

THE AFFECT TRANSFER EFFECT ON SPOKES-CHARACTERS

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Abstract: For the purpose of understanding how spokes-characters influence the retailers and the brands they are trying to sell this study explores attitude transfer relations among spokes-character attitude, spokes-character retailer attitude, and brand retailer attitude from the affect transfer perspective. In this study, further research is made on the indirect influence of three attitude constructs on spokes-character retailers and brand retailers. Research findings show that spokes-character retailer attitude is the complete intermediate variable of spokes-character attitude and spokes-character retailer intention. On the other hand, brand retailer attitude is the complete intermediate variable of spokes-character attitude and spokes-character retailer intention. The author provides some practical suggestions in view of these.

Keywords: Spokes-Character, Attitude, Interview Intention, Affect Transfer, Spokes-Character Retailer

INTRODUCTION

To create a more vigorous corporate image and strengthen the degree of identification, an increasing number of companies have begun to use innovative and unique names as their brands. In addition, some companies have created distinctive spokes-characters for their products or brands. These characters have gradually evolved from animals and plants (such as the West Highland White Terrier, the leading role in the commercials of Cesar) to today's cartoon characters (e.g., the mascot A-lung created by Taiwan Life Insurance). Companies have integrated key features of products or brands with their spokes-characters. When the attribute of the spokes-character is highly correlated to the brand, it becomes easier for consumers to remember the brand and boost favorable

response (Garretson and Burton, 2005). This measure is used to strengthen the link between the spokes-character and the brand in the consumers' impression and, eventually improve brand popularity.

Some companies have represented spokes-characters in the form of toys in order to "give life" to such characters. Furthermore, they create a virtual world peopled by friends and family whom the viewers can identify with, complete with a theme song and a child's voice for the character. Other companies have even shaped a special personality, along with a distinctive set of hobbies for the character. This personification technique not only helps the object jump from its original role as a spokes-character into being a unique commodity, it also triggers further discussions and attracts people toward purchasing and collecting such products. For example, the brand Sushi Express has created a series of dolls with various personalities, genders, interests, and occupations including Toro and Taro, among many others.

Aside from commercialization, the personified cartoon figures have also been extensively used by merchants in propaganda and promotional activities. If the effect is remarkable, the company may set up an exclusive showcase in the form of exhibits or sales for such figures (e.g., Ronald McDonald and Tatung Baby), and then open exclusive theme stores, thereby initiating another round of discussions regarding the spokes-characters. Take M&M's for instance, the names of this brand's spokes-characters (the M&M'S Characters) are assigned through their product colors resulting in names such as Red, Yellow, Orange, Blue, and Green. Each character also possesses a distinct personality and set of hobbies. These characters are then regularly featured as the spokes-characters in various commercials. As a form of additional promotion, M&M's set up exclusive websites for these characters and even introduced dolls as peripheral commodities or gift items. Aside from these, the company has opened theme stores such as the M&M World in Las Vegas. Overall, the company has used these five spokes-characters in actual retailing toward effective advertisement.

Meanwhile, previous study results show that product package printed with the cartoon image of a spokes-character will draw more attention from children thus affecting the purchase behavior (Ülger, 2009). Although spokes-characters greatly influence children, what we should note is that the application of a spokes-character also targets an increasingly diverse number of consumer groups apart from children; Pukii, the spokes-character created by Shanghai Bank, is one typical example. However, there is a lack of empirical research examining the effect and backup mechanism in relation to the other targets. In view of these limitations and developments, this study aims to take teenagers as main research subjects and study the influence of spokes-character on this particular group.

Currently, the purpose for spending a large sum of money to popularize symbolic spokes-characters is not just to gain the public's favor and cognition, but more importantly, to translate the public's positive impression into the actual purchase of the commodity being sold. As expressed by Urde (1994), the popular spokes-character is more likely to exert influence on purchase behavior and brand loyalty in addition to the increase in attraction and brand preference. This is what the empirical study hopes to examine: whether or not consumer preferences toward the spokes-character will have any substantial influence on the brand retailer.

Some companies will set up a special sale counter or exclusive theme stores for the spokes-character, thereby providing a physical retailing venue for these. It may encourage consumers who are fond of the spokes-character to visit or make a purchase, and even arouse further discussion regarding the character/brand. Hence, the initial purpose for which the companies set up exclusive retailers is not only for earning money, but to improve brand popularity. Toward this goal, understanding the reasons behind the consumers' purchasing behaviors is very important. In particular, aside from preference for the spokes-character, consumers who enter the store for a visit or purchase may also be attracted by the features or the unique aspects of the theme store as against the competing brands. In this light, the study attempts to identify the reasons influencing a consumer to visit a particular retailer. Our aim is to provide references for the practice of establishing theme stores.

