

# When pain is pleasure: Identifying consumer psychopaths

Evmorfia Karampournioti | Nadine Hennigs | Klaus-Peter Wiedmann

Institute of Marketing and Management, Leibniz University of Hannover, Hannover, Germany

## Correspondence

Evmorfia Karampournioti, Institute of Marketing and Management, Leibniz University of Hannover, Koenigsworther Platz 1, Hannover, Germany.

Email: karampournioti@m2.uni-hannover.de

## Abstract

In almost every product category, companies have incorporated the emergence of ethical and environmental consumerism into their business activities. Although ethical consumers are supposed to be concerned with a broad spectrum of ethical issues and demand that products and business practices meet their moral principles, a critical perspective supports the assumption that a dark side of consumer personality also exists. Consequently, the role of consumers has become a top priority, especially in the specific ascription of bright and dark personality traits when evaluating cruel business practices and unethical behavior. The paper aims to investigate whether anthropomorphic communication about cruel business tactics affects the formation of explicit and implicit brand attitudes and to shed light on the role of consumers' personality traits in perceiving anthropomorphic cues and in forming brand attitudes. Referencing the Dark Triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy in relation to animal cruelty in the cosmetics industry, the results of an empirical study ( $N = 610$ ) provide evidence that perceptions of brands or companies conducting cruel practices differ between consumers with more distinct Dark Triad traits and those with stronger empathetic traits.

## KEYWORDS

animal testing, anthropomorphism, cosmetics industry, Dark Triad, empathy, explicit and implicit attitudes, IAT

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

*He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.*  
Immanuel Kant

For decades, researchers and practitioners have focused on ethical and environmental consumerism, which is regarded as a mainstream phenomenon in contemporary consumer culture (e.g., Doane, 2001; Low & Davenport, 2007). In this context, the ethical consumer is presumed to be concerned about a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from the environment and animal welfare to societal concerns, such as human rights. By “shopping for a better world” (Low & Davenport, 2007, p. 336), the ethical buyer demands products that meet his/her moral principles and boycotts companies involved in unethical practices (e.g., Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2005; Muncy & Vitell, 1992). However, a critical perspective on economic reality has led to the discussion of whether the ethical consumer is nothing more than a myth (e.g., Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010). When referring to their favorite brands, global consumers are willing to turn a blind eye to political and ethical malpractice (BBC, 2002), and from a general perspective, they shift social responsibility

to the government, the market, companies or the overall system—but never to themselves (Devinney et al., 2010). In addition, a *dark side* of consumer personality also exists. For example, psychologists have examined the overemphasis on the self and self-promotion through ongoing media trends, such as a whole generation's *selfie obsession*, in connection with personality traits known as the *Dark Triad*: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. In a business context, substantial research is dedicated to investigating the dark side of management decisions and the behavior of the *organizational psychopath* (e.g., Boddy, 2006), *snakes in suits*, and *bad bosses* (e.g., Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Garcia & Sikström, 2014). Focusing particularly on the treatment of animals, research has shown that individuals with high levels of Dark Triad traits have less positive attitudes toward animals and that they even engage in more acts of animal cruelty (Kavanagh, Signal, & Taylor, 2013). Consequently, proclaiming this period to be the age of the ethical consumer is not sensible. To provide a holistic picture of contemporary consumer behavior, personality-based factors related to unethical behavior must also be specifically considered.

In the current study, the growing literature on the Dark Triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy is considered in the context of animal cruelty, with a focus on anthropomorphism and

consumer evaluation of products and brands. Against this backdrop, dark personality traits are predicted to have a significant impact on consumer awareness and reaction to cruel business practices. The remainder of the manuscript is organized as follows. The theoretical foundation of bright and dark personality traits as well as anthropomorphism is described in the next section. The conceptual model and related hypotheses are subsequently presented. The methodology section outlines the methods and sample used for the empirical study, and then the results are presented and discussed.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 | Personality traits and consumption behavior

Personality traits are understood as “[...] generalized patterns of response or modes of coping with the world [...]” (Kassarjian, 1971, p. 409) or “a configuration of cognitions, emotions, and habits activated when situations stimulate their expression” (Triandis, 2001, p. 908), and such traits are often related to consumption behavior in general and ethical decision making in particular (e.g., Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). In accordance with general theories of consumer behavior (e.g., Engel, Blackwell, & Kollat, 1978; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993), consumers’ ethical judgments are considered a key driver of their intention to engage in ethically questionable practices (e.g., Van Kenhove, De Wulf, & Steenhaut, 2003; Vitell, Singhapakdi, & Thomas, 2001).

In this context, consumers capable of empathy, defined as a “tendency to apprehend another person’s condition or state of mind” (Johnson, Cheek, & Smither, 1983) and the “ability to understand and share in another’s emotional state or context” (Cohen & Strayer, 1996), are more likely to experience the consequences of their actions toward others and therefore to avoid harmful behavior (McPhedran, 2009). As a combination of sharing (empathetic concern) and reacting (personal distress) to emotional experiences (Davis, 1980; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; McPhedran, 2009; Signal & Taylor, 2007), empathy is not limited to humans; it also involves animal welfare (Apostol, Rebege, & Miclea, 2013).

In contrast to empathetic consumers, individuals with limited empathy value the *self* over the *other* and often score high on *Dark Triad* factors (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). As a system of three socially undesirable personality traits that have been studied in the context of consumer acceptance of unethical behavior, the Dark Triad includes characteristics such as “entitlement, superiority, dominance (i.e., narcissism), glib social charm, manipulateness (i.e., Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes, impulsivity, and interpersonal antagonism (i.e., psychopathy)” (Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015, p. 6). Specifically, narcissism as a personality trait refers to an overly enhanced view of the self that devalues others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993, 2001) combined with extreme vanity, self-absorption, arrogance, and entitlement (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Machiavellian personalities pursue manipulative social strategies in a *whatever it takes attitude* that can include various unethical behaviors (e.g., Christie & Geis, 1970; Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, & Smith, 2002; Jonason &

Webster, 2012; Rauthmann, 2012). Similar to narcissists and Machiavellians, psychopaths lack empathy and demonstrate interpersonal manipulation and antisocial behavior (Hare, 2003; Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, & Leistico, 2006; Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003). Even if the origins of Dark Triad traits differ, in combination they “entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness” (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p. 557) and are often associated with dysfunctional or reduced morality (Campbell et al., 2009; Glenn, Iyer, Graham, Koleva, & Haidt, 2009).

As an important aspect of consumption behavior, an individual’s degree of empathy has been shown to influence that person’s responses to marketing stimuli. In this context, the ability to perceive humanlike attributes in communication efforts—so-called anthropomorphism—is of major importance, as shown in the following section.

### 2.2 | Seeing through the human lens—anthropomorphism

People are everywhere. We perceive them, build social ties with them, and respect, love, and hate them. In some people, we perceive similarities; we can identify with them, develop positive feelings, and feel emotional concern. Others are given lower priorities in our lives and are less relevant. These perceptions and feelings are not limited to human beings; they may also describe feelings toward nonhuman entities, such as animals or even objects. People tend to humanize trees and clouds (Guthrie, 1993); they refer to the planet as the *mother earth* and to the environment as *mother nature*. They tend to humanize animals and pets, perceive faces in products (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), describe financial markets as anxious or delirious, or talk to their plants. The tendency to create humanlike agents appears to be infinite (Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010).

Anthropomorphism refers to a prevalent tendency to perceive and interact with nonhuman agents as one would with humans (Guthrie, 1993; Mithen & Boyer, 1996). It describes “[...] the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions” (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007, p. 864). In its whole spectrum, anthropomorphism comprises both physical aspects, such as perceiving humanlike forms, and mental capacities, e.g., ascribing emotions, intentions, and consciousness to nonhuman entities (Waytz et al., 2010). The tendency to anthropomorphize is rooted in psychological antecedents, often separated into one cognitive and two motivational dimensions. One of these motivations—*effectance motivation*—is grounded in humans’ need to make sense of the surrounding world and particularly to explain and understand the behavior of nonhuman agents (Epley et al., 2007; Epley, Waytz, Akalis, & Cacioppo, 2008) in order to interact effectively in the prevailing and often complex environment. Effectance motivation particularly aims to reduce uncertainty and risk (Kim & McGill, 2011), to permit understanding and predictions of the surrounding world, and to increase controllability (Averill, 1973; Connell, 2013; Epley et al., 2007; Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). *Sociality*, the second motivational factor, is defined as “[...] the motivation for social contact,

social connection, and social approval from other agents (human or otherwise)" (Epley et al., 2007, p. 871). Sociality enhances anthropomorphic thinking when social motivation or the need for interaction with nonhuman entities is high (Hart, Jones, & Roynes, 2013). Humans who lack social connections are more likely to humanize surrounding nonhuman agents (e.g., pets or technological gadgets) in order to address their unmet social needs (Hende & Mugge, 2014). From the cognitive point of view, existing knowledge about humans or about the self serves as an easily accessible and applicable anthropocentric basis for determining and evaluating unknown objects. This implies that humans have immediate access to the experience of *being human* but have no points of contact with an animal's life "[...] simply because humans' sensory experiences are in here, not in there" (Epley et al., 2007, p. 868). Ultimately, the goals of anthropomorphic thinking are understanding, predicting, and controlling another's behavior as well as developing social connections (Epley et al., 2007). Moral consideration is also closely intertwined with the concept of humanization. Consequently, if humans experience a lack of mind attribution to other species, the moral status of perceived entities decreases along with the feeling of guilt in case of caused harm (Čehajić, Brown, & González, 2009). Accordingly, the presence of humanlike characteristics in communication campaigns may be presumed to foster support for social causes (Ahn, Kim, & Aggarwal, 2014) and the avoidance of harmful actions and abuses (Williams, Masser, & Sun, 2015) through experienced feelings of anticipatory guilt. However, guilt is a feeling to which not everyone can be exposed; this is particularly applicable to people who score high on Dark Triad personality traits (Gramzov & Tagney, 1992; Larson & Buss, 2006). Thus, studying anthropomorphic effects in relation to personality traits that are geared toward exploiting others has high theoretical value.

### 3 | CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The purpose of the present study is threefold. The first goal is to investigate whether anthropomorphic communication about cruel business tactics affects the formation of brand attitudes. In doing so, the study recognizes the explicit and implicit information processing of humans and thus considers a combination of explicit and implicit brand attitudes. Second, this study analyzes how explicit and implicit brand attitudes affect brand performance (brand perception and brand-related behavior). The third goal is to shed light on the role of consumers' personality traits in perceiving anthropomorphic cues and forming brand attitudes. In particular, this study investigates whether consumers with more distinct Dark Triad traits differ from those with stronger empathetic traits.

The cosmetics industry is a context in which cruel production processes are widely discussed. Therefore, from the numerous ethical dilemmas related to consumption behavior, the underlying study focuses on animal testing for cosmetic purposes. Testing cosmetics on animals is banned in many countries, and many prominent brands such as *Aveda*, *Bare Escentuals*, and *Burt's Bees* have incorporated the emergence of ethical and environmental consumerism into their business activities by ensuring high environmental standards with an

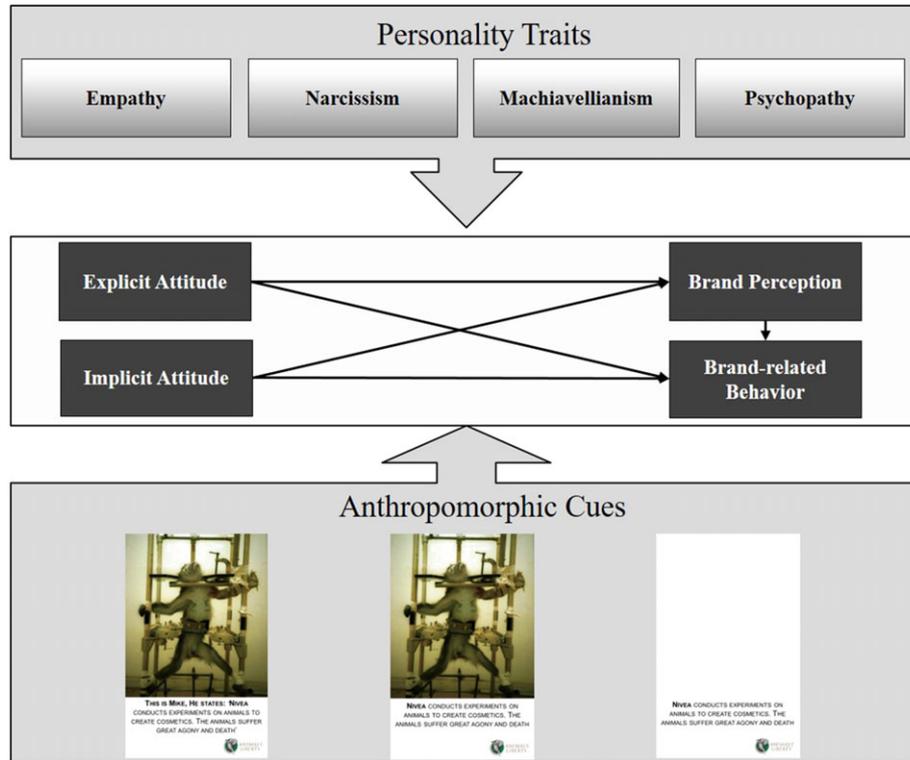
emphasis on natural and organic ingredients and animal welfare. However, the cruel business activity of animal testing remains ubiquitous in the personal care industry (Hennigs, Karampournioti, & Wiedmann, 2016). While animal testing is obligatory in countries such as China, this practice is not required in the United States, but "animal testing by manufacturers seeking to market new products is often necessary to establish product safety" (FDA, 2000). If this testing is not conducted, cosmetic products must have a warning statement on the front label: "WARNING—The safety of this product has not been determined" (FDA, 2000). Although experiments on animals are cast in a negative light and government regulations try to reduce their implementation, approximately 115 million animals are used for laboratory experiments worldwide (HSI, 2012). However, those data have been criticized for being incomplete, and nearly 90% of the animals used may not be included in official statistics; therefore, the number of reported cases (e.g., 834,453 for the USA in 2014) (USDA, 2015) may be far higher than estimated (HSI, 2012).

In an attempt to assess individual reactions to anthropomorphic cues related to animal cruelty in the beauty business on a holistic level, the fundamental characteristics of human information processing that are rooted in explicit and implicit paths must be considered. According to dual process models incorporating explicit and implicit information processing pathways, individuals possess two distinct attitudes toward the same object—an automatic, implicit attitude and an explicit attitude (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). While "implicit attitudes are introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects" (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 8) that can be accessed spontaneously, explicit attitudes are formed by a more systematic and conscious consideration of the weaknesses and benefits of specific objects (Fazio & Olson, 2003). Whether the explicit or implicit attitude is approved in different situations depends on the accessibility of cognitive capacity and the motivation to recall the explicit (deliberative) attitude and to override the implicit (automatic) (Wilson et al., 2000, p. 102). By considering both the explicit and implicit paths of information processing, the conceptual model includes both types of formation of attitudes toward brands that conduct experiments on animals.

In accordance with the research insights mentioned above, Figure 1 shows the conceptual model that guides the corresponding theoretical developments with the suggested hypothesized relations discussed below.

#### 3.1 | Effect of personality traits on anthropomorphic reception and brand perception

The perception of ethical dilemmas and individuals' acceptance of unethical consumption activities are strongly influenced by individual characteristics, such as the individual personality traits of consumers (Shen & Dickson, 2001). A consumers' ability to "vicariously 'experience' the consequences of his/her actions towards others" (McPhedran, 2009, p. 2) by being altruistic and avoiding destructive behavior toward others is associated with empathetic personality traits (McPhedran, 2009; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990).



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual framework [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Empathy for ethical concerns and issues, which may be “guided by a sense of obligation to others” (Shaw & Shiu, 2002, p. 114), has been shown to be connected to more positive attitudes toward animals and a higher probability of engaging in animal welfare and animal protection activities (Signal & Taylor, 2007). In contrast to the bright side of personality characteristics, the dark side, known as the Dark Triad of personality traits and associated with bad characters (Furnham et al., 2013), has a demonstrated relationship with less positive attitudes and behaviors. Associated with the acceptance of unethical consumption activities (Shen & Dickson, 2001), social aversion (Leary, Saltzman, & Georgeson, 1997), low levels of empathy (Hare, 2003; Paulhus, 2001), bullying behavior (Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2012; Williams, McAndrew, Learn, Harms, & Paulhus, 2001), and the execution of sexual or revenge deviant fantasies (DeLongis, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2011; Williams, Cooper, Howell, Yuille, & Paulhus, 2009), the multiple facets of the Dark Triad lead to quite diverse behaviors. In a previous study examining the associations between dark personality traits and attitudes and behaviors toward animals, Kavanagh et al. (2013) confirmed that individuals scoring higher on Dark Triad traits exhibited more negative attitudes toward animals in general, leading to greater engagement in animal cruelty. Individuals with high psychopathy scores were particularly linked to killing animals or hurting animals with the objective of causing pain. Given that individuals with darker personality traits demonstrate a higher tendency to disengage from ethical principles than others and are thus able to form unethical consumer attitudes (Egan et al. 2015), these individuals are less likely to “evaluate ethically questionable situations as inappropriate” (Steenhaut, 2006, p. 276). By contrast, moral and ethical reasoning is greatly influenced by the ability to experience empathy (Han-

son & Mullis, 1985). Therefore, we suppose that the attribution of personality traits may influence the explicit and implicit attitudes toward brands that conduct animal experiments for the creation of cosmetics, which results in:

- $H_{1a}$ : The expression of personality traits moderates the effect of anthropomorphic communication on explicit brand attitude.  
 $H_{1b}$ : The expression of personality traits moderates the effect of anthropomorphic communication on implicit brand attitude.

### 3.2 | Consequences of anthropomorphic reasoning on brand attitudes

Analyzing existing research clearly reveals that anthropomorphic thinking accounts for a variety of phenomena, ranging from religious artifacts and social and natural paradigms, such as the behavior of non-human agents and meteorological conditions, to humanized marketing campaigns to advertise products or create awareness of ethical issues.

Evidence from previous research accentuates the powerful synthesis between anthropomorphism and consumers' evaluations of products and brands. Hence, humanizing products, such as by naming cars or providing human shapes and forms to products, has the potential to improve product evaluation in general and to increase product liking in particular, thus leading to better treatment of specific products (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Brown, 2010; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011; Fournier, 1998; Levine, 2009). Moreover, anthropomorphizing products facilitates a stronger bond between consumer and brand, which enhances commitment and loyalty and lowers consumers' willingness to replace products (Chandler & Schwartz, 2010).

In an advanced state, consumers tend to develop love toward brands, which is expressed by stronger purchase intentions and a higher likelihood of engaging in positive word of mouth (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). By placing priority on the social value of products rather than their functional characteristics—or by shifting pragmatic thoughts to personal ones in a metaphorical sense—“[...] anthropomorphizing a product could be expected to increase the product's personal value by increasing a consumer's perceptual fluency, effectiveness in interacting with the product, and feeling of social contact” (Hart et al., 2013, p. 109).

The findings mentioned above exemplify the variety of effects that anthropomorphism can have on consumers' perception, judgment, and behavior with respect to brands. The genesis of strong bonds is not limited to specific humanized products or brands; instead, it can occur in a variety of contexts, such as nature and pets (Downey & Ellis, 2008). Previous research has found that anthropomorphism leads to the perception that laboratory animals are able to experience humanlike emotions (Morton, Burghardt, & Smith, 1990). Moreover, being perceived as having humanlike attributes allows nonhumans to become worthy of moral consideration (Waytz et al., 2010). Thus, individuals who attribute human characteristics to animals show more positive attitudes toward animals and express greater support for animal welfare and animal rights (Butterfield, Hill, & Lord, 2012; Clayton, Fraser, & Burgess, 2011). Finally, perceiving a nonhuman as having a mind and an ability to consciously experience the surrounding world is related to “moral patiency and hence to rights and privileges” (Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007, p. 619). Thus, we suggest that perceiving animals used in experiments in cosmetics laboratories as humanlike could lead to a more intense perception of the atrocious and painful experiences of those animals and make them “worthy of empathic care and concern” (Waytz et al., 2010, p. 222). This perception subsequently influences explicit and implicit attitudes toward the brands involved in those cruel practices. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H<sub>2a</sub>: The degree of anthropomorphism used in communication about cruel practices has a negative impact on explicit brand attitude.
- H<sub>2b</sub>: The degree of anthropomorphism used in communication about cruel practices has a negative impact on implicit brand attitude.

### 3.3 | Brand attitudes and brand performance

As introduced in the conceptual model of the underlying research investigation, individuals can have two distinct attitudes toward the same object: explicit and implicit. Defined as an “individual's internal evaluation of an object” (Mitchell & Olson 1981, p. 318), brand attitude “[...] endures for at least a short period of time and presumably energizes and directs behavior” (Eagly & Chaiken 1993, p. 7). Therefore, in the current study of the influence of anthropomorphism on explicit and implicit attitude associations, we also address the impact of brand attitudes on the nontangible, psychological perception of the brand by consumers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) and the link between attitude and behavioral intent. We do so by following a common practice

in marketing research (e.g., Batra & Ray, 1986; MacKenzie & Spreng, 1992; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Spears & Singh, 2004). As illustrated in Figure 1, we analyze the transfer from an explicit and implicit attitude association to brand performance in terms of *brand perception* (H<sub>3a–b</sub>) and *brand-related behavior* (H<sub>3c–d</sub>):

- H<sub>3a</sub>: The explicit brand attitude is positively related to brand perception.
- H<sub>3b</sub>: The implicit brand attitude is positively related to brand perception.
- H<sub>3c</sub>: The explicit brand attitude is positively related to brand-related behavior.
- H<sub>3d</sub>: The implicit brand attitude is positively related to brand-related behavior.

An individuals' perception regarding a brand, e.g., in terms of trust, image, reputation, and especially satisfaction, can predict future behavioral intentions such as loyalty, purchase intentions, and the willingness to pay a price premium (Anselmsson, Bondesson, & Johansson, 2014; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001; Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004; Zboja & Vorhees, 2006). Thus, brand perception may lead to brand-related behavioral outcomes:

- H<sub>4</sub>: Consumer brand perception has a significantly positive effect on brand-related behavior.

## 4 | METHOD

### 4.1 | Study design

To investigate the effects of anthropomorphic cues in communication activities, an experimental study was conducted. The level of anthropomorphism was varied by using three experimental conditions and one control. A specific stimulus was used to inform the participants of the animal tests conducted by a well-known German cosmetics brand. The experimental conditions differed in their extent of their anthropomorphism. To clearly exemplify the consequences of animal tests, the following message was shown in each of the three experimental conditions: “*Nivea conducts experiments on animals to create cosmetics. The animals suffer great agony and death.*” Furthermore, the stimulus contained a picture of a monkey fixed to a holding device to be used for experiments. To vary the degree of anthropomorphism, the *high anthropomorphic condition* contained the picture of the monkey with the addition of a label with the name “Mike,” as the assigning of human names to animals also represents a form of anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2007). Thus, the following message was displayed on the picture: “*This is Mike. He states: 'Nivea conducts experiments on animals to create cosmetics. The animals suffer great agony and death.'*” The *low anthropomorphic condition* contains (merely) the picture and the communication message without naming the animal, whereas in the third condition, only the communication message was visible. In contrast to consumers in other countries, German consumers are very familiar with a drastic form of anthropomorphic communication that is typical in the country, where consumer critique is apparent in almost all product categories. Agriculture, animal farming, fur trade, smoking, the pharmaceutical sector,

energy suppliers, the car industry, and sweets manufacturers, among others are confronted with heavy criticism using shocking arguments and pictures. The message and the anthropomorphized stimuli were used to provoke a direct response to the brand, which makes use of animal testing, by creating greater awareness of the painful and atrocious procedures that those animals face.

## 4.2 | Pretest

Before the final study was distributed, a pretest was conducted to examine whether the selected stimulus with the monkey was appropriate to trigger different degrees of anthropomorphic associations. Therefore, we used the 5-item Individual differences in anthropomorphism questionnaire (IDAQ) scale developed by Waytz et al. (2010), which asks whether the monkey has a free will, consciousness, intentions, emotions, and a mind of its own. In sum, 38 respondents participated in the online questionnaire and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions containing the monkey. The results reveal that both stimuli cause anthropomorphic evaluations of the monkey. Moreover, significant differences exist between the two groups, as the name condition demonstrated a significantly higher anthropomorphic perception ( $3.990 > 3.289, p < 0.05$ ), which confirms the appropriateness of the stimuli for the present research goal.

## 4.3 | Measurement instrument

Well-established and validated scales were used to investigate whether anthropomorphized communication activities have significant effects on implicit and explicit attitude formation and whether these effects are dependent on consumers' personality traits. To measure an individual's *empathy*, we used a short form of Davis's (1980) *interpersonal reactivity index* (IRI), which was translated into German by Paulus (2009) and whose scientific validity has been confirmed on several occasions. *Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy*, which form the Dark Triad of personality traits, were measured by the *Dirty Dozen* (Jonason & Webster, 2010), which is a valid instrument that is still practical (for a detailed overview, see Jonason & Krause, 2013; Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). Based on exploratory factor analyses of a 22-item pool, Jonason and Webster (2010) identified three 4-item subscales (12-item questionnaire), each of which represents one of the well-known facets of the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Jones, 2014). The questionnaire items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The same rating scale was used for the conscious evaluation of the *explicit attitude*. For the evaluation of the *implicit attitude* toward a brand, a reaction time measurement was employed using the latency-based tool  $i^2$  BrandREACT (eye square, 2014), which resembles a single category implicit association test (SC-IAT) (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006). This procedure was chosen to capture the implicit attitude based on a more automatic and spontaneous assessment. Both measures used identical items for the measurement of brand attitude (specifically, nice, good, kindly, great, smart, lovely) to ensure direct comparability of the explicit and implicit information processing path (e.g., Aaker, 2000; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001).

To assess *brand perception*, as a result of the experimental setting, well-established reflective scales were used. Specifically, we created an analog factor by measuring the brand's image, trust and satisfaction (Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011). The same procedure was applied for *brand-related behavior* by evaluating the loyalty, price premium and purchase intention related to the brand (Wiedmann et al., 2011). Finally, all items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

## 4.4 | Data collection and sample

The respondents were recruited in July 2015 via a web-based survey based on a snowball sampling method via email messages as well as links on selective web pages (e.g., Facebook, Forums). Participants were assigned randomly to one of the four conditions (as described above, three anthropomorphic conditions and one control group without any stimulus). In total, 654 subjects responded to the questionnaire. According to several studies, attitudes and preferences are not merely transmitted through language but also shaped by it (Ogunnaik, Dunham, & Banaji, 2010). To avoid biases in the implicit attitude measure due to the participants' language, data for all the respondents who were not native German speakers were deleted from the dataset. As a result, a total of 44 cases were deleted, resulting in 610 valid questionnaires. The respondents' average age was approximately 30 years, with an overrepresentation of female (71%) and single (79.7%) respondents. Of the respondents, 38.2% mentioned that they preferred conventional forms of cosmetics, while 26.9% preferred cosmetics not tested on animals. Even if the sample is not representative of the German population, the data offer a suitable basis for the empirical assessment of the underlying research aims due to the study's special focus on the cosmetics industry, which is dominated by younger and female consumers.

# 5 | ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

## 5.1 | Research method

To analyze the data and to test the proposed hypotheses, universal structure modeling (USM) was used. In recent years, partial least squares (PLS) and covariance-based structural equation modeling (CVSEM) have become popular methods in marketing research, and they have been employed using applications such as SmartPLS or LISREL. Although these methods are powerful and widely used to test suspected relationships and research models, some researchers have mentioned that alternative methods lead to more accurate and effective estimations and results (Rust & Schmittlein, 1985; Buckler & Hennig-Thurau, 2008). Recent research by Dhar and Weinberg (2016) indicates that "non-linear models provide a richer set of results than linear interaction models" (p. 392) and thus provide a more multifarious and holistic view of consumer-oriented research. Moreover, nonlinear research approaches have shown their efficiency in providing incremental details in personality-oriented research. Even though nonlinear effects (Agustin & Singh, 2005) and interactions are common

**TABLE 1** Validity and reliability of constructs

Brand Attitude Measures					
	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Explained (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-half Reliability	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient
Explicit attitude	0.740–0.908	74.62%	0.929	n/a	0.768***
Implicit attitude	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.869	0.671***
Interpersonal Reactivity Index					
	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Explained (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-half Reliability	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient
Fantasy seeking	0.654–0.845	60.12%	0.765	n/a	n/a
Empathetic concern	0.661–0.772	51.94%	0.691	n/a	n/a
Perspective taking	0.669–0.793	54.30%	0.713	n/a	n/a
Personal distress	0.778–0.838	66.91%	0.752	n/a	n/a
Dark Triad Personality Traits					
	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Explained (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-half Reliability	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient
Narcissism	0.620–0.868	62.81%	0.802	n/a	n/a
Machiavellianism	0.687–0.853	62.49%	0.793	n/a	n/a
Psychopathy	0.647–0.798	56.80%	0.615	n/a	n/a
Brand Outcomes					
	Factor Loadings	Average Variance Explained (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-half Reliability	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient
Brand perception	0.931–0.940	87.62%	0.929	n/a	n/a
Brand-related behavior	0.879–0.921	80.86%	0.879	n/a	n/a

Note: n/a = not applicable; significance: \*\*\* = 0.01, \*\* = 0.05, \* = 0.1

occurrences in marketing (related to personality-oriented factors, e.g., LaHuis, Martin, & Avis, 2005; Manley & Mobbs, 2004; Vasilopoulos, Cucina, & Hunter, 2007), CVSEM and PLS methods overlook these important effects and allow them to remain hidden and unexplored. Because the present approach combines a) personality-oriented factors with b) implicit associations that are expected to reveal non-linear effects, the relevance of alternative research methods becomes apparent. To meet these demands, USM was applied through the use of NEUSREL V8 software for hypothesis testing that “[...] combines the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach with a Bayesian neural network involving a multilayer perceptron architecture [...]” (Buckler & Hennig-Thurau 2008, p. 50). Data calculation with NEUSREL requires a systematic process and stepwise calculation procedure for data analysis, which is conducted in three steps. First, the latent variables are defined and calculated. In the second step, measurement models and structural models are estimated to conclusively investigate the strength, significance, and shape of the relationship between the constructs of the inner model in the final step. Graphical interpretations of the explored relations are also created (Buckler & Hennig-Thurau, 2008). Because the initial step requires the identification and formation of clusters based on consumers’ dark and bright personality traits, the present analysis is based on a combination of SPSS V24 and NEUSREL V8.

### 5.2.1 | Reliability and validity

To avoid a methodological discontinuity within the analysis, the evaluation of the measurement model, the cluster analysis and the forma-

tion of clusters and constructs were performed with SPSS. A factor analysis was conducted via principal components with varimax rotation to evaluate the selected measures. Factor loadings of less than 0.6 were deleted from the data analysis. Following this approach, one item from the personal distress scale (empathy) and the psychopathy measure was deleted. As summarized in Table 1, the psychographic measures, explicit and implicit brand attitudes, and brand outcomes reveal satisfactory values in terms of item reliability (factor loadings and average variance explained), internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and split half reliability for implicit measures), and external validity (Spearman's rank correlation related to a feeling thermometer as a global attitudinal factor with a rating on a scale ranging from 0 = very cold to 10 = very warm).

### 5.3 | Cluster analysis and descriptive statistics

To identify possible clusters grounded in the factor scores of the aforementioned psychographic factors (empathy and Dark Triad), a two-step approach using both hierarchical and nonhierarchical clustering algorithms was conducted (e.g., Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). First, a hierarchical procedure using Ward's method of minimum variance was performed to determine the most appropriate number of clusters. The results strongly suggested the presence of two clusters. Then, a nonhierarchical clustering procedure was applied to validate the results and optimize the allocation of subjects into the two clusters. This analysis also revealed two different consumer groups that differed in the peculiarity of the bright and dark sides of their

**TABLE 2** Results of the cluster analysis

Dimensions of Personality Traits	Cluster 1 (n = 240)	Cluster 2 (n = 370)	F <sup>a</sup>
Dark Triad			
Narcissism	0.22254	-0.14435	20.214
Machiavellianism	0.53917	-0.34973	141.576
Psychopathy	0.77661	-0.50375	391.767
Empathy			
Fantasy scale	-0.64557	0.41875	225.762
Empathetic concern	-0.82226	0.53336	476.325
Perspective taking	-0.46355	0.30068	98.654
Personnel distress	-0.24701	0.16023	25.098

<sup>a</sup>All reported *F*-values are significant at 0.000

personality traits. Next, a discriminant analysis provided support for the identified segmentation by confirming that 97.4% of the cases were assigned to the correct segment. With regard to the results of this final cluster analysis, which are displayed in Table 2, the first identified cluster of consumers was labeled *Consumer Psychopaths* due to its tendency to score higher on Dark Triad traits and lower on empathetic factors compared to the mean scores of the second cluster, the *Empathetic Consumers*. With a mean age of 27 years and 42.1% male respondents, the *Consumer Psychopaths* constitute approximately 40% of the sample. Individuals in this group rate significantly higher on all Dark Triad factors (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) and agree with statements such as “I enjoy watching video clips with people fighting and realistic blood spurts,” “I tend to be callous or insensitive,” and “I tend to manipulate others to get my way.” In contrast to these subjects, the group of *Empathetic Consumers* is more supportive of all levels of empathy-related statements, such as “When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me,” “When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them,” and “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.” This respondent group has a mean age of 28 years, is 80.3% female and constitutes approximately 60% of the sample.

In the following sections, the test results for the suggested hypotheses will be discussed with a special focus on these two disparate groups. Therefore, the neural network technique will be employed using NEUSREL as a software solution.

## 5.4 | Hypothesis testing and interpretation

To test the proposed interactions and relationships between the constructs and to discover nonlinear relationships and interactions, USM was used. Through the structural model specification matrix that was created in the first step, the latent variables and their interrelations were represented and determined. To estimate the paths between the latent variables, NEUSREL uses a Bayesian neural network with a multilayer perceptron (MLP) architecture. Furthermore, the evidence framework used for the MLP (for more information, see MacKay, 1992) effectively detects irrelevant paths and prevents overfitting (Buckler & Hennig-Thurau, 2008). The variance explanation parameters, coefficients of determination, simulated effects, and interaction

**TABLE 3** Explored interaction effects

Interaction	Interaction Effect	t-Value
Anthropomorphism × Personality → Explicit brand attitude	0.1809	1.8049
Anthropomorphism × Personality → Implicit brand attitude	0.3163	2.4758
Explicit × Implicit brand attitude → Brand perception	0.1384	3.7013

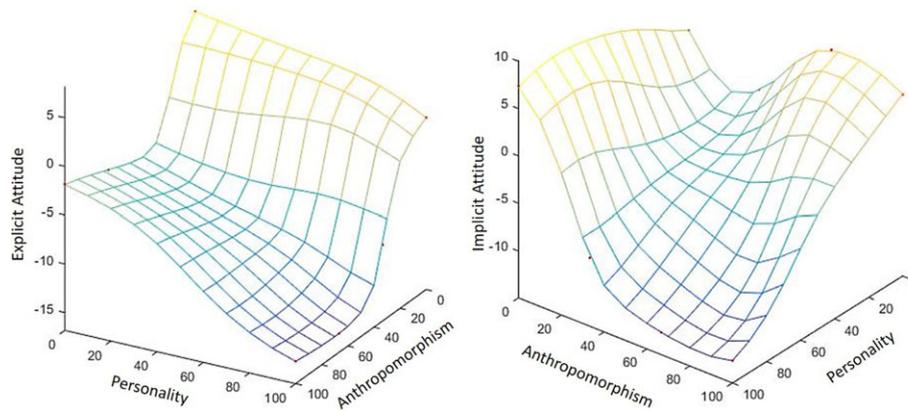
effects are calculated next in order to gain valuable insights into the strength, significance, and character of the relations between the latent constructs. Because path coefficients can be calculated only in linear relationships between constructs, NEUSREL relies on the overall explained absolute deviation (OEAD) and average simulated effects (ASEs) as criteria indicating the strength of construct relations. The OEAD criterion specifies the latent variables' amount of variance, which is influenced by another latent variable. The closer the OEAD is to the coefficient of determination, the more significant the effect of the causative variable is on the influenced variable. Furthermore, the ASE expresses the average expected impact of the causative variable on the affected variable (Buckler, 2016). Additionally, for all the aforementioned measures, a bootstrapping routine (Mooney, Duval, & Duval, 1993) with 200 subsamples was used to facilitate analysis of the statistical significance of the observed relationships. Specifically, the use of this multicriteria approach aims to increase the meaningfulness of the model and the results as well as their validity. The data calculation lasted nearly five days due to the complex calculations, the relatively large dataset for an USM estimation, and the high number of bootstrap subsamples.

### 5.4.1 | Effects on explicit and implicit brand attitudes

To gain insights into the direct effects of anthropomorphic cues on explicit and implicit brand attitudes, the ASEs and their significances were analyzed. In accordance with the ASEs, the degree of anthropomorphism clearly exerts a significant influence on explicit (ASE = -0.2029;  $p < 0.01$ ) and implicit attitudes (ASE = -0.1116,  $p < 0.01$ ) toward the brand. Hypotheses H<sub>2a</sub> and H<sub>2b</sub> can thus be confirmed.

### 5.4.2 | Moderating impact of personality traits

The interaction effects among model constructs and their significances were analyzed using the bootstrapping procedure. Based on the effect strengths and their significances as well as the graphical representation of the interaction effects, existing interactions can be discovered and meaningfully interpreted. According to the results of the calculated interaction effects (IE), as displayed in Table 3, the attribution of personality traits moderates the effect of anthropomorphism on explicit and implicit brand attitudes. The interaction of personality traits and anthropomorphism confirms effect strengths of 0.3163 ( $p < 0.01$ ) on *implicit* and 0.1810 ( $p < 0.05$ ) on *explicit* brand attitude. Accordingly, Hypotheses H<sub>1a</sub> and H<sub>1b</sub> can be confirmed.



**FIGURE 2** Interaction effect of anthropomorphism and personality traits on explicit and implicit brand attitudes. **Explicit/Implicit Attitude:** Affected latent variable (y-axis); always scales around zero. It shows the variation in the y-variable caused by the interactive variables. **Personality:** Unaffected variable; 0 = Consumer Psychopaths; 100 = Empathetic Consumers. **Anthropomorphism:** Unaffected variable; the higher the value, the higher the degree of anthropomorphism. Zero indicates the control group [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

**TABLE 4** Average simulated effect and overall explained absolute deviation for the structural relations

Exogenous LV → Endogenous LV	Average Simulated Effect (ASE)	T Statistics	OEAD
Anthropomorphism → Explicit brand attitude	0.2029	2.8549	0.0575
Anthropomorphism → Implicit brand attitude	0.1116	2.4192	0.0367
Explicit brand attitude → Brand perception	0.5954	5.3584	0.3883
Implicit brand attitude → Brand perception	0.3105	5.6009	0.2153
Explicit brand attitude → Brand-related behavior	0.0667	1.8577	0.0395
Implicit brand attitude → Brand-related behavior	0.0350	1.1939	0.0824
Brand perception → Brand-related behavior	0.6866	17.7061	0.6709

To gain deep insights based on the differences between the observed groups, Figure 2 illustrates the 3D representations of the interaction to provide a graphical comparison between the groups for both explicit and implicit brand attitudes. Specifically, weak information is sufficient to activate an appropriate awareness of ethical issues such as animal welfare for *Empathetic Consumers*. This result could also be caused by their predispositions; *Empathetic Consumers* have previously dealt with the corresponding topics, leading to a higher awareness in advance and a more sensitive response to any kind of stimulus.

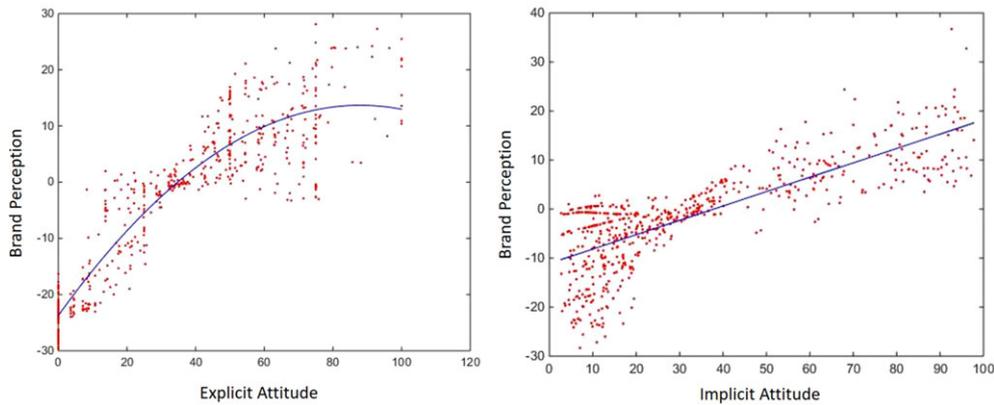
While anthropomorphism leads to a more negative attitude for *Empathetic Consumers*, the reverse trend is visible for *Consumer Psychopaths*. The results of the experimental conditions clearly demonstrate that *Consumer Psychopaths* have a more positive attitude toward the brand when the stimulus of the abused animal is shown, whereas their brand attitude clearly worsened in the text-only condition. This result confirms the ethically questionable “*the other exist for me*” illusion (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002) of *Consumer Psychopaths*, as well as their tendency to use others to satisfy their own needs (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010).

### 5.4.3 | Effect of explicit and implicit brand attitudes on brand performance

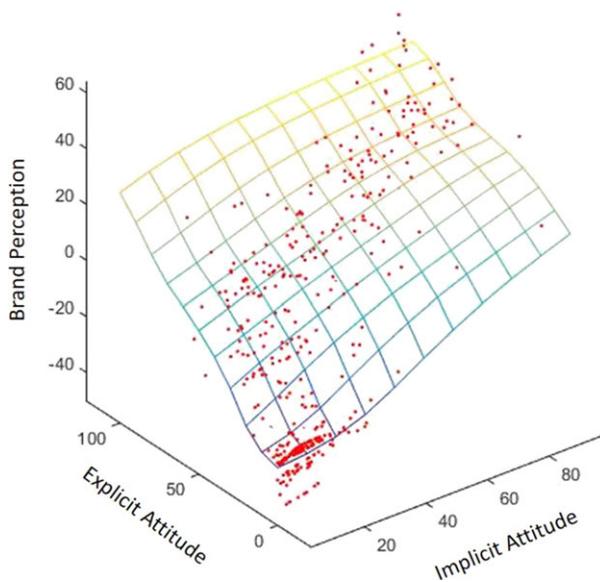
Hypotheses H<sub>3a</sub> and H<sub>3b</sub> argued that explicit and implicit brand attitudes influence brand perception. The USM estimations support

these hypotheses and show a positive and statistically significant nonlinear effect with ASEs of 0.3883 ( $p < 0.00$ ) for explicit attitudes and 0.2153 ( $p < 0.00$ ) for implicit attitudes (Table 4). Hence, consumers' perception of a certain brand can be influenced by implicit and explicit information processing. In sum, 70.3% of the variance in the response variable can be explained by the explanatory variables. According to the OEAD values, a high proportion of the variance can be explained by the explicit (OEAD: 0.3883) and implicit brand attitudes (OEAD: 0.2153). Thus, the combination of explicit and implicit brand attitudes enhances the explanatory power of brand perception. This result is supportive of the results obtained by Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003, p. 200), who assumed that “[...] association strength is a latent component of both the implicit and explicit measures.”

The plot in Figure 3 represents the nonlinear and positive depressive relationship between explicit attitude and brand perception. Furthermore, the graphical interpretation of the implicit brand attitude effect on brand performance may lead to the confirmation of a linear effect. This is not exactly true since the resulting variations in the additive plots around the lines are caused by hidden and unexplored interactions rather than by residuals (Buckler, 2016). A more detailed analysis of these hidden structures reveals a strong interaction of explicit and implicit brand attitudes on brand perception (IE: 0.1384,  $p < 0.00$ ), which also becomes visible in the 3D plot in Figure 4.



**FIGURE 3** 2D Plot: average simulated effect of explicit and implicit brand attitudes on brand perception. The vertical axis is the affected latent variable and always scales around zero. It shows the variation in the y-variable caused by the x-variable [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



**FIGURE 4** 3D Plot: hidden interaction effect of explicit and implicit brand attitudes on brand perception. The vertical axis is the affected latent variable and always scales around zero. It shows the variation in the y-variable caused by the interactive variables [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Hypotheses  $H_{3c}$  and  $H_{3d}$  address the relationship between explicit and implicit brand attitudes and brand-related behavior. Empirical evidence of a significant impact of explicit attitude ( $ASE = 0.0349$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and implicit attitude ( $ASE = 0.0667$ ,  $p < 0.15$ ) is not adequate. The average incremental change is very low in both cases. Even though the explicit attitude represents significant simulated effects, its impact is not substantial. Accordingly, the empirical results do not support  $H_{3c}$  and  $H_{3d}$ .

Hypothesis  $H_4$  proposes a positive relation between brand perception and brand-related behavior. The results indicate a strong and significant ASE of brand perception on brand-related behavior ( $ASE = 0.6866$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). The OEAD attains a high value at 0.6709, while the model accounts for 81.6% of the variance, which can be considered satisfactory (Chin, 1998). Therefore,  $H_4$  is supported and provides evidence for the assumption that the anthropomorphic reception

of cruel tactics in production processes significantly impacts consumer brand perception, which in turn impacts actual brand-related behavior. In addition, these effects are mediated by individual personality characteristics on the diverging poles between empathetic and Dark Triad traits. Table 5 provides an overview of the presumed hypotheses and the results of their empirical testing.

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 | Contribution

Numerous studies on topics such as CSR and ethical consumerism have created a backdrop of an ever-growing research stream on ethical business behavior from both corporate and consumer perspectives. A closer look into whether these principles are more than simply words seems reasonable. Despite discussions about ethical commitment, the economic reality reveals countless examples of unethical business behavior: labor exploitation and human rights abuses, child labor, animal testing, tax loopholes, bribery and corruption, toxic materials, pollution incidents, and many others. Given the variety of cruel business practices and unethical behavior, more attention needs to be focused on the dark side of business and consumer personality. Existing research reveals that dark personality traits are certainly present in individual behavior at the micro level and in society's behavior at the macro level.

The main contribution of the present manuscript is to provide a deeper understanding of consumers' inner structure with regard to good and bad personality traits. Referencing the Dark Triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy in relation to animal cruelty, the study results provide evidence that anthropomorphic communication about cruel business tactics affects the formation of explicit and implicit brand attitudes. Moreover, a resulting impact from explicit and implicit brand attitudes on related brand perception and behavior was shown. In addition, the role of consumer personality traits in processing anthropomorphic cues and forming brand attitudes was investigated. In this context, the specific expressions of empathetic and dark tendencies were shown to have a significant impact on the perception

**TABLE 5** Results of hypothesis testing with NEUSREL

No.	Hypotheses	Method	Result
H <sub>1a</sub>	The expression of personality traits moderates the effect of anthropomorphic communication on explicit brand attitude.	Interaction effect	Supported
H <sub>1b</sub>	The expression of personality traits moderates the effect of anthropomorphic communication on implicit brand attitude.	Interaction effect	Supported
H <sub>2a</sub>	The degree of anthropomorphism used in communication about cruel practices has a negative impact on explicit brand attitude.	ASE	Supported
H <sub>2b</sub>	The degree of anthropomorphism used in communication about cruel practices has a negative impact on implicit brand attitude.	ASE	Supported
H <sub>3a</sub>	The explicit brand attitude is positively related to brand perception.	ASE/OEAD	Supported
H <sub>3b</sub>	The implicit brand attitude is positively related to brand perception.	ASE/OEAD	Supported
H <sub>3c</sub>	The explicit brand attitude is positively related to brand-related behavior.	ASE/OEAD	Not supported
H <sub>3d</sub>	The implicit brand attitude is positively related to brand-related behavior.	ASE/OEAD	Not supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Consumer brand perception has a significantly positive effect on brand-related behavior.	ASE/OEAD	Supported

of anthropomorphized stimuli, which is capable of influencing human behavior to a great extent.

The results can be considered somewhat worrying, as they clearly indicate that *Consumer Psychopaths* are positively stimulated by the sight of tortured, exploited, and mistreated animals. For this group of consumers, anthropomorphized communication activities might not cause the desired effects of raised long-term awareness, brand avoidance, or even reduced consumption. Instead, a paralogous effect could appear, leading *Consumer Psychopaths* to satisfy their desire for manipulation, exploitation, and superiority when exposed to tortured anthropomorphized animals. Because every person has individual personality characteristics, it remains doubtful whether dark tendencies are the basis of societal and cultural strife, craving for glory, possessions, power, and money. This effect is leading to the continuous emergence of megalomaniacal and self-centered societal members and consumers whose impaired conscience regarding cruelty actually enhances unethical business practices. Nevertheless, empathetic values and individuals remain present in society; empathetic individuals provide a balance between good and bad and continuously provide importance and necessity to socially and ethically acceptable businesses. However, the question remains as to who these individuals are in our everyday lives and whether they are easily identifiable: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

## 6.2 | Managerial implications

From the viewpoint of companies and political and nongovernmental institutions, valuable insights can be discussed based on our empirical results addressing how individual traits can lead to different perceptions of brands or companies involved in cruel practices. First, certain types of consumers were shown to have a tendency to overlook political and ethical malpractice or even approve those actions. The assumption that consumers reject brands that are involved in unethical practices cannot be accepted unequivocally. The myth of the ethical consumer is widely discussed in the rising tension between the ethical orientation of consumers that is often reported in self-assessment studies and the actual consumer behavior that occurs at the point of sale. Economic reality reveals that even highly controversial business

actions and scandals that lead to protests and calls for boycotts are often forgotten on the long term. In our study, we identified the *Consumer Psychopath*—but do all consumers who (in)directly support business malpractice with their individual purchase decisions exhibit the dark personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy? As noted above, an individual assessment of unethical business actions is situationally contingent. Even if they are aware of possible unethical business practices or unhealthy consequences, employees continue to support their company, brand advocates still love their favorite brand, luxury lovers buy counterfeits, heavy smokers will not quit smoking, and patients take their pills. The present study focused on the effect of anthropomorphic cues on consumer perception and behavior. In addition, even if *Empathetic Consumers* were shown to react to anthropomorphism and cruel business practices, we have not assessed their actual purchase behavior in the long term. A question also arises concerning the general value of awareness-raising campaigns if they impact only those who are already empathetic while triggering reactance in many other individuals? The example of shocking visuals on cigarette packets demonstrates that these tactics may not have the desired effects because consumers perceive them as threats to their freedom, choice, or autonomy (LaVoie, Quick, Riles, & Lambert, 2015).

## 6.3 | Future research

Deeper insights into the perception and behavior of *Consumer Psychopaths* are needed with a special focus on the dark traits of consumer personality and their impact on the consumer evaluation of products and brands as well as reactions to cruel business practices. Further studies and research efforts should address the core of their specific consumption behavior without being restricted to the analysis of human relationships in general or workplace behavior. Focusing on and empowering those kinds of consumers would imply a tragic shift by businesses, especially because both consumers and businesses have a certain responsibility for ethical and social challenges and need to meet the obligations of a society in which violent tactics against living beings must be avoided. Therefore, the interplay between the dark and

bright sides of consumer psychology needs to be better understood. As stated above, proclaiming this period the age of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the ethical consumer is not useful. A holistic picture of contemporary business behavior must include the consideration of unethical behavior.

From the perspective of communication and information processing, the reception of anthropomorphized stimuli and its possible impacts on consumer perception and behavior are of interest. For *Empathetic Consumers*, anthropomorphism seems to provide an efficient means to draw attention to cruel business practices and existing societal challenges. Nevertheless, even if comprehending the world through one's own humanity is natural and commonplace (Epley et al., 2007; Guthrie, 1993), anthropomorphic reasoning may be an error and anthropocentric bias in human thinking, as has long been suggested (Fisher, 1991, Karlsson, 2012; Mameli & Bortolotti, 2006), because it permanently makes analogies to one's own species-specific traits (Karlsson, 2012). This notion assumes a direct relation to Epley et al. (2007) cognitive determinant of anthropomorphic thinking by raising the question of whether moral and ethical obligation is also affected by anthropocentric bias and whether humankind has the ability to broaden its perspective and to expand its moral concern to nonhuman species as well. Ethical theorists assume that anthropomorphism undermines the justification of animals' moral status (Regan, 1985) while also blurring the line between humans and animals, leading to a misallocation of empathy toward animals (Ruether, 1983; Taylor, 1996). More recently, Karlsson (2012) suggested that by continuously thinking outside the human perspective and making analogies to their own species-specific traits, humans could be morally obligated to consider the plight of nonhuman animals. Against this backdrop, future research efforts should focus particularly on the long-term impact of anthropomorphism on consumer awareness in the context of different business categories and different cultural backgrounds. The effect of anthropomorphic cues can reasonably be assumed to vary depending on the perceived individual importance of the given situation. For example, the case of a critically ill patient who needs his medication even if animals were used in testing is a very different circumstance than a choice between two types of cosmetic products, and this distinction will definitely lead to different effects of anthropomorphic reception. Animals are widely known to experience different treatment in everyday life based on the current culture. For example, animals that are served as meat in one society might be considered unclean or sacred in another cultural context. Therefore, the culturally bound treatment of animals might also affect the impact of anthropomorphism. Furthermore, changes in actual consumer behavior and consumption choices are valuable research objectives. A higher contact frequency might influence long-term consumer reactions to anthropomorphic communication in a positive (e.g., awareness and change of behavior) or negative way (e.g., reactance and refusal). This also raises the question of what the ideal amount of anthropomorphic manipulation is. For shocking vs. subtle nuances, what is the best stimulation vis-à-vis different types of consumers and with reference to different product categories? In general, the conditions for eliciting intentions to comply with a social campaign and change behavior are still widely unknown. This also applies to the effect of anthropomorphizing

cues (Williams et al., 2015). Therefore, what is the optimal balance between substantiated awareness that leads to ethical behavior and a moralizing undertone that fosters defiance? What nurtures the dark side and what encourages the bright side of consumer personality?

*A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner: Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time. When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied, the one I feed the most.*  
George Bernard Shaw

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