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Humanizing Brands: The Role of Anthropomorphism and Product Type in Purchase Decisions

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at predicting the impact of brand anthropomorphism on the purchase decisions of Shopee users in Bandung. Besides, it also studies the moderating role of product type in this relationship. The survey method was employed in data collection. The data were processed through SmartPLS using PLS-SEM analysis technique. The findings reveal that the humanization of brand by use of human elements in different forms like brand mascots, or interactive features make the users not only to feel engaged during the process of shopping but also this emotional engagement facilitates the purchase. The degree of effect differs according to the product type. Certain products are more responsive to these factors whereas others depend more on facts and detailed information. These findings imply that the incorporation of anthropomorphic factors should be in line with the product features. When these factors are used appropriately they may contribute to the enhancement of the buying activity in a digital context.

Introduction

Consumer shopping behaviors have evolved significantly in the recent years, largely due to the rise of digital technology. Many consumers who in past used to rely solely on physical stores have now gone on to become quite comfortable with e-commerce platforms. This is a major change in Indonesia where the change is most evident. Improved internet availability and infrastructure have made online shopping accessible to a larger proportion of the population (Nida et al., 2024). At the same time, the competition among online platforms is becoming stronger. Apart from simply offering convenience to their customers, companies are also expected to come up with user experiences that appear interesting and relevant (Wang et al., 2019).

Shopee is one of the platforms that have been able to take advantage of this environment significantly. By the end of 2023, it had around 2.35 billion visits, which was more than the combined numbers for the other rivals such as Tokopedia and Lazada. The factor behind the growth is not only the scale but also the way Shopee has developed trust and attracted users through promotions. According to the We Are Social report (2024), nearly 52.3% of Indonesians between the ages of 16 and 64 still consider the presence of discounts as an important factor when shopping online. As a result of many platforms offering similar promotions, sales by way of discounts no longer constitute the sole business strategy. Companies need to discover other methods of holding

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the users' attention. One of the ways is by establishing a greater emotional connection with the consumers (Dwi Santy et al., 2021).

Actually on their part, loads of platforms try to reach the goals by making use of human-like attributes inspired by anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism simply means attributing human features to non-human entities (Munawar et al., 2023). These human-like element in e-commerce can take the form of mascots, avatars, or interactive visuals. For instance, Shopee engages its users by featuring animated figures and activities like "Shopee Pets". These types of interactions have the potential to greatly enhance the user experience when interacting with the site through which they shop.

Nevertheless, the level of success of this method may vary. Usually, it depends on the product type. Studies have shown that product type does matter when it comes to evaluation (Chocarro et al., 2021; Gunasti et al., 2020). For instance, the emotional or the experience side of the product is the source of influence for the interaction in the case of experience goods while the factual or the informative aspect stands out for search goods (Velasco et al., 2021).

Research indicates that the use of anthropomorphic cues in marketing has the potential not only to impact the product evaluation but also the decision-making process of the consumer (X. S. Li et al., 2023; Munawar et al., 2023). Although research has been conducted, generally, the results on this phenomenon are not consistent across the different situations. On the one hand, consumers are more dependent on their rational thinking when judging the search goods, whereas on the other hand, the emotional factor has a higher influence on the experience goods (C. Li & Huang, 2024). The Indonesian e-commerce market represents a very specific case where studies on how the two factors of anthropomorphism and product type can be considered together has been hardly done. In order to address this gap, the current paper aims at exploring the influence of the two variables on each other.

Literature Review

Anthropomorphism involves attributing human traits, emotions, and intentions to entities that are not human. This mechanism provides a way to bond with our surroundings and can be a means of fulfilling our inherent need for social interaction (Blut et al., 2021; Khabibah & Pramesti, 2021). The marketing application of this idea is giving human characteristics to digital platforms, for example, by implementing chatbots, virtual assistants, or interactive visuals (S. Kim & McGill, 2018; Mota-Rojas et al., 2021). These human-like elements are capable of giving the interaction a sense of presence making the interaction feel more personal. The end result is strengthened engagement of the users which may with time alter their preferences and eventually result in enhanced purchase intentions (Herliana & Gai Sin, 2024; Khabibah & Pramesti, 2021). It is widely accepted that the purchasing behavior is not the only one affected and the consumer attitudes and the degree of trust have a significant role in the behavior also (W.-G. Kim & Park, 2020).

