
A STUDY ON THE FACTORS THAT MAKE UP A SUCCESSFUL FAST-FOOD BRAND MASCOT

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Abstract

Brand mascots are used in commercial and non-commercial industries as an effective brand communication tool, and many academic studies and industry reviews have found that the use of brand mascots has a positive effect on brand promotion, product sales and increasing customer intimacy. While there are successful brand mascots that have increased such perceived brand value successful, it is also true that there are brand mascots that have created a negative perception. The fast-food industry is no exception. Some fast-food brand mascots are loved by their customers, such as Colonel Sanders of KFC and Ronald McDonald of McDonald's, but others such as Quiznos' Spongmonkeys get a negative reaction. This study investigated customers' preference on design factors of fast-food brand mascots by a quantitative survey which was conducted online among 153 male and female in their 20s living in Bangkok and summarized the brand mascot design factors that could bring positive and negative results. As a result, the study introduced a brand mascot design canvas which can be used for designers as the design guidelines to create a fast-food brand mascot loved by customers and suggested an effective promotional method using a brand mascot to the owner of a fast-food restaurant.

Keywords: Brand Mascot Design, Fast-Food Brand, Brand Promotion, Design Guidelines

1. Introduction

1.1. Fast-food Brand Mascot Design

Brand mascots have been used as brand promotional tools in various industries. Using a brand mascot to promote a company, product, or service is a common sight around us. Because a brand mascot is a company's intellectual property and is used for marketing activities to build the foundation of consumer's brand loyalty for product purchases [1]. A good brand mascot empowers a company or organization to achieve its goals, while a bad brand mascot creates negative perceptions, which inflicts a bad impact. As such, designing and operating a good brand mascot is an important issue for business success. As shown in many academic or industry studies, the use of brand mascots is known to have a positive effect. However, unlike successful brand mascots, there are brand mascots that have disappeared after being ignored by customers. If there are design guidelines for a brand mascot that does not fail to win the love of customers and increase sales, companies will engage in marketing activities by using the brand mascot as a promotional tool, which will bring positive results of product sales.

The two graphic designers interviewed for the mascot design complained about the difficulty of convincing restaurant owners that the mascot will help sales while their designs gain the attention of customers and increase sales. The biggest problem was that when restaurant owners request mascot design, they give minimal information about the mascot they want or leave everything to the designer, so it was difficult to know how to start and design the mascot. Mascots reflecting images of products, companies, and local communities are judged to have the potential to activate the target. Therefore, the design of the mascot character is an important issue to effectively convey the image of the target, but there is little knowledge about design, and in most cases, the character is the responsibility of the designer [2].

An interview with a fast-food restaurant owner and two graphic designers at a fast-food restaurant in Bangkok revealed what designers and restaurant owners wanted to know about the fast-food brand mascot. On the one hand, business owners want to know these questions; Do customers like fast-food brand mascot? What positive effect the use of a fast-food brand mascot has on sales? If it showed the positive impact, how should it be used? On the other hand, graphic designers want to understand about brand mascot design as the following questions: What should the fast-food brand mascot design be started? What should the fast-food brand mascot be represented? What kind of mood is preferred for the fast-food brand mascot by customers? What fundamental factors are required to discuss with business owners before starting brand mascot design?

As mentioned above, this led to the research purpose on the design factors of brand mascots, based on consumer preferences. Because brand mascots have been used in a wide range of industries, it was decided to conduct research on brand mascot design in the fast-food industry. This is because fast-foods are loved and consumed by people of all ages, especially 20s and mostly using mascots as one of the brand representations. There are two main research questions: (1) what are design factors of the fast-food brand mascots and the brand mascots' representation or characteristics that customers prefer? and (2) what are brand promotional mediums that can effectively be used for fast-food brand mascots?

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Definition of a Brand Mascot

There is a logical relationship between the terms of character and mascot. The term, character is defined as 'the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing' [3], and 'a graphic symbol used in writing or printing', 'a symbol that represents information' [4]. To sum up, a character is a graphic symbol in the form of a person or thing that represents specific information. A brand mascot, according to the study of Pairoa & Arunrangsiewed [5], is a cartoon character designed for advertising or marketing purposes. In another study, a brand mascot was defined as a type of symbol used as a marketing tool to represent a product [6]. As defined by these two terms, in summary, a character is a high-level concept that includes a brand mascot, and a brand mascot refers to a cartoon character in charge of advertising or marketing among characters. As shown on Figure 1, it might be suggested that all brand mascots are characters and not all the characters are brand mascots.



Figure 1 The logical relationship between characters and brand mascots

Brand mascots can mainly be represented in various forms, such as people, animals, food, and objects. Because consumers have a natural habit of giving human-like attributes to non-human objects [7], anthropomorphic mascots allow them to better interact with brands [8].

1.2.2. Keywords of Good and Bad Fast-Food Brand Mascots

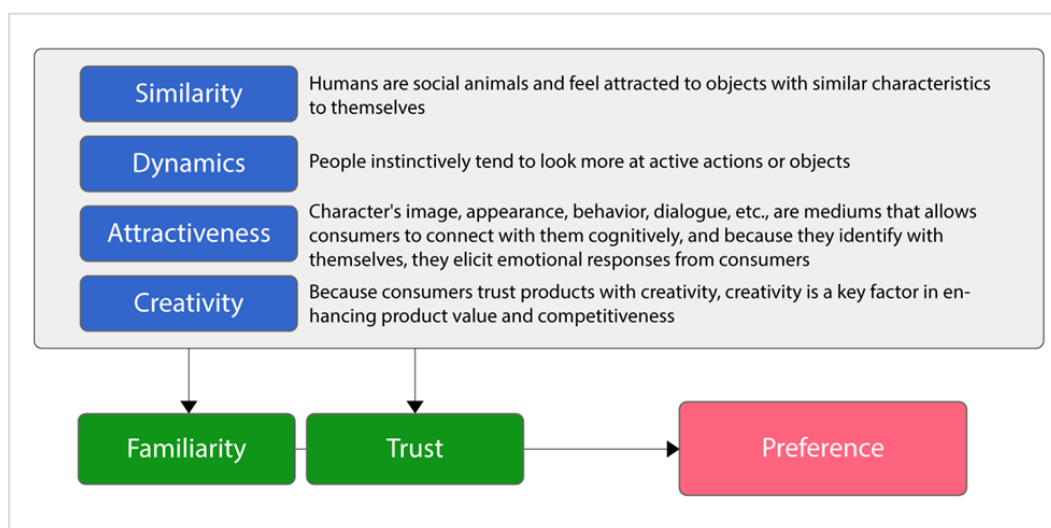


Figure 2 Characteristics of characters/mascots in relation to customers' preference

The study of Lee & Park [9] suggested four key connected characteristics related to customers' brand/product preference, as shown on Figure 2: Similarity, Dynamics, Attractiveness, and Creativity. These four characteristics drives Familiarity and Trust to establish Preference. This framework is used as the research model.

According to 'Character User Research' [10], which is carried out every year in Korea, the most significant reason that consumers purchased character-related products was their character design, followed in order by the character's behavior, its familiarity, products incorporating the character, and the character expressed consumers well. These five highest character preference among people who purchased character-related products are as shown in Figure 3.

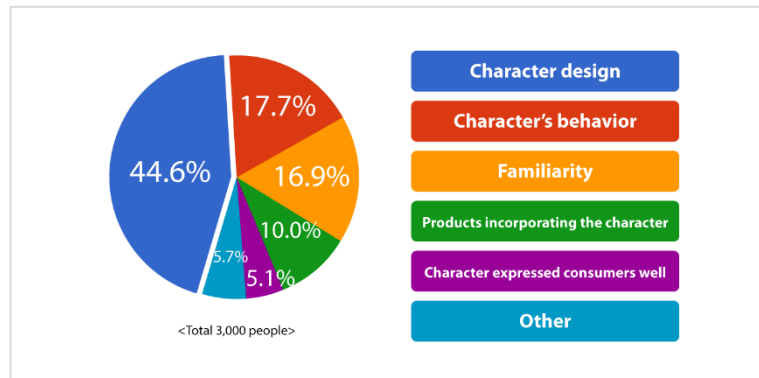


Figure 3 Character preference among people who purchased character-related products

In order to understand good and bad characteristics of brand mascots for the fast-food industry, which cannot be found in the academic and design literature, online articles were reviewed. graphicmama.com [11], marketingdive.com [12], and erinsweeneydesign.com [13] cite Colonel Sanders at KFC, Ronald McDonald at McDonald's and Tony the Tiger by Kellogg's as examples of good fast-food brand mascots, which shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Examples of good fast-food brand mascots (Image source: graphicmama.com [11], erinsweeneydesign.com [13])

