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Paralinguistic and Rhetorical Capabilities of Emojis in Marketing Communication

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PARALINGUISTIC AND RHETORICAL CAPABILITIES

OF EMOJIS IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION

A Dissertation

by

JACOB CHRISTOPHER ALMAGUER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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PARALINGUISTIC AND RHETORICAL CAPABILITIES

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JACOB CHRISTOPHER ALMAGUER

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Reto Felix, Ph.D.
Chair of Committee

Pramod Iyer, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Michael S. Minor, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Dan King, Ph.D.
Committee Member

May 2022

ABSTRACT

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references, 126 titles.

Consumers and social media marketers have over 3,000 emojis at their fingertips. Despite the

popularity of emojis on social media, marketing research on emojis remains limited. Extant

marketing research on emojis that does exist primarily focuses on the emotional and

reinforcement capabilities, a remnant of the limitations of the emoticon ancestor, and largely

ignores the additional paralinguistic and rhetorical potential of emojis. In this dissertation, I

examine emojis as a paralanguage with a particular focus on the creation of meaning on social

media (Essay 1), and emojis as full (Essay 2) and partial (Essay 3) substitutes for text in

marketing communication. Essay 1 is a conceptual piece that examines the perpetual evolution of

emoji meaning on social media through the lens of symbolic interactionism and liquid

consumption. Essay 2 looks at how consumers evaluate strings of emojis and shows that emoji

only communication has a negative (positive) effect on brand attitude via processing fluency

(fun) when compared to the equivalent textual translation. Essay 3 focuses on emojis as partial

substitutes for promotions on social media (e.g., "buy one get one" becomes "buy 🤏 get 🤏).

This essay demonstrates the positive effect of gesture emojis on promotion evaluation via

heightened processing fluency, when compared to object emojis. However, when the message

includes haptic imagery, processing fluency and promotion evaluation are similar for gesture and

object emojis. Overall, this dissertation explores the paralinguistic and rhetorical potential of

emojis in marketing communication and provides insights to marketers that use emojis on social

media.

DEDICATION

To my mom (Gracie Almaguer), dad (Fred Almaguer Jr.), and brother (Joshua Almaguer). I could not have done this without your support. Thank you for always being there for me, encouraging me to finish, and believing in me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Emojis are symbols that pictorially represent facial expressions, concepts, emotions, and activities (Kralj Novak 2015), a more recent evolution of emoticons, which are keystroke-based forms of expression through textual communication, e.g., :-). Emojis are beginning to replicate for technology-mediated communication what nonverbal cues do for face-to-face communication (Evans 2017). For instance, just as a wink in person can indicate sarcasm or irony, a winking emoji can indicate the same in technology-mediated communication (Weissman and Gould 2018). Luangrath, Peck, and Barger (2019) claim that we might assume textual paralanguage, language that supplements or replaces the written word, is as important to communication via text as nonverbal cues are to face-to-face interactions. Hence, there is a need for marketing research fully investigate the functions of emojis to understand how consumers utilize them to create meaningful interactions and how social media marketers can effectively employ emoji communication in their marketing efforts. Technology-mediated communication is impacting the way we interact with one another (Yadav and Pavlou 2021) and thus there is a need to examine the impacts that these changes in communication technology have. While there is some emergent research on emojis, there is a tendency for this research to focus on limited capabilities of emojis and their stagnant meaning. Particularly, the focus of extant research is on the emotional and reinforcement (that is, an emoji is utilized to reinforce a written message) capabilities. Further, much of the research on emojis focuses on the meaning of emojis as it currently stands and

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ignores how interactions inform and shape the evolution of emoji meaning. These limitations of extant research are something that this dissertation seeks to remedy.

Marketing research has investigated the reinforcement capabilities of emojis, that is as an enhancer or supplement to the written word (e.g., Das, Wiener, and Kareklas, 2019; Li, Chan, and Kim, 2019). This appears to be a remant of emoticons which were limited to basic nonverbal cues and simply accompanied written text (Lo, 2008). However, it has also become common to utilize emojis in other ways as the communicative capabilities of emojis evolve (Evans, 2017). For instance, emojis can be presented in a sequence in order to develop a short narrative that can attract the attention of consumers on social media platforms (Ge and Gretzel, 2018) and as a partial substitute for text. Given that emojis have capabilities beyond that of reinforcement (Evans, 2017) coupled with the importance of texual paralanguage, including emojis, in textual communication (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger, 2017), there is a need for marketing research to examines the implications of other emoji capabilities. The fundamental goal of this dissertation is to move beyond the emoticon restrictions of emotion and reinforcement to evaluate the linguistic and rhetorical capabilities of emojis. Despite the need for firms to adopt innovative language for rhetorical and communicative purposes (Ge and Gretzel, 2018), there is a lack of marketing research that has expanded the knowledge of emojis in marketing communication.

Emojis have become a quasi-universal form of communication transcending local language barriers (Evans, 2017). This may complicate the creation of meaning as it is informed by the use in the global community. Further, consumers currently maintain an active role in their highly networked online communities (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, and Bloching, 2013) and symbols are appropriable and manipulable (Firat and Venkatesh, 1994). As such, it is expected

that the emojis will be appropriable and manipulable by active consumers in networked

communities. While extant marketing research has developed an understanding of how emojis

are used in communication (Ge and Gretzel, 2018; Luangrath et al., 2017), there is a lack of

understanding of how meaning is created which, given the evolution of emojis, is important to

marketers. Particularly, via symbolic interactions, meaning can be reinforced or modified

through the interpretive process where people make sense of meaning based upon their own prior

understanding and the meaning derived from interactions with others (Blumer 1986). While

marketers set up initial meaning, it is actualized in the marketplace as consumers actually

communicate with a symbolic object (Mick, Buroughs, Hetzel, and Brannen 2004). Thus, it is

important that marketers not remain situated on the meaning as it is but also consider how

meaning will evolve and change.

In essay 1, I examine the creation of emoji meaning through a symbolic interactionism

and liquid consumption lens. The extant research on emojis focuses primarily on normalized

meaning, that is the meaning that is presently accepted by the wider population. However, there

is a need to explore those instances and deviations from the normalized meaning and how

meaning is actualized and changed via the symbolic interactions that take place. The deviations

from normalized meaning are likely to be propagated by our liquid society in which the only

thing of permanence is change (Bauman 2012). I propose that we are in a situation in which

emoji meaning is perpetually evolving given the number and nature of communicative efforts

taking place via technology-mediated interactions. Thus, my first essay explores the creation and

evolution of emoji meaning. These implications for marketing rhetoric set the stage for an

evaluation of the linguistic/substitutive functions of emojis for text which are explored in Essays

2 and 3.

The substitutive capabilities of emojis have been captured in extant marketing literature (Lohmann, Pyka, and Zanger, 2017; Luangrath et al, 2017; Ge and Gretzel, 2018; Casado-Molina, Rojas-de Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo, and Romero-Charneco, 2019). However, there is a lack of understanding of the effectiveness of emojis as substitutes for text in marketing communication. For instance, Lohmann et al. (2017) focus on the impact that a single emoji, indicating happiness or sadness, has on the emotional state of the message recipient. Further, there is no research that examines the processing of messages where a textual narrative is replaced by strings of emojis and the downstream effects on attitude towards the brand. Essay 2 of this dissertation focuses on the following research question: how is a message composed of emojis processed by consumers, compared to an equivalent message composed of text?

Essay 2 examines emojis as full substitutes for text in marketing communication. More specifically, I focus on strings of emojis that are used as a direct substitute with comparable meaning to a short textual narrative on social media. Emojis presented sequentially as a short narrative allow for information to be condensed within a limited space and at the same time attract attention amidst the sea of text in a consumer's social media feed (Ge and Gretzel, 2018). Additionally, emojis can improve likability and effectiveness (Riordan and Glikson 2020), emotional communication (Boutet, LeBlanc, Chamberland, and Collin 2021), and engagement (McShane, Pancer, Poole, and Deng 2021). While the use of emojis alone can have positive effects, it is unclear how consumers process a string of emojis and the subsequent downstream effects.

Contrary to theoretical expectations that emojis are easy to process, this essay shows that emojis are difficult to process when a brand uses them in strings and full substitutes for text. Further, this disfluency translates to unfavorable attitudes towards a brand regardless of whether

the brand is hedonic or utilitarian. For utilitarian brands, the use of emoji only communication has a negative direct effect on brand attitude, when compared to text only communication. However, the use of strings of emojis results in higher perception of fun regardless of the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the brand. While there is extant research that finds beneficial effects of processing disfluency—for example, Motyka, Suri, Grewal, and Kohli (2016) find that processing disfluency encourages deeper information processing and positive effects on purchase intentions—the current research finds that consumers immediate reaction to the disfluency of an emoji only message is negative. Social media marketers can utilize these findings to appropriately design content that consumers can easily understand and ultimately develop a favorable brand attitude.

Additionally, just as there is no research on full substitution of emojis for text, there is no research that examines the impact that partial substitution of emojis for text has on promotion evaluation. Essay 3 of this dissertation seeks to answer the following research question: how does the use of emojis as partial substitutes for text impact promotion evaluation? In Essay 3, I evaluate the use of gesture (👌) and object (e.g., 🍕) emojis as partial substitutes for text in promotions on social media. In particular, I focus on the impact that the use of emojis as partial substitute have on processing fluency. I find that compared to object emojis, gesture emojis heighten processing fluency and ultimately have a favorable effect on promotion evaluation. In addition, given the importance placed in online communication and shopping, and the lack of ability the consumer has to feel the product before buying online, I explore the interactive effects of these emojis with haptic imagery. I find that when haptic imagery is present, processing fluency is markedly similar for communication that includes gesture and object emojis. That is, consumers can easily understand gestures and object emojis when haptic imagery is present, and

thus promotion evaluation is similar. These results provide important implications to social media marketers in their design of communication that utilizes gesture and object emojis as partial substitutes for text.

CHAPTER II

ESSAY 1—PERPETUALLY EVOLVING EMOJI MEANING: A SYMBOLIC

INTERACTIONISM AND LIQUID CONSUMPTION PERSPECTIVE

As of June 2021, 😭 and 💀 have recently taken on meaning that was initially attributed

to 😂 (Jones 2021). The face with tears of joy emoji, 😂, was named the word of the year in

2015 due to the growth in popularity of emojis (Oxford Languages 2015) and is widely utilized

among older audiences as a synonym for laughter. Despite the widespread use, or rather as a

result of its widespread use, the meaning of this emoji has been altered among younger

audiences. Particularly, Gen Z consumers have started to use the face with tears of joy emoji

ironically or avoid using that emoji altogether in favor of the crying or skull emoji instead (Jones

2021). See Figure 1 for a consumer's tweet that expresses confusion with the recommendation to

use 😭 or 💀 to indicate laughter.

Despite the variation in usage and the changing meaning of emojis, there is a lack of

research that examines emojis along these lines. Particularly, extant research on emojis tends to

focus on how emojis are used and how consumers respond to the use of emojis in general. For

example, extant marketing research finds that the presence of emojis can elicit affective

responses among consumers (Das, Winer, and Kareklas 2019) and have positive and negative

implications for perceived warmth and competence, respectively (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019).

Additionally, Luangrath, Peck, and Barger (2017) provide a typology of textual paralanguage

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distinguishing tactile kinesics, visual kinesics, and artifacts providing examples for emojis for

each. Also, Ge and Greztel (2018) identify emojis as rhetorical devices used in marketing to

strengthen or modify persuasive appeals and developed a taxonomy of the verbal moves utilized

by influencers employing emojis in online communication. While this extant research provides

important implications for the general understanding of how emojis effect consumer evaluation,

there is a lack of research that provokes our understanding of the nuances of emoji meaning and

how this meaning evolves over time.

Figure 1 Consumer Tweet on Emojis to Indicate Laughter

While these works are indeed useful to marketers—particularly by underscoring the complexities of emojis—we do not yet fully understand the development of emoji meaning within the context of social media and the linguistic functions of emojis. Particularly, these works limit our understanding of meaning as it is normalized and reflected in society at some point in time. There is a need to examine beyond this normalized meaning to understand how consumers respond to these normalized meanings (Grace 2021). Particularly, social interactionism theory posits that interactions inform meaning and allow for modification of meaning as people go through an interpretive process (Blumer 1986). That is, meaning evolves and changes as consumers communicate with one another and actually use language. Marketers essentially set up and potentialize initial meaning, and the efforts of consumers can be in line with or against that initial meaning, actualizing it in the marketplace (Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, and Brannen 2004). There is a need to examine not just the meaning given to something but also how interactions inform and allow for the renegotiation of meaning. Thus, while understanding normalized meaning of emojis is beneficial to marketers, it is important to also consider actualized meaning as consumer actually use emojis in their communication with others, as this meaning will change over time.

It is particularly important to evaluate emoji meaning within the context of social media. Particularly, extant research has shown that social media can be empowering to consumers (Kozinets, Ferreira, and Chimenti 2021). These empowering capabilities can occur in ways that are not possible in traditional forms of communication (Carter and Fuller 2016) where meaning was actualized primarily through face-to-face interactions among consumers. Via social media, consumers are highly networked with others and maintain an active presence within these networks (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, and Bloching 2013), and thus the meaning of emojis is

likely to be dynamic in nature as the meaning will change as more people use them. Further, Carter and Fuller (2015) argue that there is a need to evaluate symbolic interactions in the context of emergent technology such as social media given the changing nature of interactions. Additionally, I argue that emoji meaning is perpetually evolving as the meaning of emojis becomes complicated as consumers are less tied to meaning and instead focus on utilizing emojis in ways that are valuable for a particular moment in time. I argue that this is a symptom of liquid consumption in which consumers derive value from an object's instrumental use value (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) which is rooted in the liquid modernity argument that the only permanence in meaning is change (Bauman 2012). This essay provides a look at the evolution of emoji by examining the evolution of language and situating emoji meaning within the complexities of dynamic communication that occurs via social media and liquid consumption.

This essay provides a deep dive into the development of emoji meaning through social media interactions and its relevance to marketing. First, I discuss the emergence of emojis and briefly touch on the existing marketing research on emojis. Then, I focus on language development and evolution, with a focus on symbolic interactionism and the changing emoji meaning that occurs via communicative efforts of consumers. I emphasize the parallels and deviations from language evolution in the past and argue for a need to consider symbolic interactions within the current state of society. Next, I draw on liquid consumption, which in turn is rooted in liquid modernity, to discuss emoji meaning appropriation in the dynamic social media environment. Particularly, I emphasize the importance placed on the evolving meaning of emojis that emerges from the lived experiences of consumers in the liquid modern marketplace.

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Emergence of Emojis

Emoticons, the ancestors to emojis, were first used in digital media in the 1980s when a Carnegie Mellon University professor wanted to distinguish jokes from serious messages (Kralj Novak, Smailović, Sluban, and Mozetič 2015). An emoticon, e.g., :-), essentially served as nonverbal cue that assisted understanding of computer-mediated communication (Lo 2008) as the limitations of text alone became prevalent. On the other hand, emojis are pictographic emoticons, e.g., 😊, that were developed in the late 1990s in Japan and became used by the global community in 2010 when Apple supported their use on the iPhone (Kralj Novak et al. 2015) and the U.S. based Unicode Consortium standardized those emojis that would be included on a keyboard. Evans (2017) claims that we might consider emojis to be a "quasi-universal form of communication" (p. 31). This becomes particularly important as it allows emojis to be used beyond language barriers. For instance, Jaeger, Vidal, and Ares (2021) find that US and Chinese consumers tend to attach similar meanings for emojis that display valence emotions.

The emergence of and widespread use of emojis has captured the attention of marketers, though our understanding of emojis remains quite limited regarding how emojis are utilized in terms of their normalized meaning. For instance, Ge and Gretzel (2018) provide a taxonomy of how influencers on social media use emojis as amplifiers, substitutes, or modifiers to text to persuade their audience. Additionally, extant marketing research also presents a typology of the different types of textual paralanguage (including emojis) that can be used in textual communication (Luangrath et al., 2017). Luangrath et al. (2017) distinguish emojis along three types: interaction with others (e.g., 👫) bodily movement (e.g., 🙋, ✌️, 😆), and stylistic elements (e.g., 🍓). While these findings are indeed useful to an understanding of how emojis

are used and what their meaning is at a particular point in time, there is a lack of research that examines those situations in which meaning is appropriated, that is those situations in which meaning is actively assigned by consumers (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, and Wiertz 2013).

Along these lines, the existing quantitative work on emojis in marketing has largely focused on the normalized meanings of emojis. For instance, emojis are found to have positive downstream effects when they are in a hedonic context (Das, Wiener, and Kareklas 2019), communal-oriented service situation (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019; Smith and Rose 2020), and when they are able to convey playfulness (McShane, Pancer, Poole, and Deng 2021). While this is indeed useful for nderstanding how emojis are being used, it is important to consider those instances in which deviations from the norm and the meaning of emojis evolve. For instance, while the primary focus of work by Lohmann, Pyka, and Zanger (2017) was the effect that positively and negatively valenced emojis has on receiver emotions, they find that the presence of a happy emoji leads to a slight increase in reported distress and a decrease in reported joy. This finding is counter to what would be expected as the happy emoji should in theory heighten reported joy and decrease distress.

This counterintuitive finding may be an indication of a change in meaning that is counter to expectations as consumers begin to utilize emojis in ways that deviate from the norms that have been established from the initially conceptualized meaning. Extant research has found that consumers appropriate emojis beyond that of the intents documented by the Unicode Consortium. For instance, Kelly and Watts (2015) find that beyond emotion, emojis can be used to create a shared uniqueness with others where an emoji is only interpretable within specific

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relationships. In addition to the appropriation of emojis based upon the relational context of communication, emojis can be inconsistent in meaning depending upon the cultural and subcultural norms of a group (Bich-Carrière 2019). As such it is important to consider how people of different cultures or languages spoken interpret an emoji (Wiseman and Gould 2018). These claims of differing meaning, coupled with the example presented in the initial paragraphs of this paper where the crying emoji and dead emoji have taken on meaning of laughter, suggest that there is a need to evaluate the deviations from original intent to fully capture what emojis mean in our society today. Before delving deeper into this phenomenon, I want to take a step back and look at the effects that symbolic interactions have on the creation of meaning and how meaning has developed and evolved in the past. Doing so will help to set the stage for the identification of the characteristics of the dynamic environment we are living in to explain those instances of deviations from the norm that allow for the dynamic evolution of emoji meaning.

Meaning Development Through Symbolic Interactions

Symbolic Interactionism

The use of language and symbols in communication among consumers for the creation of meaning is central to *symbolic interactionism*, a sociological theory that examines the process through which interactions define society (Carter and Fuller 2016). Mead (2015) claims that it is important that we look from the outside in, that is we look at society and the groups of people and then analyze the individual behavior of those that compose said group. This is because the symbols (made possible through gestures) that an individual uses in their communication have an impact on the response that the recipient will have (Mead 2015). Individuals consider in their

communication with others the impact that what they say and how they say (nonverbal cues) will

have on their response. They essentially take on the role of the other that they are communicating

with in order to anticipate how they will react, and this informs how the sender will

communicate (Blumer 1986). Take for instance a sarcastic remark where the intention is to wink

to indicate sarcasm. If it is anticipated that the sender will not understand that the wink is

intended to indicate sarcasm, the sender might refrain from communicating in that manner. The

essential idea is that there is a need to consider how others will act and whether meaning is

shared, and thus if understanding is even possible. Puddephatt (2017) argues that "language is

learned from the social collective within which the individual develops and evolves" (p. 102).

Thus, it important that we examine the role of interactions in the shaping of what meaning is and

how meaning can evolve change via these interactions.

   Symbolic interactionism relies on three premises: (1) humans act towards things based on

the meanings that things have for them, (2) meaning of these things comes from the interactions

with others, and (3) these meanings go through an interpretive process where people make sense

of and modify the meaning of a thing encountered (Blumer 1986). The latter is of particular

importance as it includes the redefinition process by which an individual utilizes their

interactions with others to either maintain the meaning or modify it to fit with the information

provided by the interaction. More specifically, within the context of consumer culture, it is

important that marketers are aware of this reiterative process by which consumers take the

information that is given to them, make sense of the meaning that others prescribe with their own

definition of the meaning, and how meanings "change and stay the same over time" (Grace 2021,

p. 75).

