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# When brands show a human side, hearts open a wide! Enhancing prosocial behavior through anthropomorphized brand messaging in cause related marketing

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This paper discusses the influence mechanism of prosocial behavior through anthropomorphized brand messaging in cause related marketing among young adults, based on heuristic systematic model, the study assesses how different modes of information processing shapes consumers' prosocial behavior, with moderating effect of execution style. An online survey was conducted among 299 young adults in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, utilizing a purposive sampling technique. Structural Equation Modeling was applied using Smart-PLS. The findings indicate that anthropomorphized brand message in cause related marketing significantly influence prosocial behavior. Systematic information processing is positively associated with brand anthropomorphism, while heuristic processing shows a negative association. The execution style moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and prosocial behavior, with cause-focused messaging enhancing the effectiveness of anthropomorphism in cause related marketing initiatives. The study suggests that brands can enhance effectiveness of cause related marketing by adopting anthropomorphized messaging, which fosters deeper emotional connections and encourages systematic information processing. The implications are significant for marketers aiming to design effective cause related marketing strategies that resonate with socially conscious young adults.

## KEYWORDS

brand anthropomorphism, cause related marketing (CrM), prosocial behavior, systematic information process, heuristic information process, execution style

## Introduction

Prosocial behavior describes a wide class of voluntary actions intended to benefit others or society as a whole. This article examines the body of research in behavior and psychology that explores consumers' prosocial behavior, such as helping, cooperating, sharing, and donating, through which individuals and organizations contribute to the wellbeing of others (Yang and Konrath, 2023). Prosocial behavior refers to a broad range of personal actions aimed primarily at benefiting others. In marketing research, this concept is frequently associated with socially responsible consumption, where individuals make purchasing decisions aimed at reducing negative impacts and enhancing positive contributions to society (Guo et al., 2022). Although previous studies have primarily examined aspects such as gift-giving, recycling, and other socially responsible actions, our focus centres on social responsibility as an element of prosocial behavior characterized by

a readiness to assist others and make choices that promote societal wellbeing (Schiffrin et al., 2021). This sense of social responsibility significantly shapes consumption patterns and is closely connected to practices like charitable donations and giving. A nationwide study found that 92% of consumption decisions would view a company more positively, if it actively supports a prosocial cause (Labroo et al., 2023).

The prosocial realm provides a deep theoretical framework for understanding consumers' affinity for cause related marketing. Researchers have identified social responsibility as a critical psychographic factor shaping consumer attitudes toward CRM, suggesting that individuals who exhibit social responsibility in their personal lives are more inclined to purchase products that support social causes (Wu and Wang, 2024). Research on prosocial behavior from a multilevel perspective examines the factors that motivate individuals to engage in actions that benefit others, the different forms these behaviors can take (Slattery et al., 2021), the mechanisms that drive their diverse expressions, and the gaps in understanding that still need to be addressed (Pandey et al., 2024).

The last 20 years, cause related marketing has become a prominent strategy within corporate social responsibility, particularly in India (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988; Bhatti et al., 2023). One of the earliest examples of CRM was American Express's 1983 campaign, which donated money toward the Statue of Liberty's renovation for every credit card usage, raising \$1.7 million and significantly increasing credit card usage. Numerous studies have highlighted CRM as a valuable marketing tool with various advantages. Recently, consumers have placed increasing importance on an organization's social responsibility, compelling companies to meet both social and corporate requirements (Thomas et al., 2020). Over the past 30 years, CRM, becoming a well-known marketing approach and attracting interest from both academic and management perspectives. CRM has emerged as a response to these stakeholder expectations, gaining popularity among organizations over the past three decades. CRM's participatory nature is demonstrated by its ability to generate product value through active consumer prosocial behavior. Consumers perceive buying products associated with social causes as a way to improve society, leading to broader social benefits (Terblanche et al., 2023). A notable example of an effective CRM campaign in India is Procter and Gamble's "1 Pack = 1 Life-Saving Vaccine." Several studies have analysed CRM's effects on attitudes, promotions, products, branding, and purchase intentions. While these studies offer valuable insights into CRM's potential efficacy, they often overlook prosocial behavior during CRM communication (Bhatti et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024).

This study emphasizes that consumer interaction with and interpretation of CRM information significantly impacts its success, especially when CRM aims to encourage prosocial behavior. Despite the potential for consumers to purchase CRM products, research on prosocial behavior toward CRM is limited. Consumers often expect companies to provide strong ethical justifications for supporting corporate causes through their purchases (Huang et al., 2020). Consequently, the question of how to present CRM to maximize consumers' prosocial behavior continues to be focused among scholars and practitioners. One of the strategies to enhance CRM communication is brand anthropomorphism, which involves giving

brands human touch. Consumers often anthropomorphize brands, attributing names and human characteristics (e.g., perceiving a brand as friendly), which can influence emotions and encourage prosocial behavior by fostering social interactions and emotional connections with the brand (Jeong and Kim, 2021).

While scholars have given considerable attention to the impact of advocacy advertising and CRM messages, there is still a lack of research on how consumers' prosocial behavior affects the way these messages are processed. Researchers propose that the extent of consumers' prosocial behavior toward CRM can influence how they evaluate a company and its CRM initiatives. This raises a key question: Does the use of anthropomorphized brand messaging in CRM lead to different modes of information processing and, consequently, impact consumers' prosocial behavior? This study uses the dual process heuristic systematic model (HSM) of information processing to investigate consumer prosocial behavior, when they encounter anthropomorphized brand message in CRM (Zhao, 2023). According to the Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) HSM, individuals can form attitudes and judgments through two different modes of persuasion: systematic processing and heuristic processing. Systematic processing involves a careful evaluation of all relevant data. In contrast, heuristic processing relies on simplifications and easily accessible memories. Notably, both routes can operate simultaneously. Psychology literature has long established that people engage information differently when forming attitudes and judgments. Examining these psychological factors can provide deeper insights into how brand anthropomorphism in CRM influences prosocial behaviors. Although brand anthropomorphism is becoming common in communication, little is known about how these concepts presented and work together to enhance prosocial behavior for CRM effectiveness. This study employed an exploratory approach to examine prosocial behavior in response to anthropomorphized brand message in CRM, using structural equation modeling to assess relationships and MICOM analysis were used to compare anthropomorphized versus non-anthropomorphized messages. Targeting, young adults, data were collected using a survey method. This approach was chosen to align with the study's central question, to explore how prosocial behavior is shaped by anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM and to evaluate the dual process heuristic systematic model of information processing.

This study pursues to determine if anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM influence prosocial behavior by causing distinct forms of information processing. Given this context, the present investigation offers several insights. Firstly, it improves understanding of how anthropomorphized brand messaging in CRM influences prosocial behavior. Secondly, it adds to CRM literature by exploring the connection between information processing modes and brand anthropomorphism in CRM, and how different processing methods affect individuals' prosocial behavior in response to these messages. Thirdly, this study investigates the roles of execution style as underlying mechanisms explaining the impact of brand anthropomorphism in CRM on prosocial behavior. Finally, the study Chen (2020) and Zhao (2023) evaluates the perceived motives behind a company's CRM efforts to test the moderating influence of execution style whether cause-focused or product-focused as well as the mediating role of information processing in the relationship between brand anthropomorphism in CRM and prosocial behavior.

