

Consumer perspective on fictional character crossover products

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing trend of crossover products, where two or more popular fictional franchises are combined. These products can be found in a variety of different formats, including movies, books, and video games. While some consumers will be excited to try out a new crossover item, others may be less assured about the potential for confusion or disappointment. Consumers are often interested in these products because they are intrigued by the different universes and the potential for crossover characters in recent times. These products can be found in a variety of different industries, including entertainment, food, and fashion. These products can be fun and interesting to use, and they can help to increase sales for both brands.

Some of the most popular products include Funko Pop! figures of characters from Stranger Things and The Walking Dead, Funko Pop! Vinyl figures of characters from Game of Thrones, and Nerf guns modelled after characters from The Avengers and Star Wars. These products are popular because they are fun and provide a unique way for fans of the respective franchises to interact. From this we can understand that, the new trend of buying these fictional characters crossover products is spreading at a large rate between the current young adults of the society. These endorsement products highly influencing the consumers now-a-days.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, animated characters have become more popular as an endorsement method because of technological advances (Stafford et al., 2013). According to Garretson and Niedrich (2013), firms have employed spokes-characters since the late 1800s to create brand recognition and favourable brand associations. These characters can be human or non-human, such as animals, mythical creatures, or product personifications (Callcott and Lee, 1995). All non-celebrity spokes-characters in this study were created exclusively to promote a brand or product rather than to appear in animated

movies, cartoons, or comic strips and then licensed by brands. The benefit of fictional characters is that they are a safe alternative to human endorsers because they are more effective with the target audience.

This study examines non-celebrity spokes-characters solely created to promote a brand or product rather than those who were originally created for animated movies, cartoons and/or comic strips, and then licensed by brands to appear in promotions. Fictional spokes-characters are an appealing and safe alternative to human endorsers because marketers have greater control over characteristics that are both effective with the target audience. A fictional spokes-character is an animated being or animated object that is used to promote or communicate product benefits, service features, or a concept. Spokes-characters have been a frequently used promotional and marketing communication tool over the years (Phillips et al. 2019). The use of spokes-characters grew in media consideration, with hour-long television programmes dedicated to addressing their potential benefits to brands (Garretson & Niedrich 2004).

More recent research (Kim et al. 2018) investigated the persuasive effects of fictional brand characters. When an advertisement is effective, the audience notices, recalls and thinks about the message in the advertisement and eventually considers purchasing the product. Today's advertisers must understand how individuals consume information and entertainment, both in terms of media (physical or virtual) and platform (online, app, social media, or traditional formats). However, a company using a celebrity always runs the risk of the brand being influenced by the celebrity's professional and personal life, which cannot be controlled, and sometimes, the effect could be negative.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer intention to purchase

Khan et al. (2012) define purchase intention as an individual's aim to buy a specific brand, which they have chosen after a certain evaluation process. Tariq et al. (2013) states that purchase intention relates to four behaviours of consumers, namely the definite plan to buy the product, thinking explicitly of purchasing the product, when someone contemplates to buy the product in the future, and to buy the specific product. Chinomona and Sandada (2013) explain that the intention by consumers to purchase reflects their interest in the product and hence their willingness to buy the product or service. Khan et al. (2012) depict brand knowledge, brand relationship, behavioural intention, brand advertisement and past experience about the brand as factors in the purchase intention of consumers. Chinomona and Sandada (2013) provide the elements that can be used to measure purchase intent, namely the probability of a consumer considering buying the product, the consumer's willingness to, and the likelihood of a consumer's purchase behaviour. According to Schiffman et al. (2010), purchase intention can be measured using factors such as, the consumer will definitely buy the product/brand; the probability that the consumer will purchase the product/brand; the consumer's uncertainty over whether they will buy the product/ brand; the probability the consumer will not buy the product/brand; and the consumer will definitely not buy the product/brand.

Attitude towards the brand

Attitude towards the brand refers to audiences' emotional reaction to the advertised brand. That is, to what extent audiences feel purchasing the brand is good/bad, favorable/unfavourable, or wise/foolish. Ghorban (2012) describes attitude as an achievable, relatively permanent, and at the same time purposeful, gradual, and motivated intention to react to a particular object; for example, a brand or advertisement. Attitude can be positive or negative and can be changed if people gain new experiences. Schiffman et al. (2010) state that according to the attitude-toward-object model, consumers will have a positive attitude towards a brand that they believe has an adequate level of attributes they view as positive, and have unfavourable attitudes toward a brand that they perceive as having too many undesired attributes. In measuring attitude, Ghorban (2012) used two items: favourable to unfavourable, and like to dislike. In measuring attitude towards brands amongst children, Schiffman et al. (2010) used two items, namely

definitely agreeing to definitely disagreeing to describe the brand as fun, great, useful, practical or useless.

