THE ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC SPOKES
CHARACTERS VERSUS SPOKESPEOPLE IN A COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION
SERVICE

by

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Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

Submitted to the Department of Marketing

and The Honors College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

May, 2020

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who inspires me every day as well as my friends and family who have supported me throughout the Honors program.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the comparison of the advertising effectiveness of an anthropomorphic spokes character versus a spokesperson in a collaborative consumption service. Understanding the relationship between spokes characters and spokespersons in advertising as well as the effect this relationship has in a collaborative consumption service setting is of great relevance in marketing. In addition to ad processing outcomes such as attitude towards the ad (A_{ad}) attitude towards the brand (A_b), attitude towards the spokes characters/person (A_{spokes}), Behavioral/purchase intentions (P_i), a recently developed Process Fluency scale, is used. Three pretests were conducted in order to develop a final experimental design. Multiple hypotheses are tested through a 1 (home sharing) x 2 (spokesperson versus anthropomorphic spoke character) factorial between-subjects experimental design. The stimuli used was created by the author promoting the services of a new home sharing brand Ädventyr. To test the hypotheses, independent sample t-tests were used comparing the means of the experimental stimuli treatments. Results were mixed with most hypotheses being unsupported. The results contrast extant research on anthropomorphic spokes characters showing that surprisingly, respondents generally responded more negatively to the anthropomorphic spokes character compared to the spokesperson. Results show, decreasing advertising effectiveness of the ad featuring the spokes character. There are strong implications for future researchers and marketers.

INTRODUCTION

This research investigates the advertising effectiveness of a human-like or anthropomorphic, spokes character versus a spokesperson for a fictitious brand for a home-sharing collaborative consumption service in the sharing-economy. Many articles have researched how anthropomorphism works in various marketing schemes and contexts (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Previous literature has also looked at the effectiveness between different kinds of spokespeople (e.g., Male/Female, Customer/Celebrity, CEO/Founder, Consumer/Spokes-character/celebrity/Employee) in different consumer-product settings (Agnihorti & Bhattacarya, 2018; Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015; Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002; Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). However, what researchers do not discuss is the direct relationship between the advertising effectiveness of spokespeople (the common consumer) and anthropomorphized brand mascots. Only limited work has focused on the effects of animated characters on adult consumers and this represents a new area of the application of our understanding of source effects (effect of a message source on the persuasion of a target audience) in advertising research (Callcott & Lee, 1994). Examination of spokespersons in services advertising has been especially limited and empirical research on service spokes characters has been nonexistent (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

Out of human spokespeople, celebrities often take the lead in popularity and effectiveness due to the credibility and attractiveness they bring to the brand. However, the use of people and in particular celebrities do not come without risk as their personal (mis)behavior may transfer to negative attitudes towards a brand (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). The use of animated and animal characters bypasses this risk. Spokes characters are used successfully to present high involvement offerings to audiences and because people are attracted to cartoon-like figures, there is a visibility effect in advertising when they are used (Callcott & Alvey, 1991). As limited extant research compares the effectiveness of brands using a person (spokesperson) versus an anthropomorphized spokes character, our aim is to close this research gap (Heiser, et al., 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW

Currently the marketplace is inundated with brands and products offering very similar features and benefits to consumers. When many similar brands offer similar benefits to consumers, the chances of brand parity occurring are high (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Therefore, brands often try to differentiate their service or product offerings through the use of spokespeople or brand characters. The source of this distinctiveness motive is the desire to be different through signaling one's unique identity (Vignoles, 2009). This is particularly common for service brands. For example, in the car insurance industry we see the gecko (Geico), the Mayhem man (All State), Flo (Progressive), the Statue of Liberty (presented in the background of Liberty's commercials), and a Billy goat (Farmers). However, consumer packaged goods such as canned goods, cake mixes, flour, canned goods also use brand characters. The most common characteristics measured in the spokesperson literature are expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness, which defines source credibility (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011; Ohanian, 1990). The reason why services benefit from featuring tangible cues such as a brand character in advertising efforts is that for many consumers, services are often more difficult to understand and evaluate (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

ANTHROPOMORPHIC SPOKES-CHARACTERS AND SPOKESPERSONS IN ADVERTISING

Marketers, scholars and consumers have been fascinated by anthropomorphism for some time. Anthropomorphism can be described as the attribution of humanlike physical or mental characteristics, emotions and intentions in the representation of inanimate objects, such as gods and animals (Karanika & Hogg, 2020; Lloyd & Woodside, 2013). Many terms have been coined pertaining to aspects of anthropomorphism such as: "animism", "reification", "personification", and "anthropocentrism" (Brown, 2010). Furthermore, diverse explanations of the anthropomorphic phenomenon have been posited such as developmental traits (consumers associate animal mascots with childhood), wishful fulfillment (assuming human and non-human worlds are congruent), and evolutionary psychology (recognizing predators means survival)

(Brown, 2010). Motivation theory suggests that anthropomorphism is often driven by the desire to maintain a sense of familiarity, predictability, and control as well as to reduce a sense of uncertainty; or by the need for belongingness; and that people who feel lonely may anthropomorphize nonhuman agents such as animals and religious entities (Karanika & Hogg, 2020). There are different varieties of anthropomorphism in marketing contexts. For example, brand anthropomorphism refers to brands referring to themselves as human-like entities and is a direct prerequisite for consumer brand relationships to form (Kim & Kramer, 2015; Puzakova & Pankaj, 2018). Some studies also discuss the anthropomorphisation of products and how anthropomorphisation affects the identity of consumers (Lanier, et al., 2013; Karanika & Hogg, 2020). For example, marketing managers can assist consumers to navigate such feelings of identity by facilitating consumers' magical thinking[1] and metaphoric coping[2] through assisting consumers' anthropomorphism through product designs, product descriptions (using life like descriptors; brand anthropomorphism), and advertising copy (Karanika & Hogg, 2020).

For this study, the authors focus on anthropomorphism in the spokes character or endorser of the brand. There are three broad typologies that exist in anthropomorphic/product personification: brand characters in animation such as Mickey Mouse, brand characters with identity such as Michelin Man, and brand characters in pure design such as Hello Kitty (Hosany, et al., 2013). Brand characters with identity carry a distinct brand identity and are generally referred to as 'spokes characters' which are defined as non-human characters that promote a product, brand, service, or idea (Hosany, et al., 2013). Brand characters in pure design often have simple background stories, relying on their design and style to appeal to consumers (Hosany, et al., 2013). For this study, a brand character (spokes character) with identity is used.

Companies and brands utilize anthropomorphism not just in character attributes but also in a descriptive nature of inanimate objects (Brown, 2010). Research has shown that using anthropomorphism in an advertisement may result in more positive emotions, more positive attributions of brand personality, and an increase in brand liking (Delbaere, et al., 2011). Other literature streams take a different approach to anthropomorphism in that it is believed anthropomorphism does not only reveal how we relate to the world, but also how the world

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[1] Consumers use magical thinking (blurring fantasy and perceived reality) during consumption experiences to gain emotional benefits like hope, motivation, excuses for self-indulgences, good-feelings and self-augmentation (Karanika & Hogg, 2020).
[2] Consumers use metaphors to express self/identity and describe their relationships (Karanika & Hogg, 2020).

relates to us (Lanier, et al., 2013). For example, in popular culture, anthropomorphism inexorably advances with movies like Toy Story (Walt Disney), Madagascar (DreamWorks Pictures) and Ratatouille (Pixar), computer games like Animal Crossing, iPhone applications like Baloonimals and Angry Birds, television series like Peppa Pig (featuring talking pigs) and T.O.T.S. (featuring talking birds) and newly-emergent literary genres like animal noir[3] (Brown, 2010). In one prior research study using a symbolic communications model, the use of animals (among which the horse was proven a dominant figure) are part of a culturally constituted world in which animals have symbolic meaning that is linked to products and then communicated to the consumer (Spears, et al., 1996; Lloyd and Woodside, 2013).

Using animated spokes-characters pose little to no risk as they can be easily manipulated, molded and controlled by the manufacturer, who can also design the spokes-character to match the business' organizational culture and mission (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002; Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). They can create a desirable image for the product by linking the personality and cultural meaning of the character to the product in the minds of the consumers (Callcott & Phillips, 1996). In fact, animated spokes-characters encourage and promote consumers' liking of the brand and its products. Brand liking is affected by spokes-character likability. Likability, they say, is important because it translates into advertising effectiveness (Callcott & Phillips, 1996).

Prior research on animated spokes characters show that brand impression and advertising communication effects increase when using these characters (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Specifically, characteristics shown to make anthropomorphic or human-like spokes-characters popular are relevance to product, expertise, and nostalgia. For example, U.S. brand icons, Jolly Green Giant and the Pillsbury Doughboy, use nostalgia to arouse positive emotions and recall from consumers (Hosany, et al., 2013; Callcott & Alvey, 1991; Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Furthermore, spokes characters can create an identity for the brand or advertiser and can serve as positive affect cues because people enjoy watching cartoons and associate positive feelings with them, which then leads to positive feelings for the product as well as greater recall of the product (Callcott & Alvey, 1991). Spokes characters created specifically for a product or brand produce higher percentages of correct product recall than celebrity endorsers, such as the Peanuts

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[3] Animal noir is a cross between beast fable (*Jungle Book, Black Beauty*) and hard-boiled detective fiction (*Maltese Falcon, Black Dahlia*), where animal protagonists hop, slither, and bound down the mean streets, stalking low-down dirty rats.

characters and Bugs Bunny, who might represent several products (Peirce, 2001). Furthermore, celebrity spokes characters are well known by society which makes them easily recognizable to consumers but not necessarily supporting or representing the values of the brand and its strategy itself (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

Companies also utilize customized spokes characters based on characteristics such as source credibility and attractiveness, and then further match the characters' characteristics to business' organizational culture and mission (Hosany, et al., 2013; Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Therefore, animated spokes characters can be considered highly moldable, adaptable, and easily controllable, and can become an identifying symbol of the company (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Due to the adaptability of non-celebrity spokes-characters (Keebler Elves) are used more often than celebrity brand characters (Fred Flintstone) in advertising settings (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002; Callcott & Lee, 1994).