The cartoon figures created by companies as mascots or spokes-characters always have unique appearances and funny personalities that often make it impossible for consumers to not be attracted to these (Ebenkamp, 1996). Due to these special attributes, positive attitudes toward the characters are usually formed. When companies create a spokes-character or set up an exclusive retailer for it, they want the consumers to form a positive attitude toward the brand. In this study, we aim to understand whether or not the spokes-character attitude, the spokes-character retailer attitude, and the brand retailer attitude held by the consumers can influence each other. In addition, the route of influence is also given emphasis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spokes-Character

In previous studies on spokes-characters, the terms “advertising character,” “trade character,” and “spokes-character” have been frequently used. For this study, the earliest literature on this topic was written by Kirkpatrick (1953). His work dealt with marketing issues which focused on the exploration of the trade character. Kirkpatrick (1953) divided trade character into three formations: inherent individual life (human being, animal, or other forms), given individual personality and vitality, and authorized existent figure. Whether or not we call it as an advertising character, a trade character, or a spokes-character, it is evident that the features of these characters are emphasized. Based on the definition found in Webster’s Dictionary, Phillips (1996) explained that a “character” refers to a person with a living personality. His idea that the essence of a trade character closely adheres to a human being, animal, or any other creature or living individual is consistent with the opinions of other scholars such as Mandell (1980) and Wright, Warner, and Winter (1971) who all defined a “character” as a living individual (Reference, Phillips, 1996).

Moreover, through related literature and sources, this study has found that the definitions of “trade character,” “advertising character,” and “spokes-character” are all extremely similar or are almost the same. Both “trade characters” and “spokes-characters” have been given the same definition by Phillips as virtual, life-giving or living objects that have been created for the promotion of a product, service, or image (Phillips, 1996; Philips and Goyerick, 1999). There are some literary differences, though, as expressed by Callcott and Lee (1995), “...whether from a pragmatic or historical point of view – is consistently vague about what exactly constitutes an advertising spoke-character, simply deciding what to call the advertising character is a devilish undertaking, since “advertising character” seems too broad, and “trade character” conjures up images of a bygone era...many of the more recent characters...never registered as legal trademarks...seems slightly misleading...” (p.145). As a result, Callcott and Lee coined the term “spokes-character” as a substitute for the terms “advertising character” and “trade character” that have been used in the past. The authors have explained that spokes-characters incorporate the features of both the virtual role and the spokesperson. This is similar to the opinion of Stout (1990). In his work, he mentioned that the purpose of spokes-characters is to speak for the product or provide a visual demonstration. Over the years, subsequent scholars, such as Phillips and Goyerick (1999), Garretson and Niedrich (2004) and Phillips and Lee (2005), have already recognized and used this term in their respective works. We also used this term in the study. To avoid confusion, it will be consistently applied in all subsequent chapters.

In recent years, as a result of media growth, it has become easier for companies to communicate with their target consumer groups. However, to the marketing personnel, trade character, trademark, and brand name are on the same level (Mizerski and Ford, 2005). Specifically, a spokes-character is an imaginary character rather than a real human being. It is created by companies to promote a product or brand. Similar with the opinions held by Garretson and Niedrich (2004), these characters are applied in promotional activities for brand cognition. The character is designed to be easily memorized to strengthen the reliability of the manufacturer’s information, and encourage consumers to form a positive preference aside from a positive attitude and product cognition (Mizerski, 1995). On a similar note, Ogilvy (1983) summarized ten better ways to change the consumers’ brand preference. Specifically, the seventh way dealt with a character or figure with a personality: “...trade characters can become the living symbol of the brand and tend to be particularly effective...” (p.108) Meanwhile, Heiser, Sierra, and Torres (2008) have investigated the effect of using a real person’s pictures and image in an advertisement. The research results show that using images in advertisement tends to promote favorable appraisal on ads attitude, brand attitude, and brand purchase intention. Heiser et al. interpreted this through the distinctiveness effect and believed that using pictures is different from previous advertisement strategies that used an actual person; moreover, the former can more easily draw attention and achieve the ads effect. To summarize, both the figure and picture highlight the feature of the spokes-character and not the real person, thereby presenting ads approaches not commonly employed. According to the distinctiveness effect, we can infer that these characters can draw more consumer attention and enhance the popularity of the brand.

As to previous works dealing with spokes-characters, most can be considered as regular research. Callcott and Lee (1994) classified over two thousand ads featuring spokes-characters into four categories, and then examined their effects. In their work, they grouped the ads into the following: a living figure- with real, virtual, personified animal figure characteristics, creature, and product symbol; figure behavior-the spokes-character is used to promote the product or provide a visual model; popularity-celebrity in advertisement, non-celebrity in advertisement; and gender-male, female, bisexual, or unidentified. Peirce (2001) took the Energizer Bunny and Aunt Jemima as subjects to study the influence on the advertising effect of the sexual perception associated with the spokes-character. In another study, Callcott and Lee (1995) adopted other types of classification: character appearance, medium type, origin of ads or non-ads, and positive or negative promotion. Similarly, they sought a spokes-character that had a better effect on each case based on the various categories. Later on, scholars such as Phillips and Goyerick (1999) supplemented these four categories with four classified variables of ads character namely quantity and weight, ads product categories of high or low involvement, the gender of the character and character race relation, in order to improve the integrity. All of the above scholars conducted their research based on data collected from existing ads. These authors aimed to identify the common rules being applied in the use of a successful spokes-character in accordance with the various ways of classification they have presented. Essentially, these studies are expected to provide some references, and present common rules that will guide companies in creating their respective spokes-characters. In other words, the companies, through the knowledge accessed from the abovementioned studies, can easily identify the features that can help produce the most desirable advertising effect, attract the consumers, and establish a symbolic figure

for the company.