## Related research reviews

### Brand anthropomorphism

Given the significance of prosocial behavior, a key challenge for marketers is finding ways to enhance it within cause related marketing (CRM). One effective strategy is brand anthropomorphism, where brands are given human like traits to increase consumer engagement and promote prosocial behavior (Guido and Peluso, 2015). Anthropomorphism prompts consumers to interact with brands similarly to how they would engage with other people (Kessous and Chandon, 2015). Research shows that individuals often exhibit cognitive responses to anthropomorphized objects akin to their reactions toward humans, even when they recognize that these objects are not human (Kim and McGill, 2011). These insights provide a foundation for applying interpersonal relationship theories to understand consumer interactions with anthropomorphized brands.

In strategic communication, CRM is a key area where anthropomorphism is used to promote prosocial behavior. Anthropomorphism not only activates psychological processes but also fosters interpersonal-like connections between consumers and anthropomorphized brands. The positive effects of brand anthropomorphism are well supported in the literature (Jeong and Kim, 2021). For example, studies by Jeong and Kim (2021) and Guido and Peluso, (2015) demonstrated that anthropomorphic brand content, such as graphics and text on social media, enhances consumer engagement, evidenced by increased likes, shares, and comments. They also found that highly engaged consumers perceive anthropomorphized brands as social entities, developing positive emotions toward them. Similarly, Huang et al. (2020) showed that consumers who formed relationships with an anthropomorphized brand viewed it as a dependable partner and exhibited greater long-term engagement. Other researchers have noted that consumers' perceptions of anthropomorphic brand elements positively affect their engagement with those brands. However, while much of the existing research has focused on the visual and verbal cues brands use to anthropomorphize themselves (Jeong and Kim, 2021; Guido and Peluso, 2015), relatively little attention has been given to the verbal strategies specifically within the context of brand anthropomorphism in cause-related marketing (CRM). Therefore, this study examines the communication strategies used in anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM, specifically in the context of FMCG goods, to fill this gap in the literature.

### Heuristic systematic information process

The heuristic systematic model, a prominent dual processing framework (Overton and Yang, 2021) in persuasion, suggests that persuasive messages impact recipients' judgments through two distinct processing routes: heuristic and systematic. Heuristic processing involves relying on cognitive shortcuts stored in long term memory, requiring minimal cognitive effort. This approach uses limited information and simple cues to form judgments, which reduces cognitive load. However, this method's reliance on minimal information makes it susceptible to misleading or superficial conclusions. Conversely, systematic processing is employed when heuristic processing fails to provide sufficient judgmental confidence. This method involves a thorough, analytical, and integrative examination of relevant information. Systematic processing

demands more cognitive effort and capacity, aiming for a comprehensive evaluation of the message. Despite its deliberate nature, systematic processing can be influenced by personal biases, attitudes, or beliefs, especially when individuals are motivated to defend their pre-existing views or when they have limited informational resources. While both heuristic and systematic processing aim to achieve valid judgments (Chaiken and Maheswaran, 1994), they can lead to different outcomes. Research indicates that heuristic processing often results in tentative and superficial changes in beliefs and attitudes, whereas systematic processing tends to produce more enduring and substantive effects.

For instance, Zhao (2023) discovered that individuals tend to engage in more systematic and defensive processing of group consensus messages when the content opposes their personal interests, rather than when it supports them. Giner-Sorolla et al. (2002) found that when an issue is of low personal relevance, people are more likely to adopt the majority opinion presented in the message, relying on heuristic processing. In contrast, when the issue was personally relevant, individuals engaged in systematic processing, paying more attention to the quality of the source. Despite these findings Darke et al. (1998), research has predominantly focused on how non-scientists process consensus information on non-scientific issues, such as undergraduate students reacting to new graduation requirements. The influence of heuristic and systematic processing in interpreting scientific consensus messages has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

### Prosocial behavior

The prosocial domain offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding consumers' affinity for cause related marketing. Prosocial behavior encompasses a wide range of interpersonal actions within a socio-cultural system, aiming primarily to benefit others. In Liu et al. (2024) reviewing the literature on prosocial behavior, researchers have explored the influences that promote actions benefiting others, the various manifestations of prosocial actions, the underlying processes of prosocial behavior, and the areas that remain unexplored. Within marketing, much research on social responsibility focuses on socially responsible consumption behavior, which involves individuals making consumption decisions to minimize harm and maximize societal impact (Labroo et al., 2023; Lee, 2016). Studies have examined socially responsible behaviors such as gift-giving, engagement in the music industry, and specific actions like recycling. Although these research streams (Dubé et al., 2017; Sanderson and McQuilkin, 2017) are significant, our emphasis is on social responsibility within the prosocial spectrum, characterized by a readiness to assist others and make choices that benefit the greater good. This sense of social responsibility drives consumption behaviors and correlates with charitable giving and donations. Social responsibility is considered one of the most significant psychographic factors influencing consumer attitudes toward CRM, based on the idea that socially responsible individuals are more likely to purchase products aligned with social causes (Kaur, 2020; Ketron and Naletelich, 2019).

When consumers become conscious of the ethical implications of their choices, they often move from self-interest to a focus on serving others. The evolution of moral reasoning and beliefs, as well as the exploration of moral emotions, is crucial in understanding why consumers support CRM initiatives for reasons beyond their personal gain. Studies suggest that individuals inclined to help others are more

likely to hold positive attitudes toward charitable organizations and social causes. While Golob et al. (2019) economic reasoning is crucial in consumption decisions, prosocial behavior add meaning to our understanding of how individuals navigate their world and make decisions. Moreover, prosocial behaviors are influenced by emotions, empathy, sympathetic closeness to social issues, gender, and religion (Abdullahi and Kumar, 2016; Frolova and Malanina, 2016; Condon, 2017). Building on foundational research, psychographic factors are seen as remnants of past experiences that shape individuals' beliefs and attitudes. This study uses prosocial behavior as its theoretical framework to explore consumer support for CRM initiatives, aiming to uncover the factors that motivate consumers' consumption decision with socially responsible marketing efforts.

## Execution style

Visual elements in advertisements significantly impact consumer insight and information processing. Images in ads attract attention, showcase products, demonstrate their integration into consumers' lives, and elicit emotions. Approximately 75% of the information (Chen, 2020) consumers absorb is visual, emphasizing the importance of imagery in advertising success. While research indicates that visuals contribute to campaign success, studies specific to CRM are limited. Non-profit organizations are increasingly incorporating corporate sponsorships into their fundraising efforts by offering branded gifts in exchange for donations. Consequently, visuals in charitable advertisements may emphasize either the cause (such as child welfare) or the incentive provided by the charity (like food coupons). However, there is limited research on how different execution styles whether cause-focused or product-focused affect communication effectiveness.

Cause-focused advertisements, designed to evoke empathy and altruism, tend to generate more sympathy for a cause than product-focused advertisements, which are often more rational and egoistic, emphasizing the personal benefits of the product for the consumer/donor. Cause-focused ads typically highlight the suffering of individuals (Chang, 2012), while product-focused ads provide specific information about product benefits, inducing a concrete mindset. Previous studies have found that companies often use ambiguous terms in CRM descriptions, leading to abstract thinking when cause-focused images are used. Research by Golob et al. (2019) suggests that prosocial behavior is more likely when people consider the distant future altruistically and the near future egoistically. Studies Chen (2020) and Chang (2012) indicate that the ease of information processing influences consumer evaluations, purchase intentions, and choices. This study Zhao (2023) predicts that communications' attitude will be most positive when charity advertising aligns with the target audience's mindset, distant financial goals or remote donation areas combined with cause-focused ads that evoke abstract thinking and altruistic feelings, and near financial goals or nearby donation areas combined with product-focused ads that induce concrete thinking and egoistic motives, will create a fit.