Advertisements come with a large assortment of possible endorser types, for both animated spokes characters and spokespersons, from celebrities to experts to chief executive officers. Celebrity spokespersons or endorsers are commonly used in advertising due to their high attractiveness levels (Till & Busler, 2000). Prior studies also focus on the fit of the endorser to the brand and product. The dimension of perceived endorser expertise may be more appropriate to fit endorsers than attractiveness as attractiveness was shown to negatively affect endorser trust (Till & Busler, 2000).

While many manufacturers utilize celebrities in their advertising, these celebrities can have unpredictable risks. For example, even though a consumer may like a celebrity it does not mean it will increase purchase intention. Furthermore, celebrities may experience negative scandals that may affect brand reputation. The most common types of spokespeople used in advertising are celebrities and typical consumers (Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015). This could possibly be due to the Vampire Effect. The Vampire Effect is a decrease in brand recall for an advertising stimulus or message that features a celebrity endorser as they pull consumer attention (Kuvita & Karlicek, 2014). Furthermore, the use of celebrities to promote various brands and products may cause recommendation fatigue in the short-term (Chen, 2001). Using celebrity endorsers also holds the risk of negative publicity toward the brand by choice of actions (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). For example, Tiger Woods once endorsed (AT&T, Accenture,

American Express, General Mills, and Rolex) until his negative actions were made public and it shed a negative effect on the brands associated (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2018; Till & Shimp, 1998). Even the use of CEOs and Founders could have a negative impact on advertising. The identity-badge theory is a newly developed theory, that because of the greater credibility associated with the job titles of CEOs and founders, they will likely be more effective endorsers than celebrities and other consumers (Agnihorti & Bhattacarya, 2018). However, this theory can be easily debated. For example, when a company gains a negative reputation by mishandling a brand crisis, accident or scandal (Agnihorti & Bhattacarya, 2018).

In effect, animal anthropomorphic brand mascots or spokes-characters are equivalents of celebrity endorsers with a few important benefits. Brand mascots work for free, don't complain, rarely go off the rails and are much less trouble than their human celebrity and even animated counterparts (Pringle, 2004). While human spokes characters have their benefits, these characters are too closely linked to us. Interpersonal slurs involving ethnicity, gender, age, religion, social class, sexual orientation, body-shape or nationality are all but impermissible regarding human spokes characters (Sivulka, 1998). People feel more socially comfortable discussing or watching a "daffy" duck or lazy lion but an animated stupid Pollak or Idle Irishman has too much potential for offensive repercussion among consumers. Despite the moral argument that characters like Joe Camel bring, in general animals remain fair game for brands to utilize as endorsers.

ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS OF SPOKESPERSONS/CHARACTERS

Advertisements can be defined as a type of communicative and persuasive marketing activity, the goal of which is to influence consumers' cognition, attitude, and behavior towards the product being advertised (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Determining what factors make certain advertisements more effective than others is essential to marketers and advertisers as they create new ways to connect to consumers. Advertising effectiveness can be described as a potentially multi-faced quality, generally dependent on the audience's trust in the communicator or spokes-character and related perceptions of the characters expertise on the topic at hand (Hovland, et al., 1953; Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Furthermore, an effective advertising campaign requires the right spokesperson to deliver a persuasive ad message (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Selecting the right spokesperson is a difficult and often complex decision based

on critical considerations, such as source credibility, as well as matching the brand or firm's image with the spokesperson. Therefore, the measure of source credibility on the service brand is vital to understanding the effectiveness of advertising on consumers. The spokespersons physical/intellectual characteristics are likely to also have a bearing on how well the audience perceives the credibility of the advertising claim (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

External attributes can also be used to assess advertising effectiveness in the spokesperson. In this case, stereotyping rather than credibility explains the differences in advertising effectiveness (Kamins, 1990; Lynch & Schuler, 1994). Celebrities are able to increase advertisement effectiveness primarily through attractiveness (Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015; Agnihorti & Bhattacarya, 2018), while founders and CEOs will increase effectiveness through their credibility. Due to perceived expertise compared to celebrities, CEOs are more knowledgeable about consumer's needs (Kaplan & Norton, 2001).

A consumer's attitude towards an advertisement has an influence over downstream effects such as attitude towards the brand and purchase intention. Extant research suggests that a consumer's liking of the advertisement is affected by the characteristics or meanings of spokes-characters (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Therefore, advertising effectiveness can be assessed through attitudes such as likeability of the advertisement and the brand character or person. Positive attitudes toward the advertisement and toward the brand are directly influenced by attitude toward the advertiser and favorable brand personality appeal (Freling, et al., 2011; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). By understanding the brand's personality appeal, managers can better understand the relevance, potency, and endurance of a particular brand personality and how this personality influences behavioral and purchase intentions (Freling, et al., 2011; Grigaliūnaitė & Pileliené, 2015). These positive attitudinal components also directly influence consumers' purchase intentions, which indicates these attitudinal components determine the effectiveness of the ad (Nabsiah & Methaq, 2011; Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015).

SPOKESPERSONS/CHARACTERS IN SERVICE BRANDS

From as early as the 1930s, anthropomorphic characters were contrived by marketers to tap specifically the buying power of children and adults alike (Jacobson, 2008). In one case study on Aleksandr Orlov, the anthropomorphic meerkat from UK insurance company, Compare the

Market, found the meerkat to be so anthropomorphized, he had his own autobiography (Patterson, et al., 2013). As a result of the company's successful anthropomorphic advertising campaign, people think much more favorably of the brand, and consequently, even though the competitors offer comparable services, they have been unable to regain the market share lost to Compare the Market (Patterson, et al., 2013). While popular characters like Tony the Tiger and the Jolly Green Giant hold nostalgia among consumers, they lack background and humanity that creates deeper connections from the brand to the consumer (Patterson, et al., 2013).

Advertisers hope to elevate advertising product image, ad believability, and likelihood of purchase intent with spokespersons (Wolin, 2003). As mentioned previously, brands from highly commoditized sectors such as service, food, and fast-moving consumer goods are more likely to employ spokes-characters in their advertising (Costa, 2010; Patterson, et al., 2013). With the growing number of digital platforms in the Sharing Economy, distinction becomes vital for new brands entering the market. Digital sharing platforms can find this distinctiveness in the use of advertising spokes-characters or spokespersons. For example, Airbnb utilizes adaptable general consumers in their advertising campaigns. In short, the type of spokesperson chosen for a service advertisement (and, more specifically, the spokesperson's related positive endorsement qualities) should be determined as a function of what sort of service is to be advertised (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Specifically, it appears that animated characters appear to be great attention-getting devices in advertisements (Callcott & Lee, 1994) and they can influence affective attitudinal components. Limited research has investigated how anthropomorphic brand characters affect advertising outcome variables and source effects in adult consumers (Callcott & Lee, 1994), specifically in the sharing-economy. Most of the preceding literature regarding anthropomorphized characters has focused on children's advertising (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). We therefore hypothesize the following:

H1: The use of an anthropomorphic brand character compared to a spokesperson (human) will increase advertising effectiveness on a) attitude towards the Ad (A_{ad}), b) attitude towards the brand (A_b) and c) attitude towards the endorser (A_{spokes}) and d) behavioral/purchase intentions (P_i).

One of the benefits of using a spokes-character specifically created for a particular product or service over a celebrity spokes-character is the tangible representation for a particular

service (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). In addition, previous research has examined whether the effectiveness of advertising variables depend on the product or service type such as utilitarian versus hedonic services. Utilitarian products/services tend to be more "thinking" focused, while hedonic services tend to be more "feeling focused" which may carry some social risk as they are more fun, experimental and value expressive (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). The type of spokesperson chosen for a service advertisement - and, more specifically, the spokesperson's related positive endorsement qualities - should be determined as a function of what sort of service is to be advertised. Findings lend additional support to the basic contingency hypothesis that suggest that a spokes-character may be more effective and thus more appropriate for a hedonic service as compared with a utilitarian service (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). In other words, advertisers should select a spokesperson not only to fit the nature of the product (low involvement versus high involvement or hedonic versus utilitarian) but also to fit the type of product (new versus existing) (Agnihorti & Bhattacarya, 2018). Modern advertising and media have embraced the spokes-character as an attractive alternative to consumers for achieving the same endorsement effects that celebrities have (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

MEASURES

For the second pre-test featuring a 2x2 (horse/ male vs. camp-gear /home sharing) experimental design, IBM SPSS Statistics V.20 was used to conduct statistical analysis of the research results. After the survey brief, the respondent was shown the advertisement with four blank text boxes underneath for cognitive response. Cognitive response measured both valence of the response and ad engagement (McQuarrie & Mick, 2008) by asking the respondent to "list all thoughts, ideas, and images or reactions you had while looking at the ad. List each response in a separate box below." The respondents thereafter indicated whether each cognitive response was positive, negative or neutral. In addition, a count of the number of responses indicates engagement or interest in the ad (McQuarrie & Mick, 2008).