Aside from the abovementioned normal classifications, research in other aspects emphasized various factors shaping consumer preferences. Callcott and Phillips (1996) conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen subjects and examined their manifest preferences toward five different spokes-characters. The aim of their study was to identify the reasons behind their preferences and understand the relation between such factors and brand construction. This method is different from all past studies because it deals with the consumers' psychological perception process, which can be taken as the decisive foundation for the company's promotion activities. Particularly, Callcott and Phillips have identified four factors that can sufficiently determine the preference for the spokes-character. The four factors can be divided into two categories: character factor (including personality, physical character, and humor), and the other is consumer experience. The first category focuses mainly on the features of the spokes-character, which can be controlled and changed by the company according to its objectives. It is the category that the company can manipulate. The second type, consumer experience, is different since the companies cannot control and direct any previous individual experience or cultural context.

Each person is distinct because of his or her personality. In the case of a spokes-character, its personality gives it a kind of obvious and identifiable feature to which the consumer can relate. Such a phenomenon encourages the consumer to directly associate the spokes-character with the brand feature. Second, appearance features refer to the appearance of the spokes-character. The body shape, the outfit, and props can all be used to feature the unique symbols of the brand and to effectively set up the identification of the product or brand. Meanwhile, humor refers to silly behaviors, lovely voices, and unusual faces. The humor technique enables the consumers to remember the character for a long time. These three factors are used to examine the features of the character. If the companies are able to decide and control the features of the character correctly, it can deepen the consumers' memory effectively, reinforce the position of the spokes-character in their minds, and further uplift the identity of the product or the brand intangibly.

As to the last item, consumer experience, Callcott and Phillips (1996) stated that this factor cannot be controlled by companies. Consumer experience, as a broad concept, refers to various experiences within a specific cultural context. Cultural experience originates from animal symbolism and the key point is the relation between the character and its cultural meaning. Dogs can sometimes be associated with loyalty and friendliness; hence when the company uses a dog as its spokes-character, the consumer will view this character in reference to his or her experience and then shape a positive affection. However, if this consumer was once hurt by a dog, he/she will most likely form a negative attitude toward the character. In most cases, familiarity is a kind of a favorable factor, because the consumer will always choose the more familiar brand. In some other cases though, if the consumer is highly familiar with the brand, he/she is more likely to become tired of it, and turn to a new brand. Therefore, the companies should prevent adverse effects caused by excessive familiarity when manipulating the consumers' brand familiarity.

Meanwhile, Garretson and Niedrich (2004) integrated past studies on the preference factors for the spokes-character and found three major factors influencing the consumers' attention to the spokes-character: relevance to product, expertise, and nostalgia. "Relevance to product" refers to the link between the features of the product with that of the spokes-character that the consumer recognizes. For example, the Pon De Lion character created by Mister Donut has a head shaped like the donut chain's major product. "Expertise" refers to the ability of the spokes-character to make a true declaration of the product; in effect, this refers to the product knowledge level of the character. As an example, Windex uses Mr. Muscle to speak for the strong cleaning features of the product and to emphasize the product's efficiency. Finally, "nostalgia" refers to that the ability of the spokes-character to trigger the consumers' memory. Many merchants will reuse past slogans and figures and encourage consumers to recall that this brand was once part of their childhood years (Thompson, 1999; Johnson, 2002). Based on the study of Garretson and Niedrich (2004), if the spokes-character has the above features, consumers will love it more. Although the subsequent influence of such a positive attitude on the spokes-character has not been examined, they believed that this factor will influence the consumers' trust of such figure, or even further influence the brand attitude. Specifically, this study has validated that the spokes-character attitude will be transferred to brand attitude in relation to one of the hypotheses of this study: the affect transfer.

In sum, the studies above demonstrate that the reasons influencing the popularity of the spokes-character and the types of popular spokes-characters lead to the understanding of the factors that shape the spokes-character attitude. These studies have explored the identification of such an attitude through a unidimensionalist viewpoint (e.g., Lutz, 1991). However, this study has not found any literature on the relationship between the spokes-character attitude and behavior. Thus, this issue shall be further examined. As previously mentioned, this study aims to further understand the attitude's influence on the purchase intention as well as the mutual transfer between attitudes

Attitude

Based on the early tripartite views of attitude, it has served as a collective name for “cognition, attitude and intention” (Lutz, 1991). Attitude unidimensionalists have demonstrated that cognition will influence attitude and that, in turn, attitude will influence the purchase intention. As stated by Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986), “...within a general hierarchy-of-effects framework, will cognition preceding affect which in turn precedes conation...” (p. 131). Meanwhile, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), “...a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object...” (p.6). Hence, it is the accumulated affectional appraisal which generates overall impressions on the object.