Attitude towards advertisement

This can be defined as the set of thoughts and feelings consumers have about an advertisement. Attitude towards advertising can also be seen as the way a targeted consumer responds in either a favourable or unfavourable manner towards a specific advertisement during the exposure. Consumers will be involved with an advertisement based on the degree of attention and the processing strategy. It is widely accepted that ad cognitions or antecedents, also called ad perceptions, have a direct positive effect on attitude towards the advertisement (Lutz et al. 1983; Mackenzie et al. 1986). Ad cognitions can be defined as the consumer's belief in the advertising stimulus. The determining factors of ad cognitions are 1) the ad characteristics; 2) the consumer's attitude toward the advertiser; and 3) conscious processing of executional elements (Najmi et al. 2012).

Brand extensions in fiction

Tauber (Tauber 1988, p. 27) defined brand extensions as "using a brand in one category to introduce products in a totally different category. In some instances licensing is used, but in most cases a manufacturer is searching for ways to cost effectively enter new categories", although in his previous work (1981) he referred to this practice as a "franchise extension", also distinguishing a "line extension" – using an existing brand in the same product category. Farquhar (Farquhar 1989) sees these both practices as different types of brand extensions: a category extension and a line extension. He also mentions licensing (a way to gain revenue by providing a third party the right to use a brand) as a separate strategy rather than a form of extension. A similar approach can be seen in Clifton and Simmons (Clifton, Simmons 2003) book. Colucci, Montaguti and Lago (Colucci, Montaguti, Lago 2008) treat licensing as a way of extending the brand (which they call "stretching"). Discussions on successful use of different types of extensions can be easily found (Aaker 1990; Aaker, Keller 1990; Boush, Loken 1991; Bridges, Keller, Sood 2000), although they are rarely concerned about the creative industry. The basic problem in applying the term "brand extensions" to creative goods, especially fiction, is the different way of their consumption. Regular consumer products can be produced and sold for decades without any major changes, while the lifecycle of a creative good is relatively shorter. Except for cases of changes to

the medium containing the good (i.e. VHS to DVD and later to Blu-Ray or digital distribution) or its slight update (i.e. remastered or enhanced version), there is basically no reason to purchase the same product again. Therefore, as a way of keeping the brand “alive”, we can find: Sequels – continuing the story – eg. Vabank 2, Die Hard 4; prequels – presenting the events that led to the original story – eg. Star Wars Episode I (released in 1999, 16 years after Episode VI); □ and spinoffs – telling a different story that is somehow related to the main plot – eg. Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (2016, set between episode III and IV), The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner (2010, story of a supporting character from the Twilight book series).

In addition to the above “extensions” there are also “shared universes”, eg. the “Marvel Cinematic Universe”, where different characters or their groups (Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, The Avengers) have their own series, yet they cross-over to from one series to another, creating a shared story. If we still agree to call those products brand extensions, they would be “line extensions”, since they are based in the same category. A typical “category extension” would be adaptations, which try to retell the story in a form of different medium¹⁰, for example: from novel to a film – eg. War of the Worlds (novel 1898; film 1953, 2005); a video game to a film – eg. Tomb Raider (video game series since 1996; film 2001, 2003); a film to a video game – eg. E.T. The Extraterrestrial (film 1982; video game 1982), etc.

Licensing, which can be a very profitable way of using brands from creative industries, can be easily identified in the case of non-fiction products, like toys, posters and all kinds of gadgets and consumer products bearing a brand name, logo, or one of the brands characters¹¹; it is doubtful that creators of a series of (for example) animated movies are also skilled in creating all those things, therefore they must be produced by some other entity. On the other hand, the brand “extensions” sometimes also concern products carrying a story, which can be both in the same or a different medium as the original, and both produced by the brand owner or licensed to another company. The categorization of different creative works as brand extensions gets really complicated in the case of “transmedia storytelling”, a term introduced by Jenkins (Jenkins 2003), who discussed the case of The Matrix film trilogy. Before the release of the third movie (The Matrix Revolutions, 2003), the story was expanded in the form of