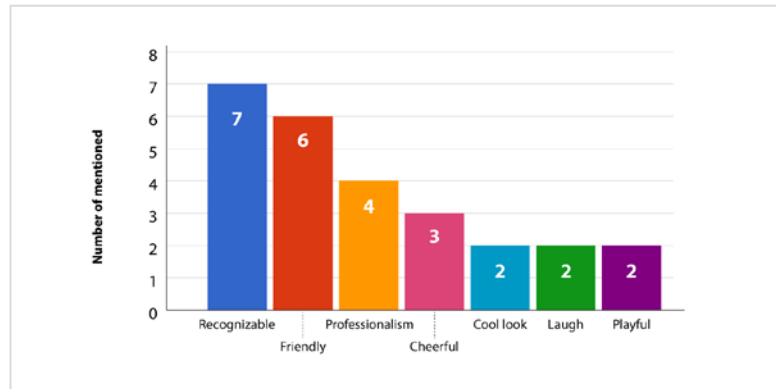


Figure 5 Keywords of good fast-food brand mascots

The drum.com [14], goodbadmarketing.com [15], ranker.com [16], blog.hubspot.com [17], businessinsider.com [18], grunge.com [19], metv.com [20], considerable.com [21], fooddive.com [22], and cracked.com [23] present The King at Burger King, Original Ronald McDonald at McDonald's, and Spongmonkeys at Quiznos as examples of bad fast-food brand mascots, as shown in Figure 6.

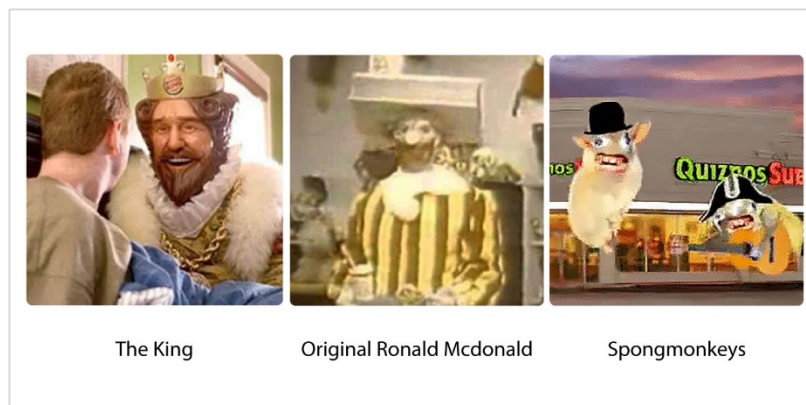


Figure 6 Examples of bad fast-food brand mascots (Image source: businessinsider.com [18], metv.com [20])

The keywords for bad fast-food brand mascots mentioned on these websites are creepy, unidentified, scary, weird, racial, and annoying, as shown in Figure 7.

