



Perception differences in using brand mascot characters on products
and services between Thai and Japanese consumers

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2015 Academic Year

Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

Acknowledgements

This research has been supported by the financial scholarship from Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology which provided the opportunities for doing the department research. This research could not be completed without this financial support from the institution.

Importantly, thank you to all research assistants; Miss Saranchana Soontornsorn Miss Pitchaya Kasemamorn, Miss Kanyapak Sonthimanotham, Miss Tatpicha Songprasi, Miss Ploypailin Jitthum, Miss Narueporn Saekok, Miss Salilthip Sithornkul, Mr. Peeranat Srikultanakij and Miss Methita Thammasa for helping and collecting the data in the several areas in Thailand and administering the surveys both offline and online in Japan, without all of your help, we could not have finished this research.

Finally, thank you for all International Business Management colleagues; Dr. Yu-Chin Wen, Mr. Ekkasit Khenguad, and Dr. Pard Teekasap who worked on their parts in the research which have helped this research become a reality. Thank you again for all of your effort and knowledge.

TNI

Research Team

Abstract

This research study aims to find out if there are personal and demographic differences in perceiving characters, specifically gender, age, nationality (Thai and Japanese), and other relevant factors. The researchers hypothesized that females are more likely to remember mascots and product/services than males, participants below 18 years old are more likely to remember mascots than older participants, and Japanese participants are more likely to remember product/services than Thai participants but that Thai participants will be more likely to buy product/service after knowing mascots compared to Japanese participants. The results show a lack of age differences, some minor gender differences and mascot strong national differences in perceiving mascot characters, while another strong factor for remembering mascot characters is passion for cartoons. In addition factors that has helped both Thai and Japanese remember brand mascots for buying items were the cuteness of characters, seeing the ad often on media channels as well as attraction to brand mascot which were colorful than others. The results also indicate that there is a significance relating to the effect of advertising media of brand mascots on consumer perception. The objectives to understand how culture affects the perception of the animated brand characters by focusing on Thai and Japanese consumers and to study the effectiveness of using brand-mascot characters in promoting consumer perception toward products and services were met.

The logo of the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI) is centered on the page. It features the letters 'TNI' in a large, bold, red serif font. The letters are superimposed on a light blue circular background that has a gear-like or cogwheel pattern. The gear teeth are also light blue and extend outwards from the circle. The overall design is clean and modern, with a professional academic feel.

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Perception differences in using brand mascot characters on products and services between Thai and Japanese consumers

Introduction

Whenever we walk through some big malls or fashion areas, we always see some mascots or cartoon characters walk around, or even billboards and posters that have some cartoon characters on them or even on the television when we see an advertisement. Have you ever wondered why do the marketers use those characters to attract people? Why do they need to use them to create the marketing strategies? Do they really attract customers? What are differences between males and females when perceiving these mascots? Do people perceive those mascots in the same ways as the marketers want customers to perceive? Do cultural factors affect the way people perceive those mascots? What are those factors that customers attracted to? This research aims to find out the answer to those questions.

Brand mascots show that there is a firmly established human tendency to understand the world by attaching human characteristics to inanimate objects, also known as anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is a common, perhaps universal, way of thinking that probably exists in all human cultures (Mithen & Boyer, 1996, p. 717). Anthropomorphic characters are used by marketers to access the buying power of children and adults (Jacobson, 2008). However, negative consequences can happen as a result of anthropomorphic marketing. Cigarette companies Joe Camel and Marlboro can attach coolness onto an addictive and potentially lethal product through marketing (Kilbourne, 1999). Mattel's Barbie doll also caused psychological harm to little girls who are unable to copy the image of her perfect body (Oppenheimer, 2009). Some anthropomorphic dolls such as My Little Ponies and Hello Kitties can also represent images of women as animals based on a primitive way of thinking from the past (Peers, 2008).

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, companies depend on brand characters to promote awareness, communicate important product/service attributes or benefits, and attract consumers. Using characters provide benefit to brands by creating a strong identity and positive associations (Dotz, Morton, & Lund, 1996; Fournier, 1998). Brand mascots are the intellectual

property of companies and used in market entry activities to build the foundation for customer brand loyalty to buy products (Chang, 2014).

Brand characters come in many forms, such as animation and live action figures. Companies create hundreds of characters for the purposes of marketing (Garretson & Burton, 2005). Any Brand character's popularity is hard to dispute, and is interesting for practitioners, scholars, and consumers (Brown, 2010). In addition, advertising people attempt to make consumers' recall their personal memories and evoke nostalgia with the use of characters. Garretson and Niedrich (2004) empirically investigated the relationships between brand-character qualities, trust, and brand attitudes. Results showed that creating a trustworthy character lead to more positive brand evaluations. Consumers accept brands with strong, positive personalities because there is a natural habit for consumers to attach human-like qualities to non-human objects (Freling et al, 2010). Techniques to use animal symbols such as lions, elephants or koalas) to represent automobile brands can evoke responses from consumers while feminine brands can use animals that symbolize beauty or caring (Levy, 1985). Woodside et el. (2008, p.113) suggests that the brand character in a marketer's story should be similar to what the customer's ideal wishes are. Brand symbolism is seen as building attachment for a brand's identity by making sure that brand characteristics are brought to mind each time its symbol is seen (Aaker, 1995). By using a powerful symbol such as an animal, a brand can build a connection with customers which can allow them to experience a conversion (McCracken, 1990).

Abernety and Frank (1996) pointed out that not only should corporate image and products be focused on a good advertising strategy should be fascinating in passing on the message. In order to send the advertising messages correctly, many companies have developed a marketing strategy through the use of an advertisement spokesperson with the hope that the spokesperson's charm and positive image could become inspiring and memorable for consumers to influence their attitude toward the products and brand and therefore encourage consumers' interest to buy the product. The study of Neeley and Schumann (2004) further confirms that advertising which contains animated characters generate a high level of attention, product recognition, and liking among young children.

However, the perception of the animated characters is strongly influenced by the culture. People from different cultures may have different opinions toward the same characters. Therefore, we would like to study the effect of cultural differences toward the perception of brand-mascot characters by focusing on the differences in perception between Thai and Japanese consumers. The objectives of this research are the following:

1. To understand how culture affects the perception of the brand mascot characters by focusing on Thai and Japanese consumers
2. To study the effectiveness of using brand-mascot characters in promoting consumer perception toward products and services

Literature Review

“If the old adage a picture tells a thousand words is true, perhaps a mascot creates that simple visual that communicates something positive to people in a way they appreciated” (Robin McKenzie, December 18, 2013, page 13).

As the marketers, the purpose of doing advertisements is to promote awareness and appreciation for a brand and hopefully happiness and loyalty. Brand loyalty is an outcome of brand equity management (Keller 1998) but Aaker (2008) stated that loyal customers not only bring a high life-time value to the company, but can also recruit potential customers for the brand through word-of-mouth and therefore brand loyalty should only be treated as one dimension of brand equity.

We can see some of the products or brands in both Thailand and Japan are related with brand mascots or brand characters. We cannot deny that brand mascots can be shown an original source of human being, which represent the understanding via anthropomorphic items or objects. Lury (2004) stated in the paper that brand mascots can be function as a meeting point for the communication of information between producers and customers (page 50). Increasing the use of mascot characters becomes more popular because cartoon-character celebrities such as Bugs Bunny and Mickey Mouse are generally unaffected by negative publicity.

Malik and Gupta (2014) determined that a celebrity endorser can strongly persuade consumers in both the personal care products and food products categories, but a strong brand mascot is more successful than celebrities in the food segment because they have a higher recall value while celebrities may become associated with too many products. The effectiveness of using a brand mascot depends on how effectively it conveys the brand values that consumers can relate to.

According to Brown (2010), brand mascots have helped the marketers and customers to be closed to one another because brand mascots can make consumers feel happier with corporations (amicable and credible). Tony the Tiger, the Pillsbury Doughboy, Aunt Jemima, or Betty Crocker gave a face and personality to companies and made an easier change into new culinary options that save time (Shapiro, 2004). Marketing researchers normally embolden people who work in the field to empower brand characters with values and personalities that consumers can relate to and eventually build everlasting loyalty (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011).

