

# Individual Project Report

## A Consumer Analysis of Pepsi Twist's Implementation of Anthropomorphism in Marketing



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PepsiCo, Inc., the company holding the Pepsi brand, utilizes the multi-brand strategy as many other fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) firms do. It has been in the market since 1965, and its most famous brand is Pepsi, one of the world-class beverage brands (PepsiCo, 2022).

For maintaining consistency, the analysis will be based on one of Pepsi's branches, Pepsi Twist, which was designed by a team led by Pedro Zuccolini (Zuccolini, Pedro, et al., 2021). To summarize, Pepsi Twist's anthropomorphism strategy mainly relies on the creation and utilization of a human mascot. The practices were in various formats, including poster-based advertisements (Exhibit 1), TV commercials (Exhibit 2), outdoor advertisements (Exhibit 3), packaging (Exhibit 4), music videos, etc.

Exhibit 1. The Poster Ad



Exhibit 2. The TV Commercial

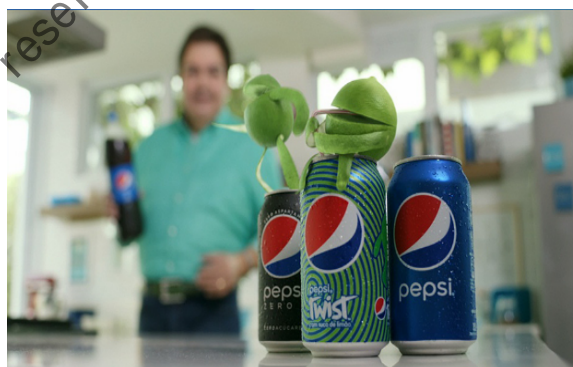


Exhibit 3. The Outdoor Advertisement



Exhibit 4. Packaging of Pepsi Twist



The brand mascots of Pepsi Twist showed human-like emotions through visuals that formed a strong contrast between the dynamic cartoon characters and the static cans (Exhibit 2). Specifically, the lemon-based characters were childish and naughty enough that consumers could easily resonate their childhood memory with the brand. In the advertisements, the children-like characters either stand at the top of the can and pee into the can or sit on the top of the can and lick their own feet (Exhibit 1&2). It is evident that Pepsi tried to create emotionally appealing messages, including a sense of happiness, humor, and relaxation.

In terms of human-like cognition, it is clear that those lemon-like brand mascots knew what they were doing and enjoyed the moments with each other. As shown in Exhibit 5, one of the characters on the right is trying to “backstab” the other character by sawing the floor. The character on the right knew how to use tools and had a basic understanding of gravity, and it wanted to make fun of its peer. All of these prove a strong human-like cognition, including thinking capability, intelligence, etc.

Exhibit 5. The Poster Advertisement of Pepsi Twist



In general, Pepsi demonstrated an effective practice of anthropomorphism. As a consumer of many beverage brands, I found two aspects that I like most about Pepsi's implementation of anthropomorphism in its marketing strategy.

The first aspect is that the characters are designed to be easily recognized as human beings with smiling faces. Research shows that faces would automatically draw consumers' attention, arouse emotion, and impact liking (Landwehr et al., 2011). Moreover, people decode human faces using various principles, and friendliness is primarily decoded from the mouth (Windhager et al., 2010). The characters with big upwards mouths in their faces make people perceive them as friendly. The same principle of how design elements related to facial features could impact product liking is widely applied in other industries. One classical example is the fact that car manufacturers intentionally design front grilles and headlights of cars to signal a human face to appeal to customers (Welsh, 2006).

My second favorite aspect is that scenes in the Pepsi Twist project were telling straightforward stories, which potentially increase customers' liking of the product. Research shows that if consumers find consistency between what human schema and characteristics marketers try to convey and what they perceive, they will like the product more, as they are more likely to interpret the metaphor that the product is the person the marketer has implied (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007).

However, there are flaws in this practice as well. The first thing that concerns me and probably also concerns people who have underage groups around them is that some messages are not appropriate for children and teenagers. Although most scenes in the Pepsi Twist project are friendly to all ages, there are a few cases that involve violent scenes. As shown in Exhibit 6 and 7, characters are having fun torturing and even killing their counterparts. Although adults may find this interesting and hilarious, underage groups might find it scary. In the worse case, due to their lack of the ability to tell right from wrong, they might find it worth trying and even want to imitate such behaviors, which could be tremendous to their mental health and physical security.



Exhibit 6. The Poster Showing One Character is Killing The Other for Fun



Exhibit 7. Violent scenes in Pepsi Twist Ad



The second flaw is that Pepsi Twist's brand mascots were born without any effort of making them memorable. These empty-core brand mascots failed to capture customers' minds and eventually disappeared in most markets accompanying Pepsi Twist.

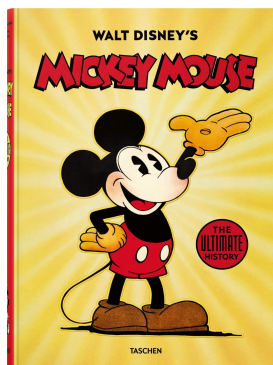
Noticeably, Pepsi Twist, the lemon flavor of regular Pepsi, was first released in 2000 in the United States, and it was discontinued in 2006. Nowadays, Pepsi Twist is only available in Albania, Greece, China, and selected supermarkets in Germany (The Soda Wiki, 2022).