Improving an individual’s purchase intention on one brand can be initiated by uplifting the brand attitude through marketing means; the brand attitude can be improved by enhancing cognition. Aside from this, it can also adopt the means recommended by Silk and Vavra (1974), wherein an individual would have positive comments on one brand if he or she appreciates the advertisement. Therefore, a company can uplift brand attitude and purchase intention by transferring the advertisement attitude to brand attitude along the route stipulating that “cognition influences attitude.”

The most famous study about the transfer between advertisement attitude and brand attitude includes the four models proposed by Mackenzie et al. (1986). This architecture comprises the respective influences of advertisement cognition on advertisement attitude, brand cognition on brand attitude, and brand attitude on brand purchase intention. The causality between the above constructs will be summarized and discussed below.

Affect transfer hypothesis (ATH)

Affect transfer refers to the advertisement attitude directly influencing brand attitude without going through brand cognition. Specifically, an individual’s preference of a brand advertisement will further influence his attitude on the brand. Mackenzie et al. (1986) further explained that such a transfer only occurs in situations marked by low involvement, i.e., the affect about an advertisement is transferred to the affect of a brand without much thought. This is consistent with the Peripheral Route concept included in the ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model). Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) explained that the attitude toward one object can be changed through peripheral or central routes. When a particular attitude is changed through the peripheral route, the object’s positive or negative appraisal is not given directly by individuals, but is decided on by the positive and negative inclinations from the other clues of the object. In other words, peripheral route is the one where individuals directly choose the clue that is easily contacted (i.e., the advertisement), to make an appraisal when the actual attributes of the brand are not considered. If the consumer likes the advertisement, he or she will probably transfer this attitude to the brand, and vice versa. This, in effect, is the definition of affect transfer.

Dual mediation hypothesis (DMH)

“Dual mediation” indicates the causality of another indirect route stating that advertisement attitudes influences brand attitude. It believes that advertisement attitude will influence brand cognition and indirectly influence the brand attitude as well as the purchase intention alongside the direct influence of brand attitude (ATH). This hypothesis has been developed from the cognition structure/cognition response model first proposed by Lutz and Swasy (1997). Specifically, the consumers’ perception of a message origin will influence the formation of their attitudes. For example, when the consumer receives the advertisement’s stimulus through the messages given by a celebrity or expert in the advertisement, the consumer will cognize the message origin and the celebrity or the expert; this cognition will then influence brand attitude.

Reciprocal mediation hypothesis (RMH)

The reciprocal mediation hypothesis explains the causality between advertisement attitude and brand attitude based on the balance theory of Heider (1946). The advertisement influence comprises three factors: the attitude on a brand (X) when a consumer (P) watches a brand’s advertisement (O). The balance theory intends to explain that people attempt to keep a balance between these three factors. In normal situations, O-X, P-X, and P-O have positive, positive, and negative relationships, respectively. When a consumer appreciates a brand’s advertisement, he or she will also show a preference for the brand and vice versa. A consumer’s preference for an advertisement or brand is regarded as his advertisement attitude and brand attitude. To maintain the result of cognition balance, the relation between advertisement attitude and brand attitude can either be positive or negative.

For example, when a new product hits the market, and consumers are not familiar with it, the product advertisement should increase consumer awareness of the brand. As discussed, the O-X relationship is positive and therefore, the P-O relationship is decided by the P-X relationship. In contrast, a mature brand already has an identity along with a an associated brand attitude that has been established in the minds of consumers. In this case, the P-X relationship is decided by the P-O relationship.

Independent influences hypothesis (IIH)

In their independent influences hypothesis, Mackenzie et al., (1986) adopted Howard's (1977) classification to infer that advertisement attitude and brand attitude will influence purchase intention. Specifically, the influence of brand attitude on purchase intention is mainly decided by the product feature, which is the evaluative element identified by Howard. The advertisement attitude is influenced by the non-product feature, such as price, which Howard labeled as an impersonal attitude. Evaluative elements are those that either change slightly or are stable among the results of evaluation of a brand's product features. In contrast, impersonal attitude represents factors of current situations present at the time a consumer decides to purchase. These factors include promotion, availability of stocks, cheaper factors that are possibly the reasons influencing the purchase intention within a short period.