In addition, the 118 years old, "the Michelin Man." The Michelin man is a strange figure in the design of logos. Light-hearted and jolly, he is a representative of the brand and a happy mascot made from tires. The small plump man is made out of tires so that he could be represented in many different situations and having a different possible version is a beloved point about him. At that time, when the Michelin man has become famous in advertising and become a part of popular culture, which has been noticed early on so he was put at the center of their head Bibendum building in London which was built in 1911. Allen Weill interviewed in 2011 stated that "Once a character becomes a popular it's simply working" (page 36).

Types of characters:

1. Animated brand character

The character should be created by advanced technologies and graphic design including supporting story line and background of characters. These impart characteristics from them that consumer's imagination can relate to (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013). Characters that undergo changes from animation series adapt to fit with consumers' range of preferred brands and culture, for example like "Disney's Mickey Mouse," "A.A. Milne Winnie the Pooh," "Peyo

Smurf,” Hiroshi Fujimoto Doraemon,” “Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki Totoro,” (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013, page 50).

2. Identity brand character

A brand identity is used to make a brand's products different from their competitors and it is a representation of what the company wants to communicate to consumers. Over time, a product's identity may change (Keller, 2003) and gain new characteristics based on the perception of consumers. Brand identity can therefore be explained as a brand's ability to express an individual consumer's concept of self and create strong emotional links in the minds of customers (Wiedmann, Hennig and Siebels, 2007). A brand contains a specific identity based on functional, emotional or symbolic benefits for the customers and a brand's identity should be active and be future-oriented (Aaker, 1996).

The remembrance on the character will enhance the customers' trust and customers' will have a positive attitude towards the brand. Personality, physical feature, humor and communicating to the customer will attract more attention to the brand. Brands normally can be used to make products different from competitors and they also represent what the message that the brands want to send to their customers (Blair & Chiou, 2014). According to Costa (2010) has been indicated the brand character with identity which has helped to build up brands such as “Michelin Man, Ronald McDonald, M & M character, and Tony the Tiger” (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013, page 51). Strong brand characters are likely to be closely linked with the brands they represent as we can see from examples above. Nevertheless, Neeley and Schumann (2004) reminded the marketers that worried about child obesity have associated brand characters to junk food consumption. These allegations are similar to worries that Joe camel's promotion of cigarettes allured children to smoke. Children lack the necessary mental functions and knowledge to process advertising messages.

3. Pure design character

The characters have simple background stories and are designed to attract customers. Therefore, companies keep launching new designs to appeal to consumers and keep their brands fresh. Characters with a story line, customer demand and launching new design style will keep customer loyalty to brands (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013). Examples that we can see in the market are “Hello Kitty from Sanrio Co., Ltd Japan, Rilakkuma from San-X in Japan,

Miffy from Dick Bruna in Netherlands, or even My Melody from Sanrio Co., Ltd in Japan, etc.” These characters are pure design characters which make consumers excited. Pure design characters depend on sales from merchandise and licensing to generate additional income. To further captivate consumers, many brand characters add to their storyline by creating animations, comics and publication titles (Hosany, Prayag, Martin,&Lee,2013).

Mascots create brand awareness

As the marketers, we cannot deny that using mascots is a great asset to the business. We can see from many companies that use mascots to represent their brands such as Mr. Peanut, the Energizer Bunny, or even Ronald who has the red-haired clown in a bright-yellow jumpsuit, it is represented synonymous with the McDonald's brand. Those mascots have helped to create the brand awareness to customers. According to president and creative director of Graphic D-signs Inc., Dan Antonelli mentioned:

“It definitely works, mascots serve as a point of recognition. People associate a symbol or mascot with a company much quicker than they do a simple message.

A lot of heating and air conditioning companies use generic icons such as the sun/snowflake graphic or something red and blue that doesn't necessarily stand out in the sea of graphics competing for people's attention. When you add a mascot, it tends to make the brand warmer. People seem to connect with them a little bit more on an emotional level than something that's more generic or cold and corporates. It's certainly something that, when implemented, serves as a means to break out from the clutter because it's not a strategy that is widely deployed on the service sector....we do it a ton, but if you look at the landscape, it's not something that's completely mainstream in term of branding for service companies” (Krawcke, June 15, 2015, page 42)

Mascots can add life into brand personalities and build a level of brand awareness that a logo simply cannot attain (Campaign, 2013).

Television Marketing and Social Media Marketing

For some brands, social media is essential for mascot to become born again and also allows the characters to develop their own personalities and become the digital face and voice of the brand. Aleksandr interacts with an extraordinary 804,000 Facebook fans, while Andrex puppy has a following of more than 480,000 on its networking site. Mascots are possibly helping to build value for brands, but the most important reason for their success depends on listening to consumers. When the public becomes tired of characters that have reached the end of their life expectancy, the benefits of a change in direction need to be addressed (Campaign, 2013).

Restoring the life of brand characters such as Charlie the Tuna and Mr. Peanut is possible through the use of the Internet and social media advertising by creating complete stories based on these mascots on social media websites like Facebook (Schultz, 2012). Creating a new mascot to encourage social media conversations and send a more effective marketing message can also be done, such as Spam's Sir Can-A-Lot (Schultz, 2012). However, failure can still result as can be seen from Burger King's weak mascot. Advertisers will be able to assess the effectiveness of their campaign based on how much interaction there was with brand mascots (Schultz, 2012).

Brand characters can be used to give information to consumers in television marketing to make them more familiar with the brand products (Fletcher, 2001). Advertising on television cannot send the complete message to consumers, so in one case, RPM which is a brand experience agency created a roadshow to provide a live experience of Mexican food to a mass audience (Fletcher, 2001). However, converting television marketing into fieldwork is very costly, which can be difficult for some of the heavily animated brand characters. Even for companies without a brand character, translating television marketing into real life is still possible by expanding on the individual components of the advertisement. In one case with Nike, it created a weeklong football event during Euro 2000 to draw British kids to learn the skills seen in its TV ad (Fletcher, 2001).

Age and Gender differences:

Companies create brand characters to make awareness and convey the key aspects of their product and service to the customer. Advertisers try to make the character stay in the customers' memories and evoke feelings of remembrance with the brand character.

This paper indicated that cute characters can attract female customers much more than other segments.

Brand characters have three types, which are animated (Mickey Mouse), identity character (Michelin Man) and pure design character (Hello Kitty). Increasing humanized personalities and giving them life and attractiveness will enhance brand loyalty.

Animated brand characters gain from a larger audience reach through television. Character awareness rises during adolescence and the image remains kept below consciousness which can be retrieved later. When ready, the consumers see the character again. Furthermore, animated brand characters can develop from publication titles such as "Harry Potter from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and Peter Rabbit from the Tale of Peter Rabbit" (Booth & Hayes, 2005 in Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013, page 51). In addition, the magic of Mickey Mouse is used as a model to compare all characters to. There is no recipe for mascots considering the emotional factors that either attach (or not attach) consumers to them, but obviously, Mickey Mouse creates magic with children. Children automatically respond positively to images of Mickey and Minnie, usually before they can even speak (Briggs, 2008, page 19).

Companies and marketers use brand mascots to build an emotional relationship with children and create brand loyalty for products that will last into adulthood (Connell et al, 2014). Children around the world are targeted by companies that use mascots to promote branded food products even though most of them contain a lot of unhealthy sugars, salt and fat in order to maximize sales and market share (Kraak & Story, 2014).

Food and restaurant companies use brand mascots to create an identity for product, increase awareness for brand personality and continuity across integrated marketing communications (Phillips, 1996). Mascots can be used for decades in promotions. Many American mascots and characters are deeply rooted in American culture (Brown, 2010). Marketers can control the message for mascots more effectively than human celebrities to keep a positive brand reputation to promote product sales (Garretson, 2004). Companies have

changed the physical appearance of mascots over decades to appear physically healthier as social standards change to compete with other similar products in international markets (Ruocco, 2013).

Children learn about mascots through social, media and marketing environments (Richert et al, 2011). Children develop one-sided relationship with their favorite characters that represent emotionally-filled friendships based on how attractive the characters are and what messages they convey which can influence the children's diet (Bond and Calvert, 2014). Mascots are associated with memorable slogans, quotes, musical themes and stories, as well as market nostalgia through multiple generations of parent-child interactions that create fun, humor, emotional and positive feelings towards company brands and products (Hemar-Nicolas and Gollety, 2012). Furthermore, Japanese animated characters are very popular in Asian countries but tend to be male-dominated. It is important to know about the kind of messages sent about females in children's cartoons. Animation is found to be the biggest category of children's television programming in the Asian countries studied (Goonasekera, 1998). Young children prefer watching cartoons compared to other television programs, starting from ages 18 month to 2 years until after age nine when they prefer other program types (Thompson and Zerbinose, 1997). Japan's obvious difference in gender roles varies from the gender values of Asian countries that are exposed to Japanese cartoons (Hofstede, 1984). Television role models can affect girls' confidence and determination to succeed (Atkin and Miller, 1975). This study confirmed the results of earlier research that there is a dominance of boys' over girls' Japanese cartoons with a ratio of 2:1 (Cooper-Chen, 1999). Similarly, a study on US television cartoons, including some from Japan, also found a dominance of boys' over girls' cartoons (Thompson & Zerbinose, 1995).

Cultural Differences

Instead of global markets becoming more Americanized, buying and consumption patterns in developed countries in the 1980s and 1990s have diverged as much as they converged (De Mooj, 2001). Even though consumers prefer local content, something foreign and exotic can become appealing as well, which can explain the success of anime outside Japan (Elasmar, 2003). Hofstede (2001) categorized culture into multiple dimensions which can provide some cultural diversity insights.

There is a perceivable difference in Asian versus Western acceptance of Japan's cartoon creations (Iwabuchi, 2002). Japanese exports are not only products but include popular music, TV shows and magazines to represent Japanese qualities. A study of US viewers by Lu (2009) found that Japanese anime created after 1964 are perceived as Caucasian, which can be a form of marketing strategy. Koyama-Richard (2007) discovered from interviews that many comic book artists create for a domestic audience.

A study by Cooper-Chen (2011) suggested that anime popular outside Japan differs from anime popular in Japan, popularity of a specific anime differs among importing nations, and that anime is most popular in Asia. Culture and consumers' earlier experience enhances attitudes towards characters. Consumers add cultural significance to animals. For example, in Chinese tradition, dragons are considered to represent strong and promising powers. Also, familiar characters are comforting, arouse positive attitudes and elicit feelings of nostalgia (Callcott & Phillips, 1996).

Furthermore, in the example by Mr. Craig Briggs (2008), he mentioned about the Olympic Games that used mascots to spawn, which represented the humanity in the games and represented the personified country, especially the value shared by the German people when referring to the Munich Games or the world by using a dachshund name Waldi. Not every Olympic mascot has been successful, some might be forgotten after the game. "The Olympic at Beijing have been a well-received family of mascots. BeiBei, JingJing, Juan-Huan, YingYing, and NiNi were characters that fulfilled many requirements, such as match with five in number, which matched with Olympic rings as well as represented the five Chinese elements and possess characteristics of the panda, Tibetan antelope, swallow, fish and the Olympic flame" (Briggs, 2008, page 19). This time the Olympics appealed to children in just the name alone by using a rhyming two-syllable name, connected with every child in them, particularly in China and Asia. The results of a study by Blair and Chiou (2014) showed that cultural and gender differences play a significant role in consumer perceptions of brands. This means that cultural and gender dimensions can be used to predict specific consumer behaviors, which can be helpful when marketing brands to consumers.

Methodology

Descriptive research, quantitative and qualitative method have been applied in this study. In the study, the researchers know that the brand-mascots are great for being used to promote the products/services in order to build awareness or boost up the recognition of companies. Since the way marketers use mascots has already been described, the desire exists to know more about the cultural differences between Thai and Japanese people by using survey for data gathering technique as well as measuring some of the information during the data collection process. The research studies what the participants were more likely to think and recall their memories, which helped the researchers to reexamine and reflect on the data and concepts simultaneously and interactively. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study the effect of cultural differences toward the perception of brand mascot characters by focusing on the differences in perception between Thai and Japanese consumers. The literature review has been reviewed as the fundamental concepts in the research. The research used many brand mascot characters all around the world; as the following table 1;

Table 1: Brand-Mascot Characters used in the research

Name	Company's name	Country of Origin
Daikin	Pichonkun	Japan
Mamypoko	Unicharm Corporation	Japan
Oishi	Oishi Group Puplic Company Limited	Thailand
Mr.Muscle	S. C. Johnson & Son	United States
Haribo	HARIBO GmbH & Co. KG	<u>Germany</u>
Yum Yum	Ajinomoto Company Limited	Thailand
HTC	High Tech Computer Corporation	Taiwan
AIS	ADVANCED INFO SERVICE PLC.	Thailand
Kellogg's Coco Pops	Kellogg Company	United States
Michelin	<u>SCA</u> Compagnie Générale des Établissements Michelin	France
Bic	SociétéBic S.A.	France
Kumamon	The government of Kumamoto Prefecture	Japan

Wendy	The Wendy's Company	United States
Amazon	Amazon.com, Inc	United States
M&M	The Mars Company Frank C. Mars	United States
MacDonald	McDonald's Corporation	<u>Scotland/Ireland</u>
Tony	Kellogg Company	United States
Babigon	THE BARBECUE PLAZA CO., LTD	Thailand
Koala's march	Lotte Co., Ltd.	Japan

The objectives of this research are the following:

1. To understand how culture affects the perception of the brand mascot characters by focusing on Thai and Japanese consumers
2. To study the effectiveness of using brand mascot characters in promoting consumer perception toward products and services

Hypotheses to measure in this study are the following:

Hypothesis 1: Female participants are more likely to remember the brand-mascot characters better than male participants of both countries

Hypothesis 2: Participants who are age under 18 years old are more likely to be interested in brand-mascot characters than other ages

Hypothesis 3: Using media in Television or online has helped to build brand-mascot awareness for all ages and gender of both countries than just the magazines or newspapers

Hypothesis 4: Participants who are age below 18 tend to be more remember interactive brand-mascot characters than non interactive brand-mascot characters

Hypothesis 5: Participants who love cartoons tend to remember the brand-mascot cartoon characters than people who do not love cartoon characters regardless of nationalities

Hypothesis 6: Using brand character illustration products and services has helped the female participants get the attention and interest to the products and services more than male participants

Hypothesis 7: Using realistic colors in brand-mascot has helped younger participants (age under 18) to recognize and remember the brand-mascot characters than older participants

Hypothesis 8: Remembering the brand characters has helped female participants to better remember the products and service than male participants for both countries

Hypothesis 9: Japanese participants are more likely to remember the products/services than Thai Participants

Hypothesis 10: Thai participants tend to more likely to buy product/service after knowing brand-mascot characters than Japanese participants

Hypothesis 11: What kind of mascot characters would be remembered by participants regardless of countries?

The data collections both used questionnaires and short interviews. To gain background knowledge, preliminary research included newspaper, magazines, corporate documents, and academic journals were also studied during the initial phase. Next, short interviews were conducted with the participants to obtain information which is normally not available. Participants tend to store information as short storytelling or product items. Also, the short interviews gave participants a chance to recall and be aware of how culture, generation, and gender forces affect their memories and actions.

Research Design

The research was conducted both online and offline. In Thailand, we do offline in different places in order to get more diverse views in perceiving the brand characters as the mascots and we received more details about choosing mascots in terms of short interviews during data collection. Whereas in Japan, we do both online and offline in both countries because of the difficulty in collecting data, in which the research assistants who did offline surveys had an opportunities to ask short questions during data collection, whereas online would not be possible to gather this part of the surveys. The participants were 497 Thais; 200 males and 297 females whereas 460 Japanese; 166 males and 294 females. The data was collected through a survey which consists of two parts. The first part is demographic information, the second part is about brand mascots information.

