

**THE USE OF SPOKES-CHARACTERS  
FOR BUILDING BRANDS IN THAILAND**



**A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
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Thematic paper  
entitled  
**THE USE OF SPOKES-CHARACTERS  
FOR BUILDING BRANDS IN THAILAND**

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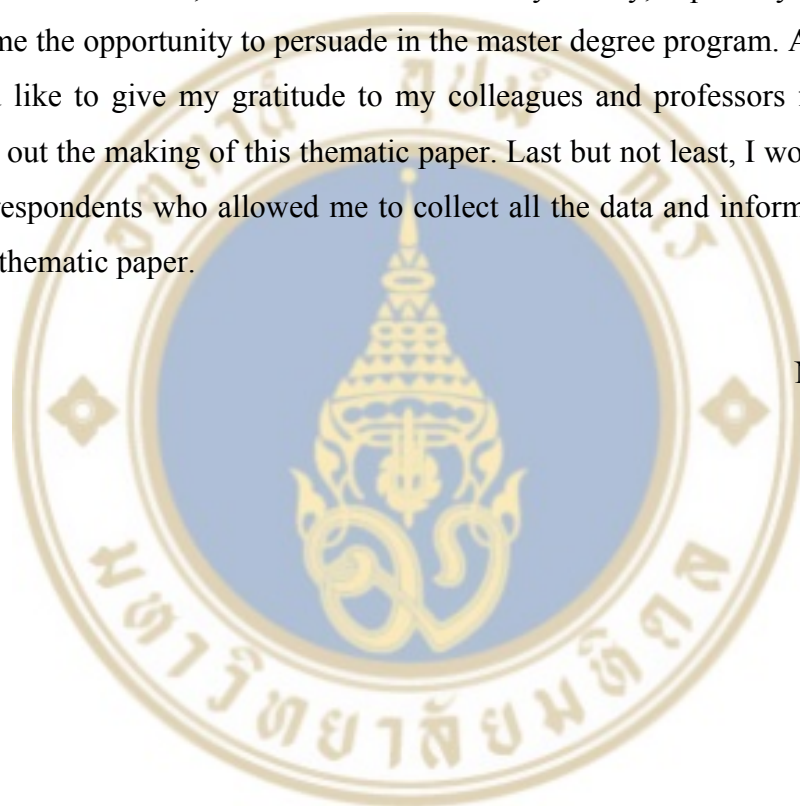
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## **THE USE OF SPOKES-CHARACTERS FOR BUILDING BRANDS IN THAILAND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In a world full of homogenous products, branding helps firms differentiate themselves from their competitors. There are multiple methods for branding, and using a spokes-character is one of them. A spokes-character is an efficient and inexpensive way to promote brand awareness and brand recognition. Spokes-characters are more than just logos or symbol designs; they possess characteristics, interests, and personalities. After the launch of LINE application in Thailand, many firms decided to create characters for use as their LINE stickers. Positive responses have helped turn these sticker designs into spokes-characters for Thai companies. At the same time, spokes-characters can also be inspired from other sources.

The objectives of this study are organized as follows: To understand how Thai companies use spokes-characters in their brand visual identity system, the challenges these companies face, and how each company overcomes their challenges while developing and promoting their spokes-characters. This study uses qualitative method (in-depth interview) in order to gain a deeper understanding of a spokes-character creating process. The respondents selected for this study are employees currently working for one of the three companies with a spokes-character. Additional respondents were two university professors and one Japanese illustrator. As a result of this study, several departments within the firm, such as marketing communication, market research, and public relations can use this information to improve and enhance their spokes-characters. On the other hand, companies without a spokes-character can use information from this study to develop the right type of spokes-character for their businesses.

**KEY WORDS:** Spokes-Characters/ Branding/ Child Marketing/ LINE Application

26 pages

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a world full of homogenous products, branding helps firms differentiate themselves from their competitors (Chang, 2013). According to the American Marketing Association, a brand consists of many elements including name, logo, theme, product packaging, service uniform, and reputation, all of which help the consumer identify the goods and services offered by the seller (Jevon, 2005). There is often confusion between branding and marketing. Simply put, marketing uses the push factor to influence consumer intention to purchase, while branding uses the pull factor to influence consumer choice of brand (Guan, 2014). In contrast, marketing may only last in the consumer's mind for a certain period of time, while branding can stick in the consumer's mind for the rest of his or her life. Having a strong brand can help increase firms' credibility and consumers' trust. In addition, a firm with a strong brand can attract strong candidates to work for their businesses. It is essential for firms to understand what their businesses stand for in order to construct the correct marketing tools to build their brands.

There are multiple methods for branding, and using a spokes-character is one of them. A spokes-character is an efficient and inexpensive way to promote brand awareness and brand recognition (Baglole, 2002). Unlike the celebrity endorsement, a spokes-character can be controlled and fully managed (Lin et al., 2012). Spokes-characters are more than just logos or symbol designs; they possess characteristics, interests, and personalities. Some firms even give their spokes-characters backgrounds as well as family and companions (Kang et al., 2012). Spokes-characters are often used as a child-oriented approach; many firms use them as an opportunity to burn their brands into children's mind. Spokes-characters should be unique, fun, and memorable in order to appeal to young audiences. At the same time, many firms also need to make sure that their spokes-characters are promoting good habits and behaviors (Heckman, 1999). Some well-known spokes-characters in the United States are McDonalds' Ronald McDonald, Michelin's Mr. Bib, Cheetos' Chester Cheetah, Kellogg's Tony the Tiger, the Energizer Bunny, and the Pillsbury Doughboy. The uniqueness of these



spokes-characters has helped make these brands memorable and recognizable to consumers worldwide.

## **1.1 Problem Statements**

Due to the time and resources it takes to develop and promote spokes-character, not all firms create their own spokes-characters. Instead, many firms choose to use license characters to promote their brand. On the other hand, licensed characters may not reflect the firms' value or enhance their brand recognition and awareness. However, after the launch of LINE application in Thailand, many firms decided to create characters for use as their LINE stickers. Positive responses have helped turn these sticker designs into spokes-characters for Thai companies. As a result, a spokes-character has become a branding tool for many Thai companies.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are organized as follows:

1.2.1 To understand how Thai companies use spokes-characters in their brand visual identity system.

1.2.2 To understand the challenges these companies face.

1.2.3 To understand how each company overcomes their challenges while developing and promoting their spokes-characters.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

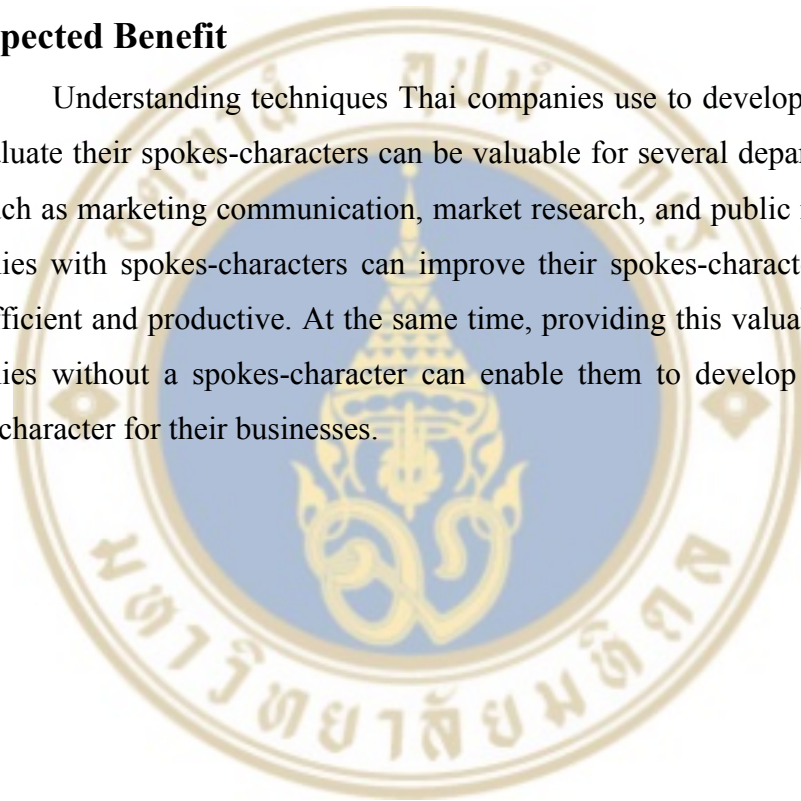
There are many cases that focus on the spokes-characters from international countries, but this study will focus mainly on Thai companies in Thailand. What does it take for Thai companies to successfully develop and promote their spokes-characters? Do all companies utilize their spokes-characters the same way? How do companies evaluate their spokes-characters?

#### **1.4 Research Scope**

In order to identify techniques Thai companies use to develop, promote, utilize and evaluate their spokes-characters, the target sample size for this study will be employees who work in Thai companies with a spokes-character. The knowledge of each employee may vary due to his or her position in the company, thus allowing for different perspectives.

#### **1.5 Expected Benefit**

Understanding techniques Thai companies use to develop, promote, utilize, and evaluate their spokes-characters can be valuable for several departments within the firm, such as marketing communication, market research, and public relations. Current companies with spokes-characters can improve their spokes-characters to make them more efficient and productive. At the same time, providing this valuable information to companies without a spokes-character can enable them to develop the right type of spokes-character for their businesses.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section consists of relevant literature and articles that describe the relationship between spokes-characters and different forms of branding strategies, including, Spokes-Character and Branding, Spoke-Characters vs. Celebrity Endorsement, Spokes-Character in Child Marketing, and Spokes-Characters in Social Media. In more detail, the literature clarifies the different types of spokes-characters, the differences between a spoke-character and spokes-person, the impact spokes-characters have on marketing for children, and the promotion of spokes-characters through LINE mobile application.

#### **2.1 Spokes-Characters and Branding**

A spokes-character can be considered a type of endorsement. It serves as a reminder of brand value and product quality. Unlike spokes-persons, spokes-characters are character designs often based on humans, animals, or objects. Choosing the right type of spokes-character is important for a brand because it will influence consumer choice and preference (Kang et al., 2012). At the same time, consumers' level of exposure to the spokes-characters can influence their attitudes. There are three types of spokes-characters (see Figure 2.1) that firms may use to promote and build their brands (Kang et al., 2012).

For the first type of spokes-character, a firm may spend money on a licensing fee in order to obtain the right to use licensed characters such as Disney's Mickey Mouse or Sanrio's Hello Kitty (Kang et al., 2012). Licensed characters are often successful due to the number of exposures they appear in media and on products. These licensed characters, however, do not belong solely to the brand that they endorse. In other words, other brands (including competitors) can also obtain these licensed characters and use them to promote their brands as well. Due to the fact that most famous licensed characters were created for comics, cartoon animations, and video

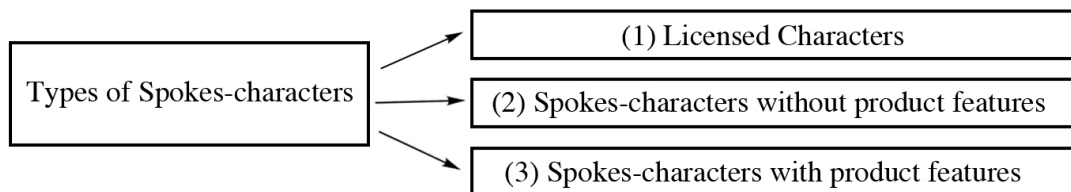
games, they may not reflect or enhance the brand personality of businesses that they endorse. Nevertheless, if used properly, licensed characters are guaranteed to increase consumers' awareness and drive sales. In fact, having licensed characters on product packaging or advertisements can automatically increase the value of the brand or product.