Multiple measures were used in the study taken from previous and current literature as well as from the Handbook of Marketing Scales vol. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Reliability scales were computed for each measure. Attitude toward the advertisement was measured with three items (e.g., 1 = "unlikeable, bad, undesirable," 7 = "likeable, good, desirable"; α = .938) (Grigaliūnaitė

& Pilelienè, 2015). General feelings toward the advertisement proved to be negative. Brand attitude (attitude toward the brand) was measured with three items (e.g., 1 = "unlikeable, bad, undesirable," 7 = "likeable, good, desirable"; α = .931) (Puzakova & Pankaj, 2018). Fifty percent of Respondents stated their attitude toward the brand was favorable.

Attitude toward the spokesperson was measured with three items (e.g., 1 = "bad, unfavorable, negative," 7 = "good, favorable, positive"; α = .958) (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Respondents generally had a negative response to the spokesperson. Brand personality was defined as a set of human characteristics that are attributed to a brand name. The scale measures how much a consumer believes a brand's personality is evident and clear. It is measured with five items (e.g., 1 = "unapparent, indistinct, not-obvious, vague, unclear," 7 = "apparent, distinct, obvious, well-defined, clear"; α = .856) (Freling, et al., 2011). Source credibility (reliability) was measured with five items (e.g., 1 = "insincere, not dependable, not trustworthy, not credible, not attractive," 7 = "sincere, dependable, trustworthy, credible, attractive"; α = .947) (Lichtenstein & Bearden, 1989).

Behavioral/purchase intention was measured to determine how likely the respondent was to visit the website/brand, Ädventyr.com to learn more about the services stated in the ad. This scale was measured with four items (e.g., 1 = "not at all, impossible, improbable, unlikely" 7 = "extremely, possible, probable, likely"; α = .960) (Chattoppadhyay & Basu, 1990; Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). Brand familiarity was measured to determine how familiar respondents were with the services advertised (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013). This scale was measured with three items (e.g., 1 = "unfamiliar, unknowledgeable, uninformed," 7 = "familiar, knowledgeable, informed"; α = .913). Generosity was measured with four items on a seven-point Likert scale (e.g., "I enjoy having guests stay at my home."; "I enjoy sharing what I have."; "I don't mind giving rides to those who don't have a car."; "I enjoy donating things to charities."; 1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .645) (Kasser, 2005). Brand anthropomorphism is the attribution of human-like qualities such as self-awareness and desires to a brand (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). This scale is measured using three, seven-point Likert-type items: ("It seems that Ädventyr has its own beliefs and desires"; "It seems that Ädventyr has consciousness"; "It seems that Ädventyr has a mind of its own"; 1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .773).

Two involvement measures were also included to test the involvement of the consumer with the advertisement (e.g., "The message in the ad was important to me"; 1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"; "The ad didn't have anything to do with me or my needs"; 1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree") (Celsi & Olson, 1988). The second pretest survey consisted of two validity/manipulation checks to test the internal validity of the experimental conditions. All respondents who did not answer correctly to the validity check were deleted.

In the third pretest, the same scales were measured, but brand anthropomorphism was not included as no statistical significance was found in the second pretest. The same manipulation checks were included as well. A statistical analysis was again run using IBM SPSS Statistics V.20. Reliability scales were computed for each measure. Most measures proved to be reliable with Cronbach alphas between .864 and .950. Purchase/Behavioral Intention was slightly high (α = .958) but still statistically significant enough to report. Generosity (α = .679) showed a low reliability and each individual measure item was tested. The two involvement measures were also tested independently.

Two new scales were added: Headline/Image Combination and Process Fluency. Headline/image combination measured the respondent's likeability of the ad execution (Miniard, et al., 1990). The question read "Please rate the headline/image combination…" underneath a replica of the ad. The measure had three bipolar items (e.g., 1 = "bad, dislikeable, unfavorable," 7 = "good, likeable, favorable"; α = .927). The next measure, Process Fluency, focuses on the processing fluency in consumers, developed by Professors: Alena Kostyk (University of Glasgow, UK), James M. Leonhardt (University of Nevada, Reno, USA), and Mihai Niculescu (New Mexico State University, USA). The scale was tested in marketing contexts and proved reliable and valid. The use of this scale allowed for the consistent measure of the psychological state that is known to have ubiquitous effects on downstream consumer outcomes including trust, attitude, and choice (Kostyk, Leonhardt, & Niculescu, 2019). This four-item scale was administered using a seven-point Likert scale, on whether a given marketing communication (e.g., ad copy) is (a) difficult to process, (b) difficult to read, (c) takes a long time to process, and (d) difficult to understand (α = .864).

In the final survey, the same scales were measured as the third pretest and demographic variables and manipulation checks included. A statistical analysis was again run using IBM SPSS Statistics V.20 on the reliability of all measures which were found to be mainly reliable.

Most measures proved to be reliable with Cronbach alphas between .856 and .942, thus indicating high reliability. Attitude Toward the Brand, which consisted of a three-question measure, resulted in a α = .955. Despite the slightly high reliability, it was still statistically significant enough to report. The measures Attitude Toward the Spokesperson, Headline/Image Combination, and Purchase Intention, resulted in a Cronbach alpha of .970, .957, and .965, respectively. These were again, slightly high but still statistically significant enough to report. The last independent variable outside of the range was Generosity which produced a Cronbach alpha of .546. Therefore, this measure was analyzed by item along with the two involvement measures.

METHOD

A fictitious brand, Ädventyr, was created for the new home-sharing and ride-sharing services advertised in the experiments to directly compete with current home-sharing sites such as Airbnb VRBO. Ädventyr is a mix between the English word adventure and Swedish version of the same word, Äventyr. The brand name was chosen to elicit feelings of excitement and curiosity about the new brand. Brand names can be considered a reflection of the names used in each nation state and some brands change or create their brand names based on these reflections. For example, Haagen Dazs, is a Danish sounding ice cream company that is actually an extension of Pillsbury and manufactured in Minneapolis (Ranchhod, et al., 2011). Evoking a different country image is done with the hopes of creating and increasing brand appeal. The deterritorialization of these brands enhances their value, exploiting the customers' stereotypes about the suggested country of origin (Ranchhod, et al., 2011).

ANIMALS IN MARKETING CONTEXTS - STIMULI DEVELOPMENT

The anthropomorphic animal-human hybridity, where qualities come together to form part of the brand meaning, is a particularly useful means of stimulating consumer enchantment (Lloyd & Woodside, 2013; Patterson, et al., 2013). This creates a connection between characteristics and traits of animals to humans. For example, the luxury car brand Ferrari, uses the horse as its animal mascot. The horse is considered a "status symbol" and tied to the notion of nobility (Feinson, 1998). The use of a powerful symbol is a means for involvement between the brand and the consumer, and the animal symbol becomes the mode of transport that enables

consumers to experience positive engagement (McCracken, 2008). The integration of animal symbols in brand communications and contexts, activates and creates cohesion of the brands identity to the animal's attributes which are then recalled each time the symbol is seen by consumers (Lloyd & Woodside, 2013).

Choosing the kind or type of animal to endorse a brand is just as important as the characteristics portrayed by said animal. Brand animal popularity is directly related to the species' physiological and psychological distance from humankind (Brown, 2010). The closer to human-kind an animal is, the more likely it will be picked as a brand mascot or spokes-character as well as have an increased level of likeability among consumers as a brand mascot. Think of the Danimals monkey or Frosted Flakes, Tony the Tiger, each spokes-character comes in a fuzzy, lovable advertising package while standing on two-legs and having qualities closer to those of humans (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002; Brown, 2010). While human spokes-characters still take the lead in popularity, they are followed closely by domesticated animals and wild animals (Brown, 2010).

Geographical locations and cultures must also be taken into consideration when choosing an animal as an endorser/spokes-character. For example, lions and bulldogs are prominent in Britain, eagles and horses are popular in America, in France roosters are popular, Australians cherish their kangaroos, and elephants are common for Indian brands (Brown, 2010). Recent increased animal activism and concern for endangered species – along with advances in attempts to assess mammal's mental states – have given rise to a new appreciation for animal intelligence, emotions, consciousness, and welfare (MacFarland, 2008). For example, parent company of legacy snacks maker Nabisco, has recently removed from its Barnum's Animals–branded crackers the caged-animal imagery evoking a circus transport.

For the final study, several pretests were conducted. The first pretest was conducted to develop the type of animal for the spokes character. After a brainstorming session of possible animals to consider, the following three stood out as a good fit for the U.S. market in particular; horse, fox, eagle. These animals were chosen due to not being common in current advertising. A horse, eagle, and fox are a rare sight as brand mascots. Furthermore, after looking at currently used brand mascots by popular brand, and reading prior literature on animal symbols and mascots, the conclusion was reached that these animals had positive attributes across multiple

cultures and would provide an interesting platform for comparison (Feinson, 1998; Lloyd & Woodside, 2013; Brown, 2010).

As the horse is a domesticated animal, support from Brown indicates that this animal would be the most popular among the chosen mascots. Specifically, the horse is seen as a dominant animal with themes of power, strength and energy, strength and war, and as a companion and helper of humans in work, leisure, and prosperity (Spears & Germain, 2007). Other characteristics of the horse include strong physique, endurance, confidence, charm, freedom, stubborn and patient (Feinson, 1998). The horse also symbolizes a love for the outdoors and activity, characteristics that fit well for the services branded in the second pretest - a collaborative Camp-Gear Sharing Site and a Home-Sharing site.

A second animal, the fox, was described as complimentary of the horse which created a similarity or constant in characteristics for the pre-test (Feinson, 1998). The fox is also described as a lover of travel and exotic places. Feinson's literature characterized the fox as intelligent, attractive, generous, creative, and agile. However, literature has also described the fox as having a reputation for being sly and manipulative (Fenison, 1998).