## Theoretical basis and research hypothesis

H1: When brands are anthropomorphized in CRM message, consumers will have greater pro-social behavior.

Consumers often experience emotional responses when brands are presented with humanlike features. For example, anthropomorphized visuals, such as a smiling car grille or a facial expression on a recycling bin, can trigger emotional reactions like increased purchasing or enhanced waste reduction by fostering humanlike feelings toward these objects. Similarly, when brands are anthropomorphized in CRM messages, consumers may attribute prosocial behavior to these brands (Wu and Wang, 2024). This personification can lead consumers to develop positive emotions toward the products. Given that CRM communication frequently aims to engage consumers in prosocial behavior, this study suggests that consumers will perceive their prosocial behavior as more gratifying due to the positive emotions elicited by anthropomorphized brands. Moreover, as previously discussed, anthropomorphized brand messaging in CRM serves as a significant psychological factor contributing to the positive impact on consumers' prosocial behavior (Jeong and Kim, 2021).

H2a: Brand anthropomorphized in CRM is associated with greater heuristic information process, when they are exposed to CRM messages.

H2b: Brand anthropomorphized in CRM is associated with greater systematic information process, when they are exposed to CRM messages.

To explore brand anthropomorphism in CRM communication, this study examines how consumers process anthropomorphized brand messages through two primary information processing lenses: heuristic and systematic. Systematic processing involves a thorough and careful analysis of persuasive messages, while heuristic processing relies on simplified strategies to minimize cognitive effort in forming judgments (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017). Over recent decades, the concept of brand anthropomorphism has evolved significantly. In CRM practices, anthropomorphized brands are employed to address consumers' social concerns, foster a positive corporate image, and build strong relationships with consumers and stakeholders. Consumers' growing interest in these practices drives corporations to engage in CRM activities, and empirical studies have shown that brand anthropomorphism influences how consumers evaluate corporate performance and products. Previous research has demonstrated that brand anthropomorphism can significantly impact consumer behavior (Ha et al., 2022).

Therefore, understanding how consumers process CRM messages is crucial for developing effective CRM strategies involving anthropomorphized brands. Cross-cultural surveys in developed countries have indicated that consumers there are more attentive to CRM communication compared to those in developing countries, though both groups show a strong interest in the information processing aspects of CRM activities. Recent studies involving in-depth interviews have highlighted that consumers place high value on brand commitments and perceive responsible actions as significantly impacting the product. Building on these insights, scholars have utilized online surveys to measure brand anthropomorphism in CRM, assessing information processing through both heuristic and systematic routes (Zhao, 2023). Researchers continue to focus on how brand anthropomorphism

affects consumer information processing when exposed to CRM messages, aiming to enhance the effectiveness of CRM strategies.

H3a: Heuristic information process has a significant mediating effect in the influence of anthropomorphized brand message in CRM on prosocial behavior.

H3b: Systematic information process has a significant mediating effect in the influence of anthropomorphized brand message in CRM on prosocial behavior.

The heuristic-systematic model of information processing (HSM) demonstrates that individuals employ two distinct modes systematic and heuristic for evaluating persuasive messages and making decisions. Systematic processing involves a thorough, analytical approach to information, while heuristic processing relies on simplified rules and prior experiences to minimize cognitive effort. The HSM highlights the challenge people face in balancing the desire for accurate decisions with the need to conserve cognitive resources (Thomas et al., 2020). When striving for high judgmental confidence, individuals engage in more extensive processing, especially when faced with incongruent information. In the context of anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM, researchers observed that when these messages conflicted with consumers' expectations of prosocial behavior, individuals engaged in more systematic processing. This heightened effort was driven by a need to achieve greater confidence in their judgments (Christofi et al., 2020). Conversely, when the messages aligned with their expectations, consumers relied more on heuristic processing, as they already felt confident in their evaluations based on the anthropomorphized brands.

The HSM provides a framework for understanding how consumers process information to enhance decision making certainty. While the model has been extensively studied in persuasion literature, particularly within risk contexts, its application in marketing research is growing. Scholars are increasingly exploring how the HSM can explain consumer information processing and attitudes in the context of CRM. Previous research has examined how CRM perceptions and engagement influence information processing strategies and, consequently, consumer behavior intentions. Findings suggest that the need for detailed information is positively correlated with systematic processing which, in turn affects pro-firm behavioral intentions (Labroo et al., 2023). This study suggests that systematic and heuristic processing modes can function simultaneously, affecting consumers' prosocial behavior. Although the heuristic systematic model has been explored in communication research, there is limited insight into how prosocial behavior toward anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM influences information processing and evaluation. Further research is needed to explore how different processing strategies can effectively persuade consumers to engage in more prosocial behavior (Liu et al., 2024; Sanderson and McQuilkin, 2017).

H4: Execution style has a significant moderating effect in the impact of anthropomorphized brand message in CRM on prosocial behavior.

Brand anthropomorphism CRM communications pose a complex challenge, as it involves balancing the promotion of social initiatives with the profit driven goals of businesses. This challenge arises from

the paradox of corporate responsibility, where the appearance of social responsibility may clash with the underlying profit motives of the company. Emphasizing anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM might lead to perceptions of self-interest rather than genuine dedication to social causes (Chen, 2020). Consequently, companies often resort to more indirect and nuanced messaging to mitigate the negative impact of overly explicit CRM statements, though this complexity can sometimes hinder consumers' ability to process information effectively and engage in prosocial behavior. Research has highlighted that the effectiveness of anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM largely depends on the execution style adopted (Chang et al., 2023).

Execution style refers to whether the focus of the CRM communication is on the product itself or the associated cause. Two main execution styles are prevalent: product-oriented and cause-focused (Zhao, 2023). A product-oriented style centres on the features and benefits of the product, while a cause-focused style emphasizes the social cause being supported, often relegating the product to a secondary role. Research indicates that a cause-focused approach is generally more effective in creating an emotional connection and advancing the cause, whereas a product-oriented style is more effective for direct product promotion. Given the complex nature of anthropomorphized brand messages and the varied execution styles used in CRM communications, there is a pressing need to further explore how these factors influence consumers' prosocial behavior (Thomas et al., 2020). Although existing research has provided valuable insights, it has not fully addressed how different execution styles affect consumers' prosocial behavior in the context of CRM. To address this gap, our study examines the impact of anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM on consumers' prosocial behavior, with a specific focus on the moderating effect of execution style. By employing fictitious brands, we aim to provide a thorough understanding of how various execution styles shape consumer response to anthropomorphized CRM messages and their resulting prosocial behavior.

## Research design

### Stimuli

The study employed a fictitious brand, "Edu Buddy Notebook," and a cause, "Quality Education," to test the effects of brand anthropomorphism in CRM communication. In line with prior research, we adjusted brand anthropomorphism by incorporating both humanlike visual and verbal elements. Specifically, in the anthropomorphized condition the product image featured a smiling face with humanlike attributes such as eyes, mouth, hands and legs. Together with this image, CRM messages were framed using first-person pronouns, for example: "Hi, I'm Edu Buddy! Join me in supporting Quality Education for Children from Marginalized Communities, with every Edu Buddy Notebook purchased, 5% will be contributed to this cause." In contrast, the same product image but without any humanlike visual elements. The CRM message in this case used third-person pronouns, such as: "Join Edu Buddy in supporting Quality Education for Children from Marginalized Communities. With every Edu Buddy Notebook purchased, 5% will be contributed to this notable initiative." Apart from the manipulation of brand

anthropomorphism, all other aspects of the CRM communication were consistent across conditions. Both scenarios featured identical brand and cause information, including the description of the cause: “The Quality Education for Children from Marginalized Communities is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing public social consciousness and supporting education.” This setup allowed us to isolate and assess the impact of anthropomorphized branding on consumer responses to CRM communications, providing a clearer understanding of how humanlike features influence prosocial behavior.

## Samples and procedures

The study focuses on young adults, a demographic recognized for their active role in addressing social/environmental issues. This age group is noted for its helping behavior and high expectations for companies to contribute positively to societal challenges. As future decision-makers, young adults are particularly relevant for examining how anthropomorphized brand messages influence prosocial behavior (Arslanagic-Kalajdzic et al., 2022). An online survey was conducted among young adults, specifically students from various colleges and universities in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling and a total of 236 young adults participated in the survey. Participants were directed to a survey link (google form), to answer a series of questions assessing their prosocial behavior in response to the anthropomorphized brand message in CRM and their information processing. To gain deeper insights into the effects of anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM, the study used two variations of the Edu Buddy Notebook campaign. Both variations were designed to assess different execution styles: one was cause-focused, emphasizing the social cause of “Quality Education for Children from Marginalized Communities,” while the other was product-oriented, highlighting the benefits of purchasing the notebook to support those in need. Participants were asked to evaluate their information processing and prosocial behavior in response to these different campaign styles, which illustrates the two distinct campaign approaches used in this study. Seven participants who provided incomplete survey responses were excluded from the final analysis, leaving a total sample size of 229 participants. This study adopted the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique and the software used for the analysis was Smart-PLS. SEM is utilized to undertake complex analysis.

## Measures

Brand anthropomorphism was checked by asking perceived brand anthropomorphism in CRM with five items (i.e., product has deliberated intentions, product holds its own awareness, product as having its own desires, product is sensible and product is capable of experiencing emotions) from Puzakova and Aggarwal (2018). Information processing, to evaluate systematic and heuristic information processing, this study modified the information processing scale from Zhao (2023) total eight items for both the processing modes, Systematic information processing with five items (i.e., When I come across information on this initiative, I usually take a moment to reflect on it, It is important to me to understand how information about this initiative directly applies to my life, Thinking about this topic typically leads to a broader

understanding for me and If I need to take action on this initiative, I believe it is beneficial to consider multiple viewpoints), Heuristic information processing with three items (i.e., I trust on the advice of a single expert if I need to take action on this initiative, I tend not to dedicate much time to contemplating information about this initiative, when I encounter it and There is an excess of information available on this initiative that outdoes my personal requirements). Prosocial behavior was assessed using six items adopted (Martí-Vilar et al., 2020; i.e., “I readily pass along any beneficial opportunities regarding responsible initiatives by products to my friends,” I try to provide support and care of those who are in need through responsible initiatives, I am willing to involve my knowledge and skills on products with responsible to others, I react immediately whenever I see responsible initiatives by product, I am open to participate for volunteer activities to help those who are in need and I am pleased to support cause-related product and their initiatives) and Execution style was measured using Two items (cause-focused and product focused) from Chen (2020). Each of the items was measure using 5-point Likert scale stating (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) (Figure 1).

## Empirical results and analysis

Table 1 outlines the respondents’ demographic profile. Our survey targeted young adults a demographic recognized for their active role in addressing social/environmental issues. Out of 299 respondents, the data revealed that 120 (52.40%) were male and 109 (47.59%) were female, the age range of the majority of participants 102 (44.54%) was 20 to 21 years, and a notable 139 (59.38%) are undergraduates, most of the respondents 201 (87.77%) are live in urban. Furthermore, the majority of respondents 117 (51.09%) prefer to support social related cause and 155 (67.68%) respondents are preferring brand anthropomorphism.

The Figures 2, 3, population pyramid, which encapsulates the descriptive analysis, graphically depicts the perceptions of 229 samples. The pyramid is divided into blue and red portions, which reflect brand anthropomorphism and non- brand anthropomorphism, respectively. Black lines operate as veins throughout each pyramid, representing the pulse of their ideas on dimensions ranging from the perceived necessity for the information process. This integrated approach provides a nuanced and diverse viewpoint of the young adults, information process by preference. When it is come to systematic information process, brand anthropomorphism has significant effect and in contrast heuristic information process is effective in non-brand anthropomorphism. From the population pyramid we concluded that, when young adults encounter anthropomorphized brand message in CRM, systematic information process has significant effect.

The Figure 5 represents a moderation analysis examining the interaction between Execution Style and Brand Anthropomorphism on Pro-social Behavior. X-Axis (Brand Anthropomorphism) representing different levels of brand anthropomorphism and Y-Axis (Pro-social Behavior) representing the level of pro-social behavior. As brand anthropomorphism increases, pro-social behavior tends to increase regardless of the execution style. The moderation analysis suggests that the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and pro-social behavior is positively moderated by execution style. Higher levels of execution style amplify the positive effect of brand

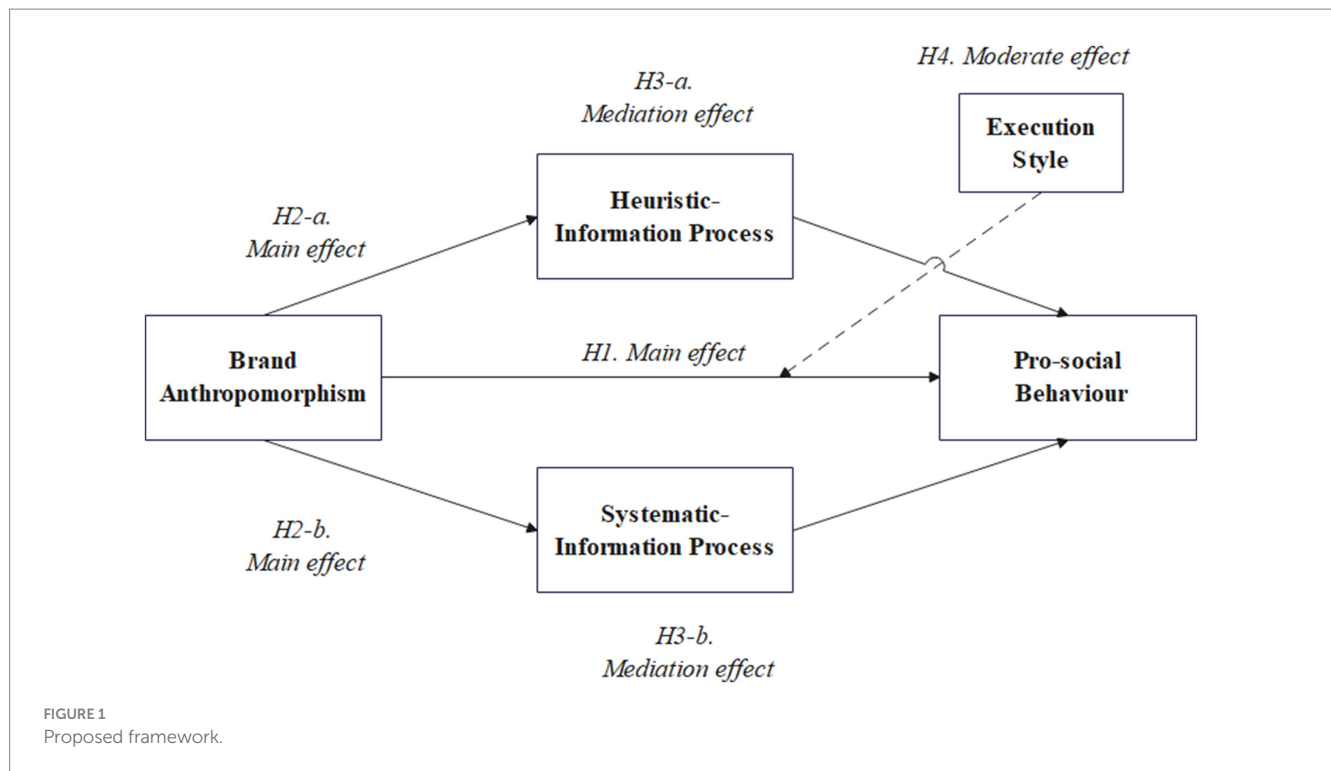


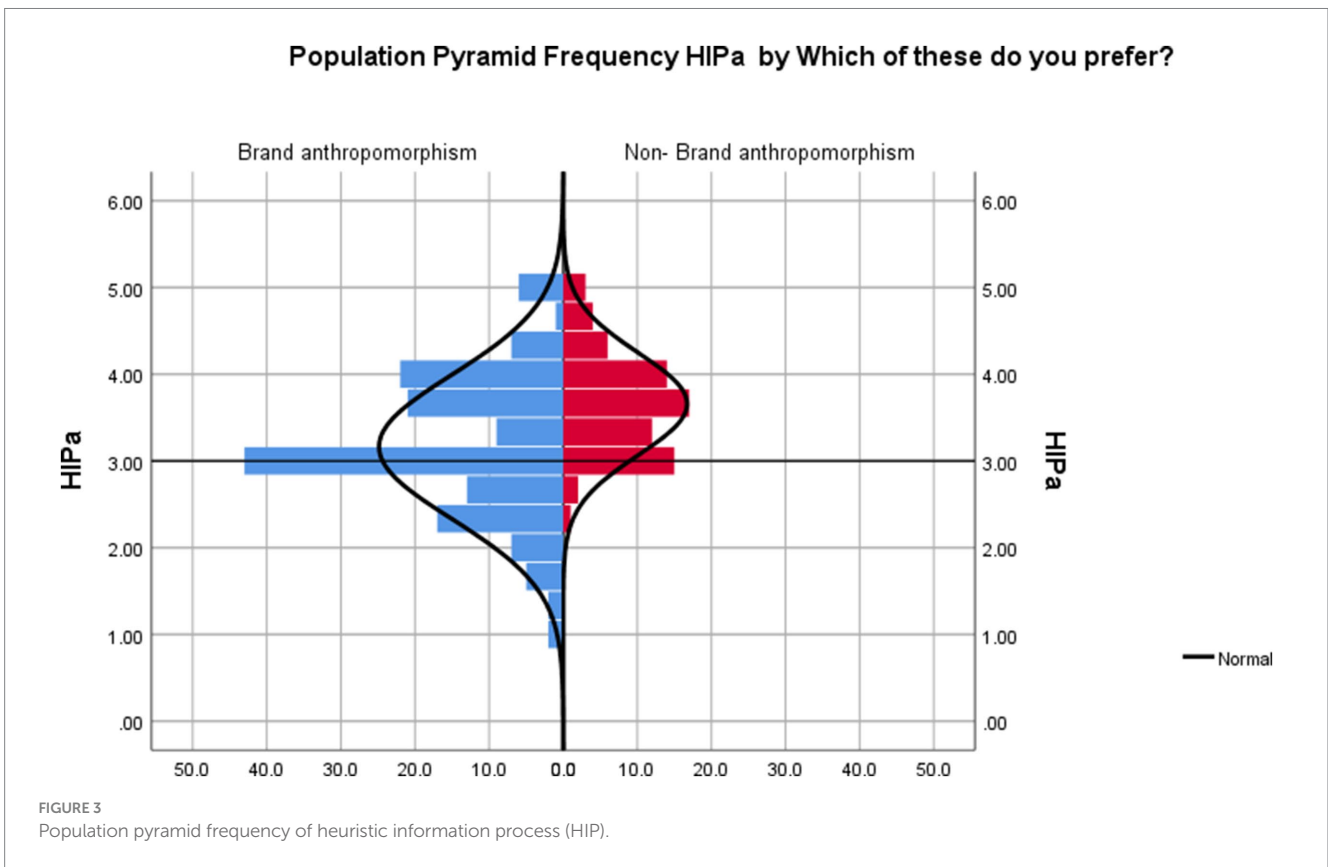
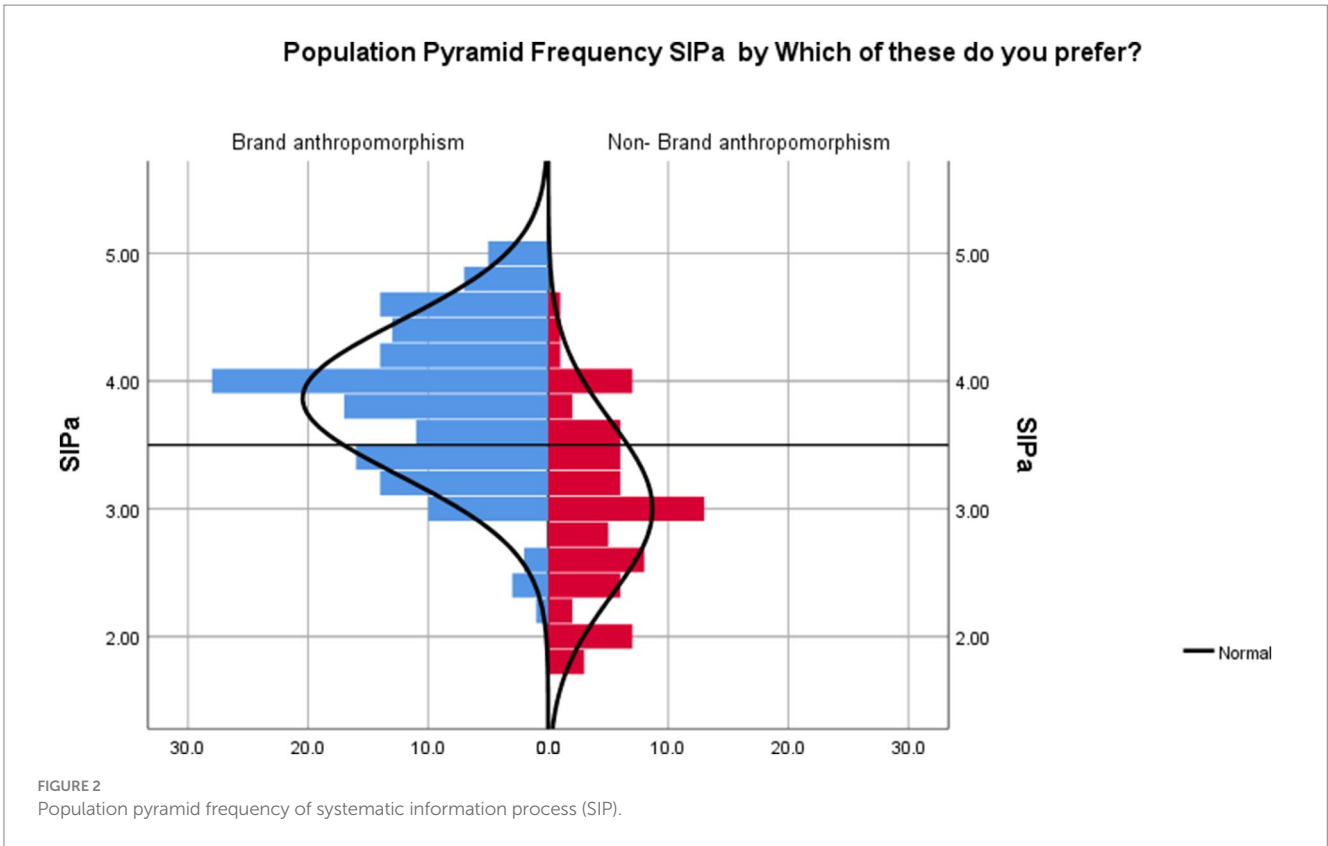
TABLE 1 Demographic response of the respondents.

Measure	Item	Frequency (N = 229)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	120	52.40
	Female	109	47.59
<b>Age</b>			
	18–19 years	54	23.58
	20–21 years	102	44.54
	22–23 years	27	11.79
	24–25 years	46	20.08
<b>Education</b>			
	Undergraduates	136	59.38
	Postgraduates	65	28.38
	Schooling	18	07.86
	Others	10	04.36
<b>Where do you live</b>			
	Urban	201	87.77
	Rural	28	12.22
<b>Cause do you prefer to support</b>			
	Social related cause	117	51.09
	Environment related cause	112	48.90
<b>Which of these do you prefer?</b>			
	Brand Anthropomorphism	155	67.68
	Non- Brand Anthropomorphism	74	32.31

anthropomorphism on pro-social behavior, while lower levels of execution style decline it.

Following the guidelines established by Hair et al. (2019), we assessed the measurement model for reliability and validity by examining various

metrics including Factor Loadings ( $\geq 0.708$ ), Cronbach's Alpha ( $\geq 0.700$ ), Composite Reliability ( $\geq 0.700$ ), and Average Variance Extracted ( $\geq 0.500$ ). Table 2 confirms that these criteria were met, indicating sufficient convergent validity and reliability. Discriminant validity, as





shown in Table 3, was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The Average Variance Extracted for each latent variable exceeded its squared correlation with other constructs, with all Fornell-Larcker values being <0.90 (Rönkkö and Cho, 2022). The conceptual distinctions between constructs are also detailed in Table 3. These results confirm strong discriminant validity for the measurement model.

Table 4 shows the collinearity issues of the Framework, this analysis calculated the VIF values. According to the (Khan et al., 2024), if the VIF value is <5, this implies no collinearity problems in the results. The analysis showed that the inner VIF of items falls between 1.072 and 2.023. The present study's data demonstrate no collinearity problem with the data and the findings are stable.

The results of the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models analysis (MICOM), presented in the Table 5, provide a

comprehensive assessment of measurement invariance for the constructs of brand anthropomorphism, execution style, heuristic information processing, systematic information processing, and prosocial behavior across two respondent groups: those exposed to anthropomorphized brand messages and those exposed to non-anthropomorphized brand messages. This analysis is crucial for confirming that these constructs are interpreted and understood similarly across both groups, thereby validating the comparability of the study's findings. Before conducting a multi-group analysis (MGA), it is essential to assess measurement invariance to ensure that the measurement models consistently capture the same attributes under different conditions (Dong and Dumas, 2020; Henseler et al., 2016). To proceed with the MGA for the proposed model, an invariance test was performed to verify that the

TABLE 2 Construct reliability and validity.

Latent variable	Indicators	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	Average value extracted
Brand anthropomorphism	BA1	0.767	0.79	0.856	0.544
	BA2	0.764			
	BA3	0.694			
	BA4	0.660			
	BA5	0.795			
Heuristic information process	HIP1	0.638	0.629	0.792	0.563
	HIP2	0.733			
	HIP3	0.863			
Systematic information process	SIP1	0.686	0.734	0.823	0.583
	SIP2	0.714			
	SIP3	0.683			
	SIP4	0.717			
	SIP5	0.672			
Pro-social behavior	PSB1	0.746	0.836	0.880	0.551
	PSB2	0.756			
	PSB3	0.638			
	PSB4	0.819			
	PSB5	0.751			
	PSB6	0.734			
Execution style	EXS1	0.664	0.712	0.762	0.620
	EXS2	0.894			

TABLE 3 Discriminant validity—Fornell–Larcker criterion.

	Brand anthropomorphism	Execution style	Heuristic information process	Pro-social behavior	Systematic information process
Brand anthropomorphism	0.738				
Execution style	0.195	0.788			
Heuristic information process	-0.092	0.370	0.750		
Pro-social behavior	0.270	0.494	0.415	0.742	
Systematic information process	0.514	0.267	0.107	0.441	0.695

measurements are interpreted similarly across both types of brand messages in CRM namely, those with and without brand anthropomorphism.

TABLE 4 Collinearity statistics.

Indicators	VIF
BA1←Brand anthropomorphism	1.578
BA2←Brand anthropomorphism	1.548
BA3←Brand anthropomorphism	1.379
BA4←Brand anthropomorphism	1.432
BA5←Brand anthropomorphism	1.806
HIP1←Heuristic information process	1.216
HIP2←Heuristic information process	1.246
HIP3←Heuristic information process	1.254
SIP1←Systematic information process	1.306
SIP2←Systematic information process	1.444
SIP3←Systematic information process	1.463
SIP4←Systematic information process	1.419
SIP5←Systematic information process	1.252
PSB1←Pro-social behavior	1.607
PSB2←Pro-social behavior	1.809
PSB3←Pro-social behavior	1.324
PSB4←Pro-social behavior	2.023
PSB5←Pro-social behavior	1.724
PSB6←Pro-social behavior	1.68
EXS1←Execution style	1.072
EXS2←Execution style	1.072

TABLE 5 Measurement invariance of composites.

Composite	c Value (=1)	Confidence interval	Compositional invariance
Brand anthropomorphism	0.977	(0.992; 1.000)	Yes
Execution style	0.977	(0.977; 1.000)	Yes
Heuristic information process	0.969	(0.955; 1.000)	Yes
Pro-social behavior	0.999	(0.997; 1.000)	Yes
Systematic information process	0.967	(0.989; 1.000)	Yes
Composite	Composite's mean value (=0)	Confidence interval	Equal mean values
Brand anthropomorphism	-0.003	(-0.263; 0.268)	Yes
Execution style	0.008	(-0.279; 0.277)	Yes
Heuristic information process	-0.001	(-0.277; 0.272)	Yes
Pro-social behavior	0.002	(-0.278; 0.285)	Yes
Systematic information process	-0.003	(-0.3; 0.267)	Yes
Composite	Composite's variance ratio (=0)	Confidence interval	Equal variances
Brand anthropomorphism	0.027	(-0.457; 0.55)	Yes
Execution style	0.016	(-0.434; 0.459)	Yes
Heuristic information process	0.023	(-0.375; 0.447)	Yes
Pro-social behavior	0.018	(-0.393; 0.468)	Yes
Systematic information process	0.017	(-0.329; 0.37)	Yes

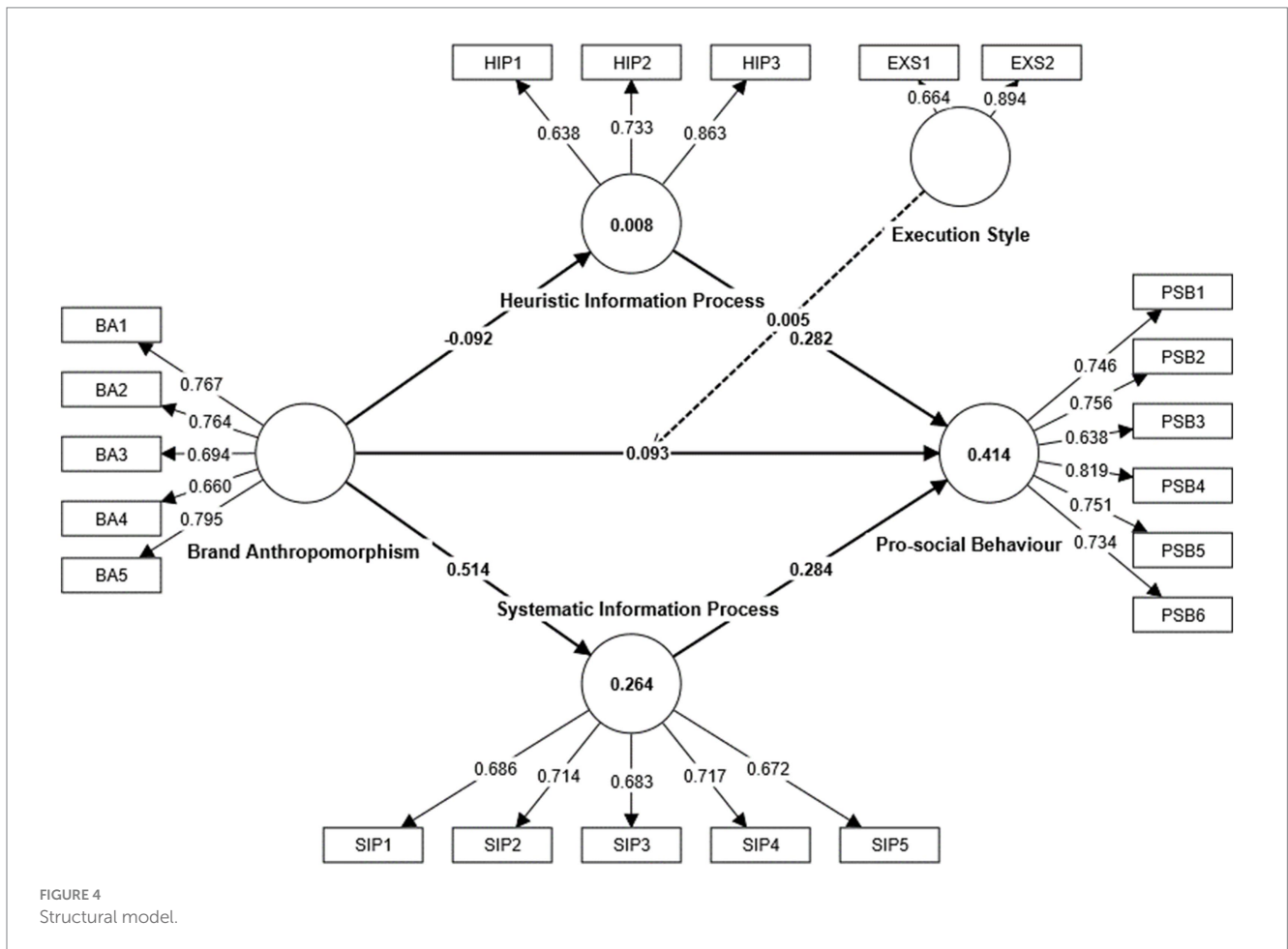
The assessment of measurement invariance followed a three-step process: (i) configural invariance, (ii) compositional invariance, and (iii) equality of composite mean values and variances. Initially, configural invariance was analysed between the data sets for brand anthropomorphism and non-brand anthropomorphism to verify that the measurement models preserved the same fundamental factor structure across both groups, with an identical number of constructs and items loading onto these constructs. Subsequently, a permutation test was conducted to evaluate compositional invariance, ensuring that the composite scores were consistent across the groups. The results, indicated by a *c* value of 1 (reported in Table 5), fell within the upper and lower bounds of the 95% confidence interval, establishing compositional invariance for the research model. Finally, the equality of composite mean values and variances was tested across the two groups of anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM (i.e., brand anthropomorphism and non-brand anthropomorphism). The results, presented in Table 5, demonstrated that all composite constructs showed significant differences in terms of composite mean and variance ratios, falling within the 95% confidence interval. Overall, these findings confirm that the constructs in the models for both brand anthropomorphism and non-brand anthropomorphism groups are consistent in content and meaning, indicating significant distinctions between them.

### Structural model evaluation

Table 6 represents the path coefficient of the structural model. Figure 4 gives the hypotheses test results, path coefficient. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. The results indicated that brand anthropomorphism directly affects prosocial behavior ( $b = 0.093$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and brand anthropomorphism negatively affects the heuristic information process ( $b = -0.092$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and positively

TABLE 6 Path coefficient.

	Path coefficients
H1—Brand anthropomorphism→Pro-social behavior	0.093
H2a—Brand anthropomorphism→Heuristic information process	−0.092
H2b—Brand anthropomorphism→Systematic information process	0.514
H3a—Brand anthropomorphism→Systematic information process→Pro-social behavior	0.146
H3b—Brand anthropomorphism→Heuristic information process→Pro-social behavior	−0.026
H4—Execution style × Brand anthropomorphism→Pro-social behavior	0.005



affects systematic information process ( $b = 0.514, p = 0.000$ ), hence hypothesis 2a (H2a) rejected and hypothesis 2b (H2b) accepted. The indirect effect of information process on brand anthropomorphism and prosocial behavior, heuristic information process effects negatively ( $b = -0.026, p = 0.000$ ) and systematic information process affect positively ( $b = 0.146, p = 0.000$ ), hence hypothesis 3a (H3a) rejected and hypothesis 3b (H3b) accepted. However, results revealed that execution style positively moderates brand anthropomorphism on pro social behavior as indicated in value ( $b = 0.005, p = 0.091$ ). Overall, our results indicate that anthropomorphized brand message in CRM has significant effect on prosocial behavior of young adults. When it is come to information process, anthropomorphized brand message in CRM is systematically gone through by young adults, which leads to

prosocial behavior. Execution style of the brand anthropomorphism has significant effect on the relationship between anthropomorphized brand message in CRM and prosocial behavior (Figure 5).

## Research conclusion and discussion

### Conclusion

This study investigates the role of anthropomorphized brand messaging in cause-related marketing and its impact on prosocial behavior, particularly among young adults. By applying the dual process heuristic systematic model, the research demonstrates that anthropomorphized brand messages significantly influence prosocial

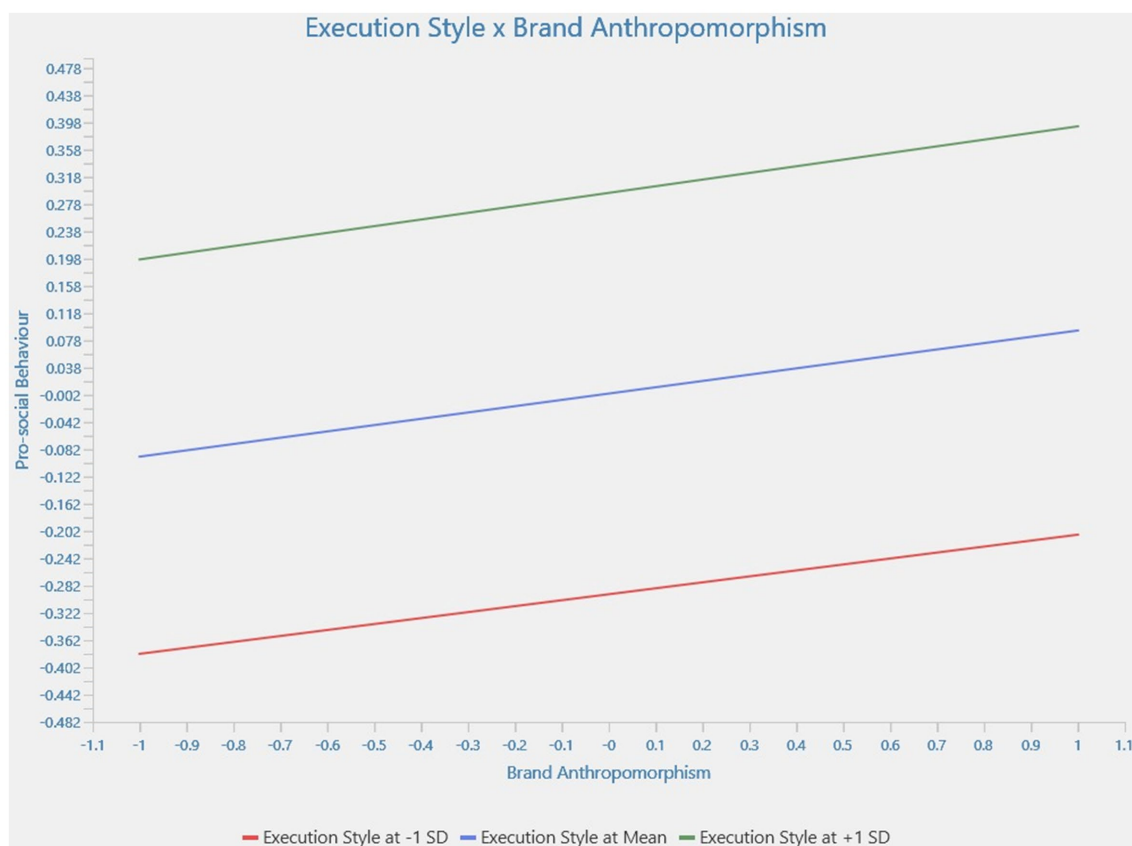


FIGURE 5  
Moderation analysis.

behavior. The study reveals that systematic information processing is positively associated with brand anthropomorphism, while heuristic processing is negatively associated. Additionally, the execution style moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and prosocial behavior, further enhancing the effectiveness of anthropomorphism in CRM initiatives. The findings suggest that young adults, as future decision makers, respond positively to anthropomorphized brand messages, leading to increased prosocial behavior when they engage in systematic information processing.

## Discussion

The findings of the study reinforce the growing importance of brand anthropomorphism in enhancing the effectiveness of cause related marketing (CRM). By humanizing brands, companies can create deeper emotional connections with consumers, which in turn can lead to engage more in meaningful consumption decision and increased prosocial behavior. The dual-process heuristic systematic model (HSM) used in this study highlights the crucial role of information processing in shaping consumer responses to anthropomorphized brands. The positive impact of systematic processing suggests that consumers who take the time to carefully evaluate anthropomorphized brand message in CRM messages are more likely to support the associated social causes. This aligns with the broader literature, which indicates that consumers who engage in systematic processing tend to form stronger, more enduring attitudes

toward brands. One key insight from the study is the differential impact of systematic versus heuristic processing on consumer prosocial behavior. Systematic processing appears to be more conducive to fostering prosocial behavior in response to anthropomorphized brand messages in CRM, as it encourages a deeper, more thoughtful consumption decision with social responsibility.

They also discover that CRM communication should be designed to encourage systematic processing, perhaps by providing detailed, meaningful information about the cause, by using messaging that prompts consumers to reflect on the social impact of their consumption decision. The study also sheds light on the moderating role of execution style in CRM communication. Specifically, the way a CRM message is framed, whether it is cause-focused or product-focused can significantly influence how consumers perceive and respond to the message. A cause-focused execution style, which emphasizes the social issue being addressed, may be more effective in fostering prosocial behavior, particularly when paired with anthropomorphized brand messaging. This suggests that companies need to carefully consider not just the content of their CRM messages but also how those messages are presented to ensure maximum impact. Moreover, the negative association between heuristic information processing and brand anthropomorphism underscores the importance of avoiding overly simplistic or superficial CRM messages. While heuristic information process can lead to quick decision making, it may not be sufficient to drive the deeper needed for sustained prosocial behavior. This finding indicates that CRM communication relying solely on heuristic cues, such as catchy slogans or superficial brand traits, may not fully realize their potential in promoting social causes.

Another significant aspect of the discussion is the implication for brands' strategy and consumers' trust. As consumers become more sceptical of corporate motives, especially in the context of social responsibility, the authenticity of brand messaging becomes supreme. Anthropomorphized brands that fail to deliver on their promises or that appear insincere in their CRM efforts risk eroding consumer trust, which could backfire and lead to negative brand perceptions. Therefore, companies must ensure that their CRM initiatives are not only well-executed but also genuinely aligned with their values and mission. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the strategic use of brand anthropomorphism in CRM communication and highlights the importance of encouraging systematic information processing to maximize prosocial behavior. The findings have important implications for marketers seeking to design effective CRM communication that resonate with consumers, particularly young adults who are increasingly agreed to social/environmental issues. Moving forward, companies should continue to explore innovative ways to humanize their brands while maintaining authenticity and fostering deeper, more meaningful connections with their consumers.

## Limitations and future research direction

There are some limitations of this study that need to be addressed. Mainly, the use of young adults from college/university student samples and particularly focus on Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Therefore, it should be careful in generalizing results to a larger consumer sample and restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions in India. Because different generation groups and location might have diverse perceptions toward anthropomorphized brand message in CRM initiatives, it would be interesting to study brand anthropomorphism across various age groups. Future research could delve deeper into several directions First, with the increasing influence of digital and social media, it is crucial to investigate how these platforms can be leveraged to enhance the impact of anthropomorphized brand messages. Second, Consumers become more aware of corporate motives, it is important to investigate how ethical considerations and transparency in CRM initiatives influence consumer trust and engagement. Third, to understand the lasting effects of anthropomorphized brand messaging, longitudinal studies could track changes in consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and impact of social responsibility over time. This research could reveal the sustainability of CRM initiatives and their influence on long-term consumer relationships.

## Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession number(s) can be found in the article/[Supplementary material](#).

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## Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee for studies on Human subjects (IECH), Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

LD: Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation. TA: Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Supervision.

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## Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1495247/full#supplementary-material>

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