The type of product also influences consumer decisions. Typically, products are split into search goods and experience goods (Aghazadeh et al., 2025). Some products have symbolic values, like luxury goods, while others are appreciated mainly for their utility, like electronics or tools. As a result, consumers process information differently. For certain products, they rely more heavily on straightforward and objective information, however, for other products, they attend to feelings and impressions. Such a contrast helps explain why the impact of human-like characteristics does not necessarily remain the same across all product categories. It also indicates that the extent to which emotions influence buying depends on the type of product.

Methodology

Through a quantitative research approach, this study delves into the interaction between brand anthropomorphism and purchase decisions of Shopee users in Bandung. The study also checks whether the product type can alter the intensity of this interaction. In this paper, anthropomorphism means the employment of human-like traits, like brand characters or interactive components, that might potentially influence consumer behavior.

This research employs a mixed-method approach of explanation with descriptive tools and hypothesis testing. Additionally, it looks at differences between product categories, specifically search goods and experience goods, since consumers normally appraise them differently. Participants of this study are Shopee customers living in Bandung who have a fairly recent experience of using the e-commerce platform- shopping and making

a purchase from various product categories. Based on their active usage and past purchase experience, among other factors, purposive sampling was used to select 100 respondents.

The sampling technique applied in this study was non-probability purposive sampling, selecting respondents based on specific criteria: active Shopee users in Bandung who have recently made purchases across various product categories. The sample size of 100 respondents was determined based on the widely accepted guideline for PLS-SEM by (Hair, 2021), which recommends a minimum sample size of 10 times the maximum number of paths directed at any latent construct in the structural model. Since this model has three main paths directing to the dependent variable, the minimum required sample is 30. Therefore, a sample size of 100 is considered highly adequate and robust for the PLS-SEM analysis.

In order to collect data, questionnaires served as the main instrument. Besides receiving consumers' views on anthropomorphic features, questionnaires also helped us identify their buying decision behavior. After gathering data, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to uncover complex interrelationships of variables, including the moderators. A two-step approach is followed for the analysis, measurement and structural models. The analysis consists of two main activities, measurement and structural model. The measurement model is concerned with validity & reliability checks; the structural model is used for evaluating variable relationships.

Hypotheses are tested based on t-statistics and p-values that researchers get by bootstrapping the process. In this research, anthropomorphism is the independent variable, product type is the moderator, and purchase decisions are the dependent variable.

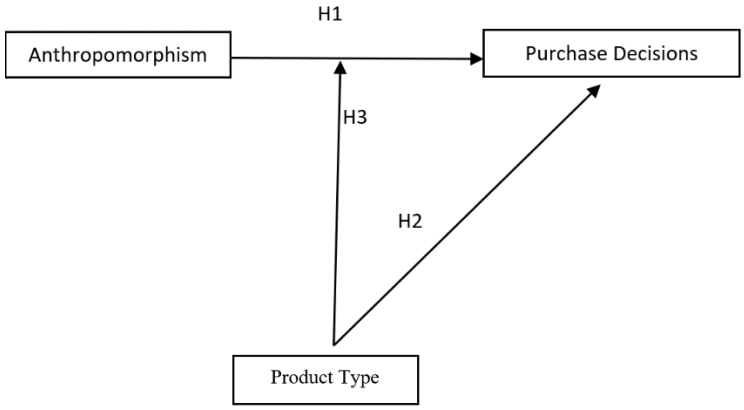


Figure 1. Research Design
Source : Author, 2026

Referring to the framework illustrated in Figure 1, the main thrust of this work is to understand how brand anthropomorphism affects purchase decisions. A case is made for considering product type in this study as well, because it could be a factor in determining how consumers react to brand anthropomorphism elements. Human-like brand features such as mascots or engaging content are believed to influence consumer response and lead to purchase intentions. However, the impact will also likely depend on the type of product that is being sold.