animated short stories (released as a collection titled Animatrix), comic books and video games. In this case (and many different, since The Matrix is not the only example of transmedia storytelling), the branded products differ in their form, and belong to different product categories (sometimes created by other entities), though they create one bigger story, a “brand” consisting of various smaller parts, and as such, the point of referring to the “parts” as “brand extensions” makes little sense. The influence of fan fiction and other fan creations on brands is surely important and highly discussed (eg. Muniz, O’Guinn 2001; Shau, Muniz, Arnauld 2009; Christodoulides, Jevons, Bonhomme 2012), therefore intentionally omitted in this article as too extensive. It brings up, however, the topic of canon in creative works. The term canon in the creative industries is usually referring to the whole of creations contributing to the “official” storyline, which is important to keep track of if the number of brand products is growing, and produced by different creators (especially licensees). For example, the Tomb Raider movies are loosely based on the story presented in video games, and therefore non-canon, while most officially released¹² creations of The Matrix brand are canon. The Star Wars franchise was a great example of canon policy, as the canonicity of every licensed book, comic book, video game and other form of fiction was supervised and approved by Lucasfilm company as a part of “Expanded Universe” (EU), which story spans 4000 years before and over 130 years after the events of the six Episodes. After the acquisition by the Disney company, all creations except the movies and the Clone Wars animated series was rebranded as “Legends”, and considered non-canon (Taylor 2014). The idea of transmedia storytelling brands is well explained by Scolari (Scolari 2009, p. 600), who imposes that the brand is expressed by the characters, topics, and aesthetic style of the fictional world. This set of distinctive attributes can be translated into different languages and media

Objectives

- To know the awareness of Fictional cross-over products among people.
- To know the consumer perspective on fictional cross-over products
- To know the change in consumer buying behaviour by branding these fictional cross-over products.
- To know the Pros and Cons, people experience while buying these products.

Methodology:

This study uses Google Forms software to collect the primary data. Google sheet software is used to analyse and present the data in a more understandable and visually appealing manner.

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data are collected from people through structured questionnaires using Google Forms software with a sample size of 100 respondents. This study makes use of a convenient

sample method. For secondary data, information is gathered from published and unpublished records like articles, stats records, websites, etc

Questionnaire:https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/e/1FAIpQLScs85M6ca1-hfxmN67yIyc3JP9MHO5uI_XP_O7Vi7PAIYpnw/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0&usp=mail_for_m_link&pli=1

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Age:

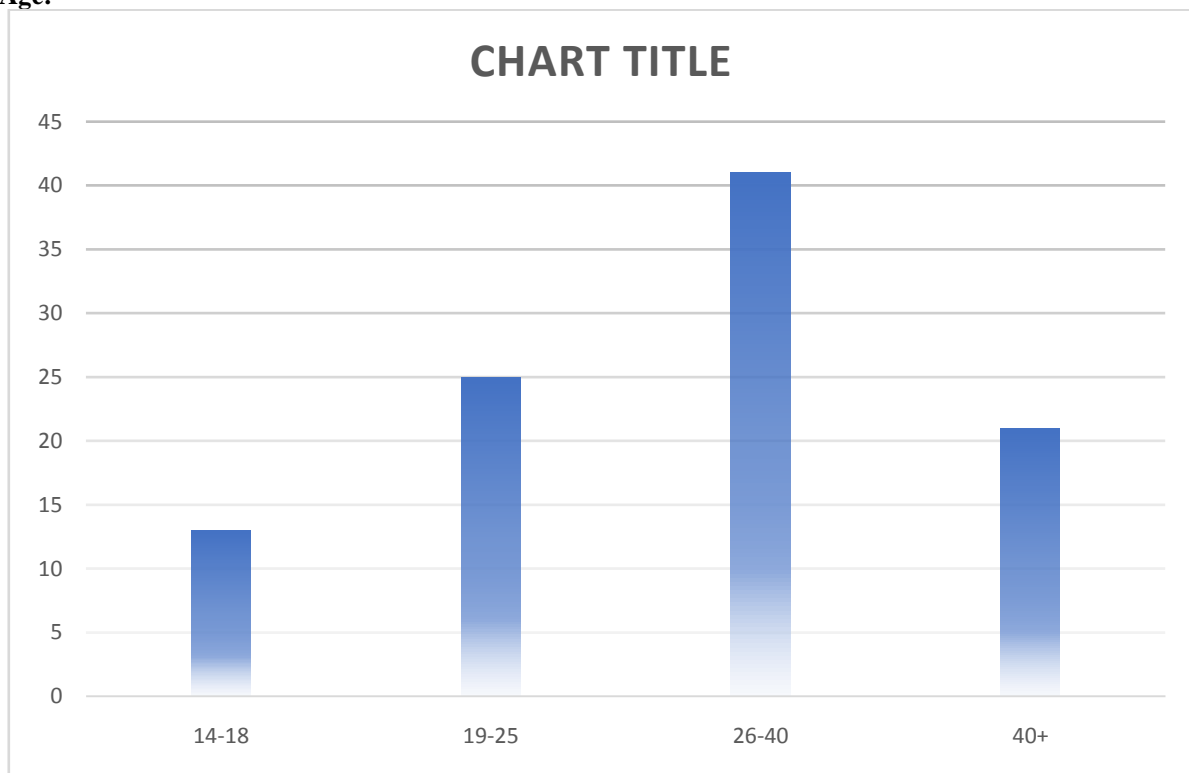


Figure no.1

(Source - Primary Data)