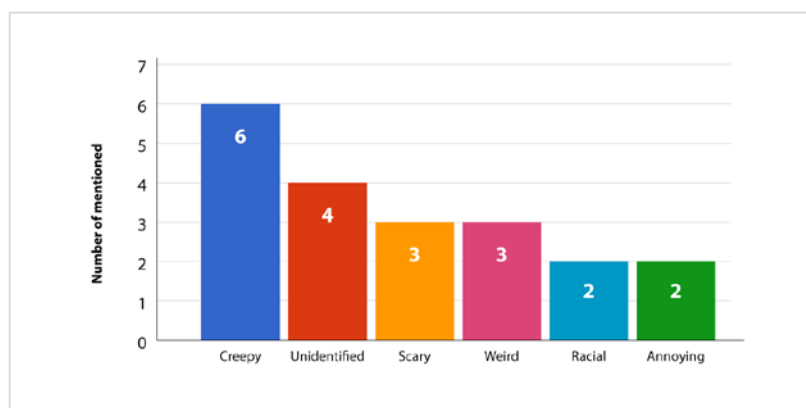


Figure 7 Keywords of bad fast-food brand mascots

2. Methods and Materials

To answer the two research questions, an online survey was conducted by a questionnaire. The study sample was in their 20s, living in Bangkok. People in their 20s are the generation that enjoys fast food, and it is expected that research on their preference of fast-food brand mascots will be helpful for mascots to be designed in the future. A sample size of 151 was obtained by calculating confidence level 95%, margin of error 8%, population Proportion 50%, a population size of 70,000,000, and a total of 153 people participated in the survey.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. In the first section, the preference of fast-foods and their brand mascots was investigated to find out how much they liked fast-food and whether the fast-food brand mascot enhances brand familiarity. In the second section, participants were asked whether TV, social medias, webpage, mascot statues, mascot costumes, flyers, food packaging, toys, accessories using fast-food brand mascots have a positive effect on their fast-food purchases. In the third section, questions about the elements required for basic fast-food brand mascots design such as gender, age, style, and color, and detailed preferences for body shape, body proportion, eye size, nose size, mouth size, length of arms, length of legs, feet size, attire, facial expression, voice, and gesture were investigated. Collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 to analyze each item's preference.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

Of the total 153 participants, 65 (42.5%) were male and 88 (57.5%) were female, more than 56% of the participants were in their late 20s, between the ages of 27-29.

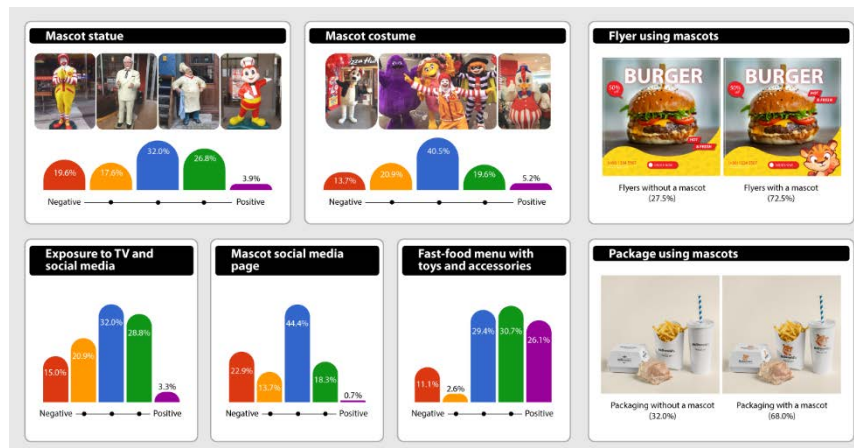


Figure 8 Preferred promotional medium

As shown in Figure 8, the fast-food brand mascot that the participants encountered through TV and social media, the mascot statue installed in front of the restaurant, and the mascot costume they saw on the street did not affect their immediate purchase of fast-food. In the case of flyer and food packaging, it was analyzed that when the mascot was used, participants' attention was more attracted, and the fast-food menu including mascot toys and accessories led to purchase decision of most participants. It has been analyzed that continuous promotion through these various media will increase familiarity with the brand and help future sales.

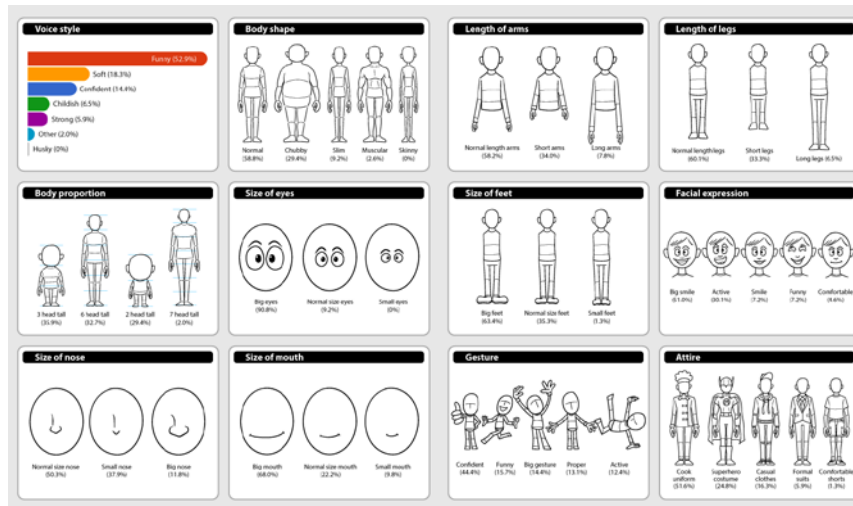


Figure 9 Preference for factors of human type fast-food brand mascot

The most popular factors of human type fast-food brand mascot among customers are funny voice, normal body shape, 3 head tall proportion, big eyes, normal size nose, big mouth, normal length arms, normal length legs, big feet, big smile, confident gesture, and cook uniform, as shown in Figure 9.