From a semiotic point of view, there is a distinction between the pre-existing rules of a language and the emergence of meaning beyond the original intentions as the language is actually used (Mick 1986). While marketers actualize the existing rules of meaning, these meanings become reinforced or altered as consumers actualize the meaning through their everyday efforts and use (Mick et al., 2004). Thus, the evolution of language and the meaning of words and objects occurs organically as it is used by consumers. In particular, intra- and interpersonal discourse helps to negotiate and construct meaning (Mick 1986), and this process recursively occurs as rules are made, broken, and reestablished. To further examine the nature of the meaning renegotiation that occurs through the interactions between others, I will briefly cover the distinction between icons and symbols.

Icons are images that directly represent the object intended, whereas *symbols* are images whose relation to an object is established (Mick 1986). For instance, an image of an eagle can be seen as iconic in that it directly represents an eagle. However, it can also be seen as symbolic in the sense that the eagle itself can represent other abstract concepts such as freedom, strength, (Larsen 2008) or America, being the national bird of the country. This distinction becomes important as symbols can be up for interpretation. In particular, symbols earn their meaning via socialization (Solomon 1983) and can be manipulated and altered as consumers consume them (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995). Extant research finds instances of consumers utilizing products in ways in which the intended meaning signal is antithetical to the conventional meaning (Warren and Mohr 2019) to the extent that consumers can shape brand meaning (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, and Wiertz 2013). Thus, it is important that we look not just at how and why meanings are normalized but also at those instances in which consumers deviate from the norms and transform meanings in the marketplace (Grace 2021). This type of transformed meaning is

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not anything new as a similar process occurred with the evolution of the earliest writing system documented, over 5000 years ago, cuneiform.

Around 3,400 BCE, the Sumerians—the earliest urban civilization documented— invented the writing system, cuneiform (Evans 2017). In its initial form, cuneiform was a system of signs that represented limited activity and information and which was not intended to fully represent spoken language; rather, it was developed to overcome the limitations of spoken language alone, such as the inability to keep record of taxes, property, debts, etc. (Harari 2015). Over time, as different needs arose, came the need to expand the scope of the communication system beyond the limitations of purely pictographic writing (Scott and Vargas 2007). Thus, the communicative efforts renegotiated the meaning that was initially set forth. Cuneiform was initially iconic (Evans 2017); however, as different needs arose over time, the need to expand the scope of the communication system beyond the limitations of purely pictographic writing arose (Scott and Vargas 2007). Thus, due to limitations of the iconic capabilities, cuneiform eventually became symbolic (Evans 2017).

As shown in Figure 2, popular discourse on social media has draws connections between ancient pictographic languages and emojis. Additionally, Alshenqeeti (2016) claims that "'emoji language' is not a new language, but rather a new form of an old method of communication" (p. 64). However, what is new is that communication that was traditionally conducted face-to-face has now largely transitioned to virtual communication. Thus, prior to examining the impact that symbolic interactions have on emoji meaning, I turn next to a brief discussion on technology-mediated interactions as they are largely the context in which these symbolic interactions are formed.

Figure 2 Parallels Between Ancient Pictographic Languages and Emojis

Technology-Mediated Interactions

The partial replacement of traditional face-to-face interactions by virtual communication (e.g., social media) has been propagated by advances in virtual communication technology (Carter and Fuller 2016). Hence, the need to evaluate interactions becomes particularly important in the digital age, given the continuity of offerings maintained through the interactions among marketplace actors (Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018). While technology has enabled symbolic consumption in the past, consumers usually had no capability in terms of response or influence on the producer (Thompson 1995). For instance, a television can convey forms of meaning from a producer to a consumer; however, the individual is a passive recipient of this meaning with no capability to interact with the producer. In this context, individuals produce symbolic content for others—who generally do not have the ability to respond to or influence the producer—to

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consume in a time and space that is different from that in which it was produced (Thompson 1995).

This inability to respond to or have an influence on the producer is an issue identified by Fırat and Venkatesh (1995) with the modern consumer being described as a "couch potato" passively watching TV. Interactions have since evolved and consumers have the capability to have two-way communication with the producers of content. Take for instance an ad presented on social media. In the past, the modern consumer would only have been able to passively consume the ad by viewing it on the television. However, on social media, it is possible for the consumer to communicate with the producer (social media manager) and other consumers which demonstrates transition to two-way communication and the complicated interactions that have arisen with an increasingly active and highly networked consumer in the social media space (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, and Bloching 2013). Changes that have been brought about by advances in communication technology have enabled these types of communication to occur and hence warrant an updated understanding of the interactions taking place (Yadav and Pavlou 2020).

In addition to the value created through the ability that people have to actively communicate with others via technology, there is also a need to consider the geographic reach that people have via this communication. Particularly, in today's context, consumers are no longer limited to interactions within specific regions or countries, but can interact with others from around the world. Emojis are of particular interest for this development because they are not limited by language constraints. For example, linguists argue that emojis are a global language that transcends language barriers (Evans 2017). Thus, the ability that consumers have to actually communicate and be understood by others who may not speak the same language

complicates the way meaning is developed. Thus, interactions in technology-mediated

communication are higher in number and include people of various backgrounds, further

increasing the complexity of the effects that symbolic interactions have on the meaning of

emojis. Next, I turn to an examination of emoji meaning through the lens of symbolic

interactionism with a particular consideration of technology-meditated communication.

Symbolic Interactions form Emoji Meaning

Emojis are either icons or symbols (Evans 2017), as emojis can be seen to be direct

representations of an object or have a relationship to an object that is established, respectively.

For instance, a peach emoji (🍑) is a direct representation of a peach—icon—however, it can

also be used as a symbol of buttocks or impeachment (Schwedel 2019). However, there are

claims by Scott (1994a) that images are never direct representations of reality; rather, they are

inherently symbolic, contextually situated, and abstract. Thus, one may argue that this

observation may also be true for emojis as the Unicode consortium creates cartoonized images

that symbolize objects in the world. Regardless of whether or not the argument by Scott (1994a)

is accepted, there is no doubt that emojis frequently have taken on meaning beyond that of the

object that they were initially designed to represent. This is particularly important as the

symbolic function of images allow them to be manipulated, appropriated (Fırat and Venkatesh

1995), and used for rhetorical purposes (Scott 1994a; Ge and Gretzel 2018). If emojis were

solely iconic, it would be impossible for meaning to be created beyond that of the object that

they seek to directly represent. Thus, it is important to examine emojis from a symbolic

interactionist perspective as the interactions that individuals have with others using emojis will

inform their meaning.

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As people use images, their meaning becomes more complex as they are used in ways that were initially unintended. While the Unicode Consortium decides what emojis will be available on keyboards, they cannot prescribe meaning, and hence the interpretation that occurs among users opens up the possibility for variation (Evans 2017). Blumer (1986) argues that "meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward a person with regard to the thing" (p. 4). As people utilize emojis in their conversations with others, they are either reinforcing the meaning that has been established by the company or from past interactions with others, or they are creating new meaning in their communicative efforts. Take for instance the peach emoji discussed earlier in the section. The initial meaning set by the Unicode consortium of the peach was as an icon for the fruit. Over time, through interactions, this emoji became symbolic of human buttocks. Even then, through new interactions, the emoji became a symbol of impeachment (Schwedel 2019), as individuals began discussing impeachment due to the negative discourse surrounding then President Donald Trump. We can expect this and other emojis to evolve as consumers continue to interact with one another and utilize emojis in ways that are suited towards their needs.

Emoji meaning is largely informed by the symbolic interactions that take place in consumer's communicative efforts. These efforts can result in broader general symbolic meaning. Consumers actualize meaning as their actual use of emojis either reinforces or modifies the normalized meaning that conforms with existing rules (Mick et al. 2004). Alsenqeeti (2016) finds that emoji meaning evolves over time through their use by social groups in ways that are at odds with what is mainstream. Thus, similar to what has happened historically with language, we are seeing a dynamic and evolving language of emoji. Blumer (1986) claims that "interpretations should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but a formative

process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (p. 5). As such, it is particularly important that research does not merely focus on the normalized meaning of emojis but realizes that emojis can be subject to different interpretations and modifications as meaning is actualized through interactions that take place.

Furthermore, Mead (2015) argues for the importance of gestures in communication for the generation of meaning. For instance, the nonverbal cues such as the movement of our eyes or the way people conduct themselves can lead to a response from others (Mead 2015). Thus, our symbolic interactions are not just informed by what is said but also via the nonverbal cues that can inform the meaning of what is said. Luangrath et al. (2017) argue that we might assume textual cues and paralanguage (including emojis) have as a strong a role in communication via text as nonverbal cues do in face-to-face interactions. This claim, coupled with the importance of gestures and nonverbal communication in symbolic interactionism, warrants a contextualized discussion on the use of emojis and the evolution of meaning. That is, there is a need for research to not just consider the meaning as it was but also what it is at the current point in time and what it may become as a result of the symbolic interactions in the marketplace.

Take for instance the use emojis for the display of irony. Weissman and Tanner (2018) find that a winking face emoji (😉) is processed in a similar way to that of irony when it is indicated via textual communication that is composed solely of words. That is, the emoji itself can be seen as a marker of irony without explicitly stating irony through text. While this finding is indeed of value to show that emojis can function as a nonverbal cue in our technology-mediated interactions, there is a need to consider other instances in which irony is being portrayed. This nonverbal cue that occurs in in textual communication is largely in line with that

of communication that occurs face-to-face. It is important that researchers do not remain situated in the past forms of nonverbal communication and instead are open to the nature of new meanings of emojis that may emerge as a result of the symbolic interactions that occur. For instance, the sparkles emoji (✨) has recently seen an evolution in meaning through which it is being used on both sides of a portion of text to indicate irony, sarcasm, or humor (Broni 2021). Hence, research that examines the evolution of emoji meaning and traces the interactions back to determine how these changes and appropriations in meaning emerged may provide valuable insights into our understanding of how symbolic interactions via technology-mediated communication inform emoji meaning.

In addition, Yadav and Pavlou (2020) call for a need to examine technology-mediated interactions given the changes that they bring about the way that we communicate. Particularly, on social media consumers are now highly active with large networks of people (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2013). This is at odds with traditional affordances of communication, considering that consumers could only interact with the group of people that they knew in the physical world. As mentioned in the preceding section, emojis are particularly suited towards an examination of interactions beyond that of geographic constraints given that it transcends language barriers (Evans 2017). As more and more people interact with one another across languages and geographic barriers, we can expect the meaning of emojis to evolve via the symbolic interactions with one another. This may result in a shared actualized meaning among and across cultures. Jaeger et al. (2018) provides initial support for this observation by stating that meaning of basic emotions displayed by emojis are similarly evaluated by US and Chinese consumers.

Despite these similarities and the ease with which consumers may be able to communicate across geographic and language barriers, different cultures may perceive emojis to mean different things. For instance, the folded hands emojis (🙏) has religious connotations in Western culture, though in Japan this gesture signifies 'please' or 'thank you' (Rawlings 2018). Importantly, these cultural differences appear to be at a deep and stable level rooted in the meanings traditionally established in the culture. Take, e.g., the thumbs up gesture which conveys approval in US culture. In certain countries (e.g., Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Nigeria), this is seen as an obscene insult (Koerner 2003) and thus, the meaning of the thumbs up gesture emoji (👍) in these cultures is similar but different to the meaning conveyed in the United States and other Western cultures (Thompson 2017).

However, because cultural differences are likely to be rooted in the traditional belief system of the country, it may be possible for individuals to anticipate the reaction others might have to emojis that have traditionally established cultural meaning. During communication, there is a need to take the role of the other in order to determine whether the message will be interpreted in the way it was intended (Blumer 1986). Thus, one needs to be aware of the cultural differences in meaning in order to be sure that the wrong meaning is being given off. This can have broader implications on meaning though, as consumers are now able to interact with people across the world and thus, they can be influenced by the meaning that these others attribute to gesture. For instance, recent research has begun to focus on the bicultural consumer that are cognitively flexible in their attempts to make sense of paradoxical meaning (Rodas, John, and Torelli 2021). While the thumb up emoji means one thing in Western cultures and another in Middle East, because these consumers now have the opportunity to interact, there is a larger base

with which they can draw established meaning from. As such, meaning becomes more complex as consumers try to make sense of these contrasting meanings in the interactions that they are having with others.

Up until this point, I have made the case for the need to consider the role of technology and social media in the shaping of our symbolic interactions with others (Carter and Fuller 2015) and the impact that this has on emoji meaning. In addition to the need to understand how interactions inform meaning, there is a need to situate symbolic interactions within the current broader state of the society as well. Namely, we are living in a liquid society by which it is argued that consumers are not tied to a stable meaning of things but use them as they need them at a particular moment in time. I argue that meaning development and evolution of emojis is propagated by heightened dynamics in modern society. To advance this argument, I draw on Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2017) liquid consumption which is rooted in Bauman's (2012) theory of liquid modernity and which rests upon the assumption that change is permanent. I examine emojis through this liquid consumption lens to discuss the perpetual evolution of emoji meaning on social media. This provides important implications for communication and interactions that occur among people and the meaning renegotiation process in current society.

Meaning is Liquid, Change Constant

Liquid Consumption

Liquid consumption challenges the notion that consumers seek to appropriate goods, services, and experiences, and argues instead that consumers seek to quickly circulate a consumption resource (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). This may complicate the way that we

understand meaning as it can be in a state of perpetual change through the numerous interactions that actualize meaning occuring in the expansive networks of communication. This perpetual change in meaning further highlights the unpredictability of the consumer identified by Fırat and Venkatesh (1995). Liquid modernity, the foundation upon which liquid consumption is built upon, suggests that consumers are not tied to a stable meaning:

> "What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) 'post-modernity'', and what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity', is the growing conviction that change is *the only* permanence, and uncertainty *the only* certainty. A hundred years ago 'to be modern' meant to chase 'the final state of perfection' – now it means in infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired." (Bauman 2012, Foreword)

The consumer is essentially engaged in a perpetual state of meaning construction "that includes a multiplicity of moments where things (most importantly as symbols) are consumed, produced, signified, represented, allocated, distributed, and circulated" (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, p. 260). Kozinets (2019) suggests that the consumption of contemporary communication technology allows for variations in meaning structures due to a continual change in what people can do and how they interact with others to essentially create new cultural forms. Further, Rosa (2013) argues that society is in a state of acceleration whereby we are experiencing rapid changes in areas including but not limited to communication technology and cultural knowledge.

Fırat and Venkatesh (1995) argue that there was a shift from use value to exchange value in modernity and then a shift from exchange value to sign value in postmodernity. This sign value places importance on symbols and the meaning of these symbols is shifting and changing in postmodernity (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995). While the emphasis on the changing meaning of

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symbols is a result of the logic set forth in both liquid consumption and postmodernity, where they differ is that the central goal of liquid consumption is use value. Extant literature on liquid consumption claims that consumers place importance on use value (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould (2012) claim that there is tendency towards logic in line with instrumental use value due to the ease with which the value translates cross-culturally in comparison to symbolic and identity value. Particularly Bardhi et al. (2012) find that "symbolic value of possessions often does not translate to other cultural contexts" (p. 520).

However, the use value that liquid consumers seek out can result in symbolic value (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, 2017). Use value is particularly important to liquid consumers (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi et al. 2012) in that consumers instrumentally use things in the moment for specific reasons in which they need them. This use for specific reasons can result in widespread shared meaning and a change in symbolic value. While the primary focus of liquid consumption may not necessarily lie on the creation of symbolic value, it is nonetheless an outcome of the consumptive experiences of liquid consumers. Particularly, though symbolic value is not the end desire of liquid consumers, ultimately it can be an outcome (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, 2017). For instance, Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020a) examine social status and distinction from the lens of liquid consumption and find that the different ways in which consumers are choosing to display their status are changing the symbolic meaning of status itself.

Given the liquid state of society where change is constant (Bauman 2012) and accelerating (Rosa 2013), coupled with the importance of evaluating symbolic interactions in terms of social structures with which meaning changes, I turn next towards an evaluation of emojis on social media grounded in the discussion in liquid consumption. Particularly, I utilize

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liquid modernity as an enabling theory and lens through which a deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be developed (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020b). The line of argument can provide important implications for emojis as their potential cross-language capabilities may be hindered due to the lack of stability in meaning.

Liquidity Enables Perpetual Evolution of Emoji Meaning

While the actualizing of meaning propagated by consumers as they engage in everyday interactions and conform with or deviate from the potentialized meaning developed by marketers (Mick et al., 2004) is not new, what is new is the permanence of change that is present in liquid modernity (Bauman 2012) and the speed at which change occurs (Rosa 2013). Particularly, as mentioned in the preceding section, meaning is consistently evolving as a result in advances in communication technology (Kozinets 2019) and the desire that consumers have to quickly circulate resources (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) for their instrumental use value (Bardhi et al. 2012). As such, it is important to evaluate the meaning renegotiation process that occurs as consumers interact with one another on social media, keeping in mind the argument by Bauman (2012) that there is no desire for a stability in meaning in liquid modernity.

Borrowing again from social interactionism, in order for understanding to take place, there is a need for shared meaning among the two parties interacting with one another (Mead 2015). However, because the only permanence in our liquid society is change (Bauman 2012), and consumers use objects for their instrumental use value (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, 2017), emoji meaning is in a constant state of change. Thus, given the complexities regarding emoji meaning, it may be particularly difficult for consumers to make sense of the meaning that emojis are intended to display. Due to the potential interpretation discrepancies, it may prove to be

particularly difficult to anticipate the reactions of others when using emojis in communication which is a central component of symbolic interactions Blumer (1986). Particularly, as mentioned in an earlier section, the renegotiation process is an important component of symbolic interactions whereby consumers need to make sense of their own perceived meaning and the meaning set forth by another in interactions (Grace 2021). Thus, while highly networked groups of liquid consumers empowered through the use of technology-mediated communication tools are now able to communicate with others that they may not have been able to communicate with easily in the past, the perpetually evolving meaning of emoji may result in difficulties in understanding.

The meaning of emojis is largely a symptom of the instrumental use value that consumers perceive. Particularly, liquid consumers seek to utilize objects instrumentally in the moment as it is needed (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). The issue is that the purpose of this use is not to gain stability in the meaning but rather to use the emoji for a particular reason at a particular point in time. Ultimately this can have a detrimental effect on the ease with which others understand what emojis mean as they continue to evolve in meaning. Bai, Dan, Mu, and Yang (2019) claim that emojis can result in use inefficiency given the ambiguities in their meaning interpretation. Thus, paradoxically consumers employ emojis for instrumental use value at a particular moment, however, this can have detrimental effects on the use efficiency of emojis in general.

In a preceding section, I discussed the role of broad cultural differences in emoji interpretation. Where liquid consumption comes into play is within narrower subcultures and even narrower individual dyads as these are unstable areas in which emoji meaning is liquid and quickly evolving. Miller et al. (2016) claims that straying from the official definitions set forth

by the Unicode Consortium may result in different interpretations. For instance, emojis can be a coded language that mean particular things to subcultures such as sexting and drug dealing (Bich-Carriére 2019). The goal of their use is to have coded meaning that is understood only to that particular subculture. However, this can often have broader implications for the symbolic meaning of the emoji altogether. For instance, while the peach (🍑) and eggplant (🍆) emojis may have only been used for sexual connotations in the sexting subculture, this meaning has largely been attributed to these emojis in general. In addition to this, we might look even narrower to relationships among consumers and the creation of meaning for highly specific purposes.

Kelly and Watts (2015) find that people can appropriate emojis and co-create new meanings for them for the development of a shared uniqueness with those that they communicate with. That is emojis mean specific things when they are shared with specific people. Thus, what happens is individuals use emojis in ways in which they co-create new meaning with the people that they interact with. This meaning is often different depending upon the person that one is interacting with (Kelly and Watts 2015). The context dependency is in line with liquid consumption where the focus is on the distribution of an object as it is needed, and consumers temporarily attach themselves to objects that are valuable to them in the moment (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). With emojis being accessible at such a large scale and the number of interactions multiplying, coupled with the lack of ties to permanent meaning in our liquid society, we can anticipate that emoji meaning will not reach stability in meaning any time soon.