A third animal, the eagle, was described as proud, physically strong, and universally admired for its independent, soaring spirit (Feinson, 1998). However, birds in general are featured more prominently in physiological terms as they have strong symbolic and religious resonances such as: flight, freedom, foretelling the future (Brown, 2010. Furthermore, some of the eagles' human-like characteristics or qualities are attractive, energetic, self-confident, and impatient. If eagles were humans, they would enjoy activities such as rock-climbing, bungee-jumping and other strenuous outdoor activities (Feinson, 1998) which fit the service product categories used. Literature has also described the eagle as agile, out-going, and associated with freedom (Feinson, 1998). The characteristics of agile and freedom are similar to the fox and the horse. The eagle is also the symbol of the United states which could possibly offer strong symbolic resonance with respondents.
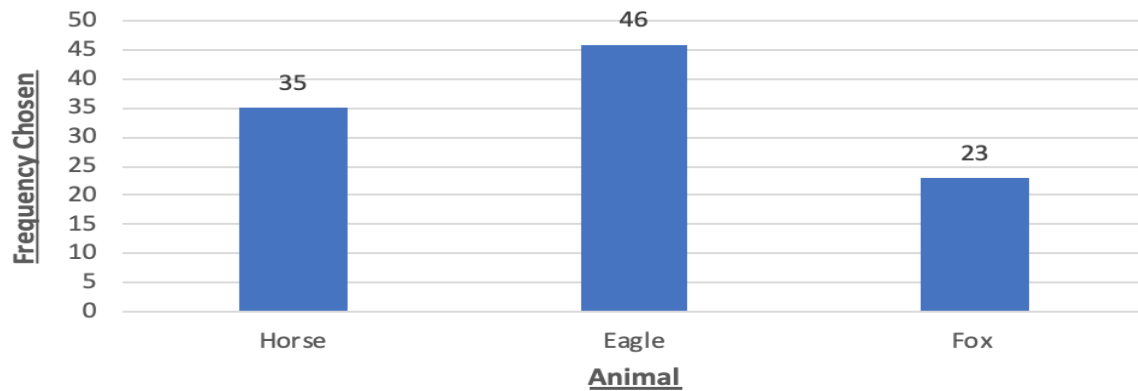
PRETEST 1

Three pre-tests were conducted prior to the main survey and data collection. The first pretest focused on testing the suitability and relevance for the spokes character for the fictitious brand, Ädventyr. The services tested were a ridesharing and camp-gear sharing service, but these were not the focus of the survey. Current spokes characters used in brands were researched and compiled as it was important for the animals tested to not be saturated in current markets. An eagle, a fox, and a horse were chosen as the spokes-characters due to the explanations in the literature review above (Brown, 2010; Feinson, 1998) [Appendix B]. The survey was administered to a convenience sample consisting of college students via the software Qualtrics and consisted of nine questions. The questions asked which brand mascot the respondent preferred (numbered 1 to 3), and the suitability/relevance of the character for a new sharing-service brand. The sample size was N=105.

RESULTS PRETEST 1

The table below showcases the results from the question asking respondents to rate their preference of the three hand-drawn spokes characters. The eagle was shown to be the most preferred with 41 respondents putting it as their most preferred, followed by the horse with 41 respondents putting it as their second most preferred and lastly, the fox was the least generally preferred with 46. Furthermore, the next table showcases the spokes character recommended for the potential services by respondents. The eagle was again to be found as the most recommended with 46 respondents, followed again by the horse with 35 and lastly the fox.

Please rank these pictures by moving them to your preferred position (1 being the most preferred).
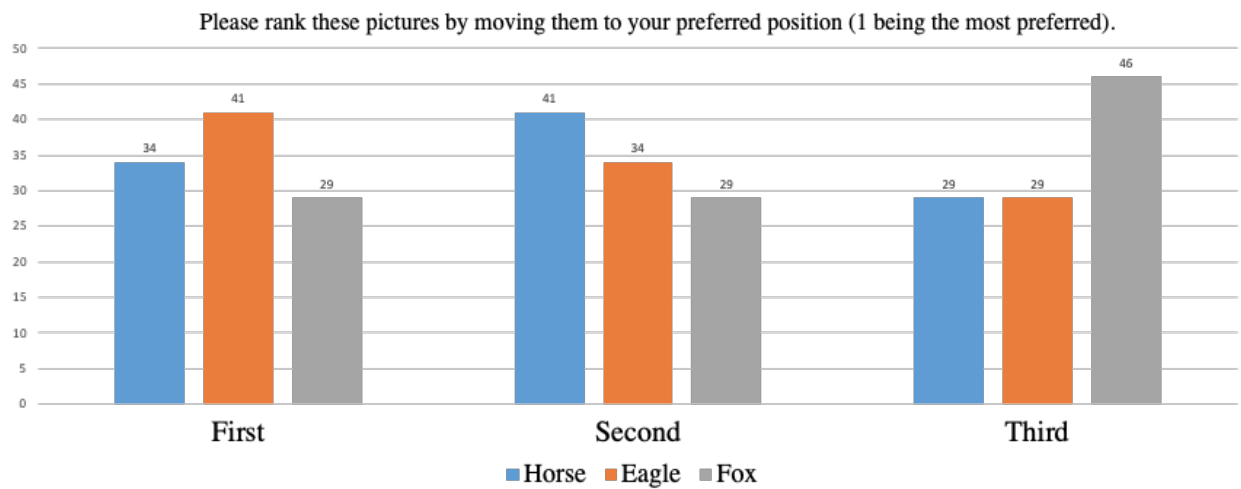
Which of these three do you recommend as a mascot for an outdoor gear sharing or outdoor ride sharing company?

Using the common attributes collected from prior literature listed above, a list of twelve characteristics were created and held constant among all three animals in the pretest. The following qualities were listed: independence, generous, solitary, freedom, energetic, loyal, intelligent, agile, stubborn, modest, impatient, and determination. The pretest survey presented the respondent with this list of characteristics and the survey prompt asked respondents to identify all three animals with the chosen characteristics. The table below features the results. As one can see, the top three qualities for the eagle were freedom, independence, and determination which is cohesive with prior literature. The top three qualities for the horse were intelligent, loyal and energetic which is cohesive with prior literature.

Brand Mascot Characteristics

Figure shows a bar chart titled "Brand Mascot Characteristics" with a legend for Horse (blue), Fox (orange), and Eagle (gray). The y-axis is labeled "Frequency" (0 to 100) and the x-axis is labeled "Characteristic" with categories: Generous, Solitary, Freedom, Energetic, Loyal, Intelligent, Agile, Stubborn, Modest, Independence, Impatient, Determination.
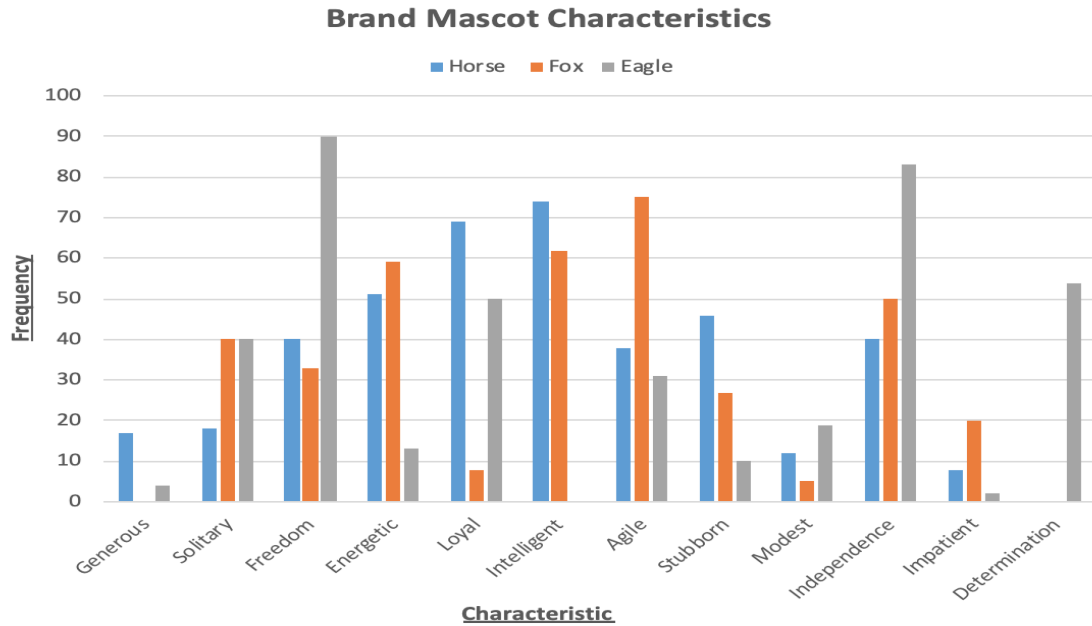
While the eagle was the most preferred and recommended by respondents, a horse was used in the next pretests and final survey. This was due to findings from prior literature that a domesticated spokes character who is perceived as more similar to humans will more likely to be picked as a spokes character (Brown, 2010). In addition, respondents were also asked to provide their cognitive responses after being exposed to the ad. Cognitive responses are the thoughts or opinions of respondents after being exposed to an advertisement stimulus. We found that the horse elicited more overall cognitive responses as well as more positive cognitive responses compared to the other two characters. As the sample was a convenience sample of United States college students, it was possible there were already preconceived ideas about the reputation of the eagle before being tested. Therefore, the horse was used for the next pretests and final surveys.