For example, when choosing a brand, a consumer will initially consider the phone's features, assess its functions, price, appearance, and so on. Afterwards, the consumer will make a decision through a comparison. When the purchase criterion is to choose products with better features, we can consider these as stable evaluative elements. However, there are cases when a consumer has decided and is about to purchase but is suddenly enticed by the "promotional" brands such that he or she will change his or her choice, which has been influenced by an "unstable" situation and belongs to the "impersonal attitude" defined by Howard.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the relationships between spokes-character attitude, spokes-character retailer attitude, brand retailer attitude, spokes-character retailer intention, and brand retailer intention. This study plans to examine the relationship between the five constructs through the questionnaire method and by using the structural equation model. The study architecture is shown below:

Figure 1. Research Framework

The attitude unidimensionalist proposes the influences between "cognition→attitude→ purchase intention." To further examine the relationship between the constructs put forward by Mackenzie et al. (1986), Brown and Stayman (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of 47 sample points in 43 articles. The result indicates that the most important factor influencing purchase intention is still brand attitude. The conclusion proves correct the viewpoints of the attitude unidimensionalist. This study puts forward hypotheses H1 and H2 on such basis.

H1: Spokes-character retailer attitude will influence spokes-character retailer intention.

H2: Brand retailer attitude will influence brand retailer intention.

We know from the "affect transfer" argument that a consumer's preference for an advertisement will further influence his brand attitude under low involvement. In other words, the brand appraisal is transferred based on its attitudes toward the relevant clues, i.e., the peripheral route of Petty et al. (1983). This study will choose spokes-characters and brands familiar to consumers, given that most consumers are unfamiliar with the spokes-character retailers, that is, the involvement of spokes-character retailer is low. Therefore, the attitudes regarding spokes-characters and the brands they are representing will further influence the spokes-character attitude. Hence, this study puts forward the following relevant hypotheses:

H3: The spokes-character attitude will influence the spokes-character retailer attitude.

H4: The brand retailer attitude will influence the spokes-character retailer attitude.

Based on the balance theory, when a consumer (P) has seen the spokes-character (O) of a brand and has subsequently formed the brand (X) attitude, the three shall maintain a balanced relationship. In normal situations, the O-X relationship is positive, hence, it could be that P-X and P-O are either both positive or both negative. An affect transfer relationship will be produced between the spokes-character attitude and brand attitude. During the attitude transfer, the "familiar" transits to the "unfamiliar." A different transfer path will occur when consumers have developed the brand attitude and the spokes-character attitude based on familiarity in different extents. Specifically, some consumers might be quite familiar with the brand, and the brand attitude will be transferred to the spokes-character attitude. If, however, consumers are familiar with the spokes-character attitude, the spokes-character attitude will be transferred to the brand attitude, which adheres to the ideas of Phillips and Lee (2005), that is, the preference of the spokes-character will positively influence the advertisement attitude and brand attitude. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

H5: The spoke-character attitude will influence the brand retailer attitude.

As mentioned above, consumers are generally familiar with brands and spokes-characters. Hence, affect is transferred from "familiar" to "unfamiliar." As to the mutual influences between attitudes, this study puts forward hypotheses H3, H4, and H5.

Among the viewpoints of independent influence, Howard (1997) believed that the direct influence of the brand attitude on the purchase intention depends mainly on product features called evaluative elements. Specifically, the consumer will carefully evaluate the brand attributes before forming the purchase intention. During the process of evaluation, the spokes-character created by the brand provides the effect of identification. If the consumer likes a specific spokes-character, he or she will choose to visit or purchase from this retailer. Hence, this study puts forward hypothesis H6 based on this viewpoint.

H6: The spokes-character attitude will influence the spokes-character retailer intention.

Among the viewpoints of independent influence, another route influencing the purchase intention is the direct influence of the advertisement attitude, which Howard called the impersonal attitude. The consumer is influenced by non-product elements, such as promotion, stock availability, and other temporary or unstable situations. In other words, if a consumer likes a spokes-character, he might visit the retailer to find out if any new products related to the spokes-character have been released. In effect, a company wants a spokes-character to not only boost the consumers' brand attitude, but also influence the purchase intention of the brand, or hope that the character can directly strengthen the consumers' purchase behavior of the brand. Hence, this study puts forward hypothesis H7 to examine the direct influence of the spokes-character attitude on the consumers' purchase intention.

H7: The spokes-character attitude will influence the brand retailer intention.

Data Collection

To delimit the spokes-character familiarity of respondents and narrow down the scope of study, we chose students in one northern university as respondents for the preliminary survey. We successfully obtained data from 47 respondents. The questionnaire included pictures of nine spokes-characters of famous enterprises in Taiwan. The respondents were then asked to identify the name of nine spokes-characters and their respective enterprises. The results are indicated below.

Spokes-character	Right answers	Percentage	Brand (Enterprise)	Right answers	Percentage
FaMiPort	9	19.15%	Family Mart	17	36.17%
Pon De Lion	31	65.96%	Mister Donut	36	76.60%
A-lung	16	34.04%	Taiwan Life Insurance	21	44.68%
Butter Lion	36	76.60%	Simba Lion	29	61.70%
Open Boy	46	97.87%	7-11	45	95.74%
Holiday Lion	2	4.26%	Holiday	32	68.09%
Tatung Baby	43	91.49%	Tatung	42	89.36%
Pukii	9	19.15%	Shanghai Bank	15	31.91%
Ronald MacDonald	45	95.74%	MacDonald	42	89.36%

Table 1. Preliminary Survey Result

From Table 1, the 7-11 convenience store and its spokes-character, Open Boy, seem to be the most familiar to our respondents. Thus, this study and the subsequent studies have chosen Open Boy, 7-11 and the spokes-character retailer, Open Plaza, located at No. 128, Jihe Road, Shilin District, Taipei as the study subjects.