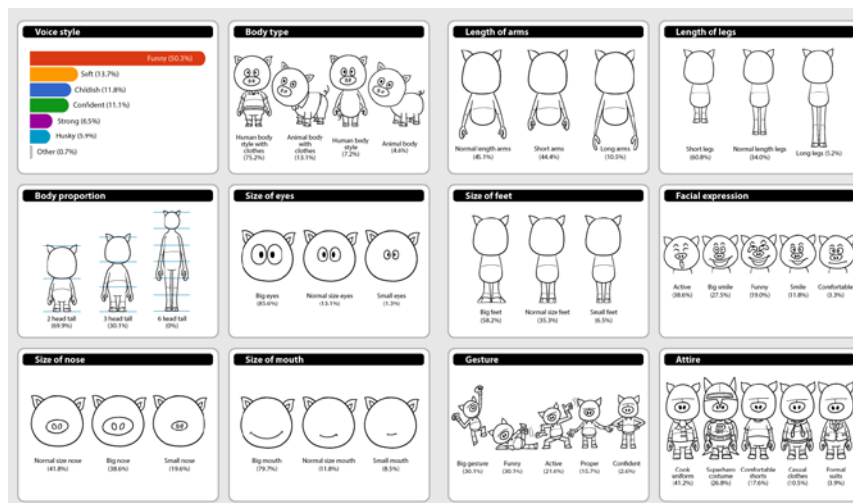


Figure 10 Preference for factors of animal type fast-food brand mascot

The most popular factors of animal type fast-food brand mascot among customers are funny voice, human body style with clothes, 2 head tall proportion, big eyes, normal size nose, big mouth, normal length arms, short legs, big feet, active facial expression, big and funny gesture, and cook uniform, as shown in Figure 10.

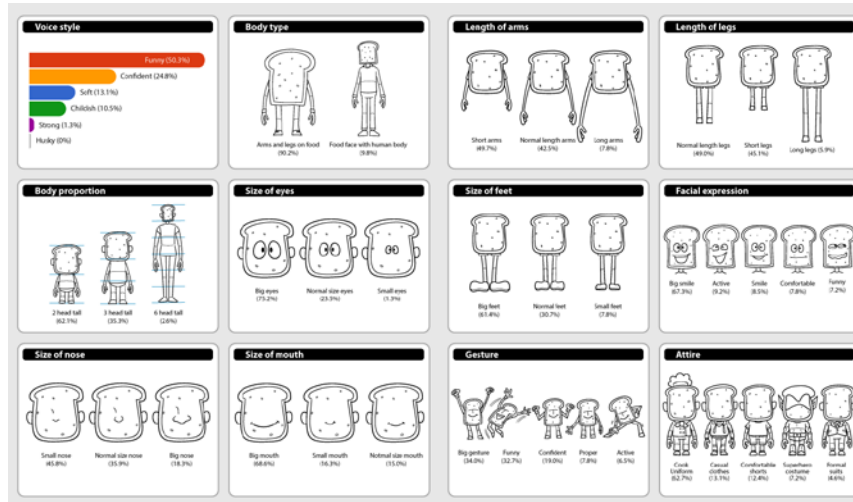


Figure 11 Preference for factors of food type fast-food brand mascot

The most popular factors of food type fast-food brand mascot among customers are funny voice, arms and legs on food, 2 head tall proportion, big eyes, small nose, big mouth, short arms, normal length legs, big feet, big smile, big gesture, and cook uniform, as shown in Figure 11.

The most popular factors of object type fast-food brand mascot among customers are funny voice, object face with human body, 2 head tall proportion, big eyes, small nose, big mouth, normal length arms, normal length legs, big feet, big smile, funny gesture, cook uniform, as shown in Figure 12.