COLLABORATIVE SERVICE - STIMULI DEVELOPMENT

Sharing and collaborative consumption or the service economy is a relatively new sector of the market. In this research, the advertising effectiveness of a collaborative service, both hedonic and utilitarian is studied. Sharing and collaborative consumption is based on an economic transaction between individuals enabled by digital platforms that does not involve the transfer of ownership but requires a physical object that one of the individual possesses, to be

shared or collaboratively consumed as a requirement for the transaction (Chasin, et al., 2017). Outside of sharing private cars or accommodations, the variety of resources being shared is ever-growing as nowadays popular and trending offerings range from 3D printers and gardens (Sharing Backyards) to storage space (Storemates) and parking spaces (JustPark) (Chasin, et al., 2017). Collaborative consumption services aid in the expansion of community building and generates trust between providers and users (Albinsson, et al., 2019). Empirical research on collaborative consumption is growing and popular sharing economy services like Airbnb and Uber are predominantly the focus but the potential in the market extends far beyond these services (Chasin, et al., 2017). Therefore, a familiar home-sharing service (similar to Airbnb) and an unfamiliar camp-gear sharing service is tested in pretest 2.

PRETEST 2

The second pre-test featuring a 2x2 (horse/ human vs. camp-gear /home sharing service) between subjects experimental design, was to examine if the advertising effectiveness would be higher featuring the home-sharing service (hedonic) than the ad featuring the camp-gear sharing service (utilitarian) [Appendix C]. A hedonic variable is a service that elicits excitement in consumers; while a utilitarian service is a functional service such as a bank or insurance company (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). The independent variables of the study were the character spokes-type and product/service type as well as Attitude toward the Advertisement, Attitude toward the Brand and Purchase intention (Puzakova & Pankaj, 2018; Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelienė, 2015; Agnihorti and Bhattacarya, 2018). The constant variables consisted of the text in the advertisement and the brand, Ädventyr, which is used in the third survey and final survey as well. In prior literature, it was found that a hedonic service such as a restaurant generated more positive cognitive responses than a utilitarian service such as a bank (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). It was also found that an ad featuring a spokes character and a hedonic service had higher levels of source credibility and attitudinal responses (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

H1: Advertising effectiveness will be higher featuring the home-sharing service (hedonic) than the ad featuring the camp-gear sharing service (utilitarian).

The survey consisted of four separate advertisements. The first advertisement featured a male spokesperson for a camp-gear sharing service, coded as 1. The second advertisement featured an anthropomorphic spokes horse for a home-sharing service, coded as 2. The third advertisement featured an anthropomorphic spokes horse for a camp-gear sharing service, coded as 3. Lastly, a fourth advertisement featuring a male spokesperson for a home-sharing service, coded as 4. The group sizes were slightly uneven with 43 respondents for ad 1, 27 for ad 2, 18 for ad 3, and 29 for ad 4.

A frequency analysis was conducted on all demographic variables. A total of 190 responses were collected; 118 of which were complete and usable. Survey respondents consisted of 88 students, 85% of which were between the ages of 18-24. Respondents were from a public university, used in the pre-test due to convenience. They were offered extra-credit as a recompense. Respondents were mixed male and female.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	72	61.5
Female	45	38.5
Total	**117**	**100%**
Age		
1 - under 18	0	0
2 - 18-24	100	85.5
3 - 25-34	12	10.3
4 - 35-44	0	0
5 - 45 - 54	1	.9
6 - 55 - 64	4	3.4
7 - 65 - 74	0	0
8 - 75 -84	0	0
9 - over 85	0	0
TOTAL	**117**	**100%**

| Category	Frequency	Percent
ethnicity		
1- white (non-Hispanic)	100	85.5
2-hispanic	4	3.4
3-african American	5	4.3
4-asian	4	3.4
5-native American	4	3.4
6 -not listed here	0	0
TOTAL	**117**	**100%**
Income		
1 <10,000	78	66.7
2 - 10,000 - 19,999	21	17.9
3 - 20,000 - 29,999	4	3.4
4 -30,000 - 39,999	2	1.7
5 - 40,000 - 49,999	5	4.3
6 - 50,000 - 59,999	2	1.7
7 - 60,000 - 69,999	0	0
8 - 70,000 - 79,999	1	.9
9 - 80,000 - 89,999	2	1.7
10 - 90,000 - 99,999	0	0
11 - 100,000 - 149,999	2	1.7
12 - 150,000<	0	0
TOTAL	**117**	**100%**

RESULTS PRETEST 2

      For pretest 2, the survey included three manipulation checks, the first was to see if the respondent could correctly identify the product category, and the second was to see if the respondent could correctly identify the spokes character or person used in the ad. Most of the respondents were able to correctly identify. A third manipulation check was run to see if the respondent agreed that the home-sharing service was more hedonic and the camp-gear sharing service was more utilitarian. Mixed results were received for this manipulation check which may have influenced the mixed results received overall. Ad 2 (HSH) was seen as the most hedonic and ad 4 (HSHU) was seen as least hedonic. Ad 4 (HSHU) was seen as the most utilitarian, followed by ad 1 (CGHU), followed by ad 3 (CGH), and lastly, ad 2 (HSH). The means for ad 1 (CGHU) and ad 3 (CGH) for hedonic were 3.93 and 3.55, respectively. The means for ad 1(CGHU) and ad 3 (CGH) for utilitarian were 3.90 and 3.45, respectively. This did not match what the authors hypothesized as camp-gear was thought to be the more utilitarian service. There was a possible interactive effect with the horse over the human so do not have clear manipulation.

      A one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze the advertising effectiveness of the different ad stimuli (treatments). No significant results were found between the means of the four ads and the outcome measures. However, an ANOVA is sensitive to group sizes so the uneven group sizes of the treatment groups may have had an impact on the significance of results. Due to the mixed results and ANOVA means showing no significant difference, H1 is not supported. However, the camp-gear sharing service was found to be slightly lower by means (see table below) than the home-sharing site which provided some justification to use it in the third pretest and final survey. Prior literature also justifies the use of home-sharing as it shows a hedonic service is more liked and has higher ad effectiveness than a utilitarian service (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). There were also a significant number of negative cognitive responses regarding the quality of the advertisements which led to using more professional software for the third pretest and final survey.
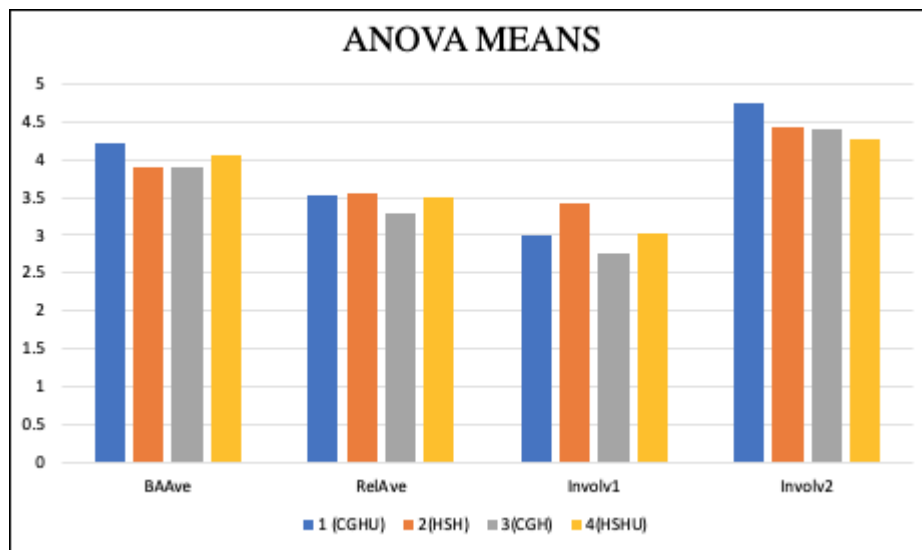
Ad Treatment	Means	Std
1(CGHU)	5.18	1.26
2(HSH)	5.75	1.38
3(CGH)	5.47	1.44
4(HSHU)	5.59	1.29

Variable	F	p
AadAVE	.190	.903
abAVE	.592	.621
SpokesAVE	.788	.503
BPAVE	.950	.419
PiAVE	.124	.946

Duncan Post ad hoc Means
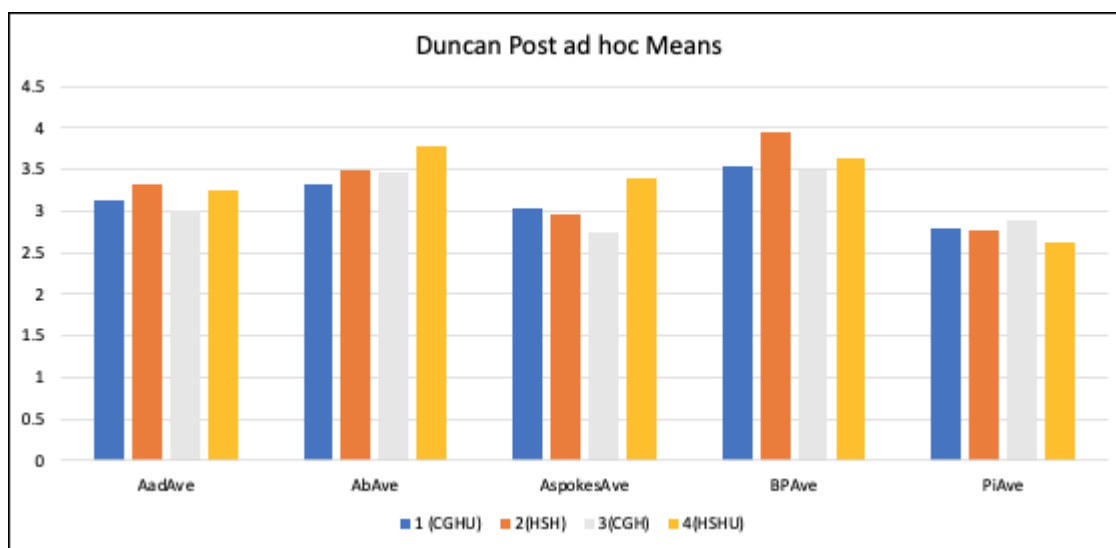
VARIABLE	F	p
BAAve	0.557	0.645
RelAve	0.149	0.93
Involv1	0.815	0.488
Involv2	0.492	0.689