In this study, questionnaires were distributed among respondents from two national colleges in the north. We know that the spokes-character retailer Open Plaza might not be familiar to all the respondents and a direct survey at the spokes-character retailer will possibly cause the problem of self-selection. Moreover, general consumers are quite familiar with the company and the spokes-character, but not with the retailer. Therefore, to ensure that respondents will truly understand the "Open Plaza" being referred to in the questionnaire, the researcher wrote a report on this shop with texts and pictures including its location and date of establishment (July 2006). The respondents were then asked to read the report prior to answering the questionnaire. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed and 146 were found to be valid for subsequent analysis. The questionnaire required all the respondents to write down their preferences for Open Boy, 7-11 Convenience Store, Open Plaza, as well as their intention to visit. These questions used a seven-point Likert scale.

In the questionnaire design, items about the spokes-character attitude were based on the formulations of Andaleeb and Anwar

(1996) and Bruner and Hensel (1994). Six questions referring to “humor,” “interesting appearance,” “amicability,” “appropriateness,” and “pleasing personality” were asked. Meanwhile, the measure of the brand retailer attitude and spokes-character retailer attitude were based on the questions of Spears and Singh (2004) and were revised accordingly. Six questions focused on “attractiveness,” “pleasing appearance,” “goodness,” “accountability,” “satisfaction,” and “positive image.” The item on purchase intention was independently developed by the authors. Questions on the brand retailer intention and the spokes-character retailer intention were also formulated (“When I need to go to a convenience store, I will definitely choose 7-11” and “When I have the chance, I will visit the Open Plaza”).

DATA ANALYSIS

Confirmatory Factors Analysis

The fitness of each construct was confirmed through the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In addition, questions were deleted through the modification factors, based on the results of statistical analysis. Two questions from each construct were deleted and four questions were retained. The fitness indexes of the CFA are listed below.

Model fitness	χ^2	df	P	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	NNFI
	232.36	160	0.000	0.86	0.82	0.99	0.96	0.98

Table 2. CFA Model’s Indices

Table 2 shows that the ratio of Chi-square freedom (χ^2/df) is $232.36/160=1.452$; GFI and AGFA are also quite close to 0.9, while the CFI, NFI, and NNFI are all higher than 0.95, indicating the model’s good fitness (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham, 2005). The composite reliability of the above five constructs including the attitudes and retailer intention, are all higher than 0.8, indicating good reliability and validity of the questions in this study.

Based on the answers from the preliminary survey on the spokes-character attitude, the brand retailer attitude and the spokes-character retailer attitude, the values of all the questions are higher than the median value of 4, indicating that respondents have positive attitudes regarding the three constructs. Second, the values of all questions about the constructs of the brand retailer and the spokes-character retailer intention are higher than 4, indicating that the respondents are highly inclined to visit the retailer.

Construct and Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Reliability
Spokes-character attitude	5.323	1.097	0.898
I think Open Boy is interesting	5.671	1.281	
I think Open Boy is funny	5.315	1.253	
I think Open Boy’s behavior is appropriate	4.772	1.306	
I think Open Boy makes me feel happy	5.521	1.210	
Brand retailer attitude	5.668	1.036	0.945
I think 7-11 is an attractive convenience store	5.699	1.091	
I think 7-11 is a pleasant convenience store	5.630	1.133	
I think 7-11 is a good convenience store	5.685	1.131	
I think 7-11 has positive images	5.658	1.117	
Spokes-character retailer attitude	5.017	1.117	0.946
I think the Open Plaza is attractive	5.027	1.270	
I think the Open Plaza is pleasant	5.007	1.239	
I think the Open Plaza is good	5.082	1.195	

I think the Open Plaza is satisfactory	4.952	1.129	
Brand retailer intention	4.872	1.237	0.900
When I need to go to a convenience store, I will definitely choose 7-11	4.671	1.415	
I will choose 7-11 except that there isn't one in the neighborhood	4.724	1.488	
I prefer 7-11 than other convenience stores	5.240	1.330	
I will go to 7-11 as much as possible if it isn't too far	4.849	1.421	
Spokes-character retailer intention	4.203	1.265	0.942
I will visit the Open Plaza when I am free	4.452	1.375	
I will buy commodities from the Open Plaza when I have the chance	4.233	1.390	
I will buy commodities from the Open Plaza when I am free	4.021	1.382	
I will buy commodities from the Open Plaza when I am	4.104	1.300	

