



**Can character  
design be used  
effectively for a  
spice brand?**

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# Overview

## What is a brand character?

A brand character, also known as a brand identity or personality, is a character that represents a company. Character design has the powerful ability to convey personality through emotional connection. This is important because branding can influence a consumer's purchasing decisions. In a world filled with never-ending products, there is always a demand for engaging and unique strategies. Throughout my research, I explored spices and their potential to be used for a character-based brand.

This topic stems from my personal use and learning experience with spices. When I moved out, I had little to no money, often resorting to cheap bland meals or fast food. To elevate my bleak eating experiences, I began experimenting with spices. Not only did it enhance every meal I cooked, but it also helped me eat at home, stay on a budget, and provide a creative outlet for experimentation.



Americans have increasingly favored the ease of convenience over the effort of cooking at home. On average, two out of three Americans indulge in fast food at least once a week, equating to 65% of the population dining out. This number is reflected in the 5.9 hours per week that Americans spend cooking meals. In contrast to countries like India, individuals spend 13.2 hours weekly in their kitchens (Statista, 2017). Encouraging people to cook at home rather than eating out is necessary for promoting a healthy diet.

I aim to create an emotional connection with the audience by using character design. Through my research, I discovered a significant need for improvements in the design and functionality of the containers.

# Can a spice brand use character-based design effectively?

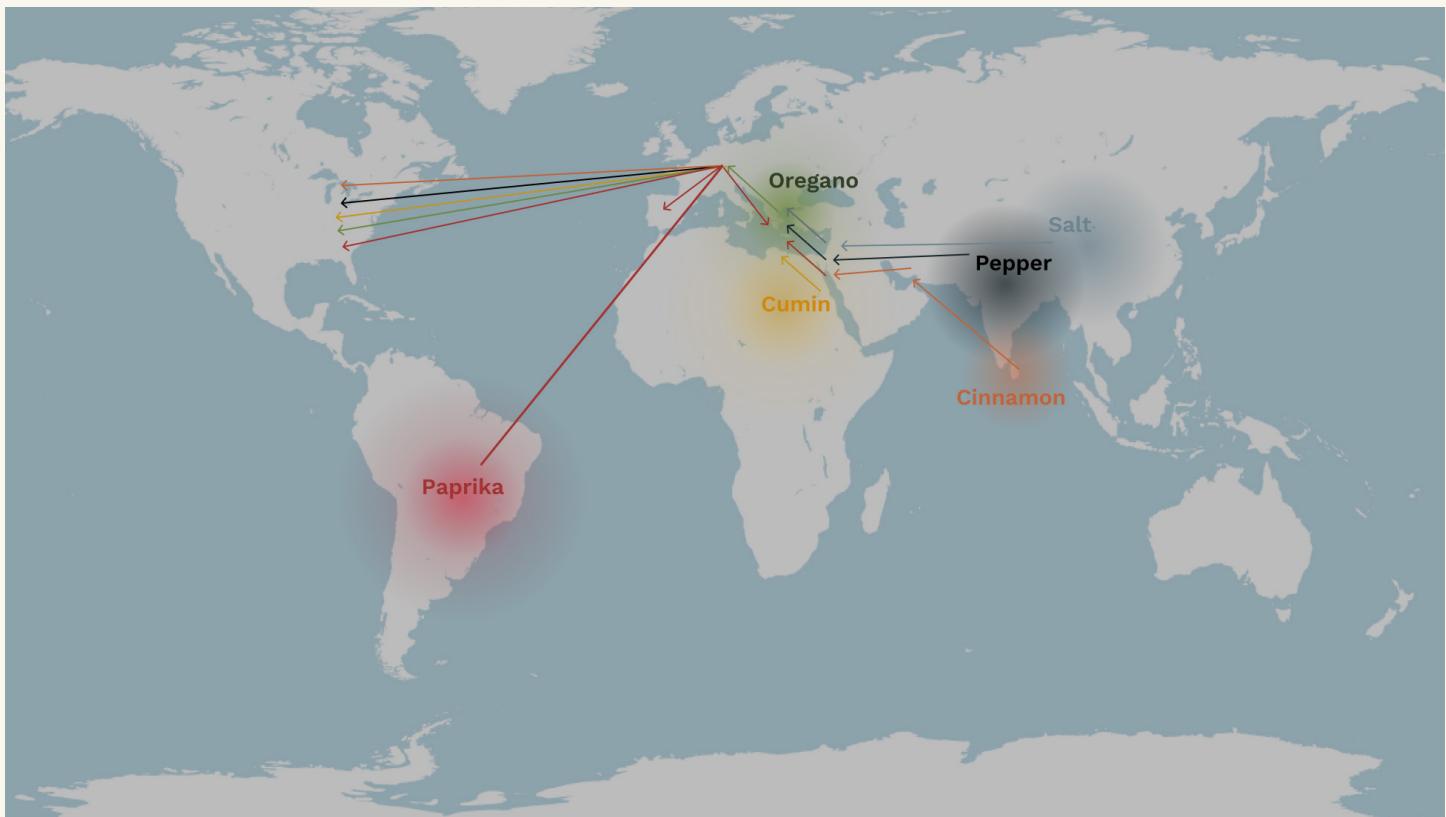
# Research

There's a lot to unpack for this project, especially since I lacked prior knowledge for the first steps of character design. To compensate, in my timeline, I created a summer outline to follow to learn how to create and design characters. My thesis research was mainly focused on deciding what spices to use, what characteristics could be incorporated, as well as a new packaging concept for the dispenser(s).

In my primary research, I relied on observations, questionnaires, and interviews. For my secondary research, I focused on what framework could be used for an array of spices.

- + Mouthfeel
- + Aroma
- + Taste (4)
- + “The X Factor”

## Language of Food



# Primary: Survey

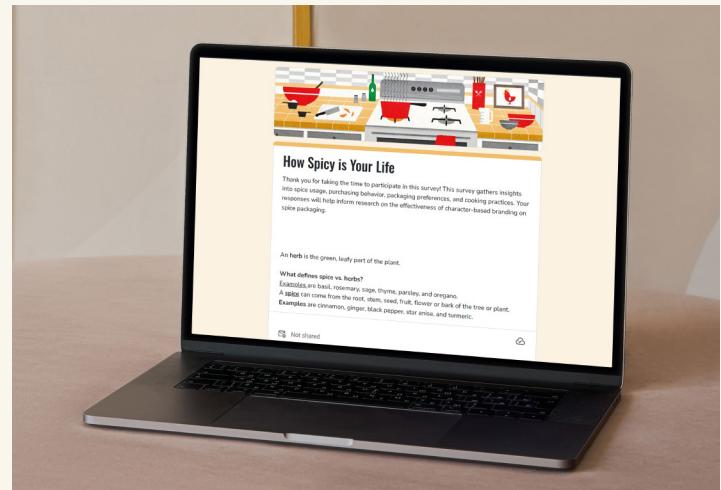
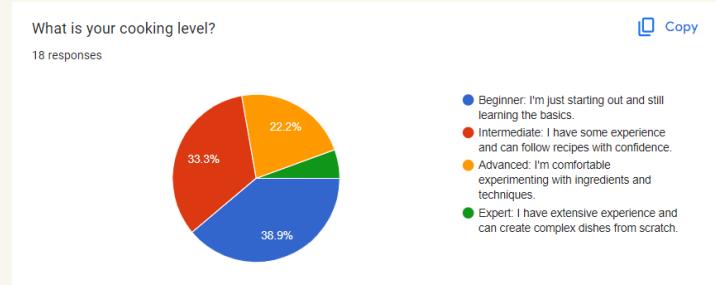
The goal of my survey was to find my audience's personal preferences, assess their skill levels, and learn whether a spice brand with characters was worth further exploration.

The survey inquired several questions based on my audience's capabilities and knowledge. These included inquiries such as: What is your cooking level? Which spices and herbs do you use the most? Are there any particular brands that appeal to you?

This gave me insights into a broad spectrum of cooking skill levels as well as what consumers were drawn to or needed. The majority of individuals who cook fall into the beginner to intermediate range. Beginners and intermediates tend to need more help and information in general, so having more information on the packaging could be overall beneficial. Furthermore, the survey aided me in narrowing down the selection of spices to focus on.

## The six most popular spices:

Salt  
Cumin  
Cinnamon  
Oregano  
Paprika  
Pepper



Which spices and herbs do you use most frequently? Which spices and herbs do you consider essential in your kitchen?

16 responses

Garlic salt, pepper, salt, cinnamon, 21 seasoning salute from Trader Joe's

cayenne and oregano are absolutely essential to me.

I usually use cinnamon, and sea salt! ( I don't cook a lot!)

Cinnamon powder

Chili Powder, Garlic, Cardamom, Black Pepper

black pepper, white pepper, sichuan pepper, chilli, bay leaf, cumin

Pepper, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, bouillon, Himalayan salt, etc.

Salt and pepper are the most essential

# Primary: Interviews

I interviewed three individuals with various cooking skills to gain more knowledge on packaging design. This provided a variety of possible opinions based on consumer preferences and personal lifestyles.

First, I interviewed Zach, a beginner cook who prioritizes simplicity. He prefers quick and easy dishes to eat throughout the week.

Next, I spoke with Brent, an intermediate cook who's a manager at a burger joint. He enjoys experimenting with creative meals and uses the same spices in different ways.

Lastly, I had the opportunity to interview a professional chef with extensive experience, ranging from artisanal chocolate to high-class restaurants. She talked about spice quality and integration, often utilizing various spice blends.

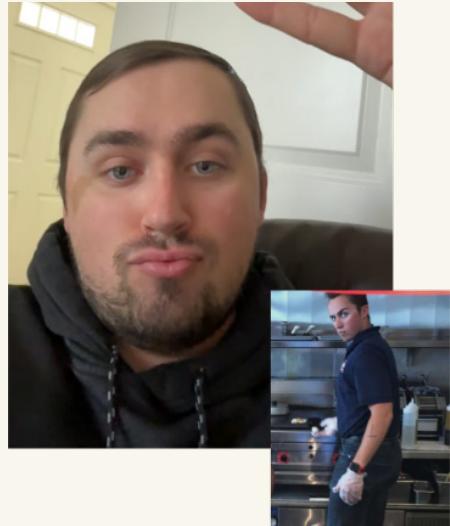
My questions mainly focused on their cooking habits, spice packaging preferences, and any issues they encountered with current spice packaging.

Through the course of these interviews, they were able to share similar complaints when it came to storage, dispensing, and packaging issues. This allowed me to narrow down what needed to be fixed about the packaging itself.

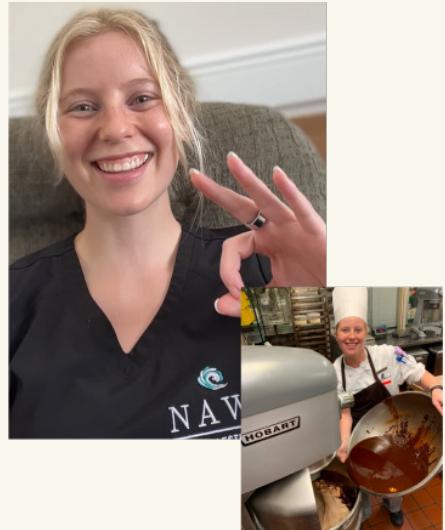
Zach- Beginner



Brent- Intermediate



Annie-Professional



# Primary: General Issues

## Packaging:

Zach complained about the lack of information provided on the packaging. To address the common problem of spice packaging lacking detailed descriptions due to limited space, I will design packaging that incorporates informative and engaging content without sacrificing its aesthetic appeal. I could use QR codes, recipes, or short character scenes that help portray as much information as possible.

## Space:

One of the key insights from my research is the generally disorganized state of spice storage in most kitchens. Spices are often downgraded to a cluttered corner, making them hard to access and use efficiently. This disorder is due to inconsistent and inconvenient packaging designs. For instance, many spice containers feature only one type of dispenser, whether it's a flip-open lid, a shaker, or a pour spout, limiting their usability. Other spice bottles are cylindrical, and though comfortable in your hand, can create unnecessary extra space when storing. When I requested images of their spice cabinets from several friends, the common response was "It's too disorganized," to which I replied, "That's the point."



# Primary: General Issues

## Dispensing:

During the interviewing process, both Annie and Brent agreed that dispensing on packaging is important. They prefer to have options when possible and dislike the caps that can't be popped off to pour the contents out quicker. This led me to question: Why not have multiple dispensers then? A noteworthy example is the Old Bay seasoning, which has made some steps in dispensing design. This was done by incorporating a lid with three different dispensing options. Additionally, the rectangular shape of Old Bay containers makes them easier to stack and store.



# Secondary: Examples

The next portion of my research was based on secondary information and how to create characters. There's a lot to unpack when it comes to character design and development. This isn't just an overnight learning process and in the timespan I have to show my research, I decided to break down the essentials of what it takes to create a spice character(s).

Before diving into character concepts, I wanted to review a few different examples and case studies. In Japan, brands often use characters to employ their values, like the Gotouchi Kyara. This is a local mascot promoting tourism and culture and enforcing the cities values and overall community. These characters undergo a creative process, from brainstorming to naming, reflecting unique aspects of their region. It's a whole identity for their mascots, and researching is over half of the process. It has to embody what the overall city represents.

Hello Kitty, an iconic character, thrives due to her simple design that allows people to connect emotionally. As quoted, “Hello Kitty’s design, with her simple and expressionless face, allows people to project their emotions and interpretations onto the character. This blank canvas aspect of Hello Kitty enables individuals to form a personal connection and find comfort or escapism through the character.” (Barrows) Similarly, Hokto, a mushroom brand, uses characters to enhance product appeal and convey brand values effectively. This approach not only engages consumers but also strengthens brand-consumer



**“A character trademark embodies brand attributes or values. Characters quickly become central to advertising campaigns and the best ones become cultural icons cherished by children and customers alike”**

(Wheeler, P. 64)

# Secondary: General Design

I began by researching how to create a character in general. While the design portion is important, it comes later down the road. I needed to make my characters appealing and relatable. I was asking myself: How am I going to give spices distinctive traits and personalities? How can I make these characters unique?

Through my research, I found a great character outline from Weiland in Crafting Unforgettable Characters.

## Making Characters Relatable:

Start with an idea for your character.

Develop their background and backstory.

Establish their personality traits.

Give them physical attributes.

Create a memorable name.

Determine their motivations and goals.

Develop their relationships with other characters. (53, Weiland)

This framework provided a structured approach to creating well-rounded and memorable characters, which I can apply to my character design. In the short time I had, I began to focus on the concepts of a characters personality and backstory.

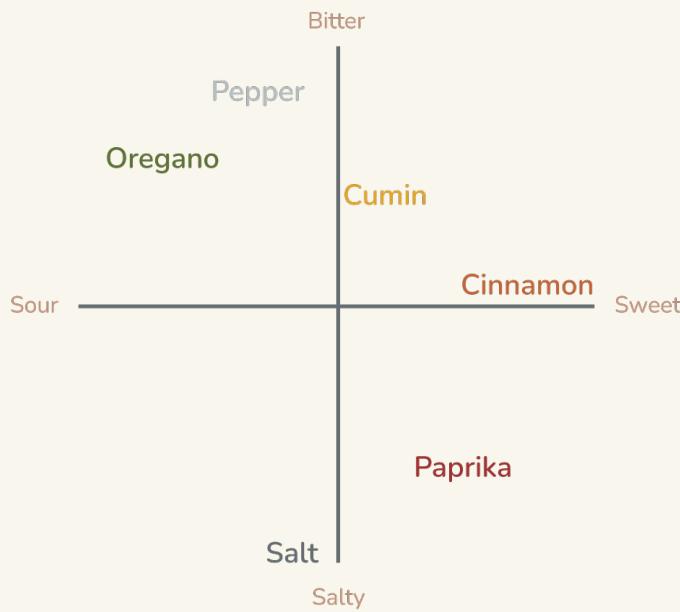


# Secondary: Tasty Traits

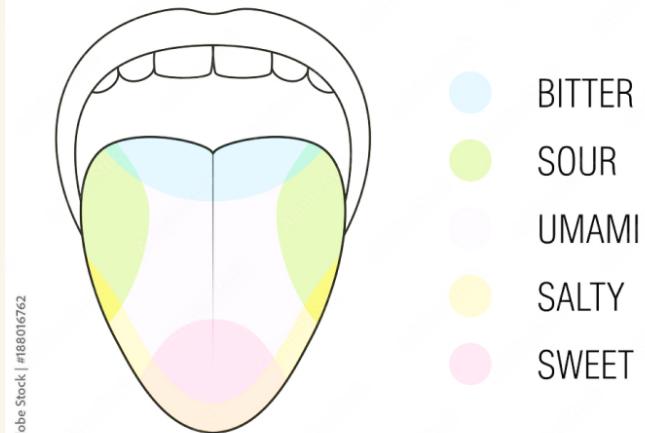
I wanted to focus on the character's personality first. This was done by focusing on what gives a spice flavor. I started researching and breaking down what flavor really is.

In the book **The Flavor Bible**, there is a flavor equation provided. It equals Mouth-feel + Aroma+ Taste+ The X-Factor. By using this equation, I started developing the characters personalities.

To begin with, I focused solely on the four main categories of taste that was defined by **The Flavor Bible**: sweet, sour, salty, and bitter. This approach helped me give each spice a base personality trait. From there, I placed the spices



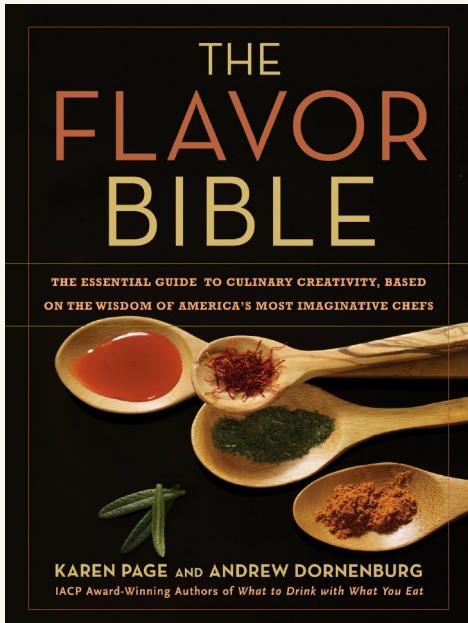
**TASTE AREAS** on the HUMAN TONGUE



accordingly on the x-y plane, allowing for a form of categorization to occur. This step was crucial in establishing a simple and efficient framework that could be easily applied to more than just one spice. Those near each other on the xy plane might have similar personality traits, vs salt and pepper, which have completely opposite tastes so their personalities should reflect that.

Next, I searched for descriptive words on **McCormick's website**. Each spice had a list of descriptive words, allowing for both categorization and a secondary personality trait.

# Secondary: X-Factor



The last characteristic I focused on is the “X-Factor”, described as the heart, mind, and spirit of flavor. The heart of the flavor equation is our emotional connection and the reminiscing we feel when we consume specific food. As stated in The Spice Bible, “We taste with our hearts as much as with our tongues.” This can explain the lasting appeal of specific meals and dishes; simply because they stem from memories rooted in culinary culture and tradition”(P.4). Imagine your parents cooking your favorite meal and feeling it when you see, smell, or taste it. This emotional connection is what I aim to highlight by connecting spices with their homeland.

I researched the origins and cultural significance of each spice. Each spice has a unique story influenced by its country of origin. For instance, cinnamon’s association with Sri Lanka can inspire designs that reflect its heritage and culture. The country’s use of the spice has helped shape its history, economy, and overall identity. The spice is included in their traditional cuisines, from rice to curry. They also use the spice in their ceremonies and religious offerings due to its symbolism of purity, prosperity, and blessings.

This knowledge provides insights into the spice’s essence and helps shape traits and styles for my character design process. Overall, this research lays the groundwork for the character design making in summer/fall.

## Cumin

**Description:**

Bitter, Slightly Sweet

**Secondary:**

Earthy, Warm

**Origin:**

Indian/Latin American

## Cinnamon

**Description:**

Sweet, Slightly Bitter

**Secondary:**

Warm, Wood, Mahogany

**Origin:**

Sri Lanka

## Oregano

**Description:**

Bitter, Slightly Sour

**Secondary:**

Minty, Pungent, spicy

**Origin:**

Mediterranean

## Paprika

**Description:**

Sweet

**Secondary:**

Smoky, Vibrant, Earthy

**Origin:**

South and Central America

## Salt

**Description:**

Salty

**Secondary**

Enhancer/ Intensifies, savory

**Origin:**

Found globally

## Pepper

**Description:**

Bitter

**Secondary**

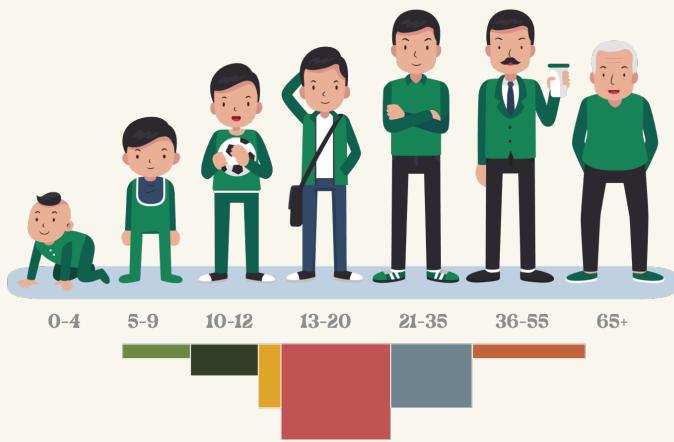
Sharp, Wood, Varying

**Origin:**

India

# Goals

I aim to engage people with spices by promoting regular usage and fostering an understanding of their applications. To achieve this, I will develop a package design that emphasizes convenience and storage efficiency, making it easier for consumers to incorporate spices into their daily cooking routines. Additionally, I will create characters inspired by each spice,. These characters will not only make the packaging visually appealing but also help in educating consumers about cooking in general.



# Audience

I'm targeting high schoolers and young adults transitioning into independent. I picture the consumers growing with the brand, creating an emotional connection that lasts a lifetime. I can see my product on shelves at grocery stores; preferably on lower shelves so kids can interact with them. I want to include recipes and fun facts on the packaging that engage children. This approach targets a broad age range, starting from kids aged 5-12, through their teenage years, and into adulthood, aiming for a loyal customer base from ages 21 to 35.

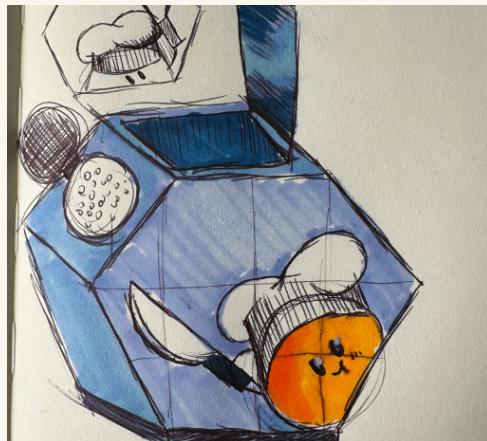
# Visual Outcomes

I'm in the process of creating characters for the brand, designing a unique dispenser, and creating a short recipe book where spices can interact.

The characters will be developed through hand-drawn iterations and eventually vectorized in Adobe Illustrator for scalability and flexibility. While I have minimum iterations, my research has been focused on improving the overall package design. I also aim to teach myself 3D printing to design a multi-purpose dispenser package, leveraging my experience with 3D modeling and software like Desmos.

Additionally, I plan to create a comic that showcases how these spice characters interact, particularly in recipes. I envision designing the characters in Procreate for possible animation effects.

The aesthetic of the layout and design needs to be flexible, engaging, and overall fun. It needs to connect and catch the eyes of kids, while still being stored on a kitchen counter top. This involves the design to be both a cartoon illustration style while maintaining a form of minimalism in order to blend into the average American Kitchen.



# Strategy

Since the majority of my startup research has been conducted, I will move forward with conceptualizing and sketching the spice-themed characters. These hand-drawn iterations will aim to capture different personalities and possible character interactions.

I will then target high schoolers to young adults for surveys and packaging concepts for overall brand perception. These insights will help guide and refine the hand-drawn concepts before moving on to experimentation and iterations. Based on feedback, I will vectorize the characters in Adobe Illustrator and focus on the package design and dispensers. Additionally, I will work on the Taste Buds logo design and overall aesthetic and brand. Experimentation will also include creating prototypes of the spice dispensers using 3D modeling software. This phase will involve testing different dispenser designs for functionality, convenience, and aesthetic appeal. If I'm unable to create a complete 3-D model prototype, my alternative would be to use an online source and proceed with blueprints and possible concepts from there. A lot of my work will be in iterations and simply creating characters.

Practice my character design skills over the summer, creating multiple drafts and styles for the characters.

Learn 3-D printing to create my own lid and container, choosing materials based on surveys about comfort and usability.

Conduct a survey where the audience can help decide the spice drawings.

Develop the final character designs, incorporating the gathered information.

Ensuring they blend seamlessly into a kitchen environment.

# Timeline-Summer

## Week 1-2: Conceptualizing and Sketching

Develop initial concepts for spice-themed characters

Create multiple hand-drawn iterations to explore different personalities and interactions

## Week 3-4: Survey and Feedback Collection

Target high schoolers and young adults for surveys on character and packaging concepts

Analyze feedback to refine character designs

## Week 5-6: Experimentation and Learning

Explore 3D printing options and materials

Experiment with different designs and functionalities for spice dispensers

## Week 7-8: Refining Designs

Use feedback to refine hand-drawn concepts

Begin initial vectorization of characters in Adobe Illustrator

## Week 9-10: Prototyping

Create initial prototypes of spice dispensers using 3D modeling software

Test prototypes for functionality and aesthetic appeal

Review summer progress and make necessary adjustments

Mentally Prepare for the intensive fall semester



# Timeline-Fall

## Week 1: Finalizing Character Designs

Finalize vectorized characters in Adobe Illustrator

Complete any remaining adjustments based on feedback

## Week 2-3: Packaging Design

Develop packaging layout and design

Incorporate brand aesthetics and logo into the packaging

## Week 4: Packaging Prototype

Print packaging prototypes for spice bottles and dispensers

Test for functionality and visual appeal

## Week 5-6: Finalizing Dispensers

Print a minimum of 6 spice bottles and dispensers

Ensure all designs are practical and visually consistent

## Week 7-8: Cookbook Development

Create wireframes for the recipe cookbook

Design short comic strips to illustrate how spices interact and enhance dishes

## Week 9-10: Cookbook Production

Finalize and print the recipe cookbook

Include 1-3 different recipes with corresponding comic strips

## Week 11: Review and Presentation Preparation

Review all project components for consistency and quality

Prepare for final presentation and feedback

# Annotated Bibliography

**Prophecy Market insights. (2022, February 7). Global spices market is estimated to be 22.8 billion by 2026 with a CAGR of 4.7% during the forecasted period - by PMI. GlobeNewswire News Room.** <https://www.globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2022/02/07/2380143/0/en/Global-Spices-Market-is-estimated-to-be-22-8-billion-by-2026-with-a-CAGR-of-4-7-during-the-forecasted-period-By-PMI.html>

The article analyzes the global projection for the spice market by the year 2026. It also highlights several key competitors such as Ajinomoto and Kerry Group, which are two competitors that dominate North America's spice market

This article, sourced from industry publication, provides valuable insights into the current state and future prospects of the spice market. It highlights a notable increase in demand for convenience, with consumers preferring ready-to-use spices.

**Weiland, K.M. Crafting Unforgettable Characters.**

In her book, K.M. Weiland provides the tools and techniques required to create memorable characters. She covers character arcs, motivations, backstories, and relationships. Overall a great starting point for character design.

Weiland's focus was mainly on traditional narrative structure design, offering clear and actionable advice. The goal is to create engaging and realistic multidimensional characters.

**Wheeler, A. (2017). Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team. In Google Books. John Wiley & Sons.**

This book is an essential guide to crafting a brand identity that connects and is recognized in the marketplace. There are five distinct sections: research, strategy, identity, touch points, and managing assets.

Wheeler offers practical advice for creating a brand identity that stands out. Its structured approach makes it easy to follow, even for beginners. It has an array of information and some character design branding as well.

# Annotated Bibliography

**Dornenburg, A., & Page, K. (2014). The Flavor Bible: The Essential Guide to Culinary Creativity, Based on the Wisdom of America's Most Imaginative Chefs.** Little Brown.

This book breaks down flavors in several different ways, offering charts and lists of ingredients that complement each other. Each entry for an ingredient includes flavors, peak seasons, and suggested techniques. The authors also include tips from renowned chefs, adding a personal and expert touch to the guidance offered.

The book is structured around the concept of flavor matchmaking, helping readers understand the principles behind successful flavor combinations. I used this for my character trait profile using the flavor equation.

**Barrows, L. (2014). Planning with Character: Gotouchi Kyara and Place Branding in Japan.** Colombia Academic Commons . <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8FQ9TRH>

The paper explores how characters are used in Japan to highlight and create community mascots. Character power and connection is presented as a cost efficient and sustainable.

It shows that the simplicity in character design allowing for versatility as well as an ability to change due to consumer preferences. It gives an understanding into iconic brand managing by giving several different case studies, including Hello Kitty.

**Moseley, J. (2006). The Mystery of Herbs and Spices: Scandalous, Romantic and Intimate Biographies of the World's Most Notorious Ingredients.** In Google Books. Xlibris Corporation. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=X&lr=&id=m28yKWIQU6wC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=essential+spice+s+for+everyone&ots=CROKWt6sck&sig=IoI3MRoLjtSpb3QYRQV-sHnFl0g#v=onepage&q=essential%20spices%20for%20everyone&f=false>

The author creates a timeline for spices and herbs through a captivating narrative of the most popular ingredients used to this day. The book ranges from their origins to their modern day significance in the culinary world.

The book is an engaging historical read about the culinary and cultural appreciation for herbs and spices. It gives the reader a deeper understanding of how spices were traded, sold, and cultivated over hundreds of years. I used this to help place the spices on the chart as well as for more information and descriptions.

# Annotated Bibliography

**Wyk, B.-E. van. (2014). Culinary Herbs and Spices of the World. In Google Books. University of Chicago Press. <https://books.google.com/>**

This book is a culinary exploration that dives into a deeper understanding of the diverse aromas and flavors that contribute to global cuisine based on the origins, culinary use, and its cultural significance.

By the botanical, historical, and socio-cultural dimensions of spices, the book illuminates their profound impact on human civilization and highlights their pivotal role in shaping culinary practices across different cultures.

**DOES YOUR MASCOT MATCH YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY? (n.d.). Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://essay.utwente.nl/66053/1/Hoolwerff%20van%20Dani%C3%AB%20-s%201116746%20scriptie.pdf>**

The document explores the relationship between brand mascots and brand personality, offering case study analyses to demonstrate their effectiveness in communicating and enhancing a brand's perception to consumers.

The research provided allows for a better understanding as to what shapes a brand's perception. Specific personality traits can be leveraged to convey a brand's desired image, resonating effectively with the target audience.

**Cooking: hours spent by country 2014 | Statista. (2017, May 8). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/420719/time-spent-cooking-per-week-among-consumers-by-country/>**

This statistic report shows various countries and hours spent cooking per week. It's an overall analysis of cooking habits across the world.

The research demonstrates a cultural difference between various countries in comparison to America. The report serves as a useful resource for understanding global cooking trends and consumer behavior related to food preparation.