According to Figure no.1, Most of the consumers are from 26-40 age limit with 41% and the second ,most highest are the young adulthoods (19-25)with 25%. The next highest are adults and senior citizens of age above 40 school students (14-18) with 21% and the least are the school students (14-18) with 21%. From this pie chart we can understand that the adult consumers are the people

are more interested and has the capability to buy these fictional crossover products.

Consumer between the age 26-40, the adults and the consumers between the age 19-25, the young adults plays a main role in recent market because they are the most curious and earning people who like to buy what they want.

Genders:

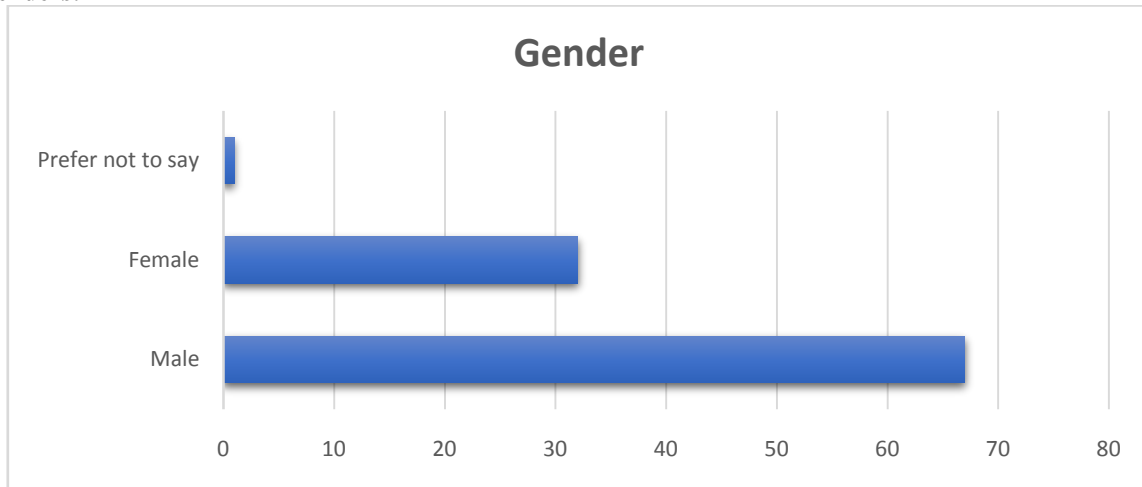


Figure no.2

(Source - Primary Data)

According to Figure No2, it is found that most of the respondents are Male with 67% responses, which shows that men are more aware of these fictional crossover products. Most of the women are not aware of these products with only

32%. Because in terms of sums spent, men are actually bigger impulse buyers than women. Typically, women's clothing costs more than men's even for similar items so they can buy many clothes at a same rate of a single women's cloth.

Income:

What is your source of income?

100 responses

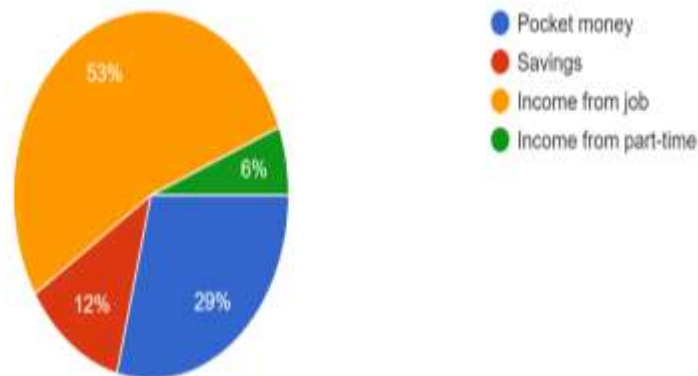


Figure no.3

(Source - Primary Data)

According to figure no.3, Most of the consumers are job workers with 53%. The second most source of income for the customers are their pocket money with 29%. The next highest is the 12% which is the savings of the customers and the last is the income which are earned through part-time jobs with 6%.

From this we can understand that many customers are employees and employers. Many job workers like to buy these products as they are capable of buying what they want when they earn salary whereas most of the other responders are just school students and college students who have no source of income on their own, they must depend on their parents or guardians.

Awareness:

Are you aware of these merchandise products ?