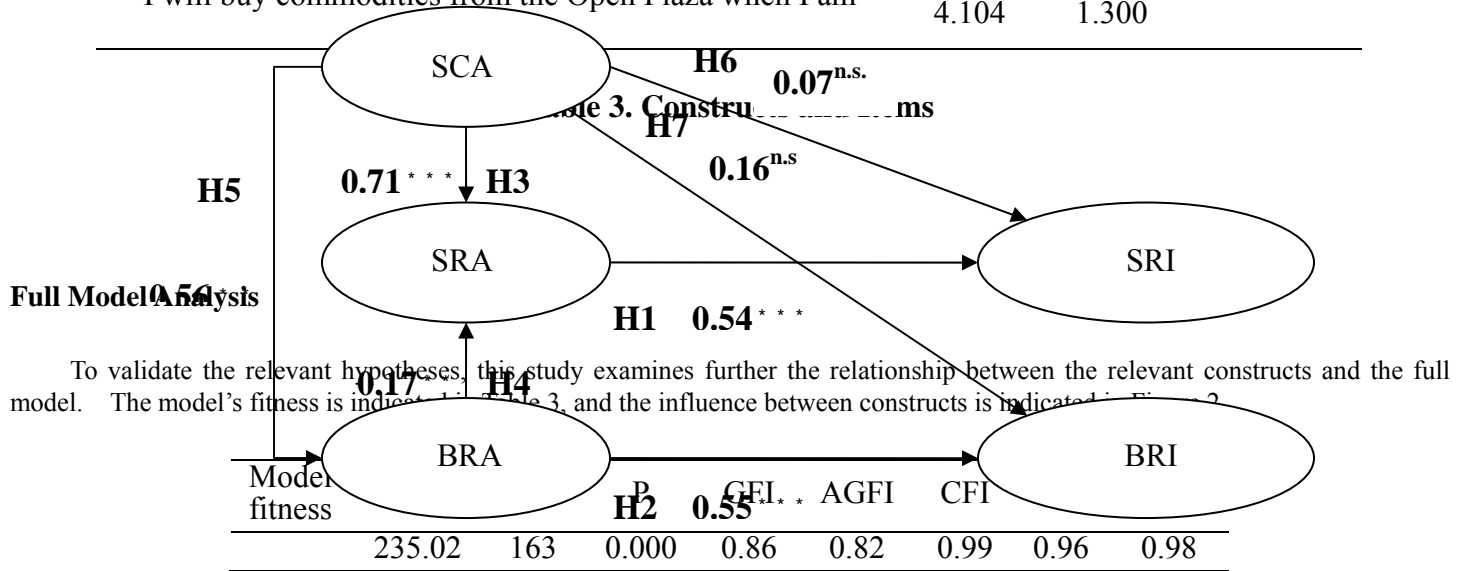


Table 4. Full Model's Indices

From Figure 2, we can see that most of the constructs in the study results are positively significant, except for the pairs of spokes-character attitude and spokes-character retailer intention (H6), and spokes-character attitude and brand retailer intention (H7).

Upon further examination of the relationship between the spokes-character attitude and the spokes-character retailer intention (H6), we find that the route coefficient of SCA → SRA (H3) is 0.71, that of SRA → SRI (H1) is 0.54, and that both reach the significance level. Although the route coefficient SCA → SRI (H7) is below the significance level, the indirect influence of SCA on SRI can be determined from SCA → SRA (H3) and SRA → SRI (H1). Thus, the spokes-character retailer attitude (SRA) is the full mediator between the spokes-character attitude (SCA) and the spokes-character retailer intention (SRI).

Moreover, the relationship between the spokes-character attitude and the brand retailer intention (H7) does not reach the significance level. Upon further examination, we find that the route coefficient of the influence of the spokes-character attitude on the brand retailer attitude (H5) is 0.56, while that of the influence of brand retailer attitude on brand retailer intention (H2) is 0.55. In other words, the spokes-character attitude (SCA) will transfer to the brand retailer attitude (BRA) and then influence the brand retailer intention (BRI). Hence, the BRA is the full mediator between the SCA and the BRI.

On the other hand, we find from the total effect that the standard coefficient of H6 and H7 are 0.45 and 0.4, and that their t-values are 5.82 and 5.12, respectively. In summary, although the affect of the spokes-character will not definitely exert a direct influence on the spokes-character intention, it will further influence the spokes-character retailer intention by influencing the affect of the spokes-character retailer. Similarly, the relationship between the spokes-character attitude and the brand retailer intention can

influence the brand retailer attitude through the affect of the spokes-character, which in turn, will further influence the brand retailer intention.

CONCLUSION

Discussion

Today, many enterprises have created symbolic spokes-characters to boost consumer preferences. However, the number of spokes-characters has increased in recent years. How could an enterprise produce a spokes-character that is highly attractive? How could an enterprise arouse another wave of sales growth? In practice, these are the areas of focus in the creation of a spokes-character. However, many enterprises not only create spokes-characters, but also commercialize these and further establish sales outlet or exclusive retailers for such characters. Their ultimate aim is to boost the company's brand retailer intention through an effective spokes-character. This study has examined thoroughly how a consumer's spokes-character attitude influences the spokes-character retailer and the brand retailer intention.