For the second type of spokes-character, a firm may choose to create its own unique spokes-character, independent of its product features (Kang et al., 2012). For instance, General Mill's Trix Rabbit and Kellogg's Tony the Tiger are based on animals, which have no direct features of the breakfast cereal. However, both spokes-characters are able to communicate with the consumer about the taste of their products using their unique personalities. In this case, Trix Rabbit is all about being fun and playful while Tony the Tiger is all about being active and exciting. Ultimately, both spokes-characters are able to convince their audiences that their products are tasty and delicious. At the same time, spokes-characters can also be inspired simply by the name of the firm. For instance, GEICO Insurance Company uses a green gecko lizard as its spokes-character, since "geico" and "gecko" have a similar pronunciation. The same scenario goes for Aflac Insurance Company, which uses a duck as its spokes-character because "aflac" sounds similar to the "quack" that a duck makes.

For the third type of spokes-character, a firm may combine its product features with the character design in order to help make the spokes-character relevant to its brand and product (Kang et al., 2012). Some examples of these spokes-characters are Michelin's Mr. Bib and Planter's Mr. Peanut. In this case, the design of Michelin's Mr. Bib consists of white round rubber tires that represent the smoothness and durability of Michelin's tires. At the same time, Planter's Mr. Peanut is a representation of a peanut but with the addition of top hat, cane, and monocle, which give him a classic gentlemanly look. Combining the spokes-character with the product features, it can help consumers recognize the brand more quickly and easily.

Keep in mind that spokes-characters may need to update their appearance over time in order to stay fresh and young. The new design should be contemporary but at the same time contain its originality (Mize et al. 2008). Oftentimes, a two-dimensional design gets upgraded to a three-dimensional design in order to give the spokes-character a more life-like quality. For instance, Michelin's Mr. Bib has become

slimmer over the years in order to promote the idea of health and wellbeing while his overall look has stayed the same (Heckman, 1999).



**Figure 2.1 Types of Spokes-characters**

## 2.2 Spoke-Characters vs. Celebrity Endorsement

Similar to spokes-characters, celebrity endorsement is an alternative technique for a firm to increase brand awareness and brand recognition. In many cases, a spokes-character may be more suitable for children while celebrity endorsement may be better when targeting adults. Celebrities' popularity is a quick and effective way to grab consumers' attention (Lin et al., 2012). Consumers' love for their favorite celebrities helps enhance a product or brand they endorse (Lin et al., 2012). Celebrities' physical appearance can also have a huge impact on consumers' attitude toward brand and product. Although celebrity endorsement can be quite effective, it can also be quite expensive.

In today's society where beauty standards are created by cultural norms, consumers may believe that certain looks and characteristics are more attractive than others (Remillard, 2003). Consumers hope to gain the same benefit as these celebrities when consuming the products they endorse. Keep in mind that these celebrities must be able to offer more than just their appearance; otherwise the firms could spend less money on equally attractive models (Till, 1998). In other words, these celebrities need to possess credibility. The two foundations that enhance the credibility of celebrities are their trustworthiness and expertise (Till, 1998). Trustworthiness is dependent on personality, while expertise is dependent on how familiar or knowledgeable the celebrities are with the brand and product.

Regardless of all the advantages celebrity endorsement has on brand and product, it also carries unpredictable risks (Huang et al., 2011). Therefore a company may choose to create a spokes-character rather than using a celebrity endorsement.

Unlike spokes-characters, celebrity behavior cannot be fully controlled or managed, especially when it comes to unexpected events such as scandals and/or affairs. There are two types of celebrity negative information that could impact credibility of both the celebrity and brand (Till, 1998). The first type is known as unrelated negative information, which means that an action caused by the celebrity has no direct connection to the product or brand that he or she is promoting. For instance, a soft drink spokes-person receiving a parking ticket may not create a huge impact on the brand image of a soft drink company. On the other hand, the second type is known as related negative, which means an action caused by the celebrity is related to the product or brand he or she is promoting. For instance, a celebrity promoting an alcoholic beverage who is later arrested for driving under the influence (DUI), surely would have a greater impact on both the celebrity and brand. Consider real case example of related negative information. A Belgium soccer team supporter named Axelle Despiegelaere was spotted during the 2014 World Cup and was offered a modeling contract with L'Oréal. Soon after Despiegelaere signed a contract with L'Oréal, she posted a photo on Facebook of herself sitting next to a dead Oryx antelope. She had shot the Oryx one year previously during a hunting trip on an African safari. After the photo went viral, L'Oréal cut ties with Despiegelaere immediately. L'Oréal was afraid her photo would damage the company brand image since they have been claiming that they do not test their products on animals or support any kind of animal cruelty (Telegraph, UK, 2014). In summary, the budget of the firm and the types of business the firm is operating may influence whether a spokes-character or celebrity endorsement is a better fit for the firm.