Operationalizations

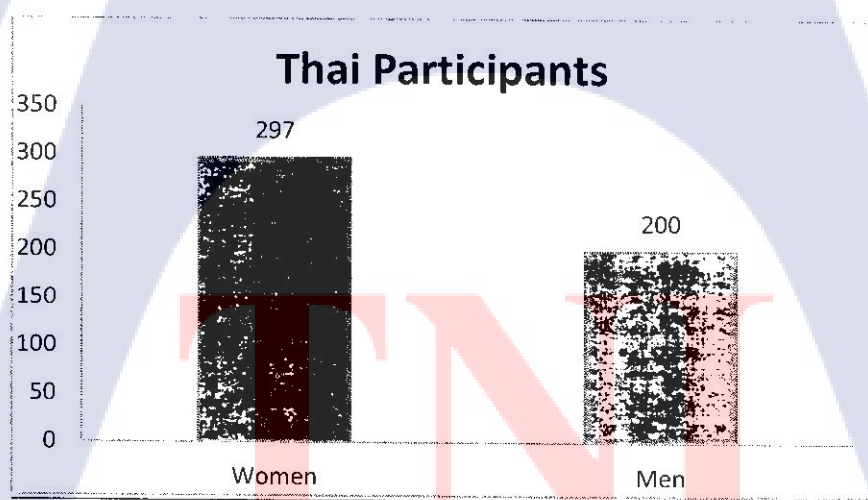
Participants are asked to indicate their memories of seeing the brand character as the mascots that are used in advertising or other channels. Next, the surveys were administered and then followed by short interviews afterwards.

Data collections

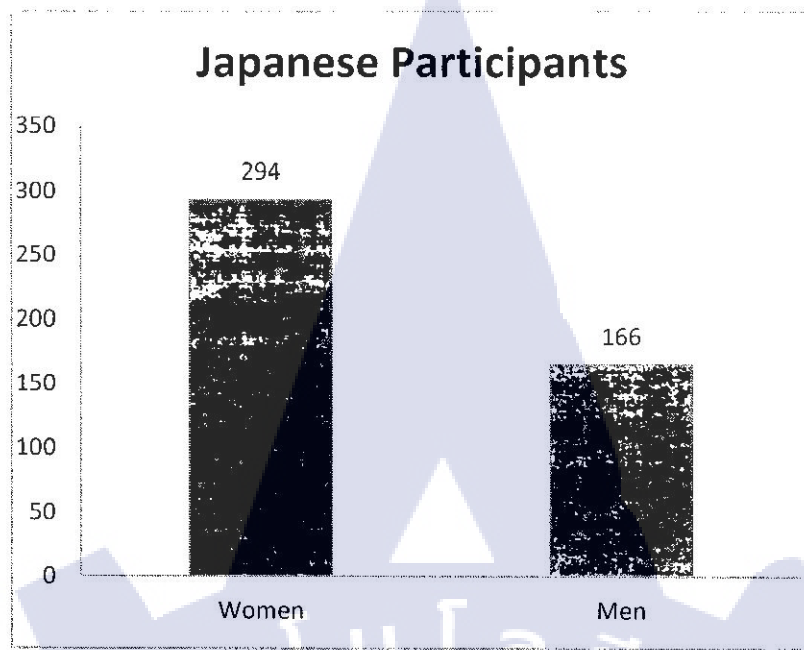
Surveys were supposed to be for Thai and Japanese participants in Thai and Japanese languages during December 2015 to February 2016, and were administered to participants in different areas in Thailand, such as Don Mueang, Bang Khae, Lat Phrao, Chatuchak, Ram Inthra, Rangsit, Min Buri, Sam Yan, and Ayutthaya, whereas in Japan the researchers did both online and offline with Japanese friends, Japanese who are living around Ram Inthra, and online with Japanese friends who live in Japan. Each survey took approximately 15-20 minutes per questionnaire. After data was collected, it was determined that 43 participants' surveys were incomplete or answered without reading carefully. Thus, this faulty data was excluded from the research, the total of Thai participants were 497 respondents and Japanese participants were 460 respondents.

Participants:

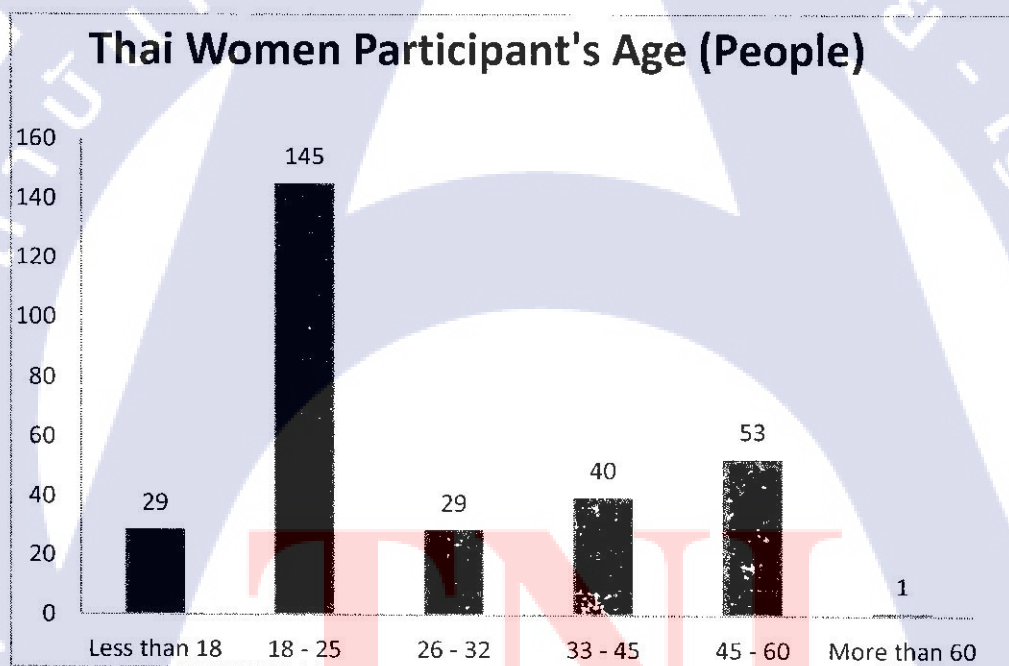
The participants' demographic information is given in Graphs below:



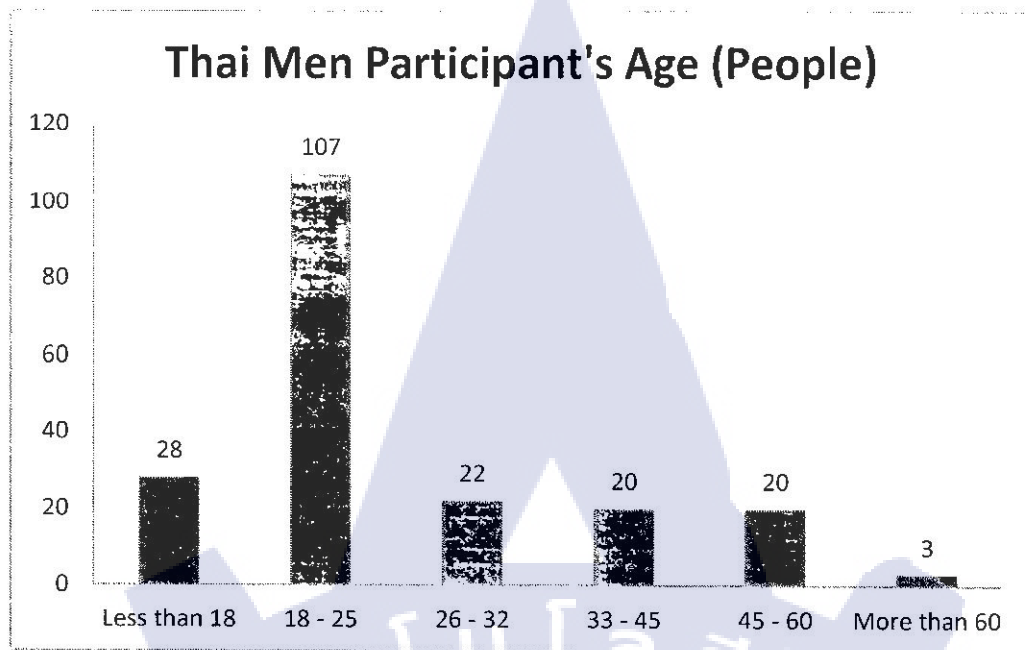
Graph 1: Thai participants



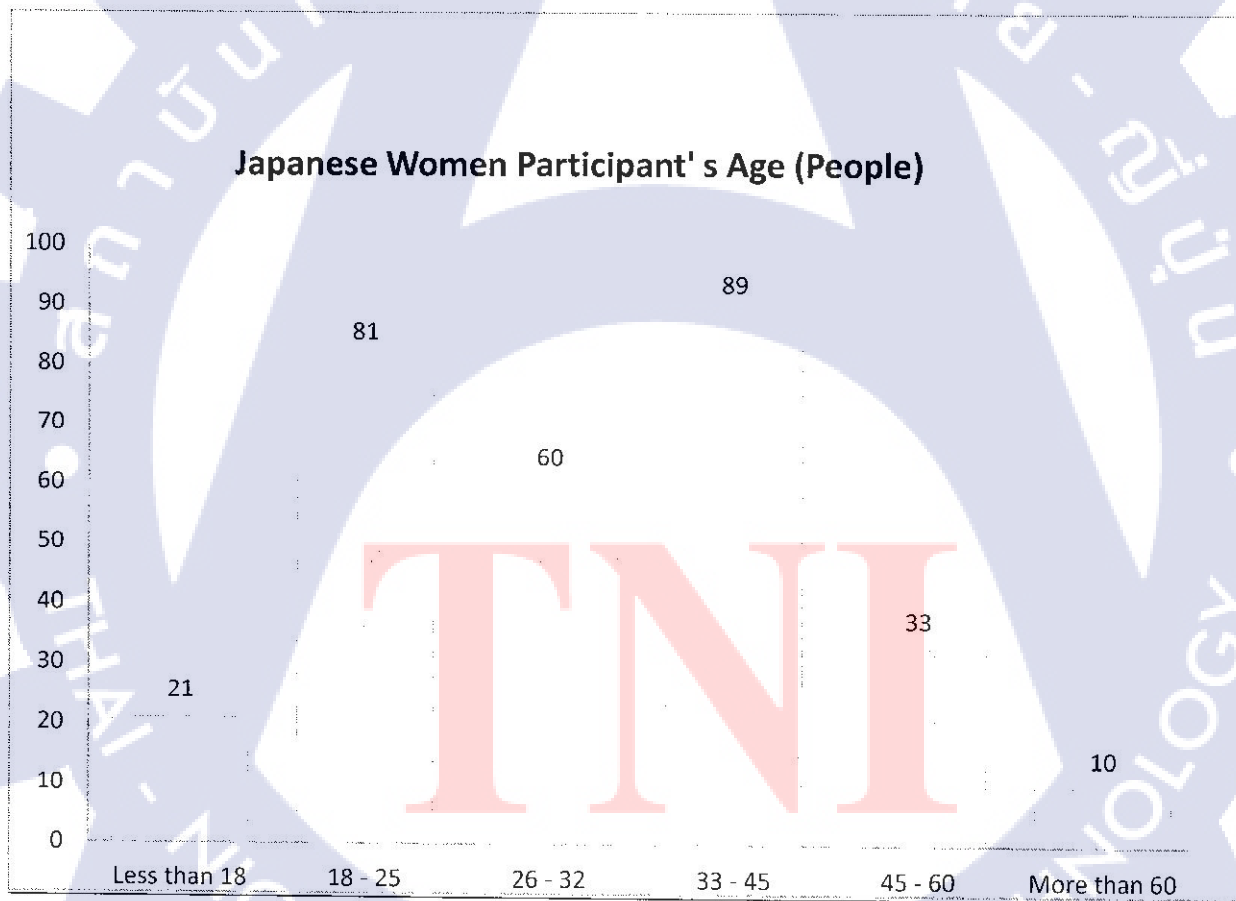
Graph 2: Japanese participants



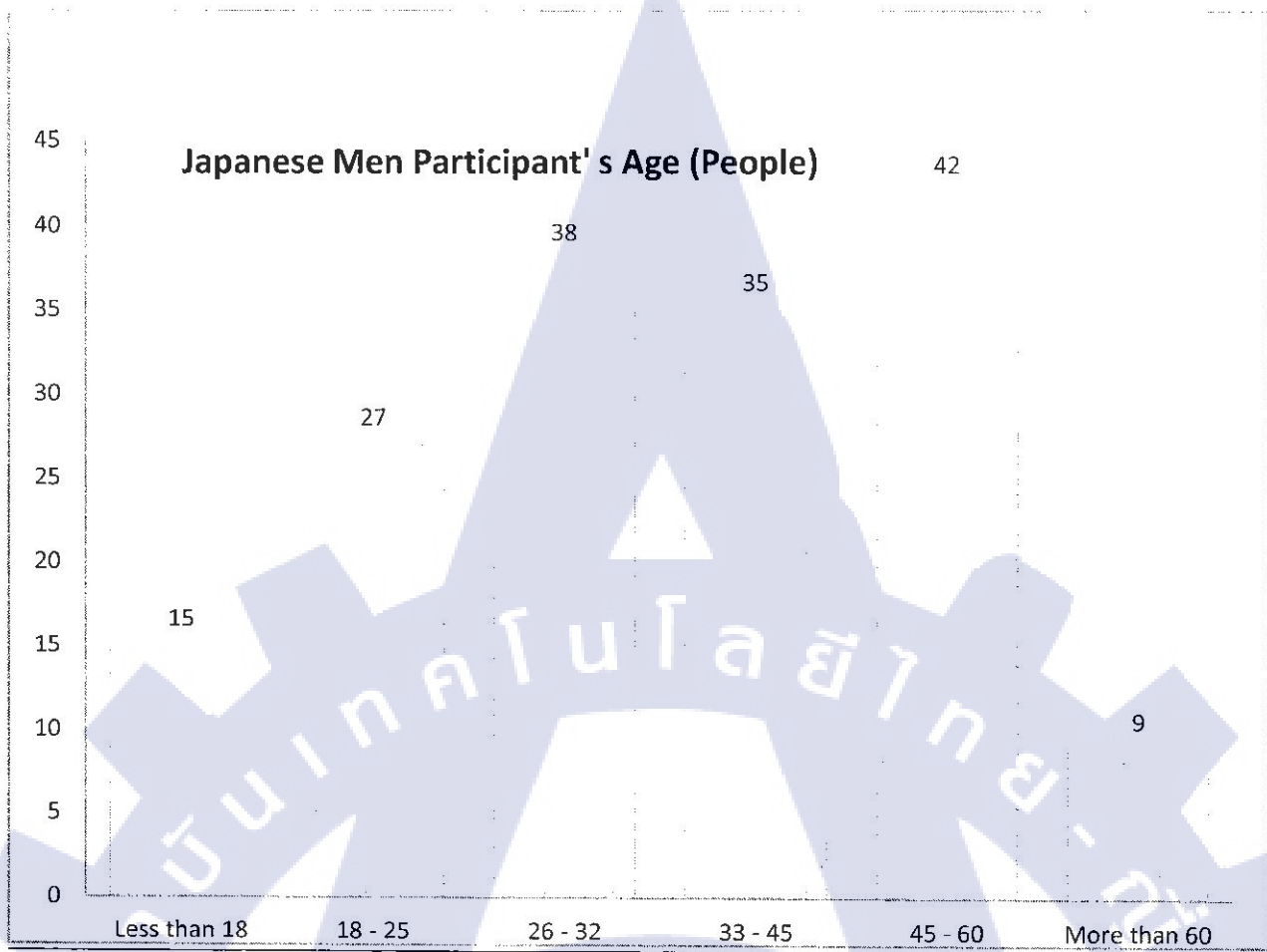
Graph 3: Age range of Thai women



Graph 4: Age range of Thai men



Graph 5: Age range of Japanese



Graph 6: Age range of Japanese man

Research Tools

The researchers used survey research, which collected by using questionnaires in persons and online surveys. For Japanese participants needed to collect both in person and online, but in Thailand collected in offline. The samples were collected from the people in Thailand who are living in Thailand and Japanese who are both living in Thailand and Japan which consisted of 500 participants per each target group (1,000 participants), thus total of participants after checking completion of surveys were 957 respondents, and the results have been studying the relationship by using Spearman rank difference method for the variable, nonparametric and Pearson product-moment correlation method for variable parametric.