GENDER IN ADVERTISING - CONTROLLING FOR SPOKESPERSON GENDER

Consistent with gender strategy, discerning advertising effectiveness is of paramount importance to advertisers (Wolin, 2003). Prior research consists of mixed results whether gender matters in advertising effectiveness. The consensus is that there is little difference pertaining to ad effectiveness between males and females (Wolin, 2003). However, research demonstrates that marketers can shape gender dimensions of brand personality through their choice of masculine and feminine spokespeople featured in advertisements (Grohmann, 2009). A spokesperson's

gender is an effective promotional cue in influencing respondents' perceptions of the gender image of products (Debevec & Iyer, 1986). Furthermore, ads found in predominantly male-oriented publications and more established magazines tend to stereotype women more often than general publications (Wolin, 2003). After conducting a content analysis of current ads of women spokes characters and spokespersons, the current most frequent and popular female spokesperson was Flo from Progressive. As for female animated spokes characters, current advertising is in short supply. One could argue about the unfairness of presenting the majority of spokes characters as male because it perpetuates the male as the voice of authority and showcases the invisibility of women in the media (Peirce, 2001). Because spokespeople are tested in the advertisement, it was important to ascertain that the gender of the spokesperson did not bias the results. There is surprisingly a dearth of research on the effect of gender on advertising effectiveness in print advertising.

PRETEST 3

The third pre-test was designed with a gender component to decipher if there was any difference between female and male spokespersons on advertising effectiveness. The advertisements were completely redesigned through ADOBE Photoshop to feature a more professional looking spokesperson and background [Appendix D]. The product or service image from prior literature indicates that the most effective way to create or alter the gender image associated with a product is to vary the spokesperson (Iyer and Debevec 1989; Grohmann, 2009). Therefore, a woman dressed as a professional in similar attire to our advertisement featuring the male was designed. Using data from the second pre-test, home-sharing was used as the collaborative service advertised. The survey consisted of ten marketing scales/questions retrieved from the Marketing Scales Handbook and previous literature. The sample was composed of mainly students from a public university due to convenience. There were a total of 121 responses to the survey; 59 of these responses were incomplete or did not pass the manipulation checks and therefore, were unusable. Sixty-two completed surveys were analyzed in SPSS. There were a total of 27 completed surveys for advertisement 1, featuring the man, and a total of 34 completed surveys for advertisement 2, featuring the woman spokesperson. Respondent income was not collected for this pretest.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	23	37.1
Female	39	62.9
Total	**62**	**100%**
Age		
1 - under 18	0	0
2 - 18-24	58	93.5
3 - 25-34	3	4.8
4 - 35-44	1	1.6
5 - 45 - 54	0	0
6 - 55 - 64	0	0
7 - 65 - 74	0	0
8 - 75 -84	0	0
9 - over 85	0	0
TOTAL	**62**	**100%**
ethnicity		
1- white (non-Hispanic)	57	91.9
2-hispanic	2	3.2
3-african American	1	1.6
4-asian	0	0
5-native American	1	1.6
6 -not listed here	1	1.6
TOTAL	**117**	**100%**

For the gender pretest, the advertisement was designed featuring a spokeswoman dressed in professional business attire and positioned similar to the spokesman featured in the opposing advertisement. The decision to test the for a gender component was in part due to how gender and product type affect the likability of spokes characters and perceptions of target audience. For example, a male spokes-character is perceived as more appropriate for male-oriented products; however, a female spokes-character and a male perceived product create the impression that the product is not as male oriented (Peirce, 2011). Therefore, the gender-neutral service used in the ad of a home-sharing site gave ability to aptly choose which gender. It is further supported that the gender of spokes-character will affect perceptions of the target audience so that a product typically targeted to one gender will be significantly less likely to be perceived as targeted to that group with an opposite gender or neutral spokes-character (Peirce, 2001). The likelihood of buying a product is greater and perceptions of the spokes-characters tend to be more positive when the gender of the spokes-character matches the perceived gender of the target audience. Findings support that men do not have to be the voice of authority and that females – both human and animated – can be as persuasive as males depending on the ad situation (Peirce, 2001). Therefore, the null hypothesis is used for pretest 3:

H2(null): There will be no difference ads featuring a male versus a female spokesperson on ad effectiveness measures (A_{ad}, A_b, A_{spokes}, B_p, P_i)

RESULTS PRETEST 3

Previous literature has very mixed results of male versus female in ad effectiveness and most recent results indicate they are equally persuasive in other media (Wolin, 2003; Peirce, 2001). Analysis was again conducted using IBM SPSS.26. An independent sample t-test was run to compare the means of the stimuli (M/F) and ad effectiveness measures. No significance was found between the stimuli and ad effectiveness measures. Therefore, the results were inconclusive meaning respondents did not differ between the male/female spokesperson. H2 is therefore supported, that the male and female spokespersons would not differ in ad effectiveness measures. Due to the male spokesperson being more common in prior literature, it was chosen as the spokesperson for the final survey. Even though results didn't have a lot of conclusion, there was a fairly large difference in means for likeability of the ad execution (headline/image

combination) and if a larger sample size was collected, a significant difference may have been seen.

Variable	Group Means	t	p
AadAVE	1 (4.3086) 2(3.7143)	1.647	.105
abAVE	1 (4.2716) 2(4.0000)	.744	.460
SpokesAVE	1(3.7284) 2(3.2476)	1.319	.192
BPAVE	1(3.5407) 2(3.5657)	-.062	.951
RelAVE	1(3.9407) 2(4.0286)	-.286	.776
PiAVE	1(3.5741) 2(3.1286)	1.127	.264
HeadAVE	1(4.3210) 2(3.6381)	1.920	.060
ProcessAVE	1(3.4444) 2(3.3143)	.332	.741

Legend: 1 - Male; 2 - Female

HYPOTHESES FOR MAIN STUDY

Persuasive Reactions

Persuasive reactions and processing outcomes include variables such as attitude towards the ad, brand attitude, attitude towards the spokesperson/character, brand personality appeal and behavioral/purchase intentions. Liking is the optimal index to measure advertisement effectiveness. Therefore, prior research states that consumers hold more positive opinions on the antecedents of animated spokes-characters, resulting in a higher liking of the characters (Huang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2011). Liking can be measured by attitude toward the ad, brand, spokesperson brand personality, and behavioral intentions. It was found that attitude toward the ad is the most commonly used variable in endorsement studies (Till & Busler, 2000; Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2018). Attitude toward the ad is construed as a situationally bound construct, an attitudinal reaction to the ad generated at the time of exposure (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

Furthermore, consumers' affective reactions to the endorser/advertiser of the ad stimulus of interest are expected to carry some weight in the formation of attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand (Till & Busler, 2000; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Therefore, it was also

found that the formation of attitude toward advertisement, and attitude toward the brand, is directly influenced by attitude toward the spokesperson (Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015). Literature streams also indicate there are benefits to having a favorable brand personality, such as enhanced brand attitudes and purchase intentions as well as higher levels of consumer trust and loyalty (Freling, et al., 2011). Brand personality appeal is the brand's ability to appeal to consumers through the combination of human characteristics associated with it (Freling, et al., 2011). Attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand also directly influence purchase/behavioral intention (Chattoppadhyay & Basu, 1990; Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006; Grigaliūnaitė & Pilelien, 2015). Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H1a: An ad with an anthropomorphic spokes-character will have a higher positive influence on persuasive reactions (likeability of ad/likeability of brand) compared to an ad with a human spokesperson.

H1b: An anthropomorphic spokes character will have higher likeability as an advertiser than a human spokesperson.

H1c: An ad with an anthropomorphic spokes character will have a higher behavioral intention of a prospective customer to purchase a sharing economy service than an ad with a human spokesperson.

H1d: An ad with an anthropomorphic spokes character will have higher perceived brand personality appeal than an ad with a human spokesperson.

Depth of Processing

Process Fluency

The measure of process fluency is a relatively new measure that has not yet been tested in this context. The measure was created by Kostyk, Leonhardt, & Niculescu (2019). The measure focuses on the process fluency after being exposed to an ad stimulus. The scale was tested in marketing contexts and proved reliable and valid. The use of this scale allowed for the consistent measure of the psychological state that is known to have ubiquitous effects on downstream consumer outcomes including trust, attitude, and choice (Kostyk, Leonhardt, & Niculescu, 2019). Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H2a: An ad featuring an anthropomorphic spokes character will be easier to process than an ad with a human spokesperson.

Likeability of Ad Execution

Due to the new brand and ad campaign being introduced (Ädventyr/Home-sharing Service), the respondents were asked to rate the headline/image combination which can strongly influence both attitude toward the ad and brand (Miniard, et al., 1990). In the final survey, the headline read: "Bringing you better prices and offering better value for both home providers and vacationers." The background featured a vacation spot, bathed in the light of a sunset. The quality of the headline claim also strongly determines the ad and brand evaluations of respondents (Miniard, et al., 1990). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2b: The ad featuring an anthropomorphic spokes character will have higher likeability of headline-image combination execution than the ad featuring a human spokesperson.

Ad Involvement

The ability to process is largely a function of the amount and type of knowledge that a person has acquired through experience (Celsi & Olson, 1988). The motivation to process information has been conceptualized as the consumer's involvement with the informational stimuli (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Celsi & Olson, 1988). That is, a consumer's level of involvement with an object, stimuli, situation, or action is determined by the degree to which they perceive that concept to be personally relevant (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Specifically, the personal relevance of a product category is represented by the perceived linkage between an individual's self- knowledge (personal needs/goals/values) and their stimuli knowledge (attributes and benefits). To the extent that stimuli characteristics are associated with personal goals and values, the consumer will experience strong feelings of personal relevance or involvement with the stimuli (Celsi & Olsen, 1988). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2c: Ad involvement will be higher for an ad featuring an anthropomorphic spokes character.

Source Credibility

Source credibility can be defined as the communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message (Ohanian, 1990). Prior research on source credibility provides an understanding of how spokespersons/characters can be more or less effective, depending on their personal characteristics and situational contingencies related to the endorsed product and the targeted audience (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). Prior research also finds that when a message is perceived as acceptable, the source of the message is evaluated as more credible (Lichtenstein & Bearden, 1989). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2d: The ad featuring the anthropomorphic spokes character would be perceived as more credible than an ad featuring a human spokesperson.

Cognitive responses

Cognitive responses are the thoughts and opinions consumers and respondents are asked to share when exposed to an ad stimulus. Furthermore, cognitive responses are greatly important to advertisers and generally reflect the processes and reactions of the respondent which, consequently, affect the acceptance or rejection of the advertising message (Belch & Belch, 1998). While no analysis was run in SPSS, the cognitive responses were tallied up for each ad treatment. It was found that the ads had about the same amount of cognitive responses with the advertisement featuring the human having 164 total comments and the advertisement featuring the horse having 165 total comments. The horse received slightly higher negative feedback with 82 negative comments compared to the man with 78. Both advertisements received 65 positive comments. The main positive comment received on both advertisements was on the choice for the background picture [see appendices]. The main negative comment received for both was regarding the design quality of the advertisements. An additional comment received from the ad featuring the horse was that it seemed childlike and geared toward children, which is discussed in prior literature as a possible downfall of using spokes characters (Brown, 2010).

Generosity

Internet-based platforms that enable private individuals to share physical resources like cars (Uber) and apartments (Airbnb), continue to gain momentum in the global economy (Chasin, et al., 2017). Due to the sharing and collaborative consumption service featured in the ad, a generosity scale was used to test the motivations of consumers/respondents (Belk, 1994; Albinsson, et al., 2019). Generosity can be described as a quality of giving or sharing with others. A hypothesis was not established for this measure as it is a covariate and was not analyzed further but the means were still briefly examined in the outcomes. The measure's means were still examined as generosity was found to be connected with sharing behaviors and is an important predictor of collaborative consumption usage (Albinsson, et al., 2019).

Familiarity

Services in the sharing and collaborative consumption markets are generally considered new, (Chasin, et al., 2017). As the services used in the experiments/surveys were all sharing and collaborative consumption services, a familiarity scale was measured. Familiarity can be defined as the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand or service (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013). A hypothesis was not established for this measure as it is a covariate and was not analyzed further but the means were still briefly examined in the outcomes. It was found that respondents were generally familiar with the sharing and collaborative consumption services.

FINAL SURVEY METHODS

In the final survey, a 1 (home sharing service) x2 (human/ horse spokes character) between subjects' experimental design was run and the original advertisements were updated to create a more professional look, changing both the man and the drawing of the anthropomorphic horse. A logo was also added to increase professionalism and credibility of the brand (Appendix E]. The survey consisted of the same ten marketing scales/measures retrieved from the Marketing Scales Handbook and previous literature. The layout of the ad/ stimuli consisted of the brand name, background and advertisement slogan/description. The independent variable being manipulated in the design was the spokesperson (either a man or anthropomorphic spokes horse). The sample was again composed of a convenience sample made up of mainly students

from a public university. There were a total of 185 responses to the survey; 72 of these responses were incomplete and therefore, unusable. There were a total of 111 completed responses, which was reduced to 98 after taking out the respondents who had previously seen or answered the survey. There were a total of 47 completed surveys for treatment 1, featuring the man and a total of 51 completed surveys for treatment 2, featuring the horse character.

A frequency analysis was run on all demographic variables: gender, age, income, and ethnicity. The demographic profile [table 1] features the analysis results. There were 38 male respondents and 59 female respondents. One person specified a gender other than male or female. The most frequent age of respondents was group 2 (18-24) with a frequency of 91.9%. For income, 65.7% of respondents were in group 1 (<$10,000), which was appropriate as the sample size was mainly students. The most frequent ethnicity of respondents was group 1 (white (non-Hispanic)) with a frequency of 87.9%. There was a text option for this variable and 4 respondents answered "mixed" ethnicity. The detailed results of the demographic profile have been comprised in the table below.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	38	39
Female	59	60
Other	1	1
TOTAL	**98**	**100%**
Age		
1 - <18	0	0
2 - 18-24	91	92.9
3 - 25-34	3	3.1
4 - 35-44	1	1
5 - 45 - 54	1	1
6 - 55 - 64	1	1
7 - 65 - 74	1	1
8 - 75 -84	0	0
9 - 85<	0	0
TOTAL	**98**	**100%**
ethnicity		
1- white (non-Hispanic)	87	89
2-hispanic	4	4
3-african American	2	2
4-asian	1	1
5-native American	0	0
6 -not listed here	4	4
TOTAL	**98**	**100%**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Income		
1 <10,000	65	66.9
2 - 10,000 - 19,999	21	21.1
3 - 20,000 - 29,999	3	3
4 -30,000 - 39,999	2	2
5 - 40,000 - 49,999	1	1
6 - 50,000 - 59,999	2	2
7 - 60,000 - 69,999	0	0
8 - 70,000 - 79,999	1	1
9 - 80,000 - 89,999	0	0
10 - 90,000 - 99,999	0	0
11 - 100,000 - 149,999	1	1
12 - 150,000<	2	2
TOTAL	**98**	**100%**

RESULTS MAIN SURVEY

For the final survey, analysis was again conducted using IBM SPSS.26. An independent sample t-test was run to compare the means of the stimuli (spokesperson/spokes character) and ad effectiveness measures. Significant results were found for the final survey at a 95% confidence level; both attitude toward the advertiser (p = .005) and brand personality appeal (p = 05). Therefore, respondents generally favored the spokesperson as the advertiser to the anthropomorphic spokes character. Respondents also perceived the ad featuring the spokesperson as having higher brand personality appeal. The rest of the compared means of the stimuli to the measures proved to be insignificant with significance levels ranging from .115 to .908. Independent sample t-tests were also run for the two ad involvement measures and for the