The study results also indicate that the three constructs of the spokes-character attitude, spokes-character retailer attitude, and brand retailer attitude could be mutually transferred. Specifically, the spokes-character attitude will influence the spokes-character retailer attitude; the brand retailer attitude will influence the spokes-character retailer attitude; and the spokes-character attitude will influence the brand retailer attitude. Given that the spokes-character attitude influences the spokes-character retailer attitude and the brand retailer attitude, then the spokes-character will influence the brand retailer and spokes-character retailer attitudes aside from attracting the fondness of the consumers. Specifically, if an enterprise creates a spokes-character that will become increasingly popular among consumers, it will boost their acceptance of the spokes-character retailer and the brand as well as further increase the retailer intention and sales volume. In contrast, an enterprise shall also consider the possibility that the spokes-character influences its brands or retailers. If a character is loved by the public, it will improve the consumers' impression on this enterprise, or even make consumers love its brand and the spokes-character retailer. Therefore, the enterprise should carefully consider the influences of these spokes-characters upon their respective consumers.

Moreover, the spokes-character retailer attitude will be influenced by the brand retailer attitude and the spokes-character attitude. Specifically, when a consumer develops a positive attitude on the brand retailer, the same inclination of attitudes will be given to the spokes-character retailer. In other words, the consumers will keep the inherent attitudes on the familiar spokes-character retailer, and subsequent spokes-character retailers set up by an enterprise will not be as familiar to consumers. However, as mentioned above, the affect transfer allows for the transition from the "highly familiar" to the "less familiar." Prior to building a spokes-character retailer, an enterprise must measure the popularity and familiarity of the spokes-character and brand retailer among consumers. In other words, the spokes-character must have produced a good effect before an exclusive spokes-character retailer is set up. Therefore, enterprises are advised not to hastily set up spokes-character retailers in to avoid failure.

When an enterprise spends a large sum of money in creating a spokes-character, the enterprise hopes to boost the consumers' intention of visit and increase the turnover. However, the study results indicate that the spokes-character attitude has no direct influence on brand retailer intention. The consumers' fondness for one spokes-character will not directly trigger interests on its brand retailer. The possible reason behind this is the fact that consumers might trace back the brand represented by this spokes-character and further think about the brand retailer intention based on past experiences and fondness for the brand. If an enterprise wants to attract consumers, it therefore has to depend mainly on the consumer's attitude toward the brand retailer. In other words, the enterprise cannot neglect the brand's attractiveness and must further the brand operation aside from highlighting the creation of an effective and interesting spokes-character.

Currently, some enterprises have set up spokes-character retailers, which is a new trend in promoting spokes-characters. How could an enterprise decide the feasibility of spokes-character retailer? It cannot be described in detail. In this study, the antecedents of the spokes-character retailer intention include the spokes-character and spokes-character retailer intention. The relationship between the three is still full mediating as discussed above. In other words, the spokes-character attitude will not bring consumers directly to the spokes-character retailer, although it can further influence the spokes-character retailer intention through the attitude transfer between the spokes-character and the spokes-character retailer. Specifically, when a consumer has a high inclination toward one spokes-character, he or she will still consider the attractiveness of the spokes-character retailer and his preferences. In short, the consumer further assesses the spokes-character retailer intention. Hence, when an enterprise wants to attract consumers to the spokes-character retailers, the design, decoration, and atmosphere of the spokes-character retailer should be carefully planned. Only

a pleasing spokes-character retailer could increase and maintain the consumers' intention to visit.

In the preliminary survey of spokes-character retailers, the study has chosen a spokes-character that is familiar to the group of respondents as well as its retailers and brand retailers. The study introduced the spoke-character retailers through a report to avoid misleading by self-selection. Nevertheless, differences between the report findings and personal experiences have been shown.

Future Suggestion

This study has explored emphatically the relationship between spokes-character, brand retailer, and spokes-character retailer from the perspectives of attitude and behavior. To avoid complicated constructs, cognition was not explored. Most literature in the past focused only on recognition of the spokes-character (e.g., Callcott and Phillips, 1996; Garretson and Niedrich, 2004) and failed to combine attitude and behavior. We recommend that future studies discuss recognition, attitude, and behavior together.

This study takes articles and reports as the bases of the experiment. Future studies may consider the inclusion of sound and visually-animated representations. Spokes-character retailers will be presented more vividly through video or network animation to ensure that each respondent is familiar with it. Could different promotional activities of the spokes-character produce different routes of influence? This issue should also be further studied.

Finally, this study has further examined the affect transfer effect between attitudes and the chosen spokes-characters that the consumers are familiar with. However, the possibility of affect transfer or the direction of influence between the attitudes requires further studies.

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