100 responses

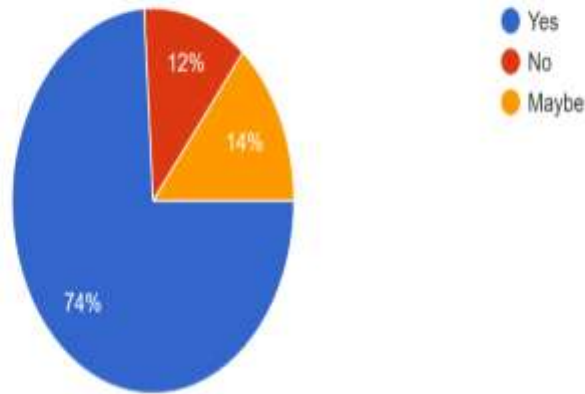


Figure no.4
 (Source - Primary Data)

According to the data, 75% of people are aware of the fictional crossover products and 12% has no idea of these products in the market and

14% may have seen these products somewhere. Due to experience and exposure into the new trend many were aware of these products.

Sighings in public:

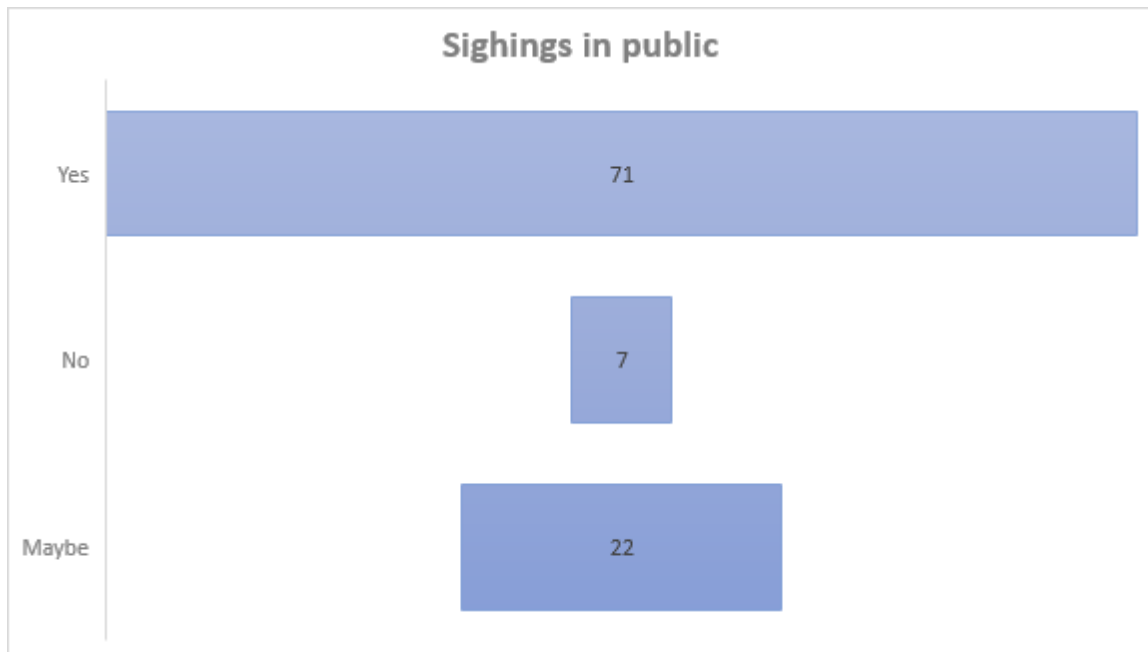


Figure no.4

(Source - Primary Data)

As per the data received, 66% of the people have seen these types of products in the public which represents it is famous now-a-days. 16% of the people never noticed these type of

products in the market and 18% of people may have or have not seen them. As it became a new trend in the market, the sightings of these products grown more.

Purchase rate:

Have you ever bought any merchandise products of a fictional character ?

100 responses

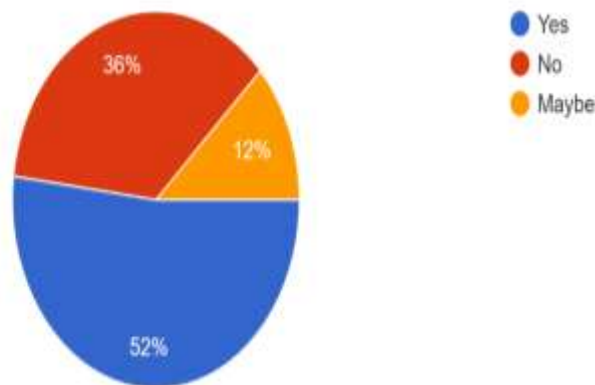


Figure no.5
 (Source - Primary Data)

According to Figure no.4, 52% of the people have already purchased these kind of products whereas 36% of the people not yet purchased products of these kinds. 12% of the

responders have no idea if the purchased or not. More than half of the respondents have bought these kind of products because the origin of the new trend in the market has begun.

Occupation:

What is your occupation ?

100 responses

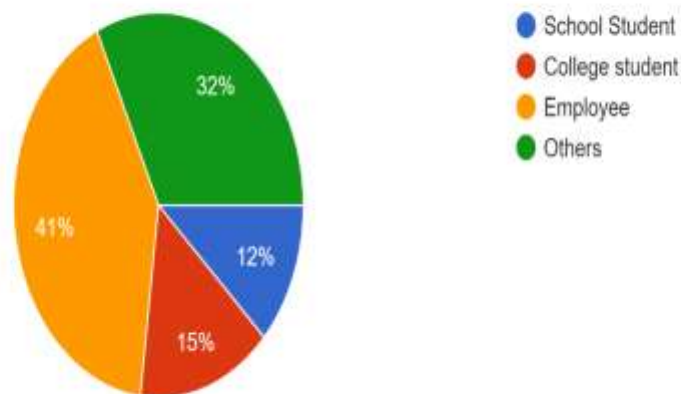


Figure no.6

(Source - Primary Data)

As per the data got from Figure no.6, most of them are employees with 41%, 32% of the people are other than employee and student, 15% are college students and 12% are school students. These are the type of respondents who co-operated

with the research. It is because most of the buyers are salaried people who are capable of buying anything they like which cannot be done by any college student or any school student.

Favourite:

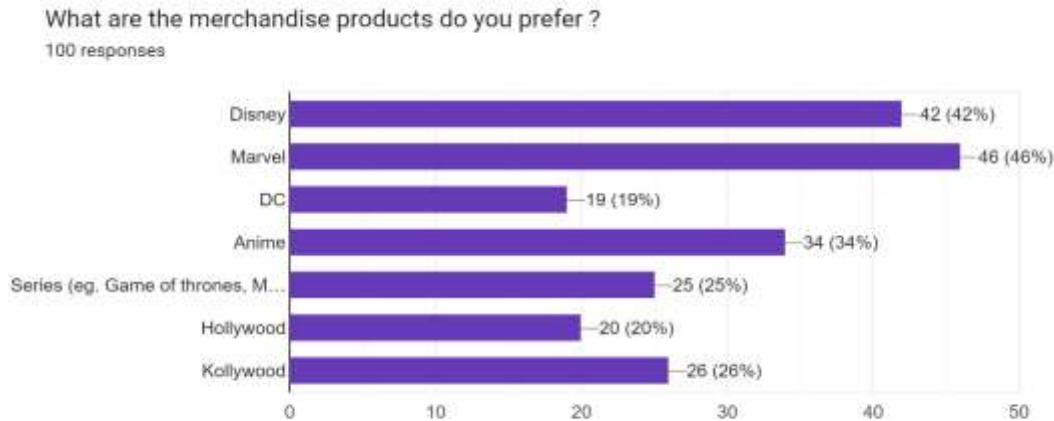


Figure no.7

(Source - Primary Data)

Branding is the process of creating and disseminating the brand name, its qualities and personality. Many responders prefer marvel product over everything which is because of their good comics and recent movies of them. Likewise the

value of the brand is created in a strong manner that no-one can define. Next is the disney which has been creating its own image for over many years and now has deep brand impression on every people.

Websites:

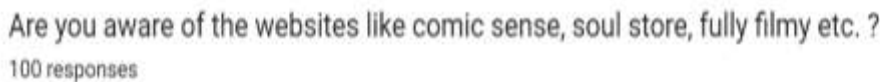


Figure no.8
 (Source - Primary Data)

As per the responds, only 63% of the people where aware of the website to buy these products online whereas 26% of the respondents didn't know this. As per the data received many of

them who were aware of these websites are mostly the post teenagers and young adults because that was the age of being curious about everything and nothing can be done about it.

Kind of products:

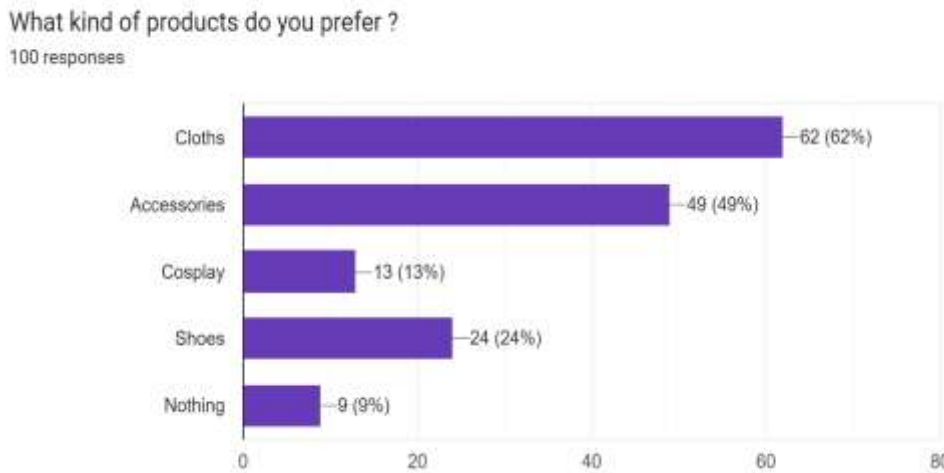


Figure no.9

(Source - Primary Data)

According to figure no.9, most of the responders of 62% would prefer fictional crossover cloths , 49% accessories , 13% cosplays, 24% shoes and 9% will never going to buy anything.

Because most of the responders prefers cloths as it is a product that can be used in a daily lifestyle and the next is obviously the accessories as it mostly used by men and woman for their decoration and to look cool in the public.

Purchase for other:

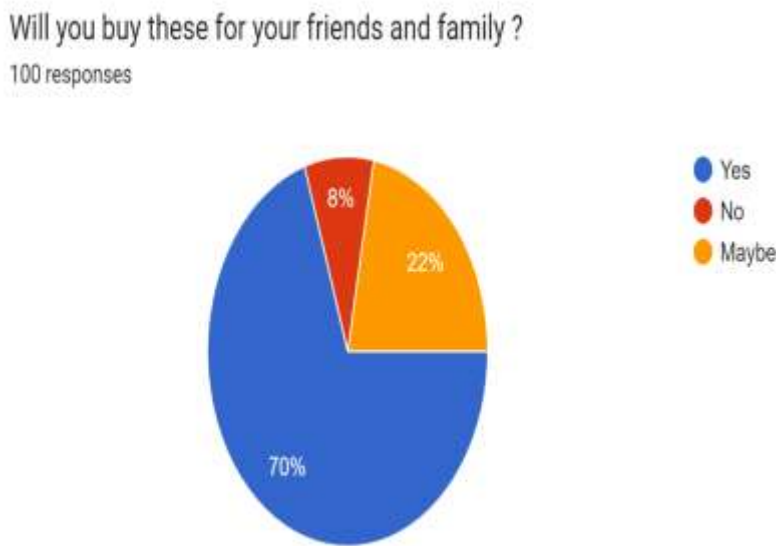


Figure no.10

(Source - Primary Data)

As per the data received, most of the responders' family and friend would like these products because 70% of the respondents would purchase these products for their friends and family and only 8% will not buy them.

Most of them would buy it because even though they don't want it, they will buy for their friends and family. Because everyone has a friend or family member who are obsessed with the fictional characters in recent times.

Successrate:

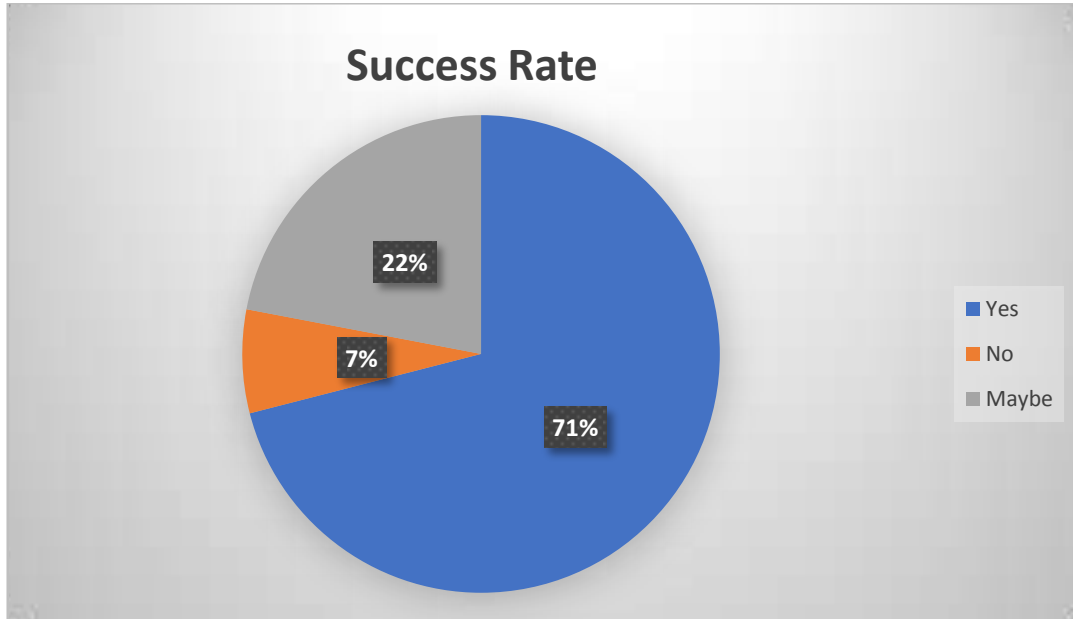


Figure no.11

According to the 71% of the respondents these fictional crossover products will be great success and only 7% didn't agree with that. From the perspective of the responders, the fictional

characters crossover products will soon be a great success in the recent market trend because no-one prefers a plain or designed product when they got a product with the fictional that they love.

Advertisement:

Have you seen any advertisement about these products in social media ?
 100 responses

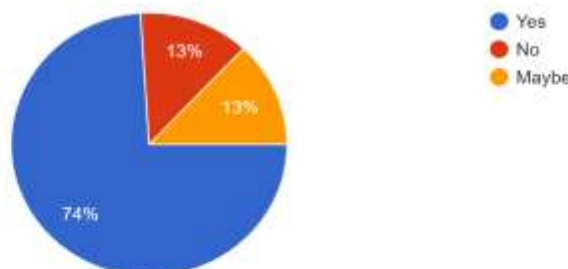


Figure no.11

(Source - Primary Data)

As per the data, many have seen advertisement about these products in the social

media platform, 75% have seen them whereas 13% haven't seen any ads.

From the data analysed most of the responders were targeted customers who are interested in stuff like these fictional character products. Because social media is the main advertisement platform for these fictional crossover products.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that moderate fictional characters endorser-product incongruence plays a significant role in increasing consumers' purchase behaviours. Consumers with high product involvement tend to exhibit purchase intention when the endorser endorses incongruent products. For consumers with a high degree of product involvement, endorser-product congruence may be regarded as a central clue in the formation of brand attitude. The aforementioned results have rarely been obtained in studies on virtual anime endorser-product congruence.

The results of this study revealed that the participants with low product involvement had a high level of brand attitude when the endorser endorsed incongruent products. The results of this study indicate that highly involved consumers are affected by peripheral clues under endorser-product incongruence. After introduction to the product through the virtual endorser, the participants of this study exhibited high brand attitude. This study demonstrated that consumers have different brand attitudes toward products under different levels of consistency between endorsers and products and emphasized the role of product involvement as a moderating factor in the relationships of virtual endorser-product congruence and moderate virtual endorser-product incongruence with brand attitudes.

This study examined the effects of endorser-product congruence and moderate endorser-product incongruence for different product categories and demonstrated that the level of product involvement has critical moderating influences on the effects of endorser-product congruence, moderate endorser-product incongruence, and endorser credibility on consumer behaviours.

V. LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations. First, although the questionnaire was administered at brand value, awareness and accessories stores, this study may not confirm whether all the formal participants were familiar with fictional character

endorsers or whether fictional-related endorsers could serve as ideal virtual endorsers for the participants.

Second, this study examined the relationships of endorser-product congruence and moderate endorser-product incongruence with consumers' attitudes (i.e., brand attitude and purchase intention). Research has indicated that the attractiveness of the endorser may affect consumer intent and brand attitude. Therefore, future research may include the construct of attractiveness to examine its effect on the relationships of endorser-product congruence and moderate endorser-product incongruence with brand attitude and purchasing intention. The sample of this study was relatively small, as it is characteristic of single-source data from only 100 responders.

In addition, the results of this study may not be generalized to all consumers in other countries even if the findings of this study found that the influences of virtual anime endorser-product congruence and moderate the endorser-product incongruence on consumer brand attitude and purchase intention. Future research investigating whether these prototypes differ in other countries would be valuable and may examine diverse cultural samples to reduce generalizability issues.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the consumer perception of personalized marketing and how the perception affects the purchase decision-making process. In order to fulfil the purpose, a conceptual framework was created out of the literature review. The empirical data collected is related to our theoretical framework which resulted in an interesting analysis. The analysis laid the foundation for our conclusions, which are based on the answers of our eight respondents and are thus based on their subjective opinions.

How consumers perceive personalized marketing plays a vital role in the problem awareness stage. The thing learned from the research is that many young adults, college students and job workers are the people who are attracted by these fictional crossover products.