Discussion

In this essay, I discussed the complexities regarding emojis and the perpetual evolution of meaning on social media. I situate the discussion in a symbolic interactionism and liquid consumption perspective. In particular, I argue that emoji meaning is largely informed via the symbolic interactions that occur on social media. Symbolic interactionism posits that humans have this idea of what meaning is, inform meaning based upon their interactions with others, and reiteratively construct meaning based upon how they encounter a symbolic object in their interactions (Blumer 1986). From a marketing perspective, marketers essentially strive to set up the initial meaning and the interactions with which consumers participate in inform and actualize said meaning (Mick et al. 2004). Hence, it is important to examine this aspect for emojis as while the Unicode Consortium sets up the initial definition of an emoji, the meaning of the emoji evolves through interactions.

Additionally, this article makes the argument for the need to consider the implications of the current state that society is in. While consumers are at a unique point in time where they are empowered (Kozinets et al. 2021) and can actively communicate with a large network of people (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2013) via social media, there is a lack of ties to stable meaning (Bauman 2012) and changes are occurring at an unprecedented pace (Rosa 2013). Further, consumers are driven in this liquid society by a desire for instrumental use value (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017 and I argue that emojis represent and reflect the underlying consumer need for communication that remains liquid and flexible. Consumers do not initially consider the symbolic value they portray; however, symbolic value is an ultimate end result (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, 2017). This results in use inefficiencies as the interpretation of emoji meaning may be particularly difficult. While we may be able to communicate with more people than ever, beyond geographic and language

constraints, paradoxically it may become more difficult to communicate via emojis given the constant evolution of meaning. However, these insights lead to important discussion points regarding future research on emojis in marketing underscoring the need to evaluate firm-initiated conversations via emojis.

The collective efforts that result in dynamic and changing emoji meaning has important implications for that of brands who are trying to maintain relevance in our liquid society. The perpetual meaning evolution of emojis complicates the interpretation of and use of emojis especially by brands that may be disconnected from communities on social media. This disconnect may make it difficult for brands to develop meaning that differentiates communication from others as meaning must be collectively developed. For instance, a new sequence of emojis may help the brand to stand out amongst the sea of images and advertisements on social media but, is not easily understood by consumers. Conversely, using a meaning that is collectively created by consumers may be understood but it does not allow the company to stand out and may become quickly outdated.

This tradeoff between the need to stand out and still be understood by consumers coupled with claims that ties to brands are becoming ephemeral and temporary (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017), highlights a major difficulty that brands encounter in this liquid and digital world of consumption and communication. Further, the symbolic meaning of brands is changing, and they are not valued as highly as they used to for signals of status (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020a). Particularly, there is a tendency of consumers to "avoid emotional engagement and identification with the marketplace" (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017, p. 587). What has become important to social capital is flexibility and the ability to draw attention (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020a). Thus, it

becomes particularly important that marketers do not remain stagnant in terms of their use of communicative efforts using emojis on social media and continue to seek ways to draw attention to their message. Future research should explore the nature of firm-initiated communication using emojis. For instance, research might look at a firm's use of emojis in a way that conforms with normalized meaning or timely meaning. Additionally, there is an opportunity for research to explore the co-creation of emoji meaning between firms and consumer symbolic interactions on social media.

CHAPTER III

ESSAY 2—EMOJIS VS TEXT: AN EVALUATION OF CONSUMER PROCESSING

FLUENCY AND PERCEPTIONS OF FUN

💚🏹👑 On December 23, 2020, using these three emojis in absence of any text,

Fortnite announced a collaboration with DC's Green Arrow (see Figure 3). Even though emojis

are frequently used in addition to text (e.g., Das, Wiener, and Kareklas 2019; Li, Chan, and Kim

2019), it has also become common to use emojis in sequence as a short narrative to attract the

attention of consumers on social media platforms (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Despite the growing

use of emojis as a substitute for (as opposed to an enhancement to) text, there is limited research

on this emergent phenomenon. The research that has been done on emojis focuses primarily on

the reinforcement capabilities that emojis provide to written messages. In addition to the focus

on the reinforcement capabilities of emojis, there is also a tendency to focus on the basic

emotional capabilities of emojis (e.g., Smith and Rose 2021). This is despite claims the emojis

can be used to indicate complex emotions and provide argumentative and credibility capabilities

(Ge and Gretzel 2018). Given that emojis have capabilities beyond that of reinforcement and

emotion (Evans 2017), and acknowledging the importance of emojis as a texual paralanguage in

textual communication (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017), there is a need for marketing

research that examines the processing of other, non-reinforcement and non-emotional related

emoji capabilities.

Figure 3 Fortnite x Green Arrow Tweet

Addressing this void in the literature, the current research seeks to answer the following question: How is a message composed of emojis processed by consumers, compared to an equivalent message composed of text? Four studies demonstrate that emoji only messages are harder to process and result in lower brand attitude, compared to an equivalent text only message. I find that this effect holds in four contexts: a law firm (study 1 and study 2), streaming service provider (study 3), medical services provider (study 4) and retail toy company (study 4). Additionally in study 4, I find that emoji only messages result in higher perception of fun which has a positive effect on brand attitude. Study 4 also finds that emoji only communication has a negative direct effect on brand attitude, when compared to text only communication, in a utilitarian condition. There is no difference in brand attitude when consumers are shown emoji or text only communication in the hedonic condition.

My findings make two main contributions. First, this research examines capabilities of emojis beyond that of emotion. Extant research primarily focuses on the emotional capabilities of emojis. For instance, researchers tend to agree that emojis can trigger emotional affect in the message recipient (e.g., Das et al. 2019; Lohmann, Pyka, and Zanger 2017; Smith and Rose

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2021). However, emojis can be used beyond that of emotion (Evans 2017, Ge and Gretzel 2018) such as the creation of a shared uniqueness between sender and recipient (Kelly and Watts 2015) and their ability to convey semantic meaning (Bai, Dan, Mu, and Yang 2019). Additionally, Hajjat and Miller (2017) find that when an employee responds to a customer initiated conversation mimicking the consumer use of emojis, there is an increase in trust, satisfaction, and rapport. Similarly, responsiveness is perceived to be higher when both both sender and respondent utilize emojis (Coyle and Carmichael 2019). As such, it is important that research further explores the non-emotional capabilties of emojis. In the current research, I examine the processing fluency and percepetion of fun experienced when viewing social media messages composed only of emojis.

Second, this is the first research, to the best of my knowledge, that examines the effect that strings of emoijs have relative to their textual translation on brand attitude. The primary focus of extant research has been on the reinforcement capabilies of emojis, that is an emoji added on to the end of the sentence to reinforce the message written in text. However, there are claims that emojis can be utilized to replace words altogether (Casado-Molina, Rojas-de Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo, and Romero-Charneco 2019) and there are claims that this is increasingly occurring on social media in an attempt to stand out (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Despite this growth, there is a lack of research that fully explores what the overall effect of the the use of emoji only communication has on a consumer evaluation of a brand. This research demonstrates that emoji only communication has a negative (positive) effect on brand attitude through processing fluency (perception of fun). These indirect effects are consistent regardless of the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the firms that is posting emoji only communication. However, I find that the direct

effect of emoji only communication on brand attitude is detrimental for utilitarian brands, when compared to text only communication.

<div style="text-align:center">Conceptual Framework</div>

Emojis Beyond Emotion and Reinforcement

      Emojis are graphic symbols used in modern expressive communication (Kralj Novak, Smailović, Sluban, and Mozetič 2015). Emojis can fulfill language functions and have begun to replace slang, which is generally language specific (e.g., LOL translates to laugh out loud in English), thus allowing for near-universal cross-language communication (Evans 2017). For instance, the word "strawberry" can only be understood by those who know the word in English; however, an emoji for strawberry (🍓) is more easily understood across language barriers. Thus, emojis can be an important way to bridge the language gap and allow for near-universal communication. While potential interpretation discrepancies due in part to a lack of grammar conventions suggest that emojis may not entirely replace languages (Evans 2017), there are claims that emojis can serve paralinguistic functions in communication. That is, emojis are in textual communication what nonverbal cues are in face-to-face communication. Particularly, Luangrath et al. (2017) claim that emojis can be utilized for tactile kinesics (communication related to interaction), visual kinesics (movement of the body), and artifacts (stylistic capabilities) in textual communication. Emojis play an important role in textual communication and deeper understanding is required beyond that of the emotional and reinforcement capabilities that tends to be the focus of extant research.

While emerging from emoticons which were generally used for the expression of emotional cues (Lo 2008), emojis serve as a much broader rhetorical tool for emotional, argumentative, and credibility purposes (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Particularly, emojis can impact connections with others (Cramer, de Juan, and Tetreault 2016; Kelly and Watts 2015), convey semantic meaning (Baruch, Feldman, and Sheridan 2021), and be used to assess personality (Marengo, Giannotta, and Settanni 2017). Further, they can be used to engage the reader, adjust the message tone (Cramer et al. 2016), relay factual information, and draw attention to a message (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Additionally, while Riordan's (2017a) focus is on the communication of affect via object emojis, the research also finds that the emojis may be helpful in the maintenance of social relationships. As such, emojis can serve much broader capabilities beyond that of emotion and an examination into these other capabilities is warranted.

However, the existing research on emojis tends to focus primarily on emotional capabilities. For instance, Urumutta Hewage, Liu, Wang, and Mao (2021) find that symmetric face emojis resemble humans and thus heightens their emotional expression strength. Additional research has examined contexts in which emotional expression is apprporpriate, and thus, subsequent appropriateness of emojis (Glikson, Chesnin, and van Kleef 2018; Li et al. 2019). Also, face emojis can have emotional contagion effects, that is emojis can impact the felt emotions in a message recipient (Lohmann et al. 2017; Smith and Rose 2020). Particularly, face emojis elicit affective responses when receivers are highly susceptible to emotional contagion (Lohmann et al. 2017) or when a relationship is communal (Smith and Rose 2020). Riordan (2017a, 2017b) finds that object emojis too can be be used to communicate positive affect. This affective response to emojis can be extended to purchase intentions through heightened positive affect (Das et al. 2019). While these findings are indeed valuable, emojis are more complex than

emoticons and can serve additional purposes, beyond that of emotions, that have not been fully examined in consumer research.

In addition to their capabilities beyond that of emotion, emojis serve deeper paralinguistic functions in textual communication. Particularly, Evans (2017) identifies different types of nonverbal cues utilized in face-to-face communication including but not limited to the reinforcement of what was spoken (e.g., excited facial expression while verbally indicating excitement), substitution of spoken word altogether (e.g., excited facial expression with no verbal statement), and clarification of a mixed message/irony (e.g., excited facial expression with a verbal indication of boredom). Tian, Galery, Dulcinati, Molimpakis, and Sun (2017) claim that emojis may serve similar functions in textual communication to those mentioned for nonverbal communication above. Particularly emojis can replace words (Casado-Molina et al. 2019), modify the meaning of text (e.g., irony, Weissman and Tanner 2018), and repeat a word (Tian et al. 2017). Luangrath et al. (2017) argue that textual paralanguage may be as important in textual communication as nonverbal cues are in face-to-face communication. As such it would make sense that we examine emojis as facilitators of cues similar to that in face-to-face communication.

Despite these other capabilities, there is a lack of research that fully explores these other communicative purposes that emojis may serve. Particularly, there is a lack of research that examines emojis as full substitutes for text. For example, Li et al. (2019) utilize emojis in their study as a reinforcement of a message (e.g., a smile emoji at the end of a statement) or to clarify intent (e.g., a sad emoji to indicate that the proceeding statement indicates disappointment). Similarly, Smith and Rose (2020) include a smiley emoji at the end of or proceeding a text message. Additionally, Das et al. (2019) utilize emojis as stickers on a product description. An

exception to this is McShane's et al. (2021) research that replaces words with emojis; however, the focus is on the interplay between emojis and text. Particularly, there is combination of text and emojis in all stimuli utilized. There is a need to take a step back and isolate the use of emojis to gauge an understanding of the impact that the emojis themselves have on downstream variables when used in strings. Particularly, while firm-initiated emoji only messages may capture the attention of consumers (Ge and Gretzel 2018), it is unclear whether consumers can easily process these messages and how they affect consumers' perceptions of the brand.

Emojis and Processing Fluency

Processing fluency is the ease with which an individual makes sense of new information (Schwarz 2004). Extant research on processing fluency generally finds that high processing fluency has beneficial effects including higher truthfulness, liking, and confidence (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). For example, extant research finds that messages (Lee and Aaker 2004) and images of a products (Chae and Hoegg 2013) that are fluently processed are more favorably evaluated. Additionally, extant research finds that songs that are fluently processed perform better on the music charts (Nunes, Ordanini, and Valesia 2015). Further, when experiencing fluency on a web interface, consumers report higher satisfaction and spend more money on that website (de Bellis, Hildebrand, Ito, Herrmann, and Schmitt 2019). Due to the beneficial effects of processing fluency, it would make sense to evaluate emoji only communication and the ease with which consumers process this type of communication.

There is limited extant research that examines processing fluency of emojis. For instance, congruency of the emoji to the context (Daniel and Camp 2018) and message valence (Boutet,

LeBlanc, Chamberland, and Collin 2021) have an impact on the ease with which consumers understand a message (i.e., processing fluency). Also, Wu, Chen, Wang, and Zhou (2022) find that among emoji novices, the use of emojis that have multiple meanings has a negative effect on review helpfulness due to lower processing fluency. Additionally, extant research has identified the neural level processing of emojis that convey irony (Weissman and Tanner 2018) and affect (Pfeifer, Armstrong, and Lai 2022). These research findings shed light on the differences in processing emojis relative to text; however, there is no research that has looked at the processing of strings of emojis as full substitutes for text. Particularly, across those studies that have examined processing of emojis, the focus is on the addition of a single emoji to textual communication (Boutet et al. 2021; Daniel and Camp 2018; Pfeifer et al. 2022; Weissman and Tanner 2018). Given the growth in use of multiple emojis in a single message by firms, it is important to examine the ease with which consumers are able to make sense of strings of emojis relative to their textual translation.

An emoji on its own may be easy to process; for example, a heart emoji (💚) can easily be interpreted as love. Research conducted by Jaeger et al. (2018) finds that emojis can often be interpreted consistently irrespective of gender, age, and frequency of emoji usage. However, Bai et al. (2019) suggest that emojis create inefficiency due to ambiguity and the need for interpretation. For example, interpretation is subject to cross-platform (Miller et al. 2016) and cross-cultural differences (Bich-Carrière 2019). Further, for strings of emojis, the lack of grammar conventions (Evans 2017), poetic functions (Ge and Gretzel 2018), and numerous ways to combine emojis require interpretation on a contextualized case-by-case basis. Take for example the following string utilized by Fortnite 💚 🏹 👑. For some, this may mean nothing and could be seen as a typo with no meaning. For others, this could mean simply royalty. Still,

for other individuals who are familiar with DC's Green Arrow, the green heart indicates the color green, the bow and arrow indicate the vigilante's iconic weapon, and the crown indicates his last name, Queen. Thus, it is anticipated that as more emojis are added, it becomes more difficult for consumers to interpret meaning.

I argue that as the complexity of a phrase increases (by using more than one emoji) and the need for controlled cognitive functions (due to the novelty of emoji only communication) gains importance, more effort is required to process the information (resulting in processing disfluency). Pogacar, Shrum, and Lowrey (2018) claim that as language becomes more complex and processing moves away from consumer's automatic memory-based cognitive functions towards controlled cognitive functions, the cognitive effort required to make sense of a message is higher. This rationale, coupled with the need for interpretation without grammar conventions (Evans 2017), leads me to anticipate that emoji only communication will result in lower brand attitude as consumers will not be able to process the message fluently.

> H1: Processing fluency mediates the relationship between language type and brand
> attitude. Particularly, emoji (text) only communication results in lower (higher)
> brand attitude through disfluency (fluency).

Emojis are Fun

Oh and Pham (forthcoming) define fun as the temporary liberation from psychological restriction through an activity that is hedonically engaging. The premise is that people experience fun when they are liberated from their restrictions or constraints such as professional obligations (Oh and Pham, forthcoming). Particularly, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argue that fun activities are those events that people engage in that cannot be explained by their functional

utility value. In other words, people look for fun activities for their pleasure and enjoyment. I argue that emojis can trigger this temporary release from psychological restrictions due to their inherent playful and whimsical nature. Particularly, play is considered a "behavior or activity that is carried out with the goal of amusement, enjoyment, and fun" (Van Vleet and Feeney 2015, p. 631) and whimsical products can act as primes for perception of fun (Nenkov and Scott 2014). Emojis are particularly suited to these findings and claims as they can convey a sense of playfulness (Kelly and Watts 2015; McShane, Pancer, Poole, and Deng 2021) and are whimsical in nature (Goldsborough 2016). Thus, I expect that these characteristics of emojis suits them as triggers of a mental representation of fun.

Additionally, Oh and Pham (forthcoming) find that experiencing a sense of novelty can be a precursor to the perception of fun. That is, one is likely to experience fun when it is something that has not been experienced before. Ge and Gretzel (2018) claim that emojis, when used to form mini narratives, can be used as a tool to break through the textual clutter on social media. This is because the emojis are something different and can stand out amidst the sea of text. As such, the sense of novelty that emojis bring can be particularly suited towards attracting attention. If paired with the claim that novelty can increase the experience of fun, one can expect the novel nature of emojis used in strings as a substitute for text can trigger fun as well. While an emoji on its own may not be considered novel, the way they are arranged in sequence can be. Thus, given the playful and whimsical qualities of emojis and the claims that strings of emojis are novel way to tell a story on social media I expect that emojis will trigger perception of fun.

H2: Perception of fun mediates the relationship between language type and brand

attitude. Particularly, emoji (text) only communication results in higher (lower)

brand attitude through higher (lower) perception of fun.

Emoji Effectiveness in Hedonic vs. Utilitarian Brands

Context has been shown in previous research to be particularly important in the

effectiveness of emoji use in communication. The use of emojis is perceived to be inappropriate

in formal contexts (Glikson et al. 2018; Riordan and Glikson 2020) and exchange service

encounters with consumers (Li et al. 2019). Particularly, the use of emojis in formal workplace

emails reduces perceptions of competence (Glikson et al. 2018). Similarly, Li et al. (2019) finds

that in a service encounter where exchange norms are salient, the use of emojis reduces the

perceptions of a service employee's competence and negatively impacts service satisfaction.

However, in a communal context, the use of emojis can result in affective responses (Smith and

Rose 2020) and have a positive effect on service satisfaction due to an increase in perceived

warmth (Li et al. 2019). Additionally, Jia, Ouyang, and Guo (2021) find that pictorial

information can have a negative effect on a consumers' product evaluations when the product is

psychologically distal. In other words, it is particularly important to consider the context in

which emojis are used as they can either have a detrimental or beneficial effect on downstream

variables.

While the findings of extant research of the importance informal and communal

(exchange) contexts is indeed valuable, of particular interest to the present research is the

hedonic or utilitarian nature of the brand that is posting. Hedonic consumption is conceptualized

as behavior related to "multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with

products" (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, p. 92) or more simply as an experience that evokes

pleasure (Alba and Williams 2013). Utilitarian consumption is conceptualized as experiences

that are "functional, sensible, and useful" (Botti and McGill 2011, p. 1067). In contrast to one

another, utilitarian consumption is more necessary in nature while hedonic consumption tends to

be more discretionary (Okada 2005). More specifically, consumers tend to engage in utilitarian

consumption for objects that their necessities (e.g., water) and engage in hedonic consumptions

for objects beyond these necessities (e.g., video game).

Extant research has shown the importance a hedonic or utilitarian context and the

effectiveness of language use. For instance, Moore (2012) finds that people are less (more) likely

to retell a story about a hedonic (utilitarian) experience when explaining language is used in the

initial story. Additionally, Kronrood and Danziger (2013) claim that conversational norms

dictate which forms of communication are effective and find that hedonic experiences are more

conducive the use of figurative, when compared to utilitarian experiences. Similarly, messages

about hedonic products (or utilitarian products that are presented hedonically) that use assertive

language are particularly effective (Kronrood, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012). In line with the

present research, Das et al. (2019) find that hedonic consumption norms are more favorable to

the use of emojis when compared to utilitarian consumption norms.