Based on the above framework, the paper has hypothesized the following points. Since anthropomorphism involves making a brand human-like, consumers will be more likely to relate to it psychologically and are more likely to purchase it, so we say that brand anthropomorphism will have a positive influence on purchase decisions. On the other hand, we expect that Product type will influence purchase decisions since search goods and experience goods have different means of evaluation by consumers. Moreover, Product type should also act as a moderator and thus change the effect of anthropomorphism on purchase decisions.

Result and Discussion

Outer Model

The first step in our analysis was the outer model assessment which in turn ensures the validity and reliability of research constructs. Here SmartPLS v.3.0 lateral tool was used to test convergent validity and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

The output from Figure 2 reveals that the components of Anthropomorphism, Purchase Decisions, and Product Type measure up to the standards. This means the tools at measurement can be borrowed and used for ongoing investigation.

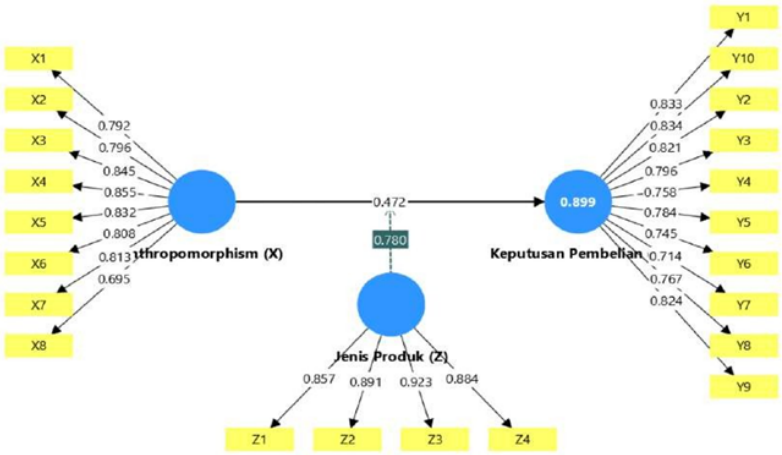


Figure 2. Loading Factor Path Diagram
Source : Author, 2026

The data indicates that the measuring elements for Anthropomorphism (X), Product Type (Z), and Purchase Decisions (Y) meet the convergent validity standards. Almost all outer loading values exceed 0.70 (Guenther et al., 2023) which strongly shows that the measuring elements still represent their constructs well. Anthropomorphism loading values lie in the interval between 0.695 and 0.855. Product Type on the other hand, displays rather higher figures, ranging from 0.857 to 0.923. Purchase Decisions also have their loadings spread between 0.714 and 0.834.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Anthropomorphism	0.649
Product Type	0.790
Purchase Decisions	0.622

Source : Author Calculation, 2026

The AVE figures for Anthropomorphism (0.649), Product Type (0.790), and Purchase Decisions (0.622) stand well above the baseline threshold of 0.50, thus signifying that all constructs have satisfactorily accomplished the criterion of convergent validity.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criteria Value

Variable	Anthropomorphism	Product Type	Purchase Decisions
Anthropomorphism	0.806		
Product Type	0.559	0.889	
Purchase Decisions	0.366	0.493	0.789

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

Then, we do the discriminant validity test using the Fornell-Larcker criterion method, which entails comparing the square root of AVE with the correlations of the constructs. Based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the values for Anthropomorphism (0.806), Product Type (0.889), and Purchase Decisions (0.789) exceed their correlations with other variables, which means that each construct is an independent entity.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Anthropomorphism	0.923	0.937
Product Type	0.913	0.938
Purchase Decisions	0.932	0.943

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

According to the findings in Table 3, the results reveal that each construct has met the reliability criteria. Anthropomorphism demonstrates a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.923 and Composite Reliability of 0.937. Product Type gives the performance results of 0.913 and 0.938 correspondingly, on the other hand, Purchase Decisions succeeds in publishing 0.932 and 0.943. These figures certify that all the constructs are trustworthy.

Inner Model (Path Coefficient and R-Square)

This section explains the details of the structural model and the path coefficients, R-Square, F-Square, and the testing of hypotheses are also part of it. The model is verified through the comparison of t-statistics and p-values. The graphical representation of their findings is shown in Figure 3, which helps the discussion of the connection between Anthropomorphism, Product Type, and Purchase Decisions.

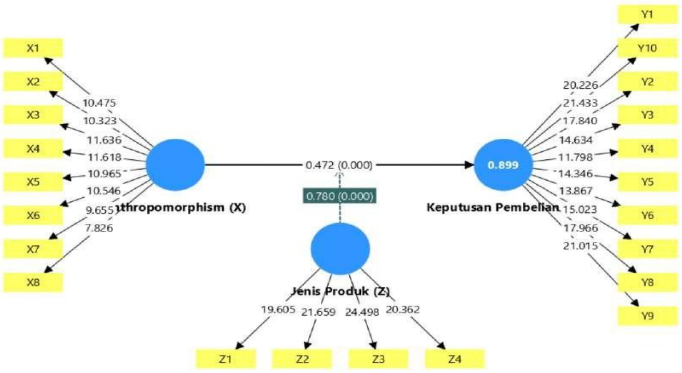


Figure 3. PLS Model

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

Path Coefficients

They are path coefficients that state the extent of the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. As per the findings, the analysis has been delivered in Table 4.

Table 4. Path Coefficient Value

Relationships Between Variables	Path Coefficient Value
Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	0.472
Product Type → Purchase Decisions	0.521
Product Type * Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	0.780

Source : Author Calculation, 2026

Table 4 results show that the connections between the components in the model are only matching. Anthropomorphism (0.472) and Product Type (0.521) both indicate some relationship with Purchase Decisions. Whereas Product Type * Anthropomorphism interaction has the largest coefficient (0.780) depicting a very strong moderating effect. The use of technological innovations such as chatbot or visual interaction can make the experience so real and engaging that consumer's purchase intention is often enhanced.

Also, Product Type indicates the type of product a consumer bases his/her decision on. Mostly search goods need crisp and comprehensive information, whereas emotional aspects such as storytelling and user's shared experiences are characteristic of experience goods. This finding corroborates with the previous researchers. (Blut et al., 2021) and (S. Kim & McGill, 2018) mention that adding anthropomorphic features can raise both emotional connections and the likelihood of purchase. (Herliana & Gai Sin, 2024) also agree with this idea, emphasizing how favorable decisions influence outcomes. Besides that, the moderation of Product Type as a factor corroborates the results of (Ku et al., 2016) and (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017), who found that different products give rise to different consumer responses to digital marketing.

Table 5. R Square Value

Variable	R-Square Value
Purchase Decisions	0.899

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

Tables 5 displays the R Square value, which indicates how much of the changes in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. The interpretation used in this research is according to (Dwi Santy

& Iffan, 2023) where R Square values above 0.67 represent strong explanatory power, between 0.33 and 0.67 represent moderate, and between 0.19 and 0.33 represent weak explanatory power.

According to Table 5 Purchase Decisions rely on Anthropomorphism and Product Type to a degree of 89.9%, as reflected by an R-Square statistic of 0.899. A value over 0.67 indicates that the model has strong explanatory power. On the ground, this finding indicates that anthropomorphic elements combined with the proper product type are crucial. If the human-like features and product characteristics are coordinated, consumers will typically have a positive response and be more inclined to purchase the product.

Earlier studies also support us in this discovery. For instance, (Blut et al., 2021) and (S. Kim & McGill, 2018) suggest that anthropomorphic cues have the ability to improve consumer perception of a brand. Moreover, the moderating role of Product Type agrees with (Ku et al., 2016) that different patterns of search and experience goods influence consumer's information processing and decision making. To sum up, the integration of anthropomorphic components with a product focused marketing message can be a very effective tool in online platform marketing. Besides attracting consumers, this strategy can also increase their involvement and strongly influence their buying decisions on Shopee.

