privileges, and to probably affect purchase intention (Mashwama, 2016).



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