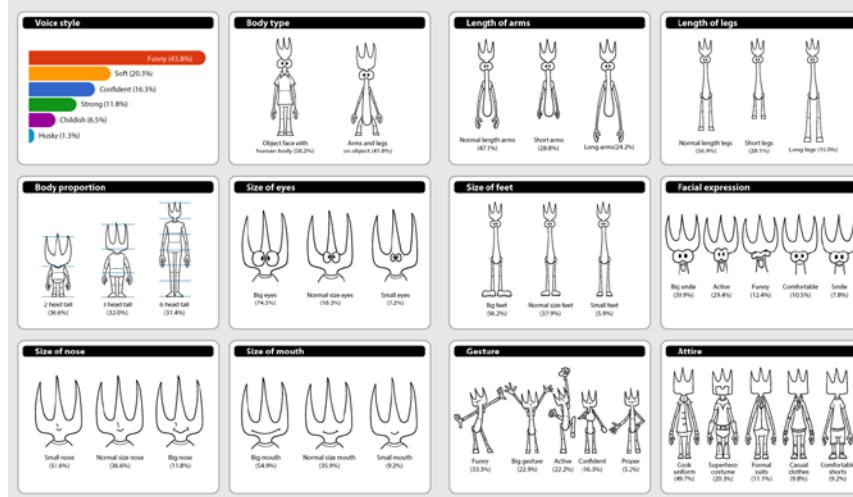


Figure 12 Preference for factors of object type fast-food brand mascot

3.2. Design Test Using Design Canvas

Based on interviews with designers who had difficulties figuring out where to start and how to design a fast-food brand mascot, a design canvas was created that they could easily use or reference by organizing the factors of mascot that customers prefer, and a test was conducted to find out whether the design canvas was effective in the real fast-food brand mascot design.

The design canvas can be used by checking one of the popular factors preferred by consumers in each item, and designing a mascot according to the selected factors, as shown in Figure 13.

In Figure 14, the left mascot was designed using factors that were popular with the participants, and the right mascot was designed using factors that were most ignored or unpopular. Unlike the left mascot that immediately gives a sense of cooking, it is difficult to figure out what the right mascot is trying to express. Also, while the left mascot has the shape of a general mascot, the right mascot has the shape of a simple cartoon character. This shows the applicability of fast-food brand mascot design using design canvas.

Design canvas showed the potential as a fast-food brand mascot design guideline. This will not only serve as a guideline for designers but will also be helpful in the future research and analysis of fast-food brand mascot.