F-Square Value

The F-Square values are presented in Table 6 and indicate each independent variable's influence on the dependent variable. The F-Square value is a measure of effect size. Small, moderate, and large effect sizes, respectively, are denoted by values as small as 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, according to (Spada et al., 2021).

Table 6. F-Square Value

Variable	F-Square
Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	1.353
Product Type → Purchase Decisions	1.838
Product Type * Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	6.409

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

Anthropomorphism has a significantly positive influence on the dependent variable with large effect size as suggested by the very high F-Square value of 1.353. It is established that anthropomorphic cues such as chatbots can be major contributors towards creating emotional bonding or engagement. This is aligned to the previous literature by (Blut et al., 2021) and (S. Kim & McGill, 2018) On the other hand, the comparatively higher F-Square effect of Product Type (1.838) corroborates the findings of (Ku et al., 2016) and (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017) that consumer choices depend on how product information is presented that would differ for search versus experience goods.

The interaction effect is substantial, with a value of 6.409, which is above the 0.35 large effect cutoff point. It can be considered a significant factor in digital marketing strategies. This premium value indicates that the combination of Product Type and Anthropomorphism, akin to matching human-like features with the right product categories, can substantially heighten consumer engagement and purchase intention. This synergy leads to a more personal shopping experience and is a source of competitive advantage in the online marketplace. Elevating the shopping experience from mere information delivery to a more engaging and meaningful one for the customer is the hallmark of this approach.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses testing is done with the help of T-statistics and P-values that are output of the analysis of the inner model. A relationship is deemed significant if the P-value is less than 0.05. Complete details can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Direct Effect

Hypothesis	Effect	T-Statistics	P-Values	Results
H_1	Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	*4.590*	*0.001*	*Accepted*
H_2	Product Type → Purchase Decisions	*6.694*	*0.000*	*Accepted*
H_3	Product Type * Anthropomorphism → Purchase Decisions	*7.778*	*0.000*	*Accepted*

Source: Author Calculation, 2026

Since all the hypothesized paths were significant at the 0.05 level, it was the case that the data supported all the hypotheses. The positive effect of Anthropomorphism on Purchase Decisions ($t = 4.590$; $p < 0.05$) means

that the use of human-like features such as chatbots or avatars on digital platforms can make customers feel a closer connection to brands, which in turn increases their willingness to buy.

The study also shows that Product Type has a significant influence on Purchase Decisions ($t = 6.694$; $p < 0.05$). Consumers apparently adjust the basis for their evaluation depending on the product type. Information cues are needed for search goods, whereas emotional cues are generally used in experience goods (e.g. via storytelling or social proof). Besides, the Product Type variable moderates the effect of anthropomorphising on purchase intentions quite strongly ($t = 7.778$; $p < 0.05$). This can be explained by the fact that anthropomorphic cues have been demonstrated to have a stronger impact on purchase decisions of emotional products like fashion or lifestyle items.

Conclusion

The results revealed that anthropomorphism greatly affects the purchase choices of Shopee users in Bandung. Adding human-like features such as mascots or interactive elements can not only enhance the shopping experience but also make the users more connected and, as a result, increase their buying intention. Nonetheless, the success of such efforts largely hinges on how well the human-like features match the nature of the product. There are also notable distinctions in product categories. Experience goods derive more advantages from incorporating anthropomorphic elements since these elements evoke emotions and enhance the overall experience for users.

On the other hand, search goods necessitate comprehensive information and detailed product specifications, which result in adopting different marketing strategies for each product type. From a practical standpoint, Shopee could improve its user involvement by adding more anthropomorphic components like virtual assistants which are not only more responsive but also more interactive. Regarding product categories, different communication modes should be adopted. For search goods, well-information and pricing disclosure are still the bare essentials. Whereas for experience goods, creative approaches like storytelling, video, or using augmented reality provide users with a deeper understanding of the product. Overall, combining these methods leads to well-informed purchasing decisions.

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