### **2.3 Spokes-Characters in Child Marketing**

From an early state of their life, children are exposed to all kind of brands and characters (Gollety et al., 2012). Many firms understand the importance of building a relationship with children because they may one day become their future customers. As children get older, their minds become more complex, enabling them to understand the messages communicated by spokes-characters. From the firms' perspective, a spokes-character is created in order to increase brand knowledge while also developing a relationship between the firms and children (Gollety et al., 2012). Having a spoke-character printed on product packaging can trigger children's emotions, making the

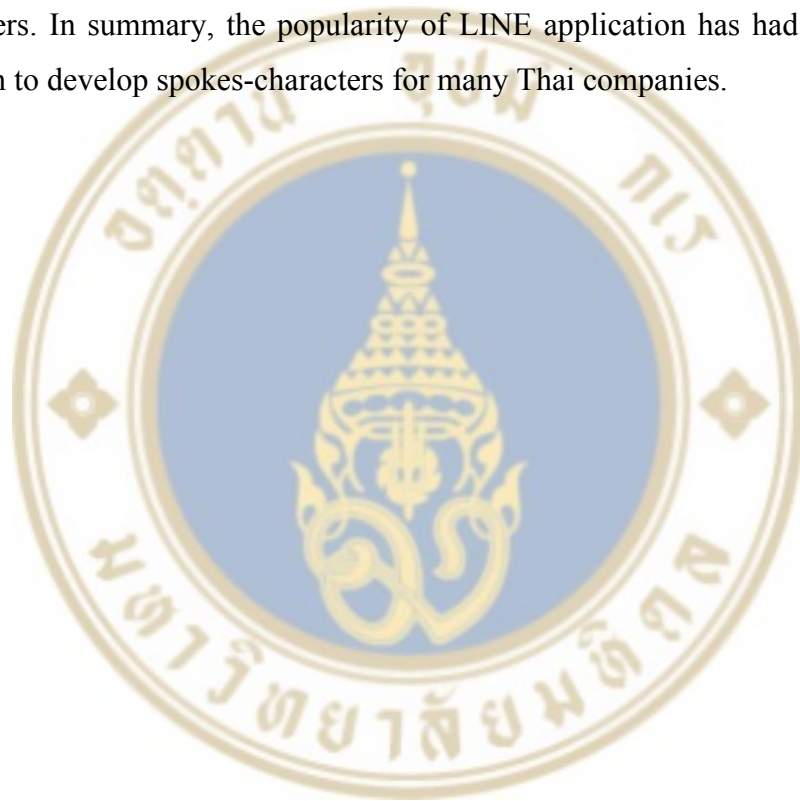
product more aesthetic and enjoyable. It is very likely that if children have a positive attitude toward spokes-characters, their parents may also have a positive attitude toward these characters (Krawcke, 2015). Children may look up to these spokes-characters as their role models. At the same time, some studies have shown that children would like to gain the same experiences and feelings as the spokes-characters (Gollety et al., 2012). In which case, many firms would need to make sure that their spokes-characters set good examples by being safe and responsible.

Unfortunately, some firms take advantage of spokes-characters and misuse them to promote unhealthy and/or potentially harmful products to children. It is claimed that a misuse of marketing tools for capital gain results in an ethical consideration issue between the firms and consumers (Shields, 2011). For instance, some breakfast cereals are high in sugar and low in nutrition, and yet both parents and children do not seem to mind thanks to the way firms portray their spokes-characters on media (Metha et al., 2012). Camel Cigarette Company also uses a spokes-character, Joe Camel, to market to children and adolescents (Duffy, 1999). Even though Joe Camel is present in a subtle way, many parents find it unethical and morally wrong for the tobacco company to encourage children to smoke at such an early age. In summary, when using spokes-characters to promote brands and products, it is the firms' duty to promote their spokes-characters responsibly otherwise the firms could damage their own brand image and reputation.

## **2.4 Spokes-Character in Social Media**

Today, an instant messenger has become one of the quickest and most practical tools for communication. An instant messenger allows information to be sent and received in a few clicks of a button. The increase in technology allows an individual to afford electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and personal computers. By 2014, the most popular instant messenger applications were WhatsApp, WeChat, and LINE (Kunaboot et al., 2015). In Asia, specifically in Thailand, the most popular instant messenger is LINE application with over 33 millions users by the end of 2015 (Kunaboot et al., 2015). LINE application captures the playfulness of instant messaging offering the sticker features, which allow users to send an image of a cartoon character as a way to communicate feelings and express emotions. LINE stickers are perhaps the

heart and soul of the LINE application. In fact, most LINE revenues come from the sales of LINE stickers and advertisements (Kunaboot et al., 2015). As part of its advertisement strategy, LINE offers firms an opportunity to promote their businesses with an official account and stickers of their own. The firms may submit their own sticker designs or pay LINE to create one for them. Firms may spend several million Baht during this process. This is the point at which firms without a spokes-character may decide to create one of their own. After successfully launching and promoting their stickers, many companies continue to develop their LINE characters into their spokes-characters. In summary, the popularity of LINE application has had an impact on the decision to develop spokes-characters for many Thai companies.





## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The trend of using a spokes-character for branding has increased in the Asian market. There have already been many studies that focus on the influence spokes-characters have on Asian consumers (Chang, 2014). This study, however, will take a different approach by analyzing the corporate point of view using an in-depth interview methodology (qualitative research). Three companies were selected for this study. They are labeled as Company A, Company B, and Company C in order to preserve their anonymity. At the same time, the spokes-character from each company is labeled corresponding to its company letter as Character A, Character B, and Character C.

The respondents selected for this study are employees currently working for one of the three companies. To make the interviews relevant, the respondents all have some background knowledge about their companies' spokes-characters. By doing so, we are able to observe how knowledgeable the selected employees are on the spokes-character subject. All in-depth interviews take place at the company. The duration for the data collection and data analysis processes is from the end of October 2016 through the end of November 2016. In addition, this study includes interviews from two professors in one of the leading universities in Thailand for a deeper understanding of spokes-characters and an interview with a Japanese illustrator for a deeper understanding of character design process. At the end of data collection, a total of twelve respondents were interviewed: nine employees from three companies, two professors, and one Japanese illustrator.

#### **3.2 Research Instrumental**

The questions for the in-depth interview were grouped into different steps (see Figure 3.1) in order to understand the similarities and the main differences between the three Thai companies. The steps consist of planning, developing, promoting, utilizing, and evaluating processes. The responses to each step in the interview process

help clarify the details about each spokes-character's background and contribution to the company.

**Figure 3.1 Interview Questionnaire**

<b>Step 1: Planning</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the planning processes for creating a spokes-character?</li> <li>• What resources does your company need to create a spokes-character?</li> <li>• What are the objectives for creating a spokes-character in your company?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2: Developing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is responsible for developing the spokes-character for your company?</li> <li>• Could you describe the characteristics of your company's spokes-character?</li> <li>• What are the features that make your spoke-character unique and memorable?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3: Promoting</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your company promote the spokes-character?</li> <li>• What consistency does a spokes-character need to have?</li> <li>• How does your company promote its spokes-character responsibly?</li> <li>• Through which channels does your company promote its spokes-character?</li> <li>• What are the challenges the company faces when promoting a spokes-character?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4: Utilizing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your company utilize the spokes-character?</li> <li>• Who is the main target/audience for your spokes-character?</li> <li>• In what ways does spokes-character contribute to your company's image?</li> <li>• In what ways does your spokes-character have an impact on children and adolescents?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 5: Evaluating</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your company evaluate the results or outcomes of the spokes-character?</li> <li>• What types of information do you need in order to improve your spokes-character?</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Data Collection

The following section consists of the information gathered through the interview process. The information reveals the details and history of each company's background. In addition, it illuminates the process of how each company developed their spokes-character. The information is divided into two parts. The first part of data collection features a brief description of each company. The second part provides

information about each spokes-character. It includes a description of and the inspiration behind each character. It also focuses on the planning, development, promotion, utilization, and evaluation processes employed by each company.

### **3.3.1 Company Background**

3.3.1.1 Company A is a Thai oil and gas company. The company's mission is to produce oil and energy for domestic consumption. The company is currently in the Stock Exchange of Thailand. Today, Company A has decided to reflect consumers' lifestyle by turning their gas stations into one-stop service locations, in other words, places where consumers not only come to fill their gas tanks or use a restroom, but also to purchase food, snacks, and beverages from a convenience store and coffee shop. The company offers membership cards, so that consumers can collect points and exchange them for deals and promotions. Since promoting their spokes-character through LINE application, the company has begun to gain more recognition from children and young consumers. For Company A, the spokes-character (Character A) is mainly used to create brand awareness, as well as to enhance the corporate social responsibility aspect of the company.

3.3.1.2 Company B is a Thai media company. The company is known for its creativity and entertainment television programs (including game shows, singing competitions, sitcoms, and more). The company also produces movies, concerts, publications, special events, and has a recording studio. The company is currently in the Stock Exchange of Thailand. In 2011, it acquired its own channel on cable network, in which only the subscriber can watch its television programs. In 2013, Company B began to upload their content onto Youtube, which allows viewers with/without television to watch reruns of their favorite shows online. Finally, by 2014, the company had received its own television network on digital TV. For Company B, the spokes-character (Character B) is not only the current logo of the company, but is also featured in many short animated clips.

3.3.1.3 Company C is a Thai soymilk company. The company focuses mainly on its pasteurized products. Unlike its competitors, Company C uses only organic soybeans as their ingredient. In addition, the company uses ingredients such as tofu sheets and black sesame seeds to enhance the taste of their products. In the beginning, the company first launched three flavors, which consisted of soymilk with

tofu sheets, banana, and green tea with red beans. By 2012, the company was able to put its products in 7-11 convenience stores. Today, the products of Company C can be purchased at most supermarkets and convenience stores. For Company C, the spokes-character (Character C) plays an important role because it appears on all company product packaging.

### 3.3.2 Spokes-Character Background



**Figure 3.2 An outline of Character A**

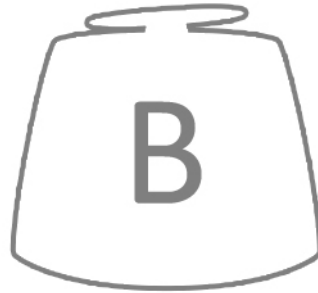
3.3.2.1 Character A is a spokes-character used to promote one of the oil and gas companies in Thailand. According to the corporate communication officers, Character A was inspired by a famous science fiction monster from Japan better known as Godzilla (see Figure 3.2). In 1997, the oil and gas company had launched its 90 seconds commercial on television featuring the famous Godzilla. In the commercial, the city is under attack, but Godzilla does not have enough fuel to terrorize the people. At the end of the commercial, the gasoline that Godzilla consumes is so strong and powerful that the creature flies out into space. This commercial was one of most notable commercials for the company due to its humor and creativity. Although Character A has been developed to a certain extent, it was not successful enough for the consumers to be aware of its existence.

Soon after LINE application gained millions of users in Thailand, many corporations including Company A decided to pay LINE Corporation for an official account and a set of their very own LINE stickers. As part of the proposal, Company A specifically requested that LINE Corporation design the character based on the Godzilla mascot that already existed in the company. After the rejuvenation process, Character A has become more simple and attractive. Once

Character A gained positive responses, the company decided to turn Character A into their official spokes-character. In 2015, Company A created a few more characters and promoted them through collectable toys. However, the company stopped promoting these new characters due to the confusion it created for consumers.

Company A not only used their spokes-character to differentiate themselves from their competitors, but also to reduce the barrier between the company and their customers. For instance, part of creating a positive corporate image is for the company to visit local schools and communities to educate children and young adults about the importance of preserving energy and resources. One of the corporate communication officers explained, “It was difficult for the company to educate young audiences when discussing serious topics such as energy and oil.” However, once the company brought Character A to events, the young audiences became more excited. Keep in mind that this spokes-character is being used to represent the corporate image and is not used to endorse the core product (gasoline) of the company. Another corporate communication officer mentioned, “Using a spokes-character has its limitations and the company must decide which promotion or campaign is the appropriate fit for it.” For instance, the company included Character A in a recycling campaign to encourage customers to help give back to their local community through recycling. Having a spokes-character promoting actual gasoline could reduce the quality and credibility of the product.

There are several channels that Company A used to promote their spokes-character. Beside television and radio commercials, Character A also had its own animated series on television. The animated series did not talk about the company, but served as a way to educate young audiences about the importance of energy and natural resources. However, the animated series only ran for a certain period of time as a way to promote the spokes-character. Once the company believed consumers were aware of their spokes-character, they discontinued the series. In addition, Company A also created a mobile game application, which involved the spokes-character and other characters from the animated series.



**Figure 3.3 An outline of Character B**

3.3.2.2 Character B is a spoke-character used to promote one of the Thai media companies in Thailand. Ideally, most companies would create a spokes-character based on the function of their business, therefore the logical choice for Company B would be related to television. However, Character B was not designed to represent the business function of the company but was created as a mascot for the company's building instead (see Figure 3.3). Several years ago, when Company B submitted one of their buildings for an architectural competition, they created Character B and named it after their building to make their presentation more friendly and professional.

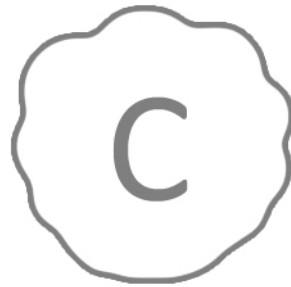
The first prototype of Character B was a two-dimensional design consisting of a rectangular outline with curve edges. Character B wore a hat shaped similar to a graduation cap. Character B was filled with a gradient of blue giving it a cool and calm look. There was a joint-like arm that formed the initial of the company name in English. This first prototype served its purpose and helped Company B achieve its objective. Once Company B was able to achieve its own cable T.V. network, they decided to rebrand and turned Character B into an official company logo and a spokes-character.

The current design of Character B is slightly different from the original. Although the outline remains the same, the gradient of blue inside is now replaced with television color bars. This transition helped the viewers easily recognize the new logo and find the connection between the logo and function of the company. The new color pattern overshadowed the original concept of the character and viewers now associate Character B with a television instead of the company building. Eventually, the team of animators turned Character B into a three-dimensional

character. Beside its looks, a part of creating any character is to develop its characteristics, personality, and interests. Character B has been given a personality and facial expressions to make it more life-like. This spokes-character does not speak due to the animator team's personal preferences for the character. To make it stay true to its first concept, Character B's shape has stayed the same with the addition of a building block pattern on its body. According to an employee from the corporate branding communication department, "Character B might look like an object, but he is actually a robot with the personality of a 6-7 year old boy."

Eventually, animators created short animated clips of Character B, which are used as an insert between their television programs. The length of each clip is about 20 seconds and consists of an interaction between Character B and his sidekick. The sidekick is currently the only companion that Character B has and is an essential part of the animated clips. The sidekick is a pet-like character designed as a cubic television, which helps reflect the business of Company B as a television network. Although both characters consistently pull pranks on each other, their relationships could be considered as loveable and playful. There are currently more than 20 short animated clips about Character B and his sidekick. As stated earlier, these animated short clips are used randomly each day to fill the gaps between television programs. According to the art director at Company B, there are multiple processes in the making of these animated clips, starting from pitching ideas and plots, creating storyboards, and then proceeding to the animation process. In fact, each 20 second animated clip could take up to one and a half months to create. Fortunately for Company B, having a team of animators allows the company to use only in house sources, which makes it convenient for the company.

One of the advantages of having its own television network is that the company can promote its spoke-character on its own channel for free. Even before Company B had its own television channel, the company was able to promote these animated clips through other media. Company B has very strong social media channels such as a Facebook page, Youtube channel, and official LINE account. As of December 2016, the company's Facebook page has over 6.2 million followers and over 4.2 million subscribers on its Youtube channel.



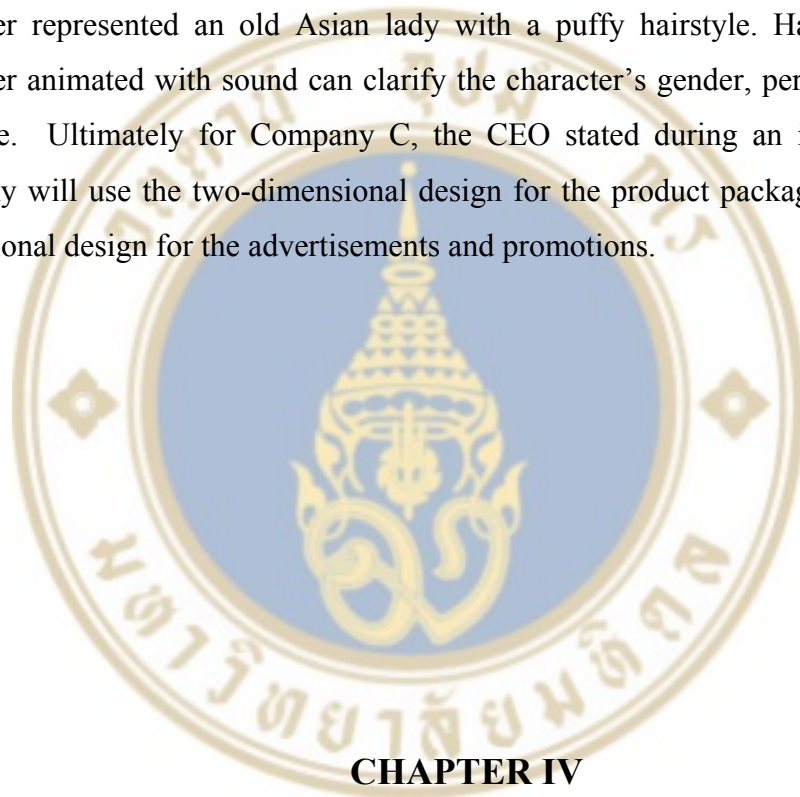
**Figure 3.4 An outline of Character C**

3.3.2.3 Character C is a spokes-character used to promote one of the soymilk beverage companies in Thailand. According to the CEO of Company C, his first intention was to create a logo that reflected the healthiness of the brand and product. In this case, the company decided to use the image of smiling young boy with rosy cheeks in order to give it a sense of friendly family business (see Figure 3.4). Surprisingly, the designer of Character C was one of Thailand's famous illustrators. Along with his teacher, both artists act as consultants for the company. From the interview, it appeared that Character C's design was based on the CEO himself. The company has placed Character C all over the product packaging to make it noticeable for consumers. It is the company's intention to educate consumers about the benefits of organic soymilk and related information. However, both the graphic designer and the CEO believe that consumers may not spend much time reading what is presented on packaging, therefore the best course of action is to use fewer words and more images of characters and icons.

Since Character C has been appearing on the product packaging from the very beginning, the character is recognizable to both consumers and non-consumers. Even though the company did not name its character, consumers believe that the character is named after the brand name. As the company grew, it launched more products including some with exclusive packaging available only in 7-11 convenience stores. Unfortunately, the different packaging may have confused some consumers. To alleviate the issue, the art consultants made the character and packaging more consistent to each other by giving them similar themes and tones across the company products.



Although Company C has not promoted its products on television, it has promoted them through its own website and other social media channels including: Facebook and Youtube. Recently, the company decided to modify the spokes-character by creating a three-dimensional version of it. This new three-dimensional design has been in use both on and offline. The company also created a 15-second animated commercial using the new three-dimensional character. The most interesting finding after launching the commercial is that many followers were not aware that the spokes-character was a boy. Instead, many people believed that the character represented an old Asian lady with a puffy hairstyle. Having the spokes-character animated with sound can clarify the character's gender, personality, and tone of voice. Ultimately for Company C, the CEO stated during an interview that the company will use the two-dimensional design for the product packaging and the three dimensional design for the advertisements and promotions.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Findings**

In terms of their demographics, the age groups of these employees are between 26-35 years old. They have served in their work places ranging from 1.5-4 years. Due to the fact that each employee may have different levels of association with the spokes-character, the amount of information each person can provide is variable. We can categorize this into two groups of employees: (1) employees who have high association with the company's spokes-character (including graphic designers, art

directors, marketers, and public relations) and (2) employees who have low association with the company's spokes-character (employees who do not use spokes-characters to do their jobs). The three companies participating in this study are different businesses with different company sizes; therefore it is reasonable to say that their developing processes and promoting techniques will be different from each other.

Each company has its own resources and advantages when it comes to developing the spokes-character. For instance, Company A hired a team of experts to create their spoke-character, which could be expensive in the long run. In contrast, Company B had the advantage of developing their spokes-character using their own animation team. Company C, on the other hand, used in house for their two-dimensional design, but outsourced for their three-dimensional design. Both Company A and Company B promoted their spokes-characters through LINE stickers in the LINE application. Promoting LINE stickers may cost up to several million Thai Baht. Company C believed that such an expenditure would be used more effectively on other marketing campaigns and promotions. All three companies, however, utilized popular social media, including Facebook and Youtube. Although the Facebook page and Youtube channel are free to create, all three companies still required high spending in order to reach their target audiences online.

All three companies have faced similar challenges regarding the clear identity of their spokes-characters. According to the employees of each company, Character A was mistaken for a dinosaur instead of Godzilla; Character B was mistaken for a television instead of a building; and Character C was mistaken for a grandma instead of a boy. Most of these remarks and information were obtained through comments on Facebook and Youtube. These companies used social media not only to communicate with consumers but to gather feedback as well. On the other hand, the art director from Company B claimed, "Having a unique spokes-character can make it memorable to the audience once they learn what the character actually is."

Another challenge that each company faced was the consistency of their character designs. For Company A, the shape and size of Character A varied depending on the type of media it was in (print ad, animation, video game, LINE stickers, and toys). For Company B, they realized that their spokes-character was inconsistent in the past, so they established an official rulebook that indicates the new format of Character B. The art director of Company B claimed, "Once we launched the new and improved

spokes-character, we no longer showed the old animated clips that we had created in the past.” On the other hand, while Company C did not change the look of their spoke-character, they quite often changed their product packaging, which created confusion for their customers.

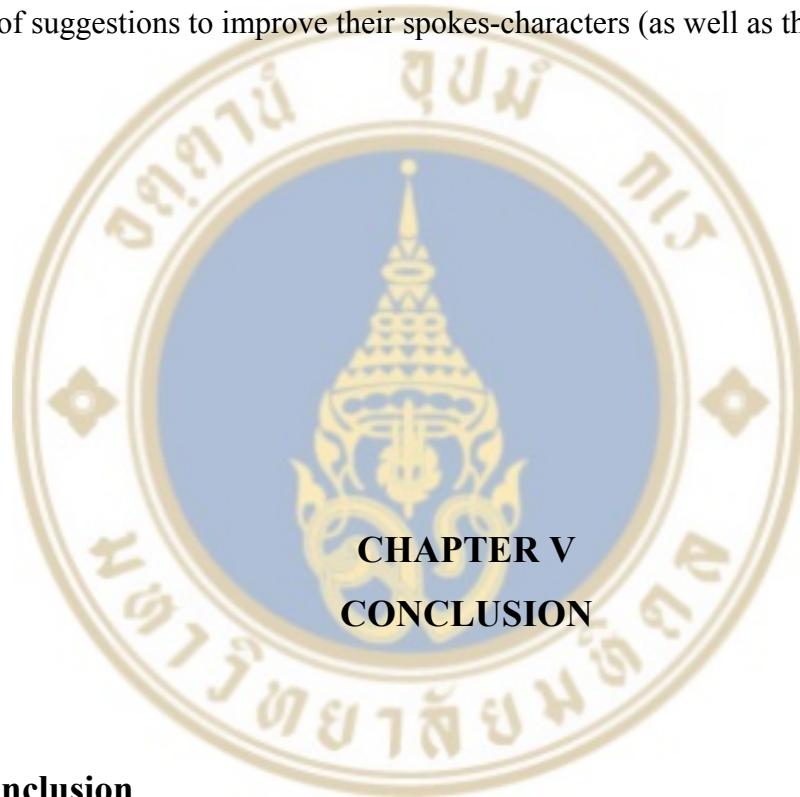
## 4.2 Data Analysis

This study has shown that spokes-characters can serve different purposes for different types of businesses. It is important for the firm to understand their objectives in order to fully utilize their spokes-characters. For Company A, the spokes-character is used to maintain a positive image of the company; for Company B, the spokes-character is used to reflect the creativity of their network programs; for Company C, the spokes-character is featured on product packaging which helps the consumer quickly recognize the brand.

According to the information gathered from this data collection, it seems that all three spokes-characters were inspired by different sources. All three companies use the second type of spokes-character, which is the spokes-character without product features. By choosing this type of spokes-character, these companies can expand their creativity and create unique and memorable characters to represent their brands. Company A and Company B may not have started their companies with a spoke-character, but they developed it later as a way to increase brand awareness and reach more targets (including children). In this case, Company C has an advantage since they developed their character from the beginning, which makes it recognizable for the customers who have been exposed to it over the past years. According to in-depth interview with the first university professor, “The companies need to create characters that are not only memorable and attractive, but also reflect the company values in order to make it relevant and meaningful.” Another university professor also suggested, “For any Thai companies that are planning to expand their business internationally, they should make sure that their spokes-characters are universal enough to carry the same message from Thailand over to another country. For instance, a spokes-character based on an elephant could have meaningful connotation in Thailand, but not in other countries near by.”

Keep in mind that companies must be satisfied with the way their spokes-characters look before settle on them for the official design. According to an interview with a Japanese illustrator, “artists who design the character should be satisfied and love their work for it to have a meaningful design.”

In order for all three companies to evaluate and improve their spokes-characters, they must first identify problems, with the main problems concerning the clear identity of the character and the consistency of the character. Utilizing social media such as Facebook and Youtube can help companies get honest opinions and a variety of suggestions to improve their spokes-characters (as well as their businesses).



## **5.1 Conclusion**

In conclusion, different companies may have different methods to develop a spokes-character depending on the company’s financial situation, policy, capability, culture, and beliefs. Firstly, a spokes-character can serve different functions. A company must know what its objectives are in order to utilize the character to its full potential. Secondly, a company must also identify to which group of customers its spokes-character is communicating. Thirdly, it is important for a company with a spokes-character to decide when to use its spokes-character in order to maintain its purpose. To ensure that a spokes-character has a clear identity, a company must be able to promote or indicate its features (is it a human, animal, or object?), characteristics (what its age and gender?), and personality (is it friendly or trustworthy?). At the same

time, a spokes-character must maintain a consistent design or it may create confusion for the audience. On the other hand, a spokes-character should be updated and improved over time in order to stay fresh and active. Lastly, using popular social media such as Facebook and Youtube is necessary in order for a company to promote its spokes-character. By preparing and understanding these steps and processes, a company can successfully develop, promote, utilize, and evaluate its spokes-character.

## **5.2 Recommendation/ Suggestion**

To fully utilize a spokes-character, companies must be able to separate the spokes-character processes into steps in order to pinpoint when problems occur and resolve them. According to the data analysis, companies should explore different types and designs of spokes-characters before settling on the official one. Keep in mind that in order to avoid confusion for the consumer there should only be one spokes-character to represent the company. However, a spokes-character can have friends, a family, a sidekick, and a partner as long as they do not overshadow companies' spokes-character. Thai companies should also make sure their spokes-characters carry the same message when expanding their business abroad. In addition, companies can increase customers' level of exposure to the spokes-character by incorporating them into product packaging and advisements more frequently.

## **5.3 Limitations and Further Research**

There are limitations to this study and a need for further research. In this study, one of the limitations is the time constraint. With unlimited time, more functions and benefits of a spokes-character could be explored by investigating other types of firms. Examples of such firms are restaurants, life assurance companies, telecommunication companies, commercial banks, and snack companies. Another limitation is access to and availability of a wider range of employees who have knowledge of the spokes-characters. At the same time, further research would allow for collection of more specific details about expenditures needed for promoting a spokes-character throughout other channels including television, print media, and online advertisement.



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