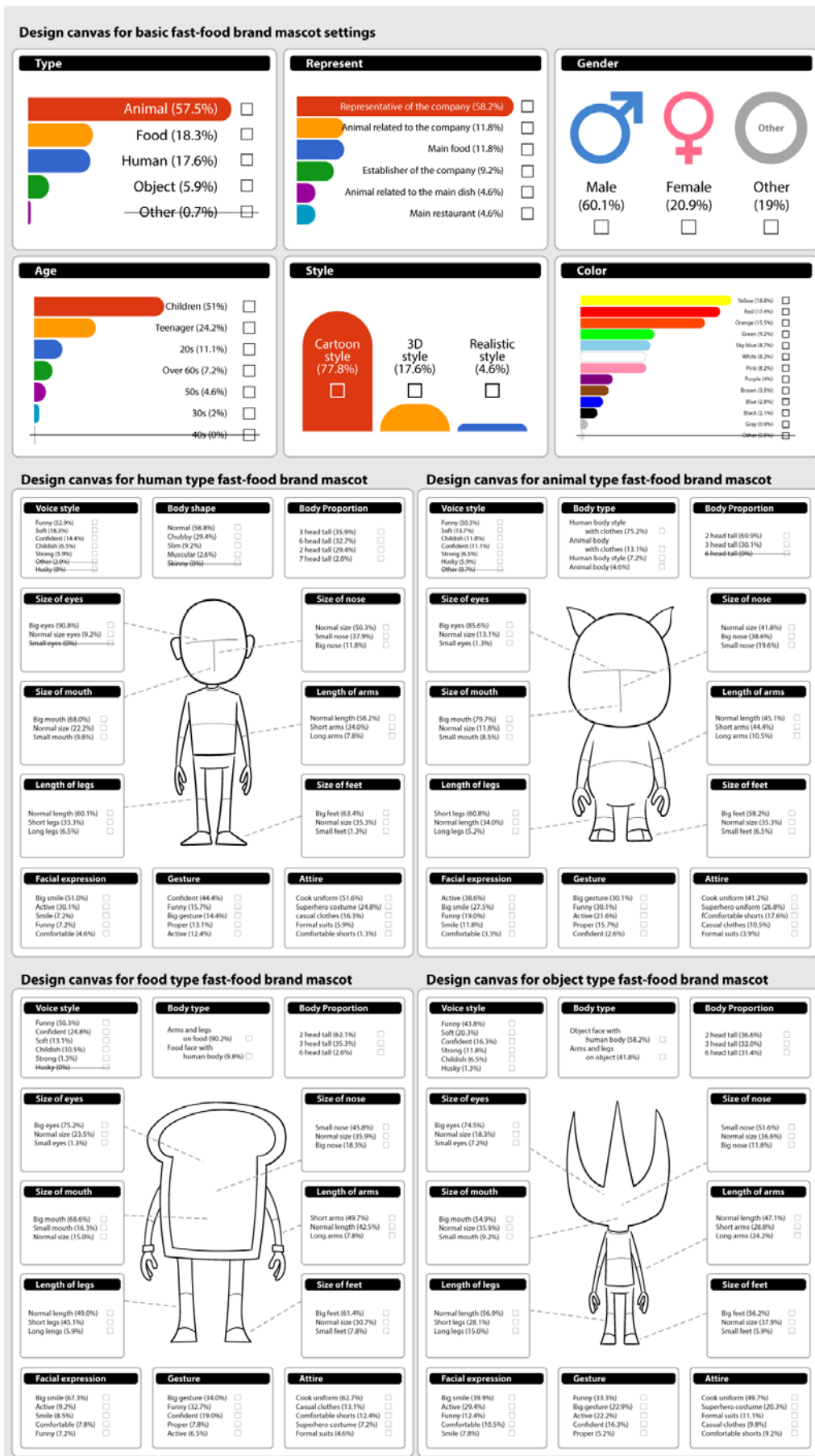


Figure 13 Design canvas for fast-food brand mascot design

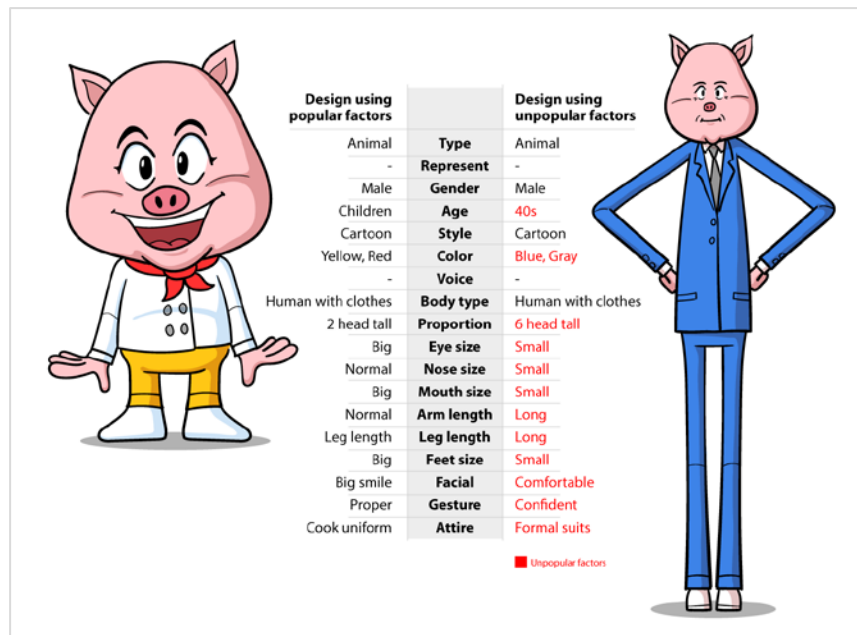


Figure 14 Design test using design canvases

3.3. Limitations

Participants are limited to men and women in their 20s residing in Bangkok. It should be recognized that the results may be different from the current ones if studies of various age groups or studies other than Bangkok are conducted.

Terms used in the questionnaire, for example, big smile, active, proper, etc., are arbitrarily determined by the researcher and may be interpreted differently depending on individual experience or understanding. It should be noted that the images used to aid understanding are also not complete to convey their meaning accurately.

In an online survey, participants must answer within a set item, so if data collection through interviews is done, it will be possible to create a design canvas that includes more detailed and diverse factors.

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