There is no doubt that Pepsi Twist was carried out with deliberate consideration and planning, but the fact that this branch only existed in the U.S for 6 years proves there was something wrong (The Soda Wiki, 2022). I believe that one of the factors contributing to its failure was the poorly designed and empty-core brand mascots that hardly resonated with customers. Unlike long-standing brand mascots in history, such as Mickey Mouse of Walt Disney (Exhibit 8), Pepsi Twist's mascots were born without either a name or a background story.

Furthermore, the positive effect of the weak and hollowed mascots on branding would be weakened by the fact that increasingly more brand mascots came into the market, and poor-quality ones would fade quickly without questioning. Research shows that technological

advancement caused the increase in the number of brand mascots in advertising over the internet (Stafford et al., 2002).

Exhibit 8. Mickey Mouse of Walt Disney



As mentioned above, Pepsi Twist is now only available in Albania, Greece, China, and selected supermarkets in Germany. Moreover, information about the Mainland China market is easier to obtain, thus, I will make recommendations on the Mainland China market accordingly.

Before tailoring recommendations, I first conducted research on the Mainland China market. Results show that Pepsi Twist has a Chinese name, “百事清柠” (Exhibit 9). According to statistics on JD.com, Pepsi Twist has received over 200,000 reviews and an overall satisfaction rating of 99%. Many customers said that they were aware of the difference in taste between Pepsi Twist and Pepsi's original flavor, but they still chose it, as they love the special flavor (JD.com, 2022).

Exhibit 9. The Chinese version of “Pepsi Twist” (百事清柠)



Regarding the fact that Pepsi Twist does not have a brand mascot in the Mainland China market, I recommend Pepsi Twist create a new brand mascot by modifying the initial mascot. It is evident that Pepsi Twist is still successful in Mainland China without having a brand mascot, and people might argue that having a brand mascot is not necessary for this context. However, we see that the ubiquity of brand mascots is extremely high in Mainland China. According to China-Britain Business Council (CBBC), the usage of cute characters to deliver messages is appreciated more commonly in China than in the west and far more acceptable to the adult culture (Pearl Zhu, 2021). Research also shows that participants were willing to pay 7% more in an auction for a tablet if it was depicted with a face during the bidding process (Yuan & Dennis, 2019). The other research shows that humans are the most popular mascot species of all, occupying almost 21% of brand mascots, and more human-like characters get more airtime, as the similarity would drive trust from customers (Brown, 2010).

In conclusion, Pepsi Twist should reflect on problems of its previous design (eg. the character had no eyes, and some have violent scenes) and work with designers specializing in the Chinese market to create a brand mascot that has a cute human-like face and acts nonviolently. Examples that Pepsi Twist can refer to include some most recognizable brand mascots in Mainland China, such as QQ's Penguin (Exhibit 10) and Three Squirrels (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 10. QQ's penguin mascot

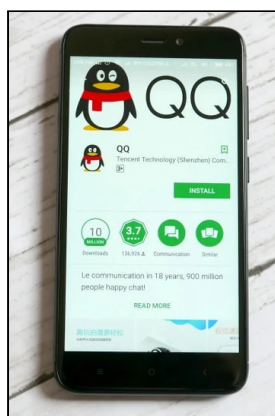


Exhibit 11. The mascot of "Three Squirrels"



The second recommendation is to make the branding information more consistent when applying anthropomorphism. Assuming Pepsi Twist already got the newly designed brand mascot, I still found it confusing that there are two types of lemon-flavored Pepsi with extremely similar product names, “青柠” and “清柠” in Chinese (Exhibit 12). The only difference is that the Pepsi Zero Lime contains no sugar while Pepsi Twist contains sugar. The drastic difference in packing, in contrast to the tiny difference in naming, might confuse consumers. To deal with this issue, I recommend Pepsi Twist share the newly designed brand mascot with Pepsi Zero Lime. It does not mean that the two branches will use the exact same brand mascot. Pepsi Zero Lime could use a recolored edition, and the colors could be the color of a lime and the color of a lemon, respectively, as shown in Exhibit 12 and 13.

Exhibit 12. Pepsi Zero Lime and Pepsi Twist



Exhibit 13. An example of recolored mascots



The third recommendation is that Pepsi Twist should construct a story behind its brand mascots. As mentioned in previous parts, Pepsi Twist's lemon-like mascots were born without either a name or a background story, which made it hard for consumers to remember and recall. Although people may argue that it is too late for Pepsi to enrich its mascot, Linabell proves that a newly created mascot could still become viral (Exhibit 14). She

appeared publicly as late as September 2021, but she was on Weibo's hot topic ranking board more than 32 times. Its exponentially growing awareness was an unmatched record that many KOLs could only dream about in their entire career (Yi & Yu, 2021). Disney created Linabell from nowhere, but she still succeeded, which laid the foundation for the recommendation for Pepsi Twist to make customers aware of where their brand mascot comes from, the personality, the name, the age, etc.

To conclude all three recommendations, Pepsi Twist should modify its initial mascot and bring it to the Mainland China market, make product lines less confusing with a recolored mascot, and enrich the brand mascot with an easily recalled name and an interesting story.

Exhibit 14. LinaBell in Halloween and Christmas costumes





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