Thus, utilitarian consumption is more suited towards language that indicates literal

meaning using simpler language (Kronrood et al. 2012; Kronrood and Danziger 2013) or

language that explains the literal meaning of a message (Moore 2012). On the other hand,

hedonic consumption is more open towards deviations from language that indicates literal

meaning. Along similar lines, textual language is more literal (that is, it says what it means)

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relative to the strings of emojis which require interpretation. Thus, the use of text only communication will likely be more suited to utilitarian consumption when compared to emoji only communication and it is expected that emoji only communication will be more suited to hedonic consumption when compared to text only communication. In support of this line of argument, Das et al. (2019) find that emojis heighten positive affect and subsequent purchase intention of hedonic products, but not utilitarian products. As such, it expected that the use of emoji only communication will be detrimental to brand attitude in the utilitarian condition. However, it is expected that the fit of the conversational norms in the hedonic context with emojis will result in a higher brand attitude when emoji only communication is used. More specifically, it is expected that a hedonic consumption context will have a beneficial effect on consumer's brand attitude towards messaging composed of emojis only.

> H3: (a) In the utilitarian condition, brand attitude is lower for consumers in the emoji
> condition, compared to the text condition. (b) In the hedonic condition, brand
> attitude is higher for consumers in the emoji condition, compared to the text
> condition.

Following the line of argument from above, emojis fit the conversational norms in the hedonic context. Fit is of particular importance to the fluent processing of messaging. That is, consumers tend to fluently process information when a message "feels right" and fits their expectations. For instance, Lee and Aaker (2004) find that the fit of regulatory focus with the message framing has a positive effect on processing fluency. Similarly, Chae and Hoegg (20130 find that the fit of time spatial representation with the product image positioning makes it easier for consumers to process the message. Thus, given that emojis fit with the hedonic context, it is

expected that a hedonic context will heighten the processing fluency of emoji only communication.

> H4: In the hedonic condition, emoji only communication results in higher processing fluency and subsequently higher brand attitude, when compared to the utilitarian condition.

Given the focus on fun and its defining characteristic of hedonic engagement (Oh and Pham, forthcoming) it is also expected that the context will moderate the relationship between emojis and perception of fun. That is, emojis appear to fit well with the hedonic context, when compared to the utilitarian context. As mentioned earlier, hedonic consumption tends to be associated with pleasurable experiences (Alba and Williams 2013) while utilitarian consumption tends to be associated with functional requirements (Botti and McGill 2011). As such it is expected that emoji only communication in conjunction with a hedonic context will heighten perceptions of fun.

> H5: In the hedonic condition, emoji only communication results in higher perception of fun when compared to the utilitarian condition.

Organization of Studies

Study 1 tests for mediation of fluency within the context of a law firm. The purpose of study 2 and 3 is to eliminate alternative explanations for the relationship. Study 2 casts doubt on an alternative explanation that the construal level of an individual influences the ability of consumers to process strings of emojis relative to their textual translation. Particularly, one may argue that consumers in an abstract mindset may be better able to process strings of emojis compared to consumers in a concrete mindset, given the abstract nature of the strings of emojis.

Study 3 tests the relationship in a different context, streaming service, demonstrating that the effect of strings of emojis on processing disfluency and ultimately brand attitude is not due to the context selected for study 1 and study 2. One may argue that the inability of consumers to process strings of emoji may be due to a lack of fit between the inherent playfulness of emojis (Ge and Gretzel 2018; McShane et al. 2021) and the serious nature of the law firm. I demonstrate that the difficulty that consumers have processing strings of emojis relative to text is not due to a lack of fit between the playfulness of emojis and the serious nature of the context.

In study 4, processing fluency and perception of fun are explored as parallel mediators of the relationship between language type and brand attitude in two contexts: medical services (utilitarian) and retail toys (hedonic). The negative effect of emojis on fluency is maintained and emojis have a positive effect on brand attitude through the perception of fun. Study 4 also tests context (hedonic vs. utilitarian) as a moderator for the main effect of language type on brand attitude. Particularly, I find that in the utilitarian context (medical services), emojis result in lower brand attitude when compared to text communication. There is no significant difference in the effect of language type on brand attitude in the hedonic context (retail toy company). See Figure 4 for the conceptual model.
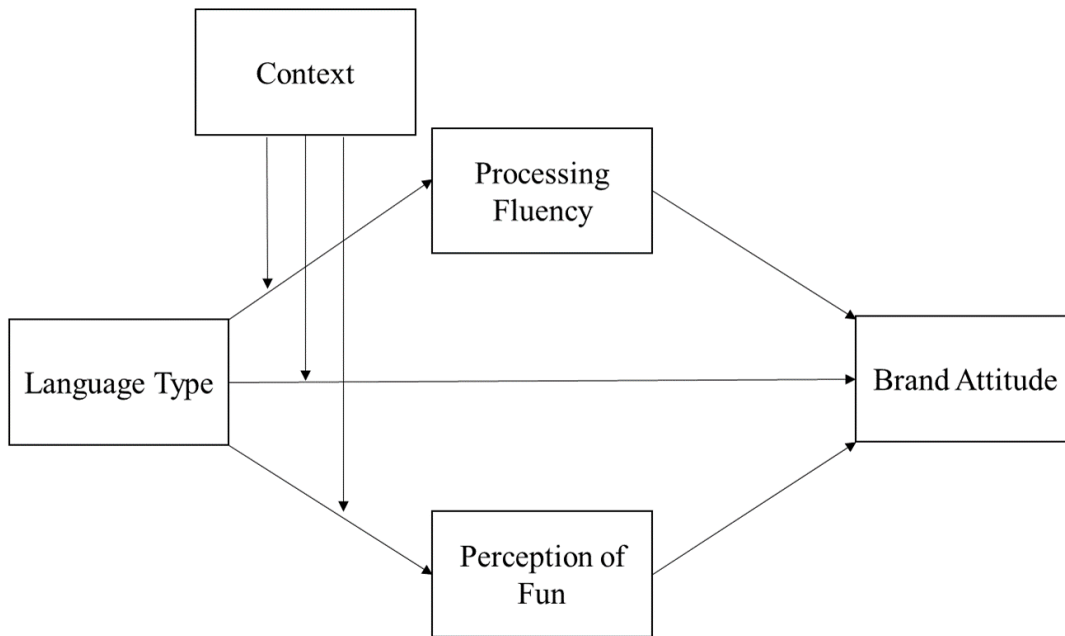
Figure 4 Essay 2 Conceptual Model

Study 1

Study 1 examines the effects of marketing communication composed of emojis only, compared to text only, on brand attitude through processing fluency. In particular, the purpose of this study is to examine the ease with which consumers understand a message composed entirely of emojis, when compared to its textual translation, and the overall effect that this has on brand attitude.

Figure 5 Essay 2 Studies 1 and 2 Stimuli

Method

Study 1 employed a one-factor (language type: emojis vs. text) between-subjects design. A sample of 156 undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 22.56$; 96 females) from a university in Southwestern United States participated in this study for course credit. Respondents were shown an image of a law office's tweet, composed either fully in text or emojis, that informed them of their ability to earn compensation if they were in a car accident (See Figure 5). Next, participants indicated their attitude toward the law firm on a three-item, seven-point bipolar scale (dislike it/like it, not appealing/appealing, unfavorable/favorable; $\alpha = 0.937$). The respondents were then asked to indicate processing fluency on a six-item, seven-point bipolar scale (difficult to understand/easy to understand, difficult to process/easy to process, not at all organized/well organized, not at all structured/well structured, illogical/logical, unclear/clear, adapted from Chae and Hoegg 2013; $\alpha = 0.949$). See Table 1 for loadings and Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1 Essay 2 Measures, Factor Loadings, and Alphas (Studies 1-3)

Construct and Items	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	Loading	Alpha	Loading	Alpha	Loading	Alpha
Brand Attitude		0.937		0.954		0.939
Dislike it/Like it	0.932		0.957		0.937	
Not appealing/Appealing	0.949		0.948		0.947	
Unfavorable/Favorable	0.948		0.967		0.954	
Processing Fluency (Chae and Hoegg 2013)		0.949		0.941		0.946
Difficult to understand/Easy to understand	0.863		0.855		0.883	
Difficult to process/Easy to process	0.881		0.867		0.873	
Not at all organized/Well organized	0.878		0.911		0.854	
Not at all structured/Well structured	0.888		0.875		0.904	
Illogical/Logical	0.923		0.861		0.888	
Unclear/Clear	0.935		0.908		0.930	

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of language type on brand attitude ($F (1, 156) = 28.864$, $p < .001$) and on processing fluency ($F (1, 156) = 43.170$, $p<.001$). Brand attitude was rated higher by participants in the text-only condition ($M_{Text} = 4.565$; $SD_{Text} = 1.394$) compared to participants in the emoji-only condition ($M_{Emoji} = 3.219$; $SD_{Emoji} = 1.752$). Similarly, processing fluency was rated higher by participants in the text-only condition ($M_{Text} = 6.031$; $SD_{Text} = 1.087$) compared to participants in the emoji-only condition ($M_{Emoji} = 4.541$; $SD_{Emoji} = 1.731$).

To formally test for mediation, a bootstrap test (PROCESS model 4; Hayes 2018) was run with language type as the independent variable, brand attitude as the dependent variable, and processing fluency as the mediator. The analysis revealed that fluency mediated the relationship between language type and brand attitude ($b = -0.488$, $SE = 0.146$, 95% $CI = [-0.802, -0.220]$) providing support for H1. In particular, emojis (compared to text) had a negative influence on

processing fluency (b = -1.490, t (156) = -6.570, p < .001). Emojis (compared to text) had a negative influence on processing fluency (b = -1.490, t (156) = -6.570, p < .001). Processing fluency had a positive effect on brand attitude (b= 0.327, t (155) = 3.865, p < .001). The indirect effect of language type on brand attitude through fluency was negative (b = -.488, SE = 0.147, 95% CI [-0.799, -0.226]). Additionally, the direct effect of language type on brand attitude was negative (b = -0.857, t (155) = -3.163, p < .01) and the total effect of language type on brand attitude was negative (b = -1.346, t (156) = -5.373, p < .001). See Table 2 for a summary of results.

Table 2 Essay 2 Summary of Results (Studies 1-3)

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
R2	0.217	0.106	0.113
Direct effect of language type on processing fluency	-1.490*** (0.227)	-0.945** (0.291)	-1.046** (0.312)
Direct effect of processing fluency on brand attitude	0.327*** (0.847)	0.515*** (0.097)	0.518*** (0.111)
Direct effect of language type on brand attitude	-0.858** (.271)	-0.925** (0.283)	0.988** (0.346)
Total effect	-1.346*** (0.250)	-1.412*** (0.306)	0.447 (0.362)
Mediating effect (language type x processing fluency)	-0.488 (0.148)	-0.487 (0.184)	-0.542 (0.199)
95% CI	-0.804 to -0.224	-0.884 to -0.166	-0.978 to -0.195
Type of Mediation	Partial Mediation	Partial Mediation	Partial Mediation

*Note: Effects are estimated in PROCESS with a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples SE is in parentheses. Study 1: n = 164, Study 2a: n = 92, Study 2b: n = 93. Indirect effects in PROCESS are significant when the confidence intervals do not include zero. *p<.05, **p<.01, **p<.001.*

Study 1 provides support for theorization that language type (emojis vs. text) impacts processing fluency and brand attitude. Particularly, consumers have difficulty understanding communication that is composed of emojis only and this disfluency results in a lower brand attitude, when compared to a text only translation.

Study 2

The purpose of study 2 is to rule out the alternative explanation that construal level influences the processing of strings of emojis vs. their textual counterpart. Particularly, given the abstract nature of emojis, one may argue that individuals in an abstract mindset may more easily understand communication composed of emojis only. This study also examines the alternative explanation that an individual's tendency towards an abstract or concrete mindset and finds that it does not influence processing fluency of emoji only communication.

Method

This study had a one-factor (language type: emojis vs. text) between-subjects design. A sample of 92 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 21.96; 55 females) from a university in Southwestern United States participated in study 2 for partial course credit. Study 2 utilized the same stimuli as study 1. Following the stimuli, respondents were asked to indicate brand attitude (α = 0.954) and processing fluency (α = 0.941) on the same scales used in study 1. Next, respondents were asked to respond to a behavioral identification form (Vallacher and Wegner 1989). Particularly, respondents were given 25 behaviors (e.g., reading) and asked to choose a description that best describes the behavior that is higher (e.g., gaining knowledge) or lower

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(e.g., following lines of print) in construal level ($\alpha = 0.799$). See Table 3 for the behavioral

listings utilized to measure concrete and abstract construal levels.

Table 3 Measures of Abstract and Concrete Construal

Behavioral Identification Form (Valacher and Wegner 1989; $\alpha = 0.799$)
Making a list: Getting organized*/Writing things down
Reading: Following lines of print/Gaining knowledge*
Joining the army: Helping the Nation's defense*/Signing up
Washing clothes: Removing odors from clothes*/Putting clothes in the machine
Picking an apple: Getting something to eat*/Pulling an apple off the branch
Chopping down a tree: Wielding an axe/Getting firewood*
Measuring a room for carpeting: Getting ready to remodel*/Using a yardstick
Cleaning the house: Showing one's cleanliness*/Vacuuming the floor
Painting a room: Applying brush strokes/Making the room look fresh*
Paying the rent: Maintaining a place to live*/Writing a check
Caring for houseplants: Watering plants/Making the room look nice*
Locking a door: Putting a key in the lock/ Securing the house*
Voting: Influencing the election*/Marking a ballot
Climbing a tree: Getting a good view*/Holding on to branches
Filling out a personality test: Answering questions/Revealing what you're like*
Toothbrushing: Preventing tooth decay*/Moving a brush around in one's mouth
Taking a test: Answering questions/Showing one's knowledge*
Greeting someone: Saying hello/Showing friendliness*
Resisting temptation: Saying "no"/Showing moral courage*
Eating: Getting nutrition*/Chewing and swallowing
Growing a garden: Planting sees/Getting fresh vegetables*
Traveling by car: Following GPS/Seeing countryside*
Having a cavity filled: Protecting your teeth*/Going to the dentist
Talking to a child: Teaching a child something*/Using simple words
Pushing a doorbell: Moving a finger/Seeing if someone's home*

*Note: *indicates abstract (higher-level) construal*

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA was run with language type predicting processing fluency and brand

attitude. Processing fluency was higher in the text condition ($M_{text} = 5.806$, $SD_{text} = 1.152$) when

compared to the emoji condition (M_{emoji} = 4.861, SD_{emoji} = 1.61 F (1, 89) = 10.523, p < .01).

Additionally, brand attitude was higher in the text condition M_{text} = 5.125, SD_{text} = 1.452) when

compared to the emoji condition (M_{emoji} = 3.788, SD_{emoji} = 1.525; F (1, 90) = 18.558, p < .001).

A formal test for mediation using Hayes (2018) PROCESS model 4, with language type

as the independent variable, brand attitude as the dependent variable, and processing fluency as

the mediator, replicated the results found in study 1. In particular, fluency mediated the

relationship between language type and brand attitude (b = -0.487, SE = 0.186, 95% CI =

[-0.888, -0.159]), providing support for H1. Emojis had a negative effect (when compared to

text) on fluency (b = -0.945, t (89) = -3.244, p < .01). Emojis had a negative effect (when

compared to text) on fluency (b = -0.945, t (89) = -3.244, p < .01). Additionally, processing

fluency had a positive effect on brand attitude (b = 0.515, t (88) = 5.286, p < .001). The indirect

effect of language type on brand attitude was negative (b = -0.487, SE = 0.183, 95% CI [-0.874, -

0.162]). The direct effect of language type of brand attitude was negative (b = -0.926, t (88) = -

3.268, p < .01) and the total effect of language type on brand attitude was negative (b = -1.412, t

(89) = -4.621, p < .001).

Next, I addressed the question whether the processing of emojis vs. text has to do with an

individual's construal level, that is if they are in an abstract or concrete mindset. To account for

the possibility that individuals in an abstract (concrete) mindset may find greater ease (difficulty)

with the processing of strings of emojis, I control for construal level based on Vallacher and

Wegner's (1989) behavioral identification form by including the variable as a covariate. After

accounting for construal level as a control, the mediation of fluency in the relationship between

language type and brand attitude persists (b = - 0.490, SE = 0.181, 95% CI [-0.882, -0.171]).

Further, there was an insignificant effect of construal level on brand attitude (b = -0.003, t (88) = -0.033, ns).

Consistent with findings in study 1, study 2 underscores the difficulty that consumers have in understanding emoji only communication when compared to a textual translation. Additionally, this study provides support for the claim that this disfluency persists regardless of an individual's abstract or concrete construal level. That is, the individuals construal level made no difference in the ease with which they understand emoji only communication.

Study 3

Study 3 seeks to rule out the alternative explanation that the inherent seriousness of the context used in studies 1 and 2 made it difficult for consumers to understand emoji only communication. Particularly, one might argue that the lack of fit between the inherently serious law firm (used in studies 1 and 2) and the playful nature of emojis make it difficult for consumers to process the strings of emoji, when compared to their textual translation. Thus, study 3 utilizes a streaming service to examine the ease with which consumers understand emoji only communication in this inherently playful context. This study examines whether or not the seriousness of the context makes a difference in the ease of processing emoji only communication.

Method

Study 3 employed a one-factor (language type: emojis vs. text) between-subjects design. A sample of 93 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 21.83; 18 males, 73 females, 2 missing) from a

Southwestern university in the United States participated in this study for partial course credit.

Respondents were first shown a Tweet posted by Peacock streaming services. The Tweet was

composed either of emojis only or text only (see Figure 6). Next, respondents were asked to

indicate brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.939$) and processing fluency ($\alpha = 0.946$) utilizing the same scales

used in study 1 and study 2.

Figure 6 Essay 2 Study 3 Stimuli

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA was run with language type predicting processing fluency and brand

attitude. Processing fluency was higher in the text condition ($M_{Text} = 5.981$, $SD_{Text} = 1.307$) as

compared to the emoji condition ($M_{Emoji} = 4.978$, $SD_{Text} = 1.307$; $F (1, 89) = 10.324$, $p < .01$).

However, there was no significant difference in reported brand attitude whether participants were

in the emoji condition ($M_{Emoji} = 4.674$, $SD_{Emoji} = 1.600$) or text condition ($M_{Text} = 4.222$, $SD_{Text} =$

1.808; $F (1, 89) = 1.595$, ns).

To formally test for mediation, Hayes (2018) PROCESS model 4 was utilized with

language type as the independent variable, brand attitude as the dependent variable, and

processing fluency as the mediator. Fluency mediated the relationship between language type

and brand attitude ($b = -0.542$, $SE = 0.198$, 95% $CI = [-0.549, -0.115]$), providing support for

H1. In particular, emojis (compared to text) had a negative effect on fluency (b = -1.046, t (88) = -3.353, p < .01). Processing fluency had a positive effect on brand attitude (b = 0.518, t (87) = 4.654, p < .001). One may expect that the lack of fit between the serious nature of the law firm and the playfulness of emojis may be a driving factor in the inability to understand the message. Study 3 successfully replicated the results from Study 1, indicating that a more playful context (as opposed to a more serious context as in Studies 1 and 2) did not have an impact on the ability for consumers to interpret strings of text compared to their textual translation.

Additionally, given that Peacock is an existing firm and that consumers may have prior experience and attitudes towards the firm, brand familiarity was measured using three items (adapted from Kent and Allen 1994, unfamiliar/familiar, inexperienced/experienced, not knowledgeable/knowledgeable). When including brand familiarity as a covariate, the negative indirect effect of language type on brand attitude persists (b = -0.474, SE = 0.176, 95% CI [-0.864, -0.183]).

Consistent with findings in studies 1 and 2, consumers had difficulty understanding emoji only communication when compared to its textual translation. Study 3 rules out the alternative explanation that the context in study 1 and study 3 played a role in the inability of consumers to process the strings of emojis. Particularly, I show that in an entertainment services context (a context that is inherently more playful than a law firm context), consumers still have difficulty processing strings of emojis relative to their textual translation. Hence, I argue that the effects on information processing we find are not due to a lack of fit between the context and the inherent playfulness of emojis. Interestingly, the main effect of emoji only communication on brand attitude was positive and significant (b = 0.988, t (87) = 2.858, p < .01) whereas the effect was negative and significant in study 1 (b = -0.858, t (155) = -3.163, p < .01) and study 2 (b = -0.925,

t (87) = 5.286, p < .01). This suggests that while this study casts doubt on playfulness as a factor in the ability consumers have in understanding emoji only communication, it may enable a heightened brand attitude through an alternative path, something that I explore in study 4.

Study 4

Study 4 seeks to examine an alternative path through which emoji only communication influences brand attitude: perception of fun. As such, I examine processing fluency and perception of fun as parallel mediators for the relationship between language type and brand attitude I expect that the emoji only communication will result in processing disfluency and lower brand attitude when compared to text only communication in line with the findings of previous studies. However, I expect that perception of fun will be a positive path, that is emoji only communication heightens perceptions of fun which subsequently heightens brand attitude. Additionally, in study 4, I examine the moderating role of hedonic vs. utilitarian brands on the relationship between language type and brand attitude. Particularly, I expect that the use of emoji only communication by a utilitarian brand will have a detrimental effect on brand attitude.

Method

Study 4 utilized a 2 (language type: emojis vs. text) x 2 (context: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subjects design. A sample of 192 undergraduate students (M_{Age} = 21.99; 69 males, 121 females, 2 non-binary) participated in this study for partial course credit. Respondents were shown a tweet that was posted by LEGO or a heart clinic. This tweet was composed either of text or emojis. See Figure 7 for the stimuli utilized.

Figure 7 Essay 2 Study 4 Stimuli

Respondents were asked to indicate brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.935$) and processing fluency ($\alpha = 0.963$) utilizing the same scales as in studies 1-3. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate their perception of how fun the tweet was by answering the degree to which the tweet was fun, whimsical, and playful on a bipolar scale where $1 = $ not at all and $7 = $ extremely (adapted from Nenkov and Scott 2014; $\alpha = 0.942$). As a manipulation check, respondents answered how hedonic they perceived the brand to be on a seven-point bipolar scale (not fun/fun, boring/exciting, not delightful/delightful, not thrilling/thrilling, unenjoyable/enjoyable; adapted from Das et al. 2019; $\alpha = 0.955$). See Table 4 for measures, factor loadings and alphas.

Table 4 Essay 2 Measures, Factor Loadings, and Alphas (Study 4)

Construct and Items	Loadings	Alpha
Brand Attitude		0.935
Dislike it/like it	0.933	
Not appealing/appealing	0.940	
Unfavorable/favorable	0.952	
Fluency (Chae and Hoegg 2013)		0.963
Difficult to understand/easy to understand	0.930	
Difficult to process/easy to process	0.930	
Not at all organized/well organized	0.905	
Not at all structured/well structured	0.893	
Illogical/logical	0.936	
Unclear/clear	0.924	
Perception of Fun (Nenkov and Scott 2014)		0.942
Fun	0.959	
Whimsical	0.931	
Playful	0.951	
Hedonic (Das et al. 2019)		0.955
Not Fun/Fun	0.906	
Boring/Exciting	0.935	
Not Delightful/Delightful	0.934	
Not Thrilling/Thrilling	0.894	
Unenjoyable/Enjoyable	0.943	

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the context on hedonic perceptions ($F_{(1, 190)} = 29.888$, $p < .001$). As expected, the hedonic condition was reported as more hedonic ($M_{hedonic} = 5.734$, $SD_{hedonic} = 1.347$) compared to the utilitarian condition ($M_{utilitarian} = 4.617$, $SD_{utilitarian} = 1.482$). Thus, the manipulation of the context was successful.

Main Effects. A one-way ANOVA was run with language type predicting processing fluency, perception of fun, and brand attitude. Processing fluency was higher in the text condition ($M_{Text} = 5.947$, $SD_{Text} = 1.318$) when compared to the emoji condition ($M_{Emoji} = 4.237$,

$SD_{Emoji} = 1.731$; $F(1, 190) = 60.267$, $p < .001$). Perception of fun was higher in the emoji condition ($M_{Emoji} = 5.133$, $SD_{Emoji} = 1.661$) when compared to the text condition ($M_{Text} = 4.455$, $SD_{Text} = 1.857$; $F(1, 190) = 6.980$, $p < .01$). Brand attitude was higher in the text condition ($M_{Text} = 5.811$, $SD_{Text} = 1.212$) when compared to the emoji condition ($M_{Emoji} = 5.349$, $SD_{Emoji} = 1.491$; $F(1, 190) = 5.620$, $p < .05$).

A one-way ANOVA was run with the context (hedonic vs. utilitarian) predicting processing fluency, perception of fun, and brand attitude. Processing fluency was higher in the utilitarian condition ($M_{Utilitarian} = 5.704$, $SD_{Utilitarian} = 1.459$) when compared to the hedonic condition ($M_{Hedonic} = 4.634$, $SD_{Hedonic} = 1.838$; $F(1, 190) = 19.899$, $p < .001$). Perception of fun was higher in the hedonic condition ($M_{Hedonic} = 5.251$, $SD_{Hedonic} = 1.579$) when compared to the utilitarian condition ($M_{Utilitarian} = 4.270$, $SD_{Utilitarian} = 1.879$; $F(1, 190) = 15.354$, $p < .001$). Brand attitude was higher in the hedonic condition ($M_{Hedonic} = 5.797$, $SD_{Hedonic} = 1.245$) when compared to the utilitarian condition ($M_{Utilitarian} = 5.397$, $SD_{Utilitarian} = 1.452$; $F(1, 190) = 4.220$, $p < .05$).

Moderation and Mediation Analysis. To formally test for moderation and mediation, a bootstrap test (5,000 bootstrap samples, PROCESS model 5, Hayes 2018) was run with language type as the independent variable, context as the moderator, perception of fun and processing fluency as mediators, and brand attitude as the dependent variable.

The analysis revealed that processing fluency mediates the relationship between language type and brand attitude ($b = -0.5316$, $SE = 0.170$, 95% CI [-0.911, -0.238]). Particularly, when compared to their textual translation, emojis had a negative effect on processing fluency ($b = -1.710$, $t(190) = -7.763$, $p < .001$) which had a positive effect on brand attitude ($b = 0.311$, $t(186)$

= 4.763, p < .001). This in line with the findings in studies 1-3 and provides additional support for H1.

Additionally, perception of fun mediates the relationship between language type and brand attitude (b = 0.143, SE = 0.066, 95% CI [0.021, 0.215]). Particularly, when compared to the textual translations, emojis had a positive effect on perception of fun (b = 0.678, t (190) = 2.642, p <.01) which had a positive effect on brand attitude (b = 0.163, t (186) = 3.823, p < .001). Thus, H2 is supported. See Table 5 for results.

Table 5 Essay 2 Summary of Results (Study 4)

	R^2	Language type direct effect	Processing fluency direct effect	Perception of fun direct effect	Language type x context effect	Indirect effect: language type via processing fluency	Indirect effect: language type via perception of fun
Processing fluency	0.241						
b		-1.71***					
Lower, upper CI		[-2.145, -1.276]					
t-value		-7.763					
Perception of Fun	0.035						
b		0.678**					
Lower, upper CI		[0.172, 1.183]					
t-value		2.642					
Brand attitude	0.230						
b		-0.529*	0.311***	0.212***	0.812*	-0.532*	0.143*
Lower, upper CI		[-1.057, -0.001]	[0.182, 0.440]	[0.102, 0.321]	[0.156, 1.468]	[-0.901, -0.238]	[0.030, 0.292]
t-value		-1.976	4.763	3.823	2.442		

Note: Effects are estimated in PROCESS with a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples. n = 192. Indirect effects in PROCESS are significant when the confidence intervals do not include zero. *p<.05, **p<.01, **p<.001.

The interaction between language type and context was significant (t (186) = 2.442, p < .05). Particularly, in the utilitarian condition, brand attitude was higher in the text condition (M_{text} = 5.557) when compared to the emojis condition (M_{emojis} = 5.027, b = -0.529, SE = 0.268, p < .05) providing support for H3a. However, in the hedonic condition, there was no significant difference in brand attitude whether respondents saw the tweet composed of emojis (M_{emojis} = 6.002) or text (M_{text} = 5.719; b = 0.283, SE = 0.265, ns) indicating a lack of support for H3b. See Figure 8.
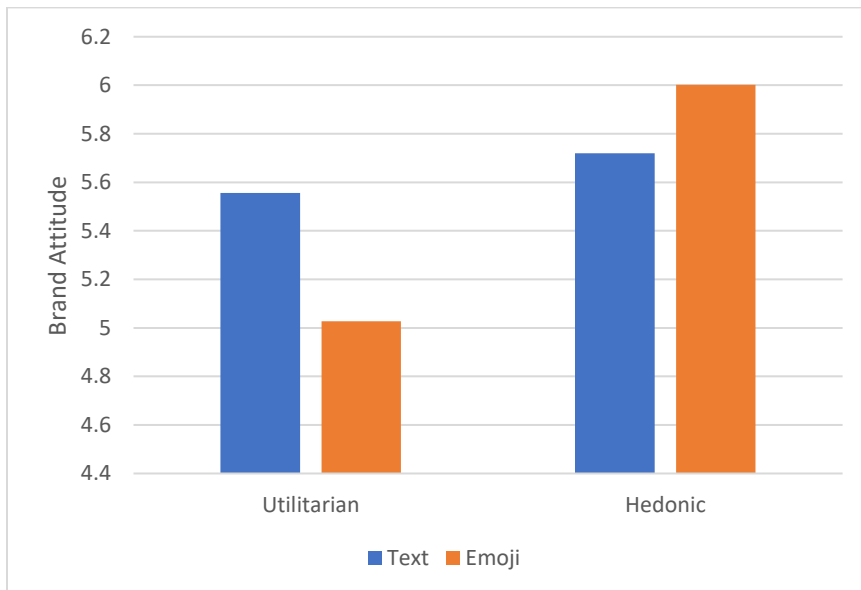
Figure 8 Interaction Effect of Language Type and Context on Brand Attitude

Moderated Mediation Analysis. To formally test for moderated mediation, a bootstrap test (5,000 bootstrap samples, PROCESS model 8, Hayes 2018) was run with language type as the predictor, context as the moderator, processing fluency and perception of fun as mediators,

and brand attitude as the outcome variable. The effect on the interaction (language type x context) on processing fluency was insignificant (b = -0.479, t (188) = -1.138, ns). The index for moderated mediation with processing fluency as the mediator was insignificant (b = -0.149, SE = 0.149, 95% CI [-0.078, 0.216]) indicating that context does not influence the relationship between language type and processing fluency. Thus, there is a lack of support for H4.

The effect of the interaction (language type x context) on perception of fun was insignificant (b =-0.713, t (188) = -1.438, ns). Additionally, the index for moderated mediation with perception of fun as the mediator was insignificant (b = -0.151, SE = 0.113, 95% CI [-0.390, 0.055]) indicating that context does not influence the relationship between language type and perception of fun and a lack of support for H5. Particularly, the negative effect of emojis on brand attitude through processing fluency and the positive effect of emojis on brand attitude through perception of fun were maintained independent of the hedonic or utilitarian context of the brand.

General Discussion

The current research evaluates the effect that emoji only communication has on a consumer's processing fluency, perception of fun, and ultimately the effect on brand attitude. Across four studies, I demonstrate that emoji only communication has a negative effect on brand attitude through processing fluency, when compared to the equivalent text only communication. Particularly, I find that it is more difficult for consumers to process strings of emojis relative to their textual translation. This processing disfluency occurs regardless of the construal level mindset that consumer is in and the serious/utilitarian or playful/hedonic nature of the brand.

Thus, while previous research has demonstrated the importance of fit in the processing of information (e.g., Lee et al. 2009; Seo and Scammon 2017), I find that strings of emojis are inherently more difficult to process, compared to text only communication, regardless of a consumer's construal level mindset and context.

Additionally, I demonstrate that emoji only communication has a positive effect on brand attitude through perception of fun. Particularly, the inherent whimsical nature of emojis (Goldsborough 2016), the ability that emojis have to evoke a sense of playfulness (Kelly and Watts 2015, McShane 2021), and the novelty of a string of emojis used as a replacement for text, enables emoji only communication to evoke perception of fun. This effect on perception of fun occurs regardless of the utilitarian or hedonic context of the firm. Particularly, while a defining characteristic of fun is the hedonic nature of the experience (Oh and Pham, forthcoming), this research finds that the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the brand can be disentangled from the hedonic capabilities of emojis.

Theoretical Implications

The current research demonstrates the effects that emojis can have and their use capabilities beyond that of emotion. The primary focus of extant research has been on the role of the emotional capabilities of emojis such as the effect that they have on a recipient's emotional response (e.g., Lohmann, et al. 2017; Smith and Rose 2020) and the appropriateness of emotional expression using emojis (Glikson et al. 2018). In this research, I demonstrate that emojis can have an impact on the consumer's ability to cognitively process messages. Further, the current research demonstrates that emojis can create heighten perceptions of fun.

This is the first research, to the best of my knowledge, that examines the influence of emoji only communication on consumers' brand attitude. Particularly, previous research has primarily focused on the addition of emojis to text for reinforcement, largely ignoring the additional functions that emojis can play such as substitution (Casado-Molina et al. 2019, Evans 2017). In the current research, I demonstrate that emojis can be used in absence of supporting text and have a positive effect on brand attitude through perception of fun. However, consumers have difficulty understanding the strings of emojis, when compared to their textual translation. Thus, while emoji only communication can evoke a sense of fun and play, they may not be able to function on their own in a way that disseminates easily processible meaning.

Managerial Implications

The effects of emoji only communication on brand attitude are positive through perception of fun, regardless of the hedonic or utilitarian context of a firm. Whereas for utilitarian firms, the use of emoji-only communication has a negative direct effect on brand attitude. That is, while a utilitarian firm can heighten perceptions of fun through the use of emoji only communication, the direct effect of the emoji only communication on brand attitude is negative for utilitarian brands. Further, this negative effect may be amplified by the negative effect through processing fluency experienced by both utilitarian and hedonic brands alike. Thus, it is important that brands—particularly utilitarian brands—weigh the pros and cons of utilizing emoji only communication.

My research provides important insights to marketing managers who may be trying to decide whether or not to utilize emoji only communication in an attempt to stand out amongst the text only communication on social media (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Extant research finds that the

use of many emojis (Willoughby and Liu 2018) and emoji only communication (Ge and Greztel 2018) heightens the attention paid to a message. Additionally, extant research focuses on the positive impacts of emojis such as positive affect (Das et al. 2019), perceived warmth (Li et al. 2019), playfulness and engagement (McShane et al. 2021), and emotional contagion (Smith and Rose 2020). However, emojis can have negative impacts as well such as reduced perceived competence when used in inappropriate contexts (Li et al. 2019) and lower processing fluency among emoji novices when emojis that have multiple meanings are used (Wu et al. 2022). The current research sheds light on an important negative aspect of the use of strings of emojis. That is, consumers in general have a difficult time understanding strings of emojis that are used as subsitutes for text, as evidenced by lower processing fluency. Hence, while emoji only communication can be used to stand out on social media and—as shown in the current research—create a sense of fun, there may be a need to include subsequent communication to ensure that consumers can fluently process and understand the underlying message.

Particularly, there has been conflicting research on whether or not emojis may become a language on its own (Bai et al. 2019). That is, it is unclear whether emojis can be adequately understood in absence of any supporting text. Despite this lack of clarity, there have been increasing instances of firms utilizing emojis as full replacement for text. The current research finds that while emoji only communication can evoke a sense of fun, consumers have difficulty processing the meaning of the communication. Thus, there may be a need to have subsequent communication that explains the meaning of the messaging in more concrete textual terms. That is, while emoji only communication may be useful to attract attention (Ge and Gretzel 2018; Willoughby and Liu 2018), there may need to be additional communication that includes some

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combination of text and emojis. This could ensure that consumers are able to understand the firm's communicative efforts.

Future Research and Limitations

The focus of the current research is limited to an examination of the perceptual fluency a consumer experiences when reading emoji only communication, compared to its textual translation. That is, I look at how consumers are able to make sense of the stimuli upon first viewing the stimuli. Future research may examine situations that may improve consumer processing fluency of emoji only communication to better understand the boundary conditions in which processing disfluency occurs. Alter and Oppenheimer (2009) provide a detailed summary of the ways in which researchers manipulate processing fluency including making something easy to make sense of upon viewing (perceptual fluency, as I have used in this research), priming (conceptual fluency), and making something linguistically simple (linguistic fluency). For instance, Lee and Labroo (2004) find that predictive contexts better enable conceptual fluency. That is, predictive contexts make it easier for consumers to picture a focal object (e.g., brand logo) in their head. Additional research might examine the priming effects of emojis for subsequent emoji communication and its effect on conceptual fluency. Future research might also look at situations in which there is repetition of a particular string may enable automatic processing of a particular emoji only communication and thus reduce cognitive difficulty (Pogacar et al. 2018).

Also, future research could explore cognitive elaboration as a mediator, in that the processing disfluency of strings of emojis may increase brand attitude in the long run. That is,

while the current research examines the immediate reaction of consumers to a string of emojis, extant research suggests that people might continue thinking about the disfluent message and thus have more favorable attitudes/impressions in the long run. Even though the consumer may have preferred the disfluent message less initially, through deeper processing of a disfluent message that represents a good value, purchase intentions can be heightened (Motyka et al. 2016).

Future research can also further examine other paths through which strings of emojis positively effect brand attitude. Particularly, study 4 sheds light on the positive impact that emoji only communication has on perception of fun and subsequently brand attitude. Also, the context is particularly important with strings of emoji, as emojis only communication has a positive effect on brand attitude when they involve a hedonic brand. Additional studies can further explore any alternative paths that may explain the beneficial effects of strings of emojis on downstream variables. Study 4 also finds that for utilitarian brands, the effect of emoji only communication has a negative direct effect on brand attitude when compared to text only communication. Future research can examine explanations for why this occurs by including an additional mediator such as context appropriateness.

Additional research can explore other mediators such as warmth and competence. Extant research has examined the positive effects emojis can have on perceived warmth and the negative effects on perceived competence (Glikson et al. 2018; Li et al. 2019). However, Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs (2012) identify beneficial effects when firms are able to cultivate both warmth and competence. Particularly, nonprofits are perceived to be high (low) in warmth (competence) and when cues are utilized to improve the credibility/competence, consumers are

more willing to buy (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010). Additional research might examine the potential to utilize emojis for higher perceived warmth for firms that are high in competence and low in perceived warmth. Additionally, extant research has examined the perception of warmth and moral judgments and finds that people are less likely to exclude individuals whose face implies high warmth and low competence (Ruder, Reutner, Greifeneder, and Walker 2017). Thus, future research might examine different emojis and their effects on warmth and competence.
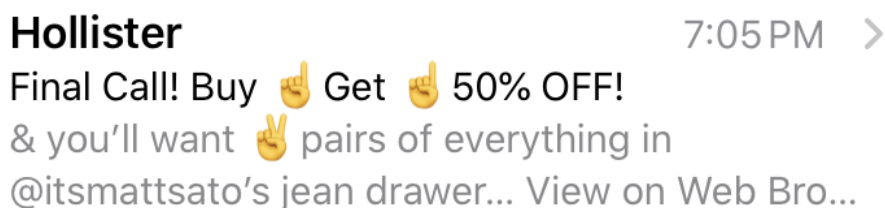
Also, the current research examines a mix of fictitious (study 1, study 2, and study 4) and familiar firms (study 3 and study 4). The familiarity with brands used like Peacock and Lego may have been problematic due to already established attitudes towards these brands. Future research can focus on purely fictitious brands, utilize a brand familiarity control variable, or examine the difference between comparable fictitious and established brands.

Finally, this research focuses on the use of emojis in a Twitter context. However, it may be interesting to evaluate emoji usage across platforms. Particularly, emoji meaning is subject to different interpretations across platforms (Miller et al. 2016) and subcultures that utilize emojis for coded messages such as sexting and drug dealing (Bich-Carriére 2019). Additionally, different social media platforms attract audiences of varying age. For instance, it is estimated that over half of Gen Z consumers utilize TikTok daily (Della Penna 2022). While existing research has found no age-related differences in the use of emojis (Koch, Romero, and Stachl 2022) this research was limited to the WhatsApp platform. Future research may examine the use of emojis on different platforms and the interplay with the dominant age group on each.

CHAPTER IV

ESSAY 3—INTERACTIVE EFFECTS OF EMOJIS AND HAPTIC IMAGERY

ON PROCESSING FLUENCY AND PROMOTION EVALUATION

Final Call! Buy 👆 get 👆 50% OFF! In a recent email sent to consumers, clothing brand

Hollister utilized partial substitution, with the "Index Pointing Up" emoji as a replacement for

"one," see Figure 9. In essay 2, I examined the effect of emojis as full substitutes for text, while

the focus here is on emojis that partially substitute text. Marketers have started using emojis in

novel ways in an attempt to attract consumer attention to their communication and promotions.

However, there is a lack of marketing research that explores the communicative capabilities of

gesture and object emojis on downstream variables such as processing fluency and promotion

evaluation. It is particularly important to evaluate gesture and object emojis as the tendency of

existing marketing tends to be on face emojis which often limits the exploration to the emotional

capabilities of emojis. A focus on gesture and object emojis allows researchers to examine

emojis in a non-emotional context as well as the connection to the self.

Figure 9 Hollister's Use of Emojis as Partial Substitutes for Text

Also, given heightened online shopping trends, it is important to explore the descriptions of a product in a promotion, e.g., haptic imagery, and the implications that this imagery has. Particularly, prior research has shown that imagined touch (i.e., haptic imagery) can be just as powerful as actual touch (Peck, Barger, and Webb 2013) and can even increase feelings of ownership (Brasel and Gips 2014). Thus, haptic imagery becomes important as consumers shop online more as they cannot actually touch the products prior to buying. The current research examines the use of gesture (👌) and object (e.g., 🍕) emojis as partial substitutes for text and explores the implications that their use has in the haptic touch of products. I explore the use of emojis as partial substitutes in social media communication in two contexts: the clothing and food service industries. The pre-study shows that the use of gesture emojis in a social media promotion results in a more favorable evaluation when compared to object emojis. Study 1 shows that this effect occurs due to a heightened consumer processing fluency of messages that utilizes gesture emojis, when compared to object emojis. Study 2 shows that textual haptic imagery information fits with the use of both gesture and object emojis, a fit that heightens consumer ability to fluently process a message, when compared to a non-haptic imagery condition. Thus, I show that haptic imagery becomes particularly relevant when consumers evaluate a promotional discount on social media that includes object and gesture emojis. Particularly, I find that the combination of visual (object and gesture emojis) and haptic imagery heightens the consumer's processing fluency, when compared to the use of non-haptic imagery.

The contribution of this research is fourfold. First, I examine the influence that gesture emojis and object emojis, emojis that have been largely ignored in marketing research, have in consumer evaluation of marketing promotions. Facial expression emojis (e.g., 😂, 😉, 😄) tend

to be the primary focus of extant marketing research (e.g., Li, Chan, and Kim 2019; Smith and Rose 2020) despite the many types of emojis that are available and used (e.g., gestures, objects, symbols, food, activities, etc.). Non-face emojis are largely unexplored in marketing research and can have important implications for company communication on social media. This research demonstrates the downstream capabilities that the use of gesture and object emojis in promotions have, relative to the use of object emojis.

Second, I look beyond the emotional capabilities of emojis that tend to be explored in existing marketing research. Particularly, there is a tendency to examine the effects of face emojis as signifiers of the emotional context of the message (e.g., Das, Wiener, and Kareklas 2019; Lohmann, Pyka, and Zanger 2017). For instance, Das et al. (2019) find that the presence of emojis heightens positive affect and purchase intentions in a hedonic context. Additionally, there is a tendency to focus on situations in which emotion expression and the subsequent use of emojis is appropriate (Glikson, Chesnin, and Van Kleef 2018; Li et al. 2019). However, emojis can also be used in non-emotional ways (Evans 2017) including for rhetorical purposes (Ge and Gretzel 2018), to relay semantic meaning (Bai, Dan, Mu, and Yang 2019), and to maintain conversational connection (Kelly and Watts 2015). Thus, research that further explores non-emotional capabilities can provide much needed insights into the implications that emojis have for theory and practice.

Third, I look beyond the reinforcement capabilities of emojis and examine emojis as partial substitutes for text. Evans (2017) claims that nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication can be used to reinforce what was spoken or substitute what is not spoken, among other capabilities. For instance, one might nod their head while saying yes aloud

(reinforcement) or simply nod their head and not say yes aloud (substitution). Luangrath, Peck, and Barger (2017) claim that we might assume that nonverbal communication has an important role in textual communication, just as it does in face-to-face communication. As such, it would make sense that we explore these other capabilities of emojis and their nonverbal capabilities. Marketing research that examines emojis beyond reinforcement remains scant. For example, McShane, Pancer, Poole, and Deng (2021) examine the influence that strings of emojis have on engagement and playfulness, however, the focus is on emojis that repeat what is said in text. Additionally, Li et al. (2017) examines the influence that the use of emojis have on perceived warmth and competence; however, the use of emojis is limited to their reinforcement capabilities. In this research, I examine emojis as a partial substitute for text and the influence that their use has on the ease with which consumer understand the message.

Fourth, I examine the interplay of gesture emojis with haptic imagery information. Particularly, there is a need to further investigate sensory imagery—imagined taste (gustatory imagery), touch (haptic imagery), smell (olfactory imagery), and sound (auditory imagery)— given the heightened consumption and advertising in digital spaces (Elder and Krishna 2021). A need that has been heightened by the trend and shift toward online shopping propagated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Chaban 2021). As such, it is important that firms are able to effectively communicate their product to consumers to ensure that if they are being reached online, it is being done so effectively. One way that firms can do this is through the use of haptic imagery in which the feeling and textures of a product are described to give consumers an idea of what the product feels like in the digital space. Extant marketing literature expects that the use of textual paralanguage, linguistic elements that supplement or replace the written word, can heighten haptic imagery (Luangrath, et al. 2017). This research examines the use of gesture and object

emojis and haptic imagery in the context of a promotional discount communicated on social

media, the ease with which consumers process this communication, and the overall effect they

have on promotion evaluation. Specifically, I find that haptic imagery heightens processing

fluency of promotional discount communication that includes object and gesture emojis, when

compared to non-haptic imagery. The subsequent effect is a stable promotion evaluation of social

media promotions that include object and gesture emojis.

Conceptual Framework

A Need to Evaluate the Use of Gesture and Object Emojis

Emojis have become a major element in communication on social media, a language that

can have persuasive and rhetorical capabilities (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Within the visual textual

paralanguage category of the typology developed by Luangrath et al. (2017), the authors show

that emojis can be used for visual kinesics to display movement of any part of the body or the

body as a whole (e.g., 😂, 👍, 🙋) and as artifacts for stylistic purposes (e.g., 🍕). Extant

literature has examined the effects of face emojis within the visual kinesics category (e.g., Li et

al. 2019, Smith and Rose 2020) and non-face object emojis as stylistic artifacts (e.g., Riordan

2017a, 2017b). However, there is a lack of research that looks at the effects of gestures as

additional forms of emojis in the visual kinesics category identified by Luangrath et al. (2017). It

is important to explore the implications that gesture emojis have on marketing communication

given that they are not explicitly tied to emotions as face emojis are but nevertheless comprise an

inherent closeness to the self. This is particularly relevant as MacInnis and Price (1987) argue

that self-related imagery has a higher likelihood of having an impact on intention when

compared to imagery that does not include the self. On the other hand, while face emojis are close to the self, they tend to be strongly connected to emotions.

Indeed, the focus of research with face emojis tends to focus on emotion. For instance, due to a perceived inappropriateness of emotions the use of face emojis lowers perceived competence in a formal or business context (Glikson et al. 2018). A similar effect occurs when used by service employees in encounters with customers (Li et al. 2019). Particularly, Li et al. (2019) argue that the expression of emotions may signal a lack of confidence, and thus the use of emojis can decrease consumer perceptions of a service employee's competence in exchange conditions. In addition, face emojis can be used to determine the emotional state of a sender (Boutet, LeBlanc, Chamberland, and Collin 2021) and influence the recipient's felt emotions (Lohmann et al. 2017). Furthermore, extant research has found that face emojis are particularly favorable and influential when they resemble humans and demonstrate strong emotional expression (Urumutta Hewage, Liu, Wang, and Mao 2021).

Summarizing, the findings presented in the extant literature are valuable in terms of establishing how emojis can impact emotional evaluations in communication. However, there is a need to further understand the non-emotional capabilities of emojis. In addition to research that examines the emotional capabilities of emojis, extant research suggests that emojis can serve non-emotional purposes as well. For instance, emojis can relay semantic meaning (Bai et al. 2019; Baruch, Feldman, and Sheridan 2021) and be used to convey factual information, initiate small talk, draw attention, and be used for rhetorical purposes (Ge and Gretzel 2018). Additionally, they can be used to maintain a conversational (Kelly and Watts 2015) and relational connection with others, adjust the tone of a message, and engage the recipient (Cramer,

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de Juan, and Tetreault 2016). As such, an analysis of the non-emotional capabilities of emojis can relay important insights into communication.

To explore the non-emotional capabilities of emojis, this research focuses on the comparison of object emojis and gesture emojis There is some research that includes gesture emojis in their stimuli (e.g., Das et al. 2019, Willoughby and Liu 2018); however, the effects of said gesture emoji was not isolated and explicitly examined. Rather, extant research examines gesture emojis with face (Das et al. 2019) and object emojis (Willoughby and Liu 2018) in a single stimulus. Similarly, some research has looked explicitly at object emojis though the focus was on affect (Riordan 2017a) and disambiguation (Riordan 2017b). As such, there is room for research that examines both object and gesture emojis. In this research, I examine the effects of gesture emojis, isolating their presence from other types of emojis, and compare them to the effects of object emojis to provide a deeper understanding of consumer evaluation of emoji usage.

Use of Gesture and Object Emojis in Promotions on Social Media

While emojis can have important persuasive capabilities, it is important that companies utilize them to effectively interact with consumers. Ge and Gretzel (2018) find that influencers are able to effectively utilize emoji in their persuasive and engagement efforts through social media communication efforts. While these findings are indeed important, it would be beneficial for a company to understand how their social media managers can effectively utilize emojis in their communication with consumers. This may be useful in efforts to drive up engagement with posts or heighten persuasion efforts of social media efforts. In line with this, the focus of the

current research is on promotional discounts (i.e., buy one get one half off) that utilize emojis as partial substitutes for text on social media. I examine the use of gesture and object emojis in promotional discount tweets as I argue that gesture emojis may be a way to connect the consumer to the promotion thereby heightening engagement and the effectiveness of the persuasion efforts.

Scott (1994b) posits that reading requires motivation and suggests that one way firms may motivate consumers to read an advertisement is to connect the self with characters in a narrative. Along similar lines, MacInnis and Price (1987) claim that closeness to self can lead to more favorable outcomes, and Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini (2006) find that imagining the self in a brand narrative can have beneficial downstream effects on the consumer's perceptions of the brand. I argue that these beneficial effects of closeness to self can be present when a consumer reads a quick promotional message on social media. Particularly, I expect that when a promotion is perceived to be close the self the consumer will evaluate a promotion more favorably when compared to a promotion that is not close to the self. Thus, if emojis can be used to create a connection to the self, then this may heighten a consumer's evaluation of a promotion.

I argue that one way to create the connection to the self is to utilize gesture emojis as they are visual representations of our hands. While face emojis may be a good way to create the connection to the self as well, they are inherently emotional and to include them in research that seeks to examine the connection of emojis to the self, one would need to disentangle the emotional content. As such, the focus of this research is on a comparison between gesture and object emojis as they are inherently less emotionally valenced. Further, I argue that comparing

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gesture and object emojis gives a good view on the effect that the inclusion of emojis that are close to the self has on consumers evaluations of a promotion.

Additionally, there is little research that examines emojis when they are used as partial substitutes for text. Rather, there is a tendency to look at the inclusion of emojis as additions to text. Das et al. (2019) utilize emojis as stickers added onto a product description and Boutet et al. (2021) included emojis at the end of a message. There are exceptions of course. For instance, McShane et al. (2021) evaluated strings of emojis as substitutes for a portion of text in study 2 of their research; however, they focus on emojis that are stand alone or have text that repeats what is said in emojis. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no research that has evaluated the use of emojis as partial substitute for text. I argue that emojis are included as a substitute for text, they become a part of the narrative and can impact how consumers evaluate a message. This becomes particularly important when a message includes an emoji that is close to the self. Based on the logic presented above, I argue that compared to object emojis, the use of gesture emojis as a partial substitute will have more beneficial effects on a consumer's evaluation of a promotional discount.

Processing Fluency of Gesture and Object Emojis

Processing fluency "pertains to the ease or difficulty with which new, external information can be processed" (Schwarz 2004, p. 338). Overall, extant research appears to concur that processing fluency is generally associated with positive effects on downstream variables. Lee (2004) argues that processing fluency can be attributed to persuasiveness of information and thus result in favorable attitudes. Further, Alter and Oppenheimer (2009) find

that processing fluency is generally associated with higher truthfulness, liking, and confidence. These effects hold in a social media context and it appears that processing fluency has a favorable effect on outcome variables such as social media engagement. For instance, posts that are easier for consumers to read are more likely to drive sharing, liking, and commenting (Pancer, Chandler, Poole, and Noseworthy 2019). It is of interest to the current research to understand the ease with which consumers process the partial substitution of emojis for text to shed light on the downstream effects that emojis can have when included in a promotional message.

There are a few instances of research that have examined how consumers process emojis. Daniel and Camp (2020) find that the inclusion of an emoji that is congruent with the context results in higher processing fluency when compared to the inclusion of an emoji incongruent with the context. Similarly, Boutet et al. (2021) find that the inclusion of emojis that are congruent with the message valence increases processing speed and understanding. Additionally, for emoji novices, review helpfulness is lower when emojis that have multiple meanings are used due to lower processing fluency (Wu, Chen, Wang, and Zhou 2022). Furthermore, the effect of the emojis on text processing can be shown at the neural level (Pfeifer, Armstrong, and Lai 2022). While these findings are indeed valuable for our understanding of how consumers process emojis, there is a tendency in the extant literature to focus on message valence. This focus on valence tends to make the underlying focus of this research on emotion, that is positively valenced emojis tend to be associated with positive emotions and negative emojis with negative emotion. Particularly, the research identified above focuses on the congruency of a message valence with the valence of face emojis (Boutet et al. 2021; Daniel and Camp 2020). Additionally, Pfeifer et al. (2022) examine the emotional salience of positive and negative emojis

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and find that positive emojis are attributable to more general positive emotion while negative emojis are attributable to more nuanced, specific general emotion. Given the numerous capabilities of emojis in communication, it is important that research examines how consumers process emojis outside of an emotional context.

As such, I examine how consumers process gesture and object emojis in a non-emotional context: promotional discounts. Scott (1994b) claims that images can override the meaning of text (in the context of commercial advertising) and thus different meanings can arise from the same verbal string. Within the context of text with emojis as partial substitutes, the inherent deal of a "buy one get one half off" offer is the same whether object emojis (e.g., Buy 🍕 get 🍕 50% off) or gesture emojis (e.g., Buy 👆 get 👆 50% off) are used. However, I argue that the relation of an emoji to the self makes a difference. Particularly, one of the motivations behind reading an advertisement is to test the imagined self (Belk 1988; Scott 1994b). In other words, consumers run through a process in which they are trying to decide if a product or brand fits with who they are. Thus, I argue that gesture emojis, being closer to the self, will be evaluated more favorably as compared to object emojis.

Extant research finds that when it is easier for consumers to imagine themselves in a brand narrative, they have a more favorable opinion of the brand (Mandel et al. 2006). Visual imagery can be conducive towards a consumer's mental simulation, i.e., the ease with which they are able to imagine interaction with the image. Particularly, Elder and Krishna (2012) find that an object is more appealing when it is portrayed in a way that is congruent with a consumer's dominant hand—e.g., a picture of a right hand holding a sandwich being viewed by a right-handed consumer. This is because mental stimulation is facilitated by a consumer's ability to imagine

their own hand holding a sandwich. Krishna and Schwarz (2014) argue that this effect may occur due to fluency effects. That is, it is easier for consumers to imagine themselves in the situation and thus they have a more favorable impression of the object.

I argue that gesture emojis are likely to be very well suited towards helping consumers fluently process communication as they are universal iconic depictions of hand. Particularly, effects with images of a hand are found with gesture emojis though the effects may be isolated better as they are universal depictions of what a hand is. Particularly, a hand that is incongruent with someone's hand aesthetically (e.g., different skin tones) may have a negative effect on the ability consumers have to imagine themselves in a situation. Gesture emojis can be universally depicted with yellow skin, thus being congruent with the larger population in general. That is, rather than picking a skin tone and risking isolating ethnic/racial segments, the use of the default yellow skin tone emojis can be a way to relate to the broader population. However, it the market segment is isolated towards a specific group, then the use of skin tones tailored towards that group may be more desirable. Thus, I anticipate that gesture emojis will result in higher processing fluency when compared to object emojis.

> H1: Processing fluency mediates the relationship between the emoji usage and promotion evaluation. Particularly, gesture emojis result in higher processing fluency and a subsequent higher promotion evaluation, when compared to object emojis.

Haptic Imagery Enables Fluent Processing of Gesture and Object Emojis

Consumers rely on mental imagery to imagine their experience with a product when shopping online and in person (Elder and Krishna 2021). Imagery can be a way to communicate

sensory experiences that are not easily communicable in virtual spaces (Petit, Velasco, and Spence 2019) such as appeals that evoke taste, textures, smells etc. For instance, a firm that wants to give an idea of the texture of a garment in an online space might use haptic imagery and discuss the softness of a garment to give consumers of an idea of what it feels like. Extant research finds that haptic imagery can allow for a mental recreation of an experience and perceived touch can have similar effects as actual touch (Peck et al. 2013). Imagery can have powerful positive effects on consumers; however, when improperly implemented, it can have adverse effects. Particularly, when a product is not vividly presented, imagery has a negative effect on product preferences (Petrova and Cialdini 2005). Additionally, imagery that is incongruent with expectations (e.g., an image that shows the use of a hand that is incongruent with the viewers dominant hand) adversely effects embodied mental simulation and purchase intention (Elder and Krishna 2012). Thus, the firms must ensure that the imagery is vivid and that consumers interpret the information as it was intended. One way that may enable researchers to examine how easily consumers can make sense of information provided is through a consumer's reported processing fluency of a message.

As mentioned earlier, imagery can have a negative effect on downstream consequences when it is not vivid or it is difficult for consumers to imagine themselves in the situation (Petrova and Cialdini 2005). Visual imagery is proximally distal given when compared to imagery that requires close proximity to the body, e.g., touch (Elder, Schlosser, Poor, and Xu 2017). Thus, I expect that the use of non-haptic imagery will have a detrimental effect on the ease with which consumers can understand communication with gesture and object emojis.

H2a: In the non-haptic imagery condition, processing fluency is higher for text only communication, when compared to communication that includes object emojis and gesture emojis.

The inclusion of haptic imagery may better enable consumers to imagine themselves in the situation when compared to the inclusion of non-haptic imagery. Many researchers argue for the importance of what "feels right" to consumers as this makes it easier for consumers to process information. Extant research shows that consistency increases fluent processing of a message when the message fits with how consumers think about something (Chae and Hoegg 2013; de Bellis, Hildebrand, Ito, Herrmann, and Schmitt 2019; Kim, Rao, and Lee 2009; King and Auschaitrakul 2019; Lee and Aaker 2004; Lee, Keller, and Sternthal 2009). For instance, the fit of regulatory focus with message framing (Lee and Aaker 2004), temporal distance with message abstraction (Kim, Rao, and Lee 2009), and spatial representation of time with product image positioning (Chae and Hoegg 2013) has been shown to have a positive impact on processing fluency. Additionally, King and Auschaitrakul (2019) find that when a brand claim (e.g., A causes B) confers with natural sequencing expectations (A comes before B in the alphabet), it is easier for consumers to process. Thus, the fit of the message is particularly important as a consumer tries to process the information presented. Haptic imagery is particularly suited in this situation as it has to do with imagined touch and fits with the gesture (the hand that is used to touch) and the object (that is imagined to be touched).

Gesture emojis fit with imagined touch as consumers inherently connect them with their own hands to touch. Extant research in psychology has found support for the rubber hand illusion which is an experience in which humans perceive a model rubber hand to be their own (e.g.,

Kalckert and Ehrsson 2014; Tsakiris and Haggard 2005). Particularly, research conducted by Botvinick and Cohen (1998) found that subjects experienced felt touch of the brush that they watched stroke a rubber hand. The rubber hand illusion occurs when the rubber hand is congruent with the participant's hand in terms of posture and identity—right or left (Tsakiris and Haggard 2005). While these psychological research studies are with participants seated in a lab to view the rubber hand, Kalckert and Ehrsson (2014) claim that there can be different combinations of somatosensory (e.g., sensations like touch) and visual information that can bring about feelings of ownership. Thus, I argue that the fit of sensory haptic imagery (imagined touch) and the visual imagery of a hand (via gesture emojis) makes it easier for consumers to imagine themselves touching the object in question. Specifically, I argue that the combination of haptic imagery and gesture emojis will have a beneficial effect on consumer processing fluency.

Additionally, the inclusion of an object emoji that is focal to the discount being promoted on social media is likely to enhance processing fluency given the fit of the object emoji to the focal object. Particularly, Jiang, Adaval, Steinhart, and Wyer Jr. (2014) suggest that consumers may utilize imagery to imagine their own interaction with a product in order to obtain information about a product. As such, one might argue that to perceive touch of an object, there is a need to see an image of the object. Importantly, the extant literature posits that emojis can function as iconic signs (Evans 2017), meaning that they are related to an object via imitation or resemblance (Mick 1986). Thus, I argue that the depiction of a universal object (via an object emoji) can be a way to bridge consumers' need to see the actual focal object. The object emoji is likely to fit with the object that is being imagined to be touched in the haptic touch condition and thus heighten processing fluency, when compared to the non-haptic touch condition.

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H2b: In the haptic imagery condition, there is no difference in processing fluency whether the communication is composed of text only or includes gesture emojis or object emojis.

Organization of Studies

In the pre-study, I test the main effect of the inclusion of gesture and object emojis on promotional evaluation within the context of the clothing industry. I find that gesture emojis result in heightened promotion evaluation when compared to object emojis. Study 1 examines processing fluency as a mediator for the relationship between emoji usage and promotion evaluation in a food context. In this study, I find that the effect of gesture emojis on heightened promotion evaluation that was supported in the pre-study can be attributed to heightened processing fluency. That is, it is easier for consumers to understand the message when it includes gesture emojis when compared to object emojis. In study 2, I examine the role that haptic imagery plays in increasing processing fluency of communication that includes gesture and object emojis. I find that when additional non-haptic imagery information is included, processing fluency is highest when text only communication is utilized and lowest when gesture emojis are present. This is attributed to the negative effects that occur when imagery is not vivid or easy to imagine. On the other hand, the use of haptic imagery evens the playing field and makes it so that processing fluency is similar whether consumers see text only communication or communication that utilizes gesture or object emojis. See Figure 10 for the conceptual model.
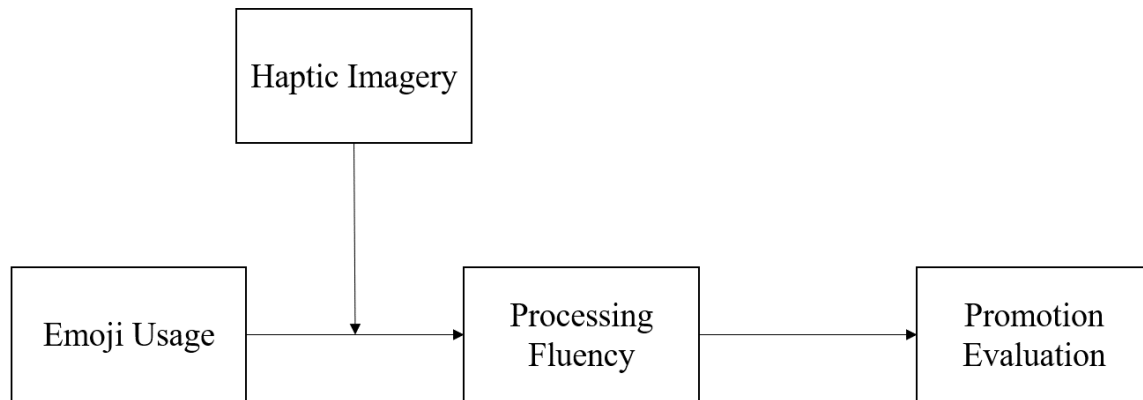
Figure 90 Essay 3 Conceptual Model

Pre-Study

The pre-study investigates consumer evaluation of the use of object and gesture emojis in marketing communication. Particularly, the focus is on firm tweets that are promoting a "buy one get one" deal to consumers. Using promotional discounts that partially substitute objects or gestures for text, I examine whether the use of gesture emojis increases promotion evaluation, when compared to the use of object emojis.

Method

The pre-study had a one-factor (emoji usage: object vs. gesture vs. control) between-subjects design. A sample of 121 undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 23.14$; 42 males, 77 females, 2 missing) from a university in Southwestern United States participated in this study for partial course credit.

Gesture Emoji Condition

FatFace @FatFace

Our shirts are buy 👆 get 👆 half off this week only!

Object Emoji Condition

FatFace @FatFace

Our 👕👕 are buy one get one half off this week only!

Control Condition

FatFace @FatFace

Our shirts are buy one get one half off this week only!

Figure 11 Essay 3 Pre-Study Stimuli

Respondents were first shown a promotional tweet from a clothing brand that included object or gesture emojis as partial substitutes for portions of the text. The clothing brand FatFace was utilized as the intended participant pool was an American audience that is unlikely to be familiar with the British brand. The object emoji condition was "Our 👕👕 are buy one get one half off this week only!" and the gesture emoji condition was "Our shirts are buy 👆 get 👆 half off this week only!" and the control condition was "Our shirts are buy one get one half off this week only!". See Figure 11 for the stimuli. Then, participants were asked to evaluate the promotion (bad/good, dislike/like, unfavorable/favorable, unappealing/appealing, undesirable/desirable; adapted from Rodas and John 2020; α = 0.959). See Table 6 for factor

loadings and Cronbach's alpha. In accordance with previous marketing research on emojis (e.g., Das et al. 2019; Li et al., 2019; McShane et al. 2021) a manipulation check was not included for the presence of emojis as the emojis are either present or they are not.

Table 6 Essay 3 Measures, Factor Loadings, and Alphas

	Pre-Study		Study 1		Study 2	
Construct and Items	**Loading**	**Alpha**	**Loading**	**Alpha**	**Loading**	**Alpha**
Promotion Evaluation						
Bad/Good	0.901	0.959	0.952	0.974	0.899	0.951
Dislike it/Like it	0.939		0.949		0.918	
Unfavorable/Favorable	0.948		0.965		0.914	
Unappealing/Appealing	0.935		0.963		0.920	
Undesirable/Desirable	0.916		0.933		0.925	
Processing Fluency						
Difficult to understand/Easy to understand			0.870	0.946	0.839	0.902
Difficult to process/Easy to process			0.892		0.796	
Not at all organized/Well organized			0.926		0.812	
Not at all structured/Well structured			0.895		0.788	
Illogical/Logical			0.889		0.842	
Unclear/Clear			0.863		0.848	
Haptic Imagery						
I imagined the feel of the fabric textures of products					0.919	0.958
I imagined what it would be like to touch the products					0.922	
I fantasized the fabric properties of the products					0.897	
The imagery which occurred was clear					0.895	
The imagery which occurred was detailed					0.915	
The imagery which occurred was vivid					0.905	

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of emoji usage on promotion evaluation ($F (2, 117) = 3.702$; $p < .05$). Particularly, promotion evaluation was lower in the object emoji condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji} = 3.035$, $SD_{ObjectEmoji} = 1.593$) than in the control condition ($M_{Control} = 3.979$, $SD_{Conrol} = 1.993$; $p < .05$). Additionally, promotion evaluation was lower in the gesture emoji condition ($M_{GestureEmoji} = 3.849$, $SD_{GestureEmoji} = 1.779$) when compared to the control condition ($p < .05$). However, the difference between the gesture and emoji conditions was insignificant.

The pre-study underscores the positive effect that the use of gesture emojis has on promotion evaluation when compared to object emojis. Particularly, support is provided for theorizing that consumers prefer promotions that contain gesture emojis when compared to promotions that contain object emojis. Interestingly, I find that object emojis result in lower processing fluency when compared to the control condition. I explore reasons why this occurs in the next study. Particularly, I examine the process through which the beneficial effects of gesture emojis on promotion evaluation occur by focusing on the ease with which consumers process (processing fluency) communication that is composed of text alone or includes gesture or object emojis.

Study 1

In study 1, I examine processing fluency as a potential explanation for consumers' heightened evaluation of a promotional discount. It is expected that processing fluency will mediate the relationship between emoji usage and promotion evaluation. Particularly, I argue that

it is easier for consumers to process a message that includes a gesture emoji as it is closer to the self, when compared to object emojis.

Method

Study 1 used a one-factor (emoji usage: object vs. gesture vs. control) between-subjects design. 168 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 22.23; 52 males, 114 females, 2 non-binary) from a university in Southwestern United States participated in this study for partial course credit.

Gesture Emoji Condition

Andrew's Pizza @andrews_pizza
Buy 👆 get ☝ 50% off today only!

Object Emoji Condition

Andrew's Pizza @andrews_pizza
Buy 🍕 get 🍕 50% off today only!

Control Condition

Andrew's Pizza @andrews_pizza
Buy one get one 50% off today only!

Figure 12 Essay 3 Study 1 Stimuli

In this study, I examine a similar promotion to that used in study 1 using pizza restaurant to show that the effect holds in a different context. Respondents were first shown a promotional

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tweet from a pizza restaurant that included an object or gesture emoji as a partial substitute for text. A fictional brand was utilized to ensure that brand familiarity would not play a role in the consumer evaluation of the tweet. The object emoji condition was "Buy 🍕 get 🍕 50% off today only!", the gesture emoji condition was "Buy 👆 get 👆 50% off today only!", and the control condition was "Buy one get one 50% off today only!". See Figure 12 for the stimuli. Participants were asked to evaluate the promotion using the same scale from the pre-study (adapted from Rodas and John 2020; $\alpha = 0.974$). Then, they were asked to indicate processing fluency (difficult to understand/easy to understand, difficult to process/easy to process, not at all organized/well organized, not at all structured/well structured, illogical/logical, unclear/clear; six items adapted from Chae and Hoegg 2013; $\alpha = 0.946$).

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of emoji usage on processing fluency ($F_{(2, 165)} = 9.539$, $p < .001$). Particularly, processing fluency was lower in the object emoji condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji} = 5.268$, $SD_{ObjectEmoji} = 1.429$) when compared to the gesture emoji condition ($M_{GestureEmoji} = 5.789$, $SD_{GestureEmoji} = 1.215$; $p < .05$) and control condition ($M_{Control} = 6.275$, $SD_{Control} = 0.905$; $p < .001$). Additionally, processing fluency was lower in the gesture condition when compared to the control condition ($p < .05$).

Also, a one-way ANOVA was run with emoji usage predicting promotion evaluation ($F_{(2, 165)} = 3.314$, $p < .05$). Consumers in the object emoji condition reported lower promotion evaluation ($M_{ObjectEmoji} = 4.997$, $SD_{ObjectEmoji} = 1.698$) when compared to the control condition ($M_{Control} = 5.758$, $SD_{Control} = 1.326$; $p < .05$). The difference between the gesture emoji condition

($M_{GestureEmoji} = 5.362$, $SD_{GestureEmoji} = 1.595$) and the control condition was insignificant, as was the difference between the gesture emoji and object emoji conditions.

Mediation analysis (5,000 bootstrap samples; PROCESS model 4; Hayes 2018) was run with emoji usage as the independent variable, processing fluency as the mediator, and promotion evaluation as the dependent variable. Due the use of three conditions, I ran two mediation analyses with the control condition and object emoji condition set as the reference condition in each. This was done to conduct pairwise comparisons of each of the potential combinations: control vs. gesture, control vs. object, and gesture vs. object. The analysis revealed that fluency mediates the relationship between emoji usage and promotion evaluation when comparing the gesture condition to the control condition ($b = -0.458$, $SE = 0.199$, 95% CI = [-0.526, -0.057]), object condition to the control condition ($b = -0.949$, $SE = 0.230$, 95% CI = [-1.423, -0.515]) and object condition to the gesture condition ($b = 0.311$, $SE = 0.149$, 95% CI = [0.022, 0.598]). Particularly, the gesture emoji condition had a negative effect on processing fluency when compared to the control condition ($b = -0.486$, t (165) = -2.061, $p < .05$). Additionally, the object emoji condition had a negative effect on processing fluency when compared to the control condition ($b = -1.007$, t (165) = -4.357, $p < .001$). Finally, the gesture emoji condition had a positive effect on processing fluency when compared to the object emoji condition ($b = 0.521$, t (165) = 2.311, $p < .05$). Processing fluency overall had a positive effect on promotion evaluation ($b = 0.943$, t (165) = 13.960, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 was supported. See Table 7 for a summary of results.

Table 7 Essay 3 Summary of Results (Study 1)

	Gesture Emojis vs. Control	Object Emojis vs. Control	Gesture Emojis vs. Object Emojis
Direct effect on processing fluency	-0.486*(0.236)	-1.007***(0.231)	0.521*(0.225)
Direct effect on promotion evaluation	0.062(0.207)	-0.188(0.211)	-0.126 (0.199)
Total Effect	-0.396(0.302)	-0.761*(0.296)	0.365(0.288)
Mediating Effect	-0.458*(0.199)	-0.949*(0.230)	0.491*(0.238)
95% CI	-0.861 to -0.087	-1.423 to -0.515	0.036 to 0.960
Type of Mediation	Full Mediation	Full Mediation	Full Mediation

*Note: Effects are estimated in PROCESS with a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples. n = 168. Indirect effects in PROCESS are significant when the confidence intervals do not include zero. *p<.05, **p<.01, **p<.001.*

Study 2

Study 2 examines the interactive effect of emoji usage and haptic imagery on processing fluency and promotion evaluation. I expect that the use of non-haptic imagery will have a detrimental effect on consumer's processing fluency of communication that includes gesture and object emojis as the lack of vivid imagery is likely to make it difficult for consumers to understand the communication.

On the other hand, I expect that the haptic imagery condition is likely to make it easier for consumers to understand communication that includes gesture and object emojis. Psychological research on the rubber hand illusion finds that the combination of sensory and visual imagery can have positive effects on reported ownership of a rubber hand (Kalckert and Ehrsson 2014). In accordance with this finding, I expect that fit of sensory imagery—more specifically haptic imagery—in combination with visual imagery of the hand—via gesture emojis will have a positive effect on processing fluency. Additionally, I argue that the fit of the object emoji as a universal representation of the object being sold. Thus, the object emoji is

likely to fit with the object that is being imagined to be touched in the haptic touch condition and thus have a positive effect on processing fluency.

Method

Study 2 used a 3 (emoji usage: control vs. object vs. gesture) x 2 (non-haptic imagery vs. haptic imagery) between-subjects design. A sample of 274 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (M_{age} = 33.92, 182 males, 92 females) participated in the study for compensation.

Respondents were told that they are on Twitter and have come across a clothing brand's tweet. In the non-haptic imagery condition, a basic description was provided: "A true staple, perfect for any wardrobe." In the haptic imagery condition, the following description was provided: "A comfortable fit, supersoft, and lightweight." The same promotion from study 1 was utilized with a control condition and 👕 or 👆 as partial substitutes for text. The same brand that was utilized in study 1, FatFace, was utilized as it was expected that an American sample would be largely unfamiliar with the British clothing brand. See Figure 13 for the stimuli.

Participants were asked to evaluate the promotion using the same scale from the pre-study and study 2 (five items adapted from Rodas and John 2020; α = 0.951) Then, they were asked to indicate processing fluency using the same scale from study 1 (six items adapted from Chae and Hoegg 2013; α = 0.902). As a manipulation check for haptic imagery, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they "imagined the feel of the fabric textures of products," "imagined what it would be like to touch the products," "fantasized the fabric

properties of the products," and felt "the imagery which occurred was clear," "detailed," and "vivid" (six items adapted from Bone and Ellen 1992; Park 2006; α = 0.958)
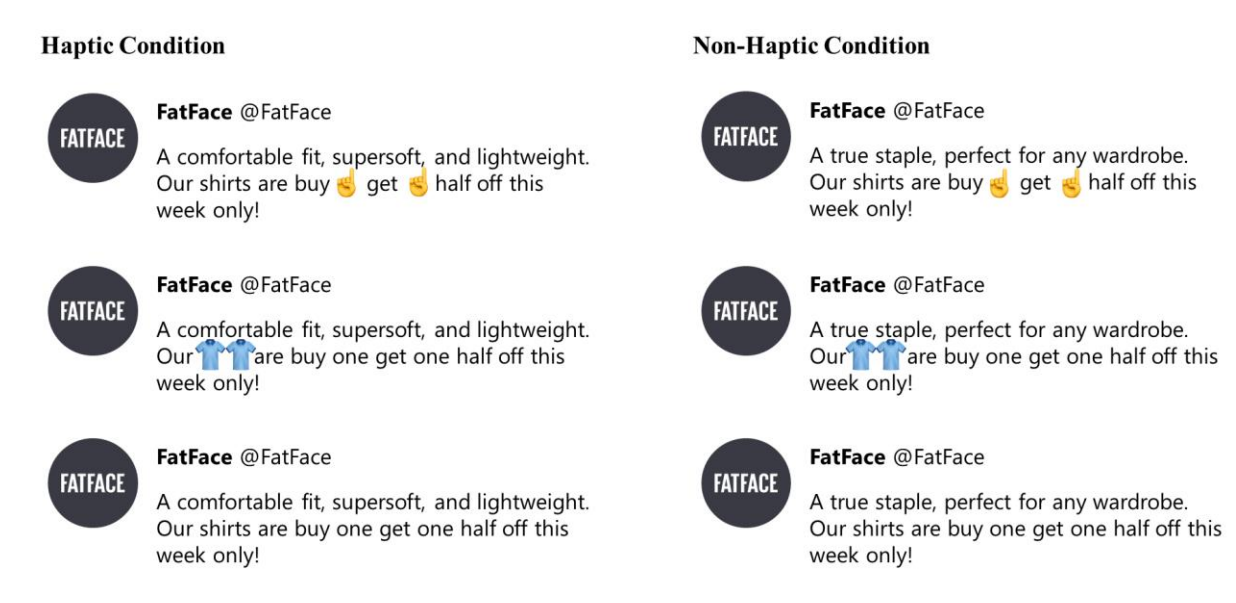

Figure 13 Essay 3 Study 2 Stimuli

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check. Respondents in the experimental haptic condition reported higher haptic imagery (M = 4.722, SD = 1.757) compared to those in the control non-haptic condition (M = 3.965, SD = 1.786; $F (1, 272) = 13.294$, $p < .001$).

Main Effects of Emoji Usage. A one-way ANOVA was run with emoji usage as a predictor for processing fluency ($F (2, 271) = 1.463$, ns) and promotion evaluation ($F (2, 271) = 1.596$, ns). Particularly, regardless of the condition, there was no significant difference in processing fluency ($M_{GestureEmoji} = 5.710$, $SD_{GestureEmoji} = 1.115$; $M_{ObjectEmoji} = 5.870$, $SD_{ObjectEmoji} = 1.061$; $M_{Control} = 5.984$, $SD_{Control} = 0.965$). Nor was there a significant difference in promotion

evaluation ($M_{GestureEmoji} = 5.117$, $SD_{GestureEmoji} = 1.366$; $M_{ObjectEmoji} = 5.004$, $SD_{ObjectEmoji} = 1.470$; $M_{Control} = 5.375$, $SD_{Control} = 1.278$).

Main Effects of Haptic Imagery. A one-way ANOVA was run with haptic imagery as a predictor for processing fluency ($F (1, 272) = 1.753$, ns) and promotion evaluation ($F (1, 272) = 8.040$, $p <.01$). Particularly, haptic imagery did not have a significant effect on processing fluency ($M_{Haptic} = 5.930$, $SD_{Haptic} = 1.027$; $M_{NonHaptic} = 5.760$, $SD_{NonHaptic} = 1.084$). However, promotion evaluation was higher in the haptic condition ($M_{Haptic} = 5.380$, $SD_{Haptic} = 1.257$) when compared to the non-haptic condition ($M_{NonHaptic} = 4.911$, $SD_{NonHaptic} = 1.473$).

Moderation Analysis. Hayes PROCESS Model 1 was run to formally test for moderation with emoji usage as the predictor, haptic imagery as the moderator, and processing fluency as the outcome variable. Due the use of three conditions, I ran two separate analyses with the control condition and object emoji condition set as the reference condition in each to conduct pairwise comparisons of each of the potential combinations: gesture vs. control, object vs. control, and gesture vs. object. The results revealed a significant interaction between emoji usage and haptic imagery when comparing the gesture emoji with control condition ($b = 0.845$, $t (268) = 2.524$, $p < .05$) and object emoji with control condition ($b = 0.660$, $t (268) = 2.074$, $p<.05$). The interaction between emoji usage and haptic imagery when comparing the gesture with object condition was insignificant ($b = 0.154$, $t (268) = 0.520$, ns).

For those participants who were in the non-haptic condition, processing fluency was lower in the gesture condition ($M_{GestureEmoji} = 5.482$; $b = -0.703$, $t (268) = -2.990$, $p < .01$) and object condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji} = 5.737$; $b = -0.449$, $t (268) = -1.978$, $p < .05$) when compared to the control condition ($M_{Control} = 6.185$). Additionally, in the non-haptic condition, there was no

significant difference in processing fluency for participants in the gesture condition ($M_{GestureEmoji}$ = 5.482) compared to the object condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji}$ = 5.737; b = -0.254, t (268) = -1.230, ns). providing support for H2a.

For those participants in the haptic condition, there is no significant difference in processing fluency in the gesture condition ($M_{GestureEmoji}$ = 5.929; b = 0.112, t (268) = 0.504, ns) and object condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji}$ = 6.028; b = 0.211, t (268) = 0.947, ns) when compared to the control condition ($M_{Control}$ = 5.817). Additionally, in the haptic condition, there is no significant difference in processing fluency for participants in the gesture condition ($M_{GestureEmoji}$ = 5.929) when compared to the object condition ($M_{ObjectEmoji}$ = 6.028; b = -0.100, t (268) = -0.468, ns). This provides support for H2b. See Figure 14.
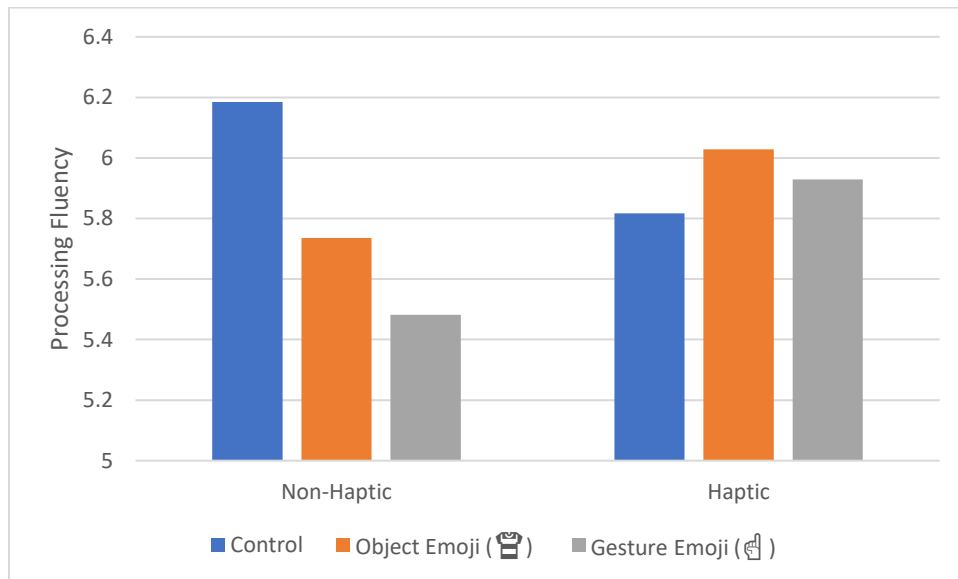

Figure 14 Interaction Effect of Emoji Usage and Haptic Imagery on Processing Fluency

Moderated Mediation Analysis. To formally test for moderated mediation, Hayes

PROCESS Model 7 was run with emoji usage as the predictor, haptic imagery as the moderator,

fluency as the mediator, and promotion evaluation as the outcome variable. I ran two separate

analyses with the control condition as the referent variable and object emoji condition as the

referent variable in order to conduct pairwise comparisons of all three possible combinations of

variables: gesture vs. control, object vs. control, and gesture vs. object.

In the non-haptic condition, the indirect effect of gesture emojis on promotion evaluation

was negative and significant when compared to the control condition (b = - 0.304, SE = 0.118,

95% CI = [-0.548, -0.099]). Additionally, the indirect effect of object emojis on promotion

evaluation was negative and significant when compared to the control condition (b = - 0.194, SE

= 0.102, 95% CI = [-0.415, -0.018]). Finally, the indirect effect of gesture emojis on promotion

evaluation was insignificant when compared to the object emojis (b = - 0.110, SE = 0.010, 95%

CI = [-0.307, 0.090]).

In the haptic condition, the indirect effect of gesture emojis on promotion evaluation was

insignificant when compared to the control condition (b = 0.048, SE = 0.096, 95% CI = [-0.154,

0.230]). Additionally, the indirect effect of object emojis on promotion evaluation was

insignificant when compared to the control condition (b = 0.091, SE = 0.100, 95% CI = [-0.085,

0.306]). Finally, the indirect effect of gesture emojis on promotion evaluation was insignificant

when compared to the object emojis (b = - 0.043, SE = 0.097, 95% CI = [-0.271, 0.110]).

The index of moderated mediation was significant when comparing the gesture emoji

condition to the control condition (b = 0.352, SE = 0.147, 95% CI = [0.089, 0.654]) and the

object emoji condition to the control condition (b = 0.286, SE = 0.154, 95% CI = [0.026, 0.620]).

However, the index of moderated mediation was insignificant when comparing the gesture emoji condition to the object emoji condition (b = 0.067, SE = 0.130, 95% CI = [-0.227, 0.294]).

Study 2 provides support for theorization that the interaction between emoji usage and haptic imagery has a detrimental effect on processing fluency of promotional tweets that include object and gesture emojis which has a negative effect on promotion evaluations. This is in line with previous research that finds that a lack of vivid imagery can have negative effect on the ease with which consumers can imagine themselves in the situation (Petrova and Cialdini 2005). On the other hand, the use of haptic imagery heightens the consumer's processing fluency of promotional discount communication that includes object and gesture emojis which ultimately heightens the consumer's promotion evaluation.

General Discussion

Emojis have become the language of social media and it is important that firms are able to utilize this language to ensure that that their communication is effective in terms of consumer persuasion (Ge and Gretzel 2018). While there is much marketing research that examines the use and impact that a brand's use of face emojis can have, there is a lack of research that explicitly looks at non-face emojis, including gestures and objects. Additionally, the tendency in the extant literature is to focus on the emotional and reinforcement capabilities that emojis have. The present research addresses this research gap by examining the use of gesture and object emojis as partial substitutes for text in a marketing promotion, the ease with which consumers understand the message, and the effect that this understanding has on the overall evaluation of the promotion. The pre-study finds that consumers evaluate promotions that utilize gesture emojis

more favorably when compared to object emojis. This effect is attributed to the consumer's ease of understanding (study 1). Particularly, in study 1, I find that processing fluency mediates the effect of emoji usage on promotion evaluation, whereby it is easier for consumers to understand communication that includes gesture emojis, compared to object emojis. Study 2 manipulates haptic imagery and demonstrates that the fit between haptic imagery and the use of gesture and object emojis makes it easier for consumers to understand the promotion across all conditions. This heightened processing fluency has beneficial effects on consumers' reported evaluation of the promotional discount communication on social media.

Theoretical Implications

Existing marketing research tends to focus primarily on the use of face emojis (e.g., Li et al. 2019). This research examines the gesture and object emojis, revealing that when used absent of additional sensory imagery, gesture emojis can have beneficial downstream effects on promotion evaluation (pre-study) due to higher processing fluency (study 1) when compared to object emojis. Their use in combination with haptic imagery increases processing fluency for both gesture and object emojis, when compared to a non-haptic imagery condition (study 2). Hence, the current research demonstrates that the use of gesture and object emojis can have beneficial downstream effects, particularly when used in conjunction with additional description of haptic imagery in an advertisement. Summarizing, these findings sheds light on how emojis, other than face emojis, function on social media.

The current research also demonstrates non-emotional capabilities of emojis. Extant marketing research on emojis tends to focus on the emotional aspects of emojis. For instance,

messages that include emojis generate affective responses of the recipient (Das et al. 2019; Smith and Rose 2020). Similarly, past research has examined the appropriateness of emotional expression and find that emoji use is beneficial in communal (Li et al. 2019) and informal (Glikson et al. 2018) contexts. The current research reveals the importance of processing fluency for firm-initiated marketing communications that include emojis. Particularly, it is important that firms utilize emojis in ways that a consumers can fluently process them in order to ensure that communication and promotions have a favorable outcome.

This research also contributes to our understanding of partial substitutive capabilities of emojis. Extant research tends to focus on the reinforcement capabilities of emojis, that is emojis that reinforce the written word (e.g., Das et al. 2019). Work by Evans (2017) and Luangrath et al. (2017) suggest that emojis can serve additional capabilities beyond that of reinforcement. For instance, in traditional face-to-face communication, consumers or sales representatives can replace some verbal communication with nonverbal communication, such as gestures (e.g., thumbs up to indicate liking) and movement (e.g., nodding head side to side to indicate disagreement). This is the first research, to the best of my knowledge that examines the use of emojis as partial substitutes for text in marketing communication.

Moreover, this research examines the interplay between emojis and haptic imagery information. The heightened consumption and advertising in digital spaces (Elder and Krishna 2021) creates a need to better understand how to effectively communicate product characteristics as consumers cannot physically touch the object. The results suggest that a fit between haptic touch and the display of hands via the gesture emojis enable consumers to better understand the firm's message. Extant marketing research has demonstrated the beneficial effects of fit with

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expectations (e.g., Chae and Hoegg 2013; King and Auschaitrakul 2019). In line with this, the findings from the current research suggest that the combination of visual imagery through the use the gesture emojis with haptic touch has beneficial effects on consumers' ability to understand a promotion that uses gesture emojis as partial substitutes for text and haptic information. This finding is in line with previous psychological research on the rubber hand illusion, which shows that somasensory and visual imagery can heighten feelings of ownership (Kalckert and Ehrsson 2014). I argue that the combination of haptic imagery and gesture emojis increases the closeness to the self in a similar way that the rubber hand illusion functions. The current research provides support for the connection of haptic imagery with the iconic nature of the object emojis, that is the object emoji is an icon that represents the actual object. Thus, the haptic imagery information interacts with the object emoji (object being imagined) and makes it easier for the consumer to process the information. This ultimately has beneficial effects on the consumer's processing fluency.

Managerial Implications

These results have clear implications for social media managers that use emojis in marketing communication and promotional messages. Particularly, whenever firms make use of promotions and provide descriptions of products online, the combination of gesture/object emojis and haptic imagery can positively influence promotion evaluations through increased levels of processing fluency. Importantly, while the text only condition performed well throughout all of the experiments, the use of emojis may be particularly beneficial as extant research has claimed that the use of emojis can draw attention to a message (Ge and Gretzel 2017; Willoughby and

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Liu 2018). Thus, by including additional sensory information, consumers can fluently process messages that include gesture and object emojis as well as text only communication. While consumers can fluently process text only communication across both conditions, the marketer can benefit from more attention being drawn to those messaging that include emojis and the utilization of haptic imagery to ensure that the message is fluently processed.

The current research also suggests that gesture and object emojis may function as proxies for additional information on the product. Particularly, it suggests that emojis may be a good substitute for photography. Object emojis may be viewed as universal icons that directly represent and depict the object that is being sold. Thus, they may be used to provide some context as to what is being sold without actually needing to include an image of the product. Additionally, gesture emojis can be particularly useful as they may reduce the distance to the self and thus make it easier for consumers to imagine themselves in the narrative. Extant research shows that portraying a hand in a way that is congruent to consumers can heighten appeal as it is easier to imagine their own hand in the situation (Elder and Krishna 2012). The current research shows that gesture emojis provide a similar effect. However, I argue that the gesture emojis (particularly when they are yellow) can serve a broader purpose due to their universal appeal. A photograph of a hand is congruent only to certain people (e.g., skin color, size of hands, etc.). Yellow gesture emojis are particularly valuable in that they are congruent to the broader population. Thus, the findings of the current research suggest that multiple photographs of hands that are congruent to different populations may be unnecessary when the universal yellow gesture emojis are used in marketing communication.

Future Research and Limitations

Future research may examine additional boundary conditions of the beneficial effects of gesture and object emojis. The present research primarily focuses on the interaction between gesture and object emojis and haptic imagery. Additional research may be conducted that examines the interaction of emojis with other sensory imagery. For instance, in study 1, I examine the use of gesture and object emojis within the context of the food industry. For this particular context and others that are similar, it may be worthwhile to examine the interaction of emoji usage and gustatory (taste) or olfactory (smell) imagery.

The present research also focuses on a comparison between object and gesture emojis. Future research that provides a more holistic comparison of the many different types of emojis may provide a more nuanced understanding of the effects that emojis can have in marketing promotions. Luangrath et al. (2017) provide a detailed framework on textual paralanguage. Research that examines the other types of emojis that are largely ignored in research, e.g., those that indicate interactions with others or movement of the body as a whole.

Also, the focus of the current research is on the use of price-based promotions (discounts) providing an opportunity for future research to look at non-price promotional strategies (e.g., free gift). For instance, Chandran and Morowitz (2006) find that free promotions are viewed independent of price due to the nonmonetary terms used and promotion-related thoughts are more salient. Further, this may enable us to disentangle the effect of emojis from price-related variables and focus more on the promotion itself. Thus, future research that examines non-price promotional strategies could yield interesting insights into the way consumers process promotional communication that utilize emojis.

The current research primarily focuses on processing fluency as a mediator explaining the relationship between gesture/object emojis and promotion evaluation. Future research that examines other mediators will allow for a deeper understanding of the underlying psychological process through which the use of gesture and object emojis affect promotion evaluation. For instance, Wu et al. (2022) find that for emoji novices, the use of emojis with multiple meanings can have an adverse effect on processing fluency. Thus, it could be interesting to further examine variables such as memory accessibility. Particularly, research that examines the ease with which consumers are able to recall an ad that includes emojis might yield insights into the way they make purchase decisions.

Additionally, future research might look at the use of skin tones to increase consistency with the consumer's own skin tone. Research by Barbieri and Camacho-Collados (2018) finds that while the use of gestures with the yellow default skin tone are frequent, consumers also make substantial use of variations in skin tone when using emojis that relate to the body. While the current research finds that yellow skin tone gestures appear to be congruent with the larger population as they may be considered the emoji universal skin tone, it may be interesting to examine if the effects of gesture emojis are stronger when they are consistent with the actual skin tone of the consumer.

Finally, the focus of this research is primarily on the use of emojis as a partial substitute for text in promotions. Additional research may examine more complex substitutive scenarios, such as situations in which emojis fully substitute text or situations in which multiple types of emojis are substituted in a single post. In addition to the use of substitution, future emoji research may examine other nonverbal communication strategies that are utilized in face-to-face

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communication. For instance, in addition to reinforcement and substitution, Evans (2017) suggests that nonverbal communication in the face-to-face context can also be used to send a mixed message (i.e., nonverbal cues don't match what is being said), provide information that cannot be communicated orally, emphasize or accent what is spoken, and manage communication with others. Additional research that examines emojis use in ways similar to that of nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication may further our understanding of emojis as a textual paralanguage.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This dissertation provides an analysis of the functions of emojis beyond what the primary

focus of extant literature has been. Particularly, previous emoji research has largely focused on

the normalized meaning of emojis, i.e., meaning which is currently accepted. However, there is

also a need to consider how consumers react to this normalized meaning (Grace 2021) and the

way interactions inform the maintenance and modification of meaning (Blumer 1986). Essay 1

provides a conceptual examination of emojis through a social interactionism and liquid

consumption lens. I argue that symbolic interactions using emojis among many people at the

global level, made possible through technology-mediated interactions, is informing the meaning

of emojis. Further, this meaning is in a state of perpetual evolution given the liquid state of

society where the only permanence is change (Bauman 2012) and this change is occurring at

more rapid pace than ever (Rosa 2013). This line of argument has important implications for

marketers who strive to remain relevant and stand out in the liquid marketplace.

Additionally, extant research has a tendency to focus on the reinforcement and emotional

capabilities of emojis. This focus persists despite claims that emojis can have capabilities beyond

that of reinforcement (Evans 2017) and can serve argumentative and credibility purposes (Ge

and Gretzel 2018). Within this dissertation, I look at emojis as full (Essay 2) and partial (Essay

3) substitutes for text. Particularly, in Essay 2, I examine strings of emojis as substitutes for text.

Whereas extant research claims that this type of communication is useful to draw attention to

messages, I find that consumers have difficulty understanding this messaging. In particular, I find that emoji only communication results in lower processing fluency which ultimately has a negative effect on brand attitude. This negative indirect effect holds regardless of whether or not the brand is utilitarian or hedonic. However, the direct effect of emoji only communication on brand attitude is negative, when compared to text only communication, when used by utilitarian brands. Additionally, in Essay 2 I find that regardless of the nature of the brand as hedonic or utilitarian, emoji only communication has a positive effect on brand attitude through perception of fun. These findings provide important implications for social media managers that seek to design communication strategies that stand out social media. Particularly, while emoji only communication can attract attention and be seen as fun, there may be a need for subsequent traditional textual communication to ensure that the messaging is clear.

In Essay 3, I examine emojis as partial substitutes for text in firm-initiated promotional messages that are posted on social media. Particularly, I focus on gesture (👍) and object (e.g., 👕) emojis when communicating promotional discounts to consumers. This focus serves a dual purpose by providing an evaluation of non-face emojis (which are largely under researched) and by examining emojis in a non-emotional context. I find that the use of gesture emojis leads to higher processing fluency when compared to object emojis. This positive effect of gesture emojis has in turn a favorable effect on consumers' evaluation of the message. Additionally, I examine the interplay of emoji usage with haptic imagery and find that the inclusion of haptic information makes it easier to understand messages that include object and gesture emojis. That is processing fluency is similar for communication that includes object and gesture emojis when haptic imagery is provided. Thus, Essay 3 provides important insights into the partial substitutive and

non-emotional capabilities of emojis. Additionally, Essay 3 finds that haptic imagery can have

beneficial effects on the ease with which consumers understand gesture and object emojis.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jacob Christopher Almaguer (jacob.almaguer@gmail.com) earned his Ph.D. in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in 2022. He has previously completed his M.B.A. at UTRGV in 2016. He also completed his B.B.A. in Management from the University of Texas at Brownsville in 2014. His research focuses on consumer behavior, marketing communication, and social media communities. He has presented research at *Association for Consumer Research* and *American Marketing Association* and has published work in *Journal of Consumer Marketing* and *Markets, Globalization and Development Review*. In 2019, he was awarded the Ph.D. Student Excellence Award from the Marketing Department at UTRGV. Additionally, in 2021 he was awarded a Ph.D. Program Research Award from the Robert C. Vackar College of Business and Entrepreneurship at UTRGV.