Results of the Research

The online and offline convenience sample consists of 957 Thai and Japanese respondents; 497 Thai and 460 Japanese, of which 43 participants were eliminated because of incomplete questionnaires. They ranged from under 18 to more than 60 years of age, with majority of Female Thai respondents (30%) ranging from 33 to 45 years old and male Thai respondents (25%) ranging from 45 – 60 years old, whereas with majority of Female Japanese respondents (58%) ranging from 18-25, and 33-45 for male Japanese respondents and ranging from 26 to 60 years old (69%).

Hypotheses to measure in this study are the following:

H1) Female participants are more likely to remember the brand-mascot characters better than male participants of both countries

Table 2: Gender with ability to remember brand mascot characters in Thailand

Gender		Frequency of remembering brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Female	Count	247	50	297
	%	83.16%	16.84%	100.00%
Male	Count	162	38	200
	%	81.00%	19.00%	100.00%
Total	Count	409	88	497
	%	82.29%	17.71%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.384 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.5352

From the table above, we find that Thai female and male can remember brand mascot characters similarly. As 83.16% of Thai female and 81% of Thai male show that they can recognize brand mascot characters correctly. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.384 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between genders in Thailand are not significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters.

Table3: Gender with ability to remember brand mascot characters in Japan

Gender		Frequency of remembering brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Female	Count	130	164	294
	%	44.22%	55.78%	100.00%
Male	Count	66	100	166
	%	39.76%	60.24%	100.00%
Total	Count	196	264	460
	%	42.61%	57.39%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.863 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.3530

Japanese female and male can remember brand mascot characters similarly. As 44.22% of Japanese female and 39.76% of Japanese male show that they can recognize brand mascot characters correctly. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.863 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between genders in Japan are not significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters.

Therefore, the results show that males and females in both Thailand and Japan are not significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters.

H2) Participants who are age under 18 years old are more likely to be interested in brand-mascot characters than other ages

Table 4: Age with ability to remember brand mascot characters in Thailand

Age		Frequency of people who are interested in brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Under 18	Count	52	5	57
	%	91.23%	8.77%	100.00%
Over 18	Count	357	83	440
	%	81.14%	18.86%	100.00%
Total	Count	409	88	497
	%	82.29%	17.71%	100.00%

Chi-

square value = 3.527 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.0604

In Thailand, out of 497 respondents, 91.23% of respondents younger than 18 years old and 81.14% of respondents older than 18 years old have been interested in brand mascot characters. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 3.527 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between Ages in Thailand are not significantly different from each other regarding interest in brand mascot characters.

Table 5: Age with ability to remember brand mascot characters in Japan

Age		Frequency of people who are interested in brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Under 18	Count	17	19	36
	%	47.22%	52.78%	100.00%
Over 18	Count	179	245	424
	%	42.22%	57.78%	100.00%
Total	Count	196	264	460
	%	42.61%	57.39%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.3399 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.5599

In Japan, out of 460 respondents, 47.22% of respondents younger than 18 years old and 42.22% of respondents older than 18 years old have been interested in brand mascot characters. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.3399 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between Ages in Japan are not significantly different from each other regarding interest in brand mascot characters.

The results show that age differences regarding interest in brand mascot characters in both Thailand and Japan are not significant different.

H3) Using media in Television or online has helped to build brand-mascot awareness for all ages and gender of both countries than just the magazines or newspapers

Table 6: Remembering Brand Mascot Percentage through Each Media comparing Thailand-Japan

	THAI		JAPAN	
1	Poster	95%	Billboard	74%
2	Mascot in Product Exhibition	94%	Leaflet	60%
3	Product's packaging	91%	Product's packaging	58%
4	TV Advertisement	89%	Mascot in Product Exhibition	58%
5	Online Advertisement	89%	Online Advertisement	57%
6	Leaflet	88%	TV Advertisement	57%
7	Billboard	87%	Poster	56%

From the table above we can see that Thai people can remember brand mascot through poster, exhibition and product's packaging as the top three media rather than TV advertisement or online advertisement. While in Japan the top three media which help Japanese people remember the brand mascot are billboard, leaflet and product's packaging. The results indicate that there is a significance relating to the effect of advertising media of brand mascots on consumer perception.

H4) Participants who are age below 18 tend to be more remember interactive brand-mascot characters than not interactive brand-mascot characters regardless of nationalities

Table 7: Brand Mascot Interactiveness and Young People's Interest

Cartoon		Frequency of people who are under 18 and interested in brand mascot		Total
		YES	NO	
Interactive	Count	19	11	30
	%	63.33%	36.67%	100.00%
Non-Interactive	Count	12	7	19
	%	63.16%	36.84%	100.00%
Interactive and Non-interactive	Count	37	7	44
	%	84.09%	15.91%	100.00%
Total	Count	68	25	93
	%	73.12%	26.88%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 5.116 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.0775

Of all 93 Thai and Japanese who are under 18, we find that brand mascot characters which are both interactive and non-interactive gain the most interest from teenagers. However, the calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 5.116 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that brand mascot's interactiveness are not significantly related to younger people's interest.

H5) Participants who love cartoon tend to remember the brand-mascot cartoon characters than people who not love cartoon characters regardless of nationalities

Table 8: Interest in Cartoon and Ability to Remember Brand Mascot Characters in Thailand

Interest		Frequency of people who can remember brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Cartoon Lover	Count	321	50	371
	%	86.52%	13.48%	100.00%
Not a Cartoon L	Count	88	38	126
	%	69.84%	30.16%	100.00%
Total	Count	409	88	497
	%	82.29%	17.71%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 17.963 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.0000

In Thailand, out of 497 respondents, 86.52% of respondents who claim that they are cartoon lovers can remember brand mascot characters correctly, while 69.84% of respondents who are not cartoon lovers can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 17.963 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the passion in cartoon is significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters in Thailand.

Table 9 : Interest in Cartoon and Ability to Remember Brand Mascot Characters in Japan

Interest		Frequency of people who can remember brand mascot characters		Total
		YES	NO	
Cartoon Lover	Count	136	160	296
	%	45.95%	54.05%	100.00%
Not a Cartoon L	Count	60	104	164
	%	36.59%	63.41%	100.00%
Total	Count	196	264	460
	%	42.61%	57.39%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 3.781 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.0518

In Japan, out of 460 respondents, 45.95% of respondents who claim that they are cartoon lovers can remember brand mascot characters correctly, while 36.59% of respondents who are not cartoon lovers can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 3.781 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the passion in cartoon is not significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters in Japan.

In comparison, there is a significant difference between passion in cartoon and ability to remember brand mascot for Thai participants, but no significant difference for Japanese participants.

H6) Using brand character illustration products and services has helped the female participants get the attention and interest to the products and services more than male participants

Table 10: Gender and Interest in Brand Mascot Character's Product Illustration in Thailand

Gender		Frequency of people who are interested in brand mascot characters' product illustration		Total
		Not Interested	Interested	
Female	Count	75	222	297
	%	25.25%	74.75%	100.00%
Male	Count	58	142	200
	%	29.00%	71.00%	100.00%
Total	Count	133	364	497
	%	26.76%	73.24%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.856 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.3548

This question we want to measure whether brand mascot's product illustration can gain attention and interest from female participants more than male. Out of 497 Thai respondents, 74.75% of female respondents are interested in the product illustration, while 71.00% of male

respondents have the attention. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.856 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between genders in Thailand are not significantly different from each other when measuring interest in product illustration by brand mascot characters.

Table 11 : Gender and Interest in Brand Mascot Character's Product Illustration in Japan

Gender		Frequency of people who are interested in brand mascot characters' product illustration		Total
		Not Interested	Interested	
Female	Count	74	220	294
	%	25.17%	74.83%	100.00%
Male	Count	45	121	166
	%	27.11%	72.89%	100.00%
Total	Count	119	341	460
	%	25.87%	74.13%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.208 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.6484

Out of 460 Japanese respondents, 74.83% of female respondents are interested in the product illustration, while 72.89% of male respondents have the attention. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.208 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between genders in Japan are not significantly different from each other when measuring interest in product illustration by brand mascot characters.

The results show that males and females in both Thailand and Japan are not significant different when measuring interest in product illustration by brand mascot characters.

H7) Using realistic colors in brand-mascot has helped younger participants (age under 18) to recognize and remember the brand-mascot characters than older participants

Table 12: Age and Ability to Remember Brand Mascot Characters with Realistic and Unrealistic Color in Thailand

Age		Frequency of people who can recognize and remember brand mascot		Total
		with realistic color	with unrealistic color	
Under 18	Count	10	47	57
	%	17.54%	82.46%	100.00%
Over 18	Count	89	351	440
	%	20.23%	79.77%	100.00%
Total	Count	99	398	497
	%	19.92%	80.08%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 0.228 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.6332

This question we want to measure whether brand mascot's realistic color can gain attention and interest from people under 18 years old participants more than older people. Out of 497 Thai respondents, 17.54% of respondents under 18 years old can recognize and remember brand mascot with realistic color, while 20.23% of over 18 years old respondents can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 0.228 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between ages in Thailand are not significantly different from each other when measuring interest in brand mascot characters with realistic color and unrealistic color.

Table 13: Age and Ability to Remember Brand Mascot Characters with Realistic and Unrealistic Color in Japan

Age		Frequency of people who can recognize and remember brand mascot		Total
		with realistic color	with unrealistic color	
Under 18	Count	14	22	36
	%	38.89%	61.11%	100.00%
Over 18	Count	122	302	424
	%	28.77%	71.23%	100.00%
Total	Count	136	324	460
	%	29.57%	70.43%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 1.630 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.2016

Out of 460 Japanese respondents, 38.89% of respondents under 18 years old can recognize and remember brand mascot with realistic color, while 28.77% of over 18 years old respondents can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 1.630 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between ages in Japan are not significantly different from each other when measuring interest in brand mascot characters with realistic color and unrealistic color.

The results show that age differences when measuring interest in brand mascot characters with realistic color and unrealistic color in both Thailand and Japan are not significant different.

H8) Remembering the brand characters has helped female participants to be well remembered the products and service for both countries

Table 14: Remembering Brand Mascot Has Helped Remembering Product & Brand Name in Thai Female

Female		Frequency of people who can recognize and remember brand mascot		Total
		Remember product&brand name	Don't remember product&brand name	
Remember mascot	Count	222	30	252
	%	88.10%	11.90%	100.00%
Don't remember Mascot	Count	26	17	43
	%	60.47%	39.53%	100.00%
Total	Count	248	47	297
	%	83.50%	15.82%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 20.937 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.000

Out of 297 Thai female respondents, 88.10% of respondents who can recognize and remember brand mascot eventually remember product and brand name, while 60.47% of respondents who cannot recognize and remember brand mascot can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 20.937 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that remembering brand mascot is significantly related to remembering product and brand name in Thai female.

Table 15: Remembering Brand Mascot Has Helped Remembering Product & Brand Name in Japanese Female

Female		Frequency of people who can recognize and remember brand mascot		Total
		Remember product&service	Don't remember product&service	
Remember mascot	Count	68	57	125
	%	54.40%	45.60%	100.00%
Don't remember Mascot	Count	56	112	168
	%	33.33%	66.67%	100.00%
Total	Count	124	169	294
	%	42.18%	57.48%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 13.031 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.000

Out of 294 Japanese female respondents, 54.40% of respondents who can recognize and remember brand mascot eventually remember product and brand name, while 33.33% of respondents who cannot recognize and remember brand mascot can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 13.031 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that remembering brand mascot is significantly related to remembering product and brand name in Japanese female.

The results show remembering brand mascot is significantly related to remembering product and brand name in both Thai and Japanese females.

H9) participants are more likely to remember the products/services than Thai Participants

Table 16: Nationalities and Ability to Remember Brand Mascot Characters

Nationalities		Frequency of people who can recognize and remember brand mascot characters			Don't remember product&service and brand name	Total
		Remember product&service and brand name	Remember only product&service	Remember only brand name		
Thai	Count	320	77	47	53	497
	%	64%	15%	9%	11%	100%
Japanese	Count	155	84	103	118	460
	%	34%	18%	22%	26%	100%
Total	Count	475	161	150	171	957
	%	50%	17%	16%	18%	100%

Chi-square value = 101.956 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.000

Out of all 957 respondents, 64% of Thai respondents can recognize and remember product and brand name, while 34% of Japanese respondents who cannot recognize and remember brand mascot can do so. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 101.956 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that the responses between nationalities are significantly different in terms of remembering products/services. However, we find that Thai are more likely to remember the products/services comparing to Japanese participants.

H10) Thai participants tend to more likely to buy product/service after knowing brand-mascot characters than Japanese participants

Table 16: Nationalities and Tendency to Buy Products/Services after Knowing Brand Mascot Characters

Nationalities		Frequency of people who tend to buy products and services after knowing brand mascot		Total
		buy	don't buy	
Thai	Count	396	101	497
	%	79.68%	20.32%	100.00%
Japanese	Count	350	110	460
	%	76.09%	23.91%	100.00%
Total	Count	746	211	957
	%	77.95%	22.05%	100.00%

Chi-square value = 1.793 at significant level = 0.05, p-value = 0.1806

Out of all 957 respondents, 79.68% of Thai respondents and 76.09% of Japanese respondents tend to buy products or services after knowing brand mascot characters. The calculated value of Chi-square test statistic is 1.793 at a 95% level of confidence. This shows that nationalities are not significantly different regarding tendency to buy products or services after knowing brand mascot characters.

H11) What kind of mascot characters would be remembered by participants regardless of countries?

When we asked our samplings to match various brand mascots with their brand names, 191 out of 957 respondents are able to match correctly, then, we asked why they can did so. Here are the top 5 reasons accounted for ability to remember brand mascots. Firstly, the mascots are publicly advertised through several media channel. Second, the mascots have their own stories which had been created by the marketing team. Third, they have outstanding color and this is not a matter of realistic color or unrealistic color, but as long as the color is outstanding, people tend to remember them better. Next, they are seen often, for example,

they might appear on their products' packaging. Lastly, people tend to remember the brand mascots well because of their own preference.

Table 17: Top 5 Reasons for Remembering Brand Mascot Characters

	Reason for remembering brand mascot characters
1	Advertisement through Media
2	They have got their own stories
3	They have outstanding color
4	They are seen often
5	Own preference

Conclusion and Discussion

Our objectives to understand how culture affects the perception of the animated brand characters by focusing on Thai and Japanese consumers and to study the effectiveness of using brand-mascot characters in promoting consumer perception toward products and services were met to a certain degree, but only a few factors were found to show statistical significance.

The results also indicate that there is a significance relating to the effect of advertising media of brand mascots on consumer perception. The results of a study by Abernety and Frank (1996) showed that a good advertising strategy should be fascinating in passing on the message through advertising media and to send the advertising messages correctly, so many companies have developed a marketing strategy through the use of a brand mascot with the hope that the mascot's charm and positive image could encourage consumers' interest to buy the product. The study of Neeley and Schumann (2004) further confirms that advertising which contains animated characters generate a high level of attention, product recognition, and liking among young children. Brand characters can be brought to life by creating complete stories based on these mascots through social media websites like Facebook (Schultz, 2012). In television marketing, brand characters can be used to give information to consumers to make them more familiar with the brand popular (Fletcher, 2001). However, other advertising methods such as roadshows and events can be used along with mascots to create a better and live experience to consumers (Fletcher, 2001).

From the analyses of results in the study, most of our hypotheses were rejected by Chi-square test statistical analysis except for a few, which were:

Passion in cartoon being significantly different from each other when measuring ability to remember brand mascot characters in Thailand. Passion in cartoons could originate from participants' childhood where young children preferred to watch cartoons compared to other television programs, resulting in better recognition of brand-mascots (Thompson and Zerbinose, 1997).

Remembering brand mascot is significantly related to remembering product and brand name for both Thai and Japanese females. Television role models can affect girls' confidence and determination to succeed (Atkin and Miller, 1975) and although there is a dominance of boys' over girls' Japanese cartoons with a ratio of 2:1 (Cooper-Chen, 1999), females have better recollection of brand mascots than males despite the male dominance of Japanese cartoon characters.

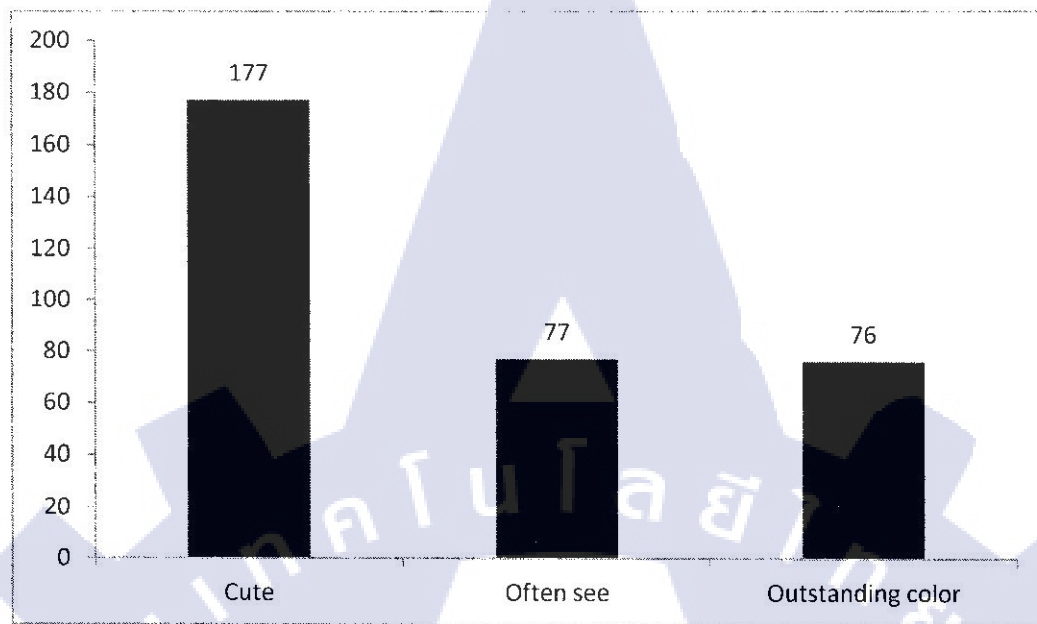
The responses between nationalities are significantly different in terms of remembering products/services. We find that Thais are more likely to remember the products/services compared to Japanese participants. There is a relevance to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory about differences in national cultures (Hofstede, 1984).

Factors that include age, interactiveness and unrealistic colors of mascots were shown to be insignificant to remembering mascots while gender differences for the factors are also shown to be much less than hypothesized. A lack of correlation was discovered as the answer to most of our research hypotheses.

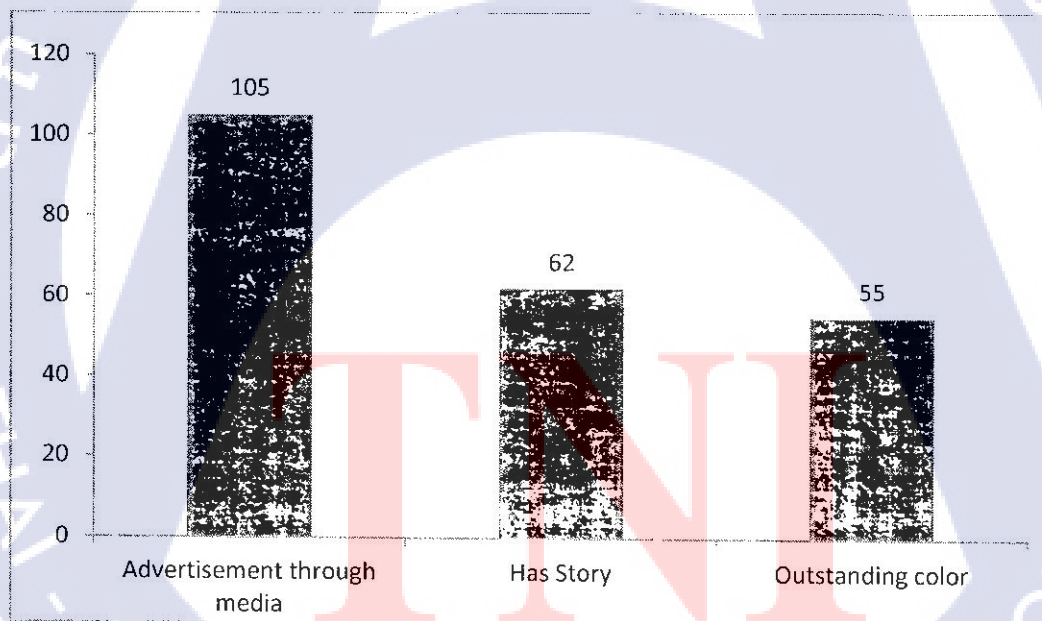
The results confirm the theories that passion in cartoons is important for being able to remember brand mascots, a possibility of gender differences in being able to remember brand mascots may exist, and there are national differences in remembering products/services. Other variables that we measured in this study are age differences between those below 18 and those above 18, type of mascots, brand awareness, social media, communication channels, realistic and unrealistic colors of mascots, and interactiveness.

Furthermore, our study has also measured what were the factors that customers remember about buying the brand mascot products/services. The findings discovered some interesting results from both countries. In Thailand, the most factors that helped them to remember were brand mascot characters were "Cuteness," which attracted the Thai customers more than Japanese customers. Followed by the brand mascot characters that have been

“often seen” on communication channels regardless of what channels used. In addition, “attractiveness of the brand mascot colors” have helped them to remember the products and services.



Graph 7: Remembering Factors of products/services (Thai)



Graph 8: Remembering Factors of products/services (Japanese)

The findings of the research results on remembering factors of products and services were “spending on advertising through all media,” followed by the brand mascot characters that have “the storytelling” which helped them to remember the products/services, and finally “attractiveness of brand mascots colors were the factors that helped them to remember those products/services.

Research Limitation

There are a few limitations in this study. First, starting up to write the Japanese questionnaire was doing by two research assistants who were able to write and understand and translate from Thai questionnaire to Japanese version, then by asking the Sensei in Japanese Language Center at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology to help out with revising the Japanese questionnaires for correction version. Second, data collection in Japanese version for offline procedure was short of research assistants who could speak fluent Japanese during the short interview in Thailand. Third limitation was collecting data via the linkage and connection with all MOU that Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology had. The ten surveys were returned after three weeks passed and therefore, the researchers changed the procedure by administering the surveys both offline and online in Thailand and Japan. Last limitation was collecting data together in the same area for faster outcomes, but it was made more difficult by gathering all the research assistants together. Therefore, the first time we went out for collecting data was difficult, which we solved by asking each research assistant to administer their portion of surveys in different areas in Bangkok and nearby areas for offline data. Furthermore, because of summer time, each lecturer and research assistant have other duties to engage so each person had to reply and respond back via only email and other forms of social networks to get the research done.

Future Research

There are a few research questions that researchers would love to continue and find out more from this kind of research by using factor analysis statistic to compile from this study, especially the factors that can affect the way people decide to choose the brands or products/services from the mascot characters. From this research, we found the factors but we couldn't run the statistics because of a lack of a good questionnaire and thus future research must ensure the research design in this particular part.

Future research can also include more countries other than just Thailand and Japan, so we can discover more knowledge about how people in other countries perceive brand mascots as well. Also, most of the results in this research study were not significant so questions relating to these variables could be examined in more detail in future research.



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