generosity scale for each individual scale item. No significance was found in these as well. For the process fluency scale, while not significant, respondents generally found the anthropomorphic spokes character harder to process than the spokesperson (group 1 means = 3.3245, group 2 means = 3.6961). The significance level of the scale purchase intention (.115), may yield some significance with a larger sample size.
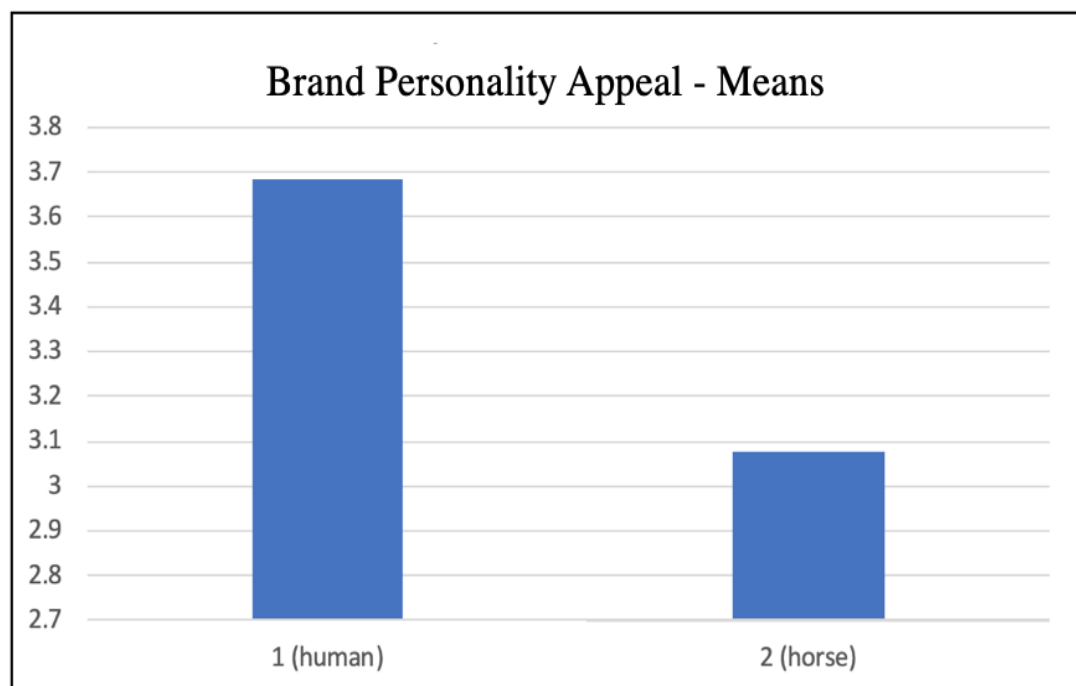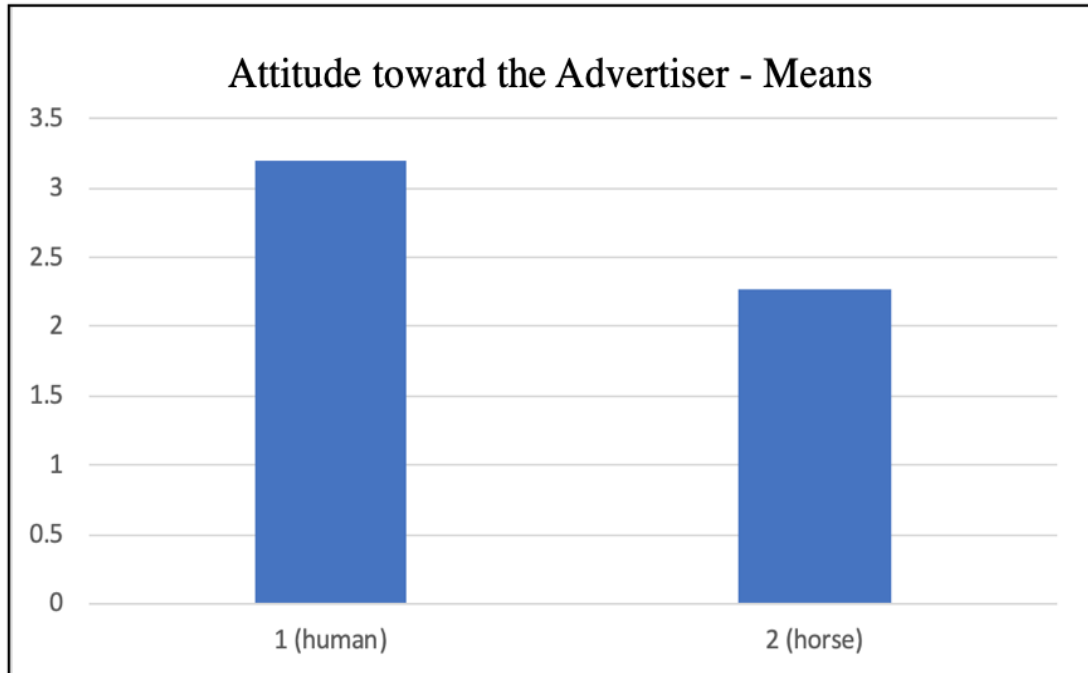
VARIABLE	GROUP MEANS	t	p
AADAVE	1(3.7447) 2(3.4183)	1.154	0.251
ABAVE	1(3.7872) 2(3.6013)	0.72	0.73
SPAVE	1 (3.1915) 2(2.2680)	2.905	0.005
BPAVE	1(3.6851) 2(3.0745)	1.983	0.05
RELAVE	1(3.7447) 2(3.7137)	0.116	0.908
PIAVE	1(3.5160) 2(2.9461)	1.592	0.115
FAMAVE	1(5.8227) 2(5.8824)	-0.217	0.829
Gen1	1(4.43) 2(3.90)	1.516	0.133
Gen2	1(4.34) 2(4.67)	-1.113	0.269
Gen3	1(5.64) 2(5.61)	0.133	0.894
Gen4	1(5.28) 2(5.27)	0.008	0.994
HEADAVE	1(3.4043) 2(3.1961)	0.604	0.547
PROCESSAVE	1(3.3245) 2(3.6961)	-1.153	0.252
Involv1	1(3.98) 2(4.18)	-0.562	0.575
Involv2	1(3.40) 2(3.16)	0.794	0.429

Legend: 1 - Male; 2 - Horse

DISCUSSION

For pretest 1, results indicated that respondents generally preferred the drawing of the eagle followed closely by the horse. Respondents also considered the eagle a better fit for the product categories (ridesharing/camp-gear sharing), again followed closely by the horse. However, due to prior literature (Brown, 2010; Feinson, 1998), the horse was chosen as the spokes character for the next pretests and final survey. The horse was also chosen due to the fact it likely had less reputation as a symbolic animal among the sample of U.S. college students. The second pretest then featured four ads for two different services: a camp-gear sharing service with a male spokesperson, a home-sharing service with a horse spokes character, a camp-gear sharing service with a horse spokes character and a home-sharing service with a male spokesperson. This pretest was to determine the product category for the final survey. The hypothesis was that ad effectiveness would be higher for a hedonic home-sharing service than an ad for a utilitarian camp-gear sharing service. No significant differences among the ads were found for advertising effectiveness measures. The manipulation check of the hedonic versus utilitarian received mixed results which may have influenced overall mixed results. Therefore, the hypothesis of pretest 1 was unsupported. The home-sharing service was slightly higher by means. Therefore, home-sharing was used in the last pretest and final survey.

The third pretest was conducted to control for any influence gender may have regarding the spokesperson. Based on prior literature, it was hypothesized that no differences would be found between a female spokesperson and a male spokesperson. The results were inconclusive in that no significant differences were found between the two ad stimuli. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported. As there is more literature on male spokespersons, the male spokesperson was featured in the final advertisement. The final advertisement hypothesized that an ad featuring a spokes character would have higher ad effectiveness than a spokesperson for a collaborative consumption service. The results indicated significant differences between the stimuli in favor of the spokesperson for ad effectiveness measures: attitude toward the advertiser and brand personality appeal. Therefore, the hypotheses were unsupported as the spokesperson was shown to have higher ad effectiveness than the spoke character.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

While the statistical evidence from the final survey data does not support the hypotheses predicted in this research, it was found that the advertising effectiveness of a spokesperson was shown to be higher than that of a spokes character for a collaborative service in both attitude toward the advertiser and brand personality appeal. This goes against prior literatures and has interesting future implications for future studies and advertising practices. Since not many differences were found, advertising practitioners may be able to warrant the use of brand characters instead of spending millions of dollars on endorsement fees of athletes/celebrities and thereby limiting the risk of negative associations on the brand. A celebrity was not tested which is a limitation of this recommendation. However, for smaller brands who are struggling with small advertising budgets, they could use a spokes character as a lower cost option. This would still provide brand differentiation in the mind of the consumer from competitors as well as likeability with the character. It would also reduce the risk of brand parity such as with services such as insurance and sharing services (Lyft, Uber).

LIMITATIONS

Brand mascots and celebrities are still being used and therefore, ignites the need to try and pan out what this means for advertisers. The results of this research could be valuable information for new brands entering the market and for brands repositioning themselves as a way to reduce the marketing budget but still have an effect on people. There were also quite a few limitations to this study. The small sample size can also be considered a limitation as some results may have been significant with a bigger sample size. So therefore, even though the convenience sample was justified, a panel or general sample could be used in order to allow for more understanding of the advertisement. Furthermore, even though it was stated in the introductions of the surveys that the advertisements were drafts, the student convenience sample was highly critical, and a lot of people may have taken the surveys on cell phones which was a limitation not controlled for. Therefore, although it was highly encouraged for respondents to take the survey on a computer or desktop, people may have not followed this and therefore, viewed the ad on their phones which may have influenced results.

FUTURE IMPLICATION/STUDIES

This study offers a few contributions to the current marketing literature in both spokesperson/character streams and sharing and collaborative consumption streams. The process fluency scale had never before been used in this context. The scale was found to be consistently reliable, despite no significance among stimuli and ad effectiveness measures being found. Furthermore, the research goes against prior literature streams that a spokes character would have higher advertising effectiveness than a spokesperson.

The authors plan to continue this study by further manipulating the advertisements and measures. For example, brand credibility is measured but endorser credibility is not. The quality of the ads were also a common negative aspect when looking at the cognitive responses for the ad. While the cognitive responses mentioned the horse spokes character made the ad child-like, it is possible that updating the character to be more animated and cuter like Hello Kitty may positively influence likeability. Hello Kitty is perceived as a small, innocent, young, round, and animal-like character which has proven to attract people of all ages (Hosany, et al., 2013). Since very little difference was also found between spokes character and spokesperson and significant evidence was found in favor of the spokesperson, other endorsers should be examined in the sharing and collaborative consumption market. Furthermore, the ad effectiveness of brand anthropomorphism versus a spokesperson could be examined. Another possible avenue from this research could be in brand extensions for sharing and collaborative consumption services and how spokespersons/characters play a role. Furthermore, this study was focused on print advertising, further studies could be done on other media platforms such as television and social media. For well-crafted, anthropomorphic characters may be successful through interacting and engaging with social media users (Patterson, et al., 2013).

APPENDICES

Appalachian
STATE UNIVERSITY

Information to Consider about this Research

Advertising Effectiveness of a new brand.
Principal Investigator: Abigail Edwards
Department: Marketing
Contact Information: Edwardsah1@appstate.edu
Faculty Advisor: Pia Albinsson, Albinssonpa@appstate.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study about the advertising effectiveness a new brand.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete surveys through Qualtrics comparing several ads of a new brand. The survey includes questions about the way you react to the different ad components.

If applicable Benefits of the research may include **extra credit from professors.**

If applicable Risks and discomforts may include **none. Surveys will remain anonymous.**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to **answer any survey question** for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Abigail Edwards (Edwardsah1@appstate.edu) and Pia Albinsson (Albinssonpa@appstate.edu)

The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By continuing to the research procedures, I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old, have read the above information, and agree to participate.

If you are conducting an online survey, contact information should be provided again at the end of the survey for those who navigate away from the original page but have questions post-survey.

*******Remove this section if you do not need a signature********

If you need a signature, replace the bold text above with this:

I agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

HORSE

FOX

EAGLE

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APPENDIX D

ADVERTISEMENTS PRETEST 3

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APPENDIX E

ADVERTISEMENTS FOR FINAL SURVEY
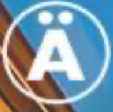
MALE SPOKESPERSON VS. MALE SPOKES-CHARACTER

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