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Interpreting Emojis: Millennials Versus Non-Millennials

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Introduction

The ability to represent emotion through textual interfaces has increased with time and, with a wide variety and demographically diverse audience of consumers being able to access emojis in a variety of conversational contexts, the interpretations of their intended meanings have become more ambiguous. Due to the many changes of icons that represent emotion over the years, generational differences of perception may vary. This study will focus on discovering these differences between generations when interpreting messages containing emojis.

Method

Hypothesis: Younger generations will perceive the smirking emoji as a seductive symbol, more than will older generations.

Variables:

Independent: Millennials and non-Millennials

Dependent*: Message perceived as seductive and message not perceived as seductive

*measured on a Likert type scale ranging from 1-10

Participants: 283 participants completed the survey, 73% were Millennials and the remaining 27% were non-Millennials.

Procedure: An online survey was administered to a convenience sample of participants through email and social media sharing. The questions addressed the message represented in the image found under the results section.

Measures: An independent samples t-test using SPSS was used to compare the mean results of each sample in terms of Millennials versus non-Millennials. The x-axis will represent age and the y-axis will represent how seductively the generational group tended to perceive the message.

Results

During the survey, when the participants were asked if they thought the message was seductive, Millennials ($M=4.56$, $SD=2.23$) viewed the message as more seductive than did non-Millennials ($M=2.06$, $SD=1.72$), $t(281)=-8.90$, $p<.01$. This can be seen in the graph, Perceptions of Seductiveness. **There was significance between Millennials' and non-Millennials' perceptions of the given message as seductive. Therefore, the data were consistent with the hypothesis.** In addition, the three other feeling words, "sarcastic," "happy," and "honest," also showed significant results:

- Sarcasm: Millennials ($M=3.25$, $SD=2.05$) versus non-Millennials ($M=2.65$, $SD=2.25$); $t(281)=-2.13$, $p=.034$. These results suggest that Millennials perceived the message more sarcastic than did non-Millennials.

- Happiness: Millennials ($M=6.12$, $SD=1.85$) versus non-Millennials ($M=7.12$, $SD=2.24$); $t(281)=3.81$, $p<.01$. These results suggest that Millennials viewed the message less happy than did non-Millennials.

- Honesty: Millennials ($M=5.51$, $SD=1.98$) versus non-Millennials ($M=6.96$, $SD=2.32$); $t(281)=5.23$, $p<.01$. These results suggest that Millennials view the message as less honest than non-Millennials.

Have a good day 😏
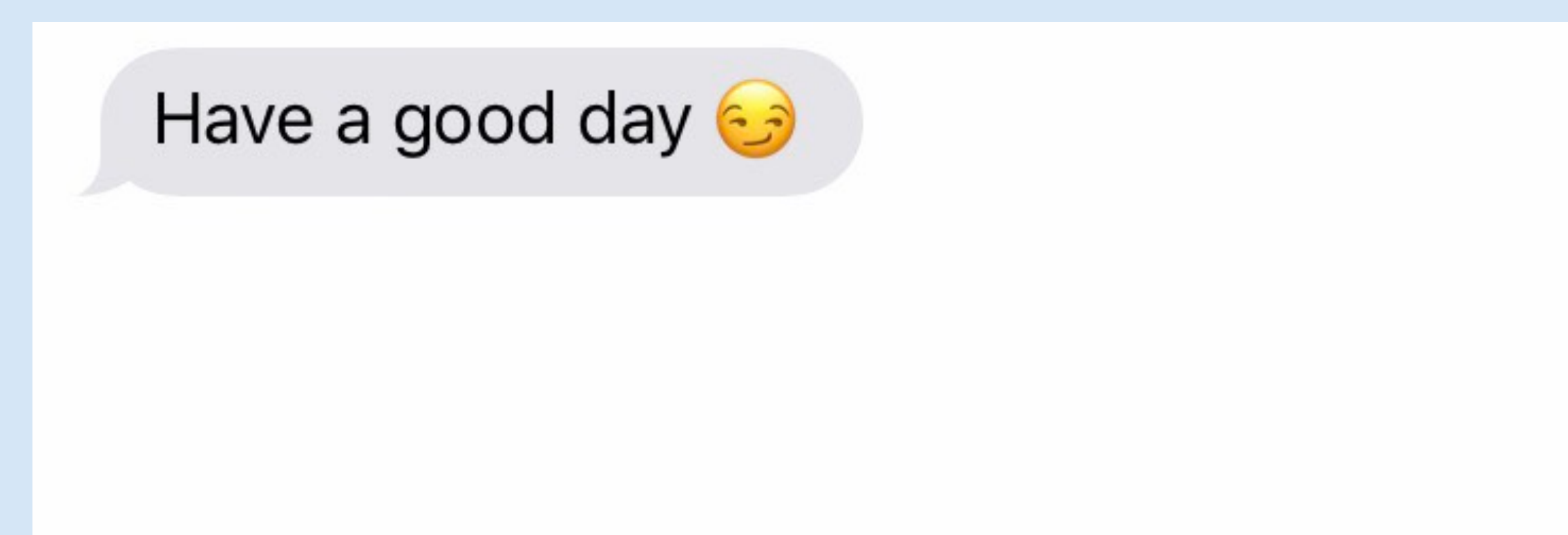
Discussion

The main focus of the study was to determine whether this emoji in particular was perceived as seductive by one or both of the generational groups. The data found that there was a significant difference between perception of seduction with Millennials perceiving the smirking emoji as more seductive than the non-Millennials. The significance of these findings lies within understanding how people communicate in such a rapidly changing technical world.

Limitations:
- Context surrounding the receiving of the message was unclear.
- Convenient sample and sample size.

Future Research:
- Provide more message options in the survey.
- Test out different emojis with possible mixed messages

Perception of Seductiveness

Perception of Sarcasm

Perception of Honesty

Perception of Happiness

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