Radboud University of Nijmegen

The effect of brands affordability on the identity of the commenter and the formality of the language on YouTube comments

Bachelor Thesis

Het effect van de betaalbaarheid van merken op de identiteit van de gebruikers en de formaliteit van de taal op YouTube opmerkingen

Theoretisch gestuurde Bachelorwerkstuk

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Abstract

Social media are web-based technologies that are able to create interactive internet platforms where people can communicate with each other. YouTube is one platforms where people can post and comment on videos. Commenting on social media can differ per commenter. Some commenters use formal language and others use informal language. Similarly, commenters can choose whether they want to stay anonymous or not. The two variables, formality of language and identity of poster were analysed on YouTube comments of two videos where well-known brands were rivalling; Coca Cola vs. Pepsi and Samsung vs. Apple. The relation between the affordability of the brand and the formality of language was analysed and also was the relation between the identity of the commenter and the formality of the language analysed. Finally, the relation between the affordability of the brand and the identity of the commenter was analysed. The corpus contained 500 randomly selected comments. The variables were divided into three groups each. The formality of the language was divided into 'formal', 'informal' and 'neutral'. The identity of the commenter was divided into 'anonymous', 'real identity' and 'not sure'. The results showed that the language that was used in the comments of the expensive brands were more formal than the comments of the cheaper brand. However, the formality of the language did not significantly relate to when the commenter was anonymous or had a real identity. Nevertheless, the identity of the commenter was more often real when commenting on the video of the expensive brand (Samsung vs. Apple). The results showed that more luxurious and expensive products attract users that have a real identity on YouTube. Results also revealed that commenters use more formal language when they are commenting on videos with expensive brands than on videos with cheaper brands . This research may benefit the marketing field on how to approach the consumers better and if rivalling has a positive or negative influence on the brands' image.

Introduction

A new way of communicating with each other has risen in the last decade, which is social media. Social media are mobile and web-based technologies that are able to create interactive internet platforms where people can communicate with each other. Social media has a great exposure in the press nowadays and is seen as new way of communication (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Social media contains a big variety of online, user generated content forums. Such as blogs, chat rooms, social networking websites, consumer-to-consumer email and consumer-to-business (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Since social media is used so often in the daily lives of people it can be said that corporate communication has been democratized. The power does not lie in the hands of those in public relations and marketing, but it is in the hands of the individuals and communities that create blogs, are active on Facebook, Twitter and so forth (Kietzmann, et al., 2011). The reason for that is because it has ease of use, speed and reach; social media is changing the public discourse in our society rapidly (Asur & Huberman, 2010).

On almost every social media platform people can leave a comment. Commenting is a way to interact through social media with other people. People can engage in discussion or give their opinion. Comments show the readers' concern toward a specific or general topic of the post. The impact of comments can differ according to their quality, some comments can be useful opinions but others can be totally meaningless (Li, Wang, Chen, & Lin, 2010). According to Li et al. (2010) content and structural linkage of comments should also be taken into consideration in order to measure the quality of the comments.

As a social networking service, YouTube is used to upload different videos online. Siersdorfer, Chelaru, Nejd and Pedro (2010) investigated that 60% of all online watched videos are watched on YouTube. They state that "YouTube provides several social tools for community interaction, including the possibility to comment on published videos and, in addition, to provide ratings about these comments by other users" (Siersdorfer et al. 2010, p. 1). YouTube also offers a personal profile page which is called 'channel page', where users can upload their personal videos (Boyd, 2006). Although everybody can watch the videos, users can only post a comment when they are a member of YouTube and have their own account. Where they register they have to give some personal information such as age, gender and location. Users do not have to give their real personal data, they may choose to give false information (Thelwall, Sud, & Vis, 2012).

According to research done by Thelwall et al. (2012) most YouTube comments are

short with a range from 58 to 500 characters, this is approximately eleven words. The commenters have choose to give short comments. However they do not have a minimum of characters like on other platforms of social media, for example Twitter where commenters are able to use a maximum of 140 characters. Thelwall et al. (2012) also found out that most comments are slightly more positive but a 35% is more negative. Negative sentiment was not often seen in YouTube videos, but the videos that attracted many comments, there, the negative sentiment was more common to appear in contrary to videos with fewer comments. There the sentiment was much more often positive. Thelwall et al. (2012) concluded that negativity can lead to long discussions on YouTube. Commenters can keep on commenting on each other. The use of language on YouTube can differ, a number of conventions have emerged, such as emoticons (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008). Walther & Parks (2002) mentioned that textual comments such as those from YouTube have limitations and peculiarities because they are an electronic text. The absence of nonverbal channels, such as appearance, body language and sounds, in textual communication can lead to misunderstandings mostly in short messages.

As mentioned earlier the length of comments on YouTube is short. In those comments the use of language can differ. Heylighen & Dewaele (1999, p. 33) state that "a formal style will be characterized by detachment, precision, and "objectivity", but also rigidity and cognitive load; an informal style will be much lighter in form, more flexible, direct, and involved, but correspondingly more subjective, less accurate and less informative". According to Herring (1998a) the informal use of language, such as spelling errors, are often not caused by lack of knowledge or the lack of attention but are made on purpose. People often try to write their message by using fewer letters, in that way people can get creative. They are able to write words with fewer letters or use numbers instead of letters. It is a common perception that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) language is less correct, less coherent and more simple than standard written language (Herring, 2001). Chun (1994) claims that electronic discussion is comparable to written texts in terms of language complexity, but also has characteristics of face-to face discussions and that is why it can be an important connection for the transfer of communication skills from the written to spoken domain.

Although commenters need to register to make an account they can still be anonymous by filling in false information. Many commenters use a pseudonym on YouTube (Friedman, Khan & Howe, 2000). The reason they choose for a pseudonym is because they feel free from social norms and because it is difficult to impose social or other sanctions on anonymous users; research shows that most of the users have a pseudonym (Friedman et al., 2000). Some

users choose for a pseudonym that is only recognisable by their friends and not strangers (Thelwall et al., 2012). When users of YouTube give false personal data than they have chosen for a fake identity, they want to stay anonymous. When they give real personal data, for example a real photograph and a real name they chose to give their real identity.

People communicating about brands happens with or without the permission of the companies in question, this is one of the ways of user-generated content. It is now up to organisations to decide if they want to get serious about social media and participate in this communication, or continue to ignore it. Either ignoring it or participating in it, both can have a tremendous impact (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Due to brand-related user-generated content many different kinds of videos are found on YouTube; reviews, demonstrations, creative consumption, the 'unboxing' of new products, amateur advertisements, satires and spoofs, brand community storytelling and the coverage of brand related events (Blythe & Cairns ,2009; Pace, 2008). These videos can be used by brands to attract viewers but also to rival with other brands.

Brand rivalry is the interaction between two competing brands. For brands to distinguish themselves from the competitors they often propagate their brand as greater and superior in comparison to other brands. By using this technique they possibly form, maybe unintentionally, a negative view about the competition and brand rivalry (Sponga, 2013). According to Sponga (2013) Apple and Samsung are one of the most famous duos that are rivals. Muniz & Hamer (2001) show that Coca Cola fans expressed their hatred towards Pepsi and vice versa. This was done on public websites where fans could express their preferences towards their soda of choice (Muniz & Hamer, 2001). The rival brands Coca Cola vs. Pepsi are brands that produce products that are affordable for almost everyone. The brands are not associated with luxury. On the other hand, Samsung vs. Apple are two brands that bring products on the market that not all people can afford. Their product are more luxurious and people will not buy them on a daily basis.

This research will focus on the formality of the comments on YouTube rival brand advertisement videos and the formality of the comments in combination with the identity of the commenter. The reason that this study is done, is because there is little knowledge about this topic. Research has been done when it comes to YouTube comments and brand rivalry; but there is no research available that combines these two fields. This research could help researchers, marketing and public relations in the future to know how to approach consumers of their products. This research can show how users react on the advertisements that rival brands post on YouTube. It can also show if this way of advertising helps the brand become

even more popular. For this research four very famous brands will be analysed; Coca Cola vs. Pepsi and Apple vs. Samsung. Two of the brands are expensive and the other two are less expensive. Despite the price difference these brands are for most people easy to relate to. To explore this issue the overarching questions guiding this research are:

1.	What is the relationship between the use of formal language in comments and the price affordability of brands on YouTube's brand rivalry ads; do cheaper brands (Cola & Pepsi) attract more informal comments compared to the more expensive brands (Apple & Samsung)?

2.	Is there any link between the formality of the comments and the identity of the commenter on YouTube?

3.	Is there any link between the affordability of the brand and the identity of the commenter on YouTube?

Method

In this study a corpus of 500 comments were analysed using a Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2004). In short, CMDA is a way to research online behaviour. "In the broadest sense, any analysis of online behaviour that is grounded in empirical, textual observations is computer-mediated discourse analysis" (Herring, 2004 p. 339).

Materials

Comments of two YouTube videos were chosen for this study. The comments were chosen randomly, using an online programme named "Randomizer". In each video two brands were rivalling each other. The first video contained a commercial of two inexpensive brands, Coca Cola vs. Pepsi and the second video contained a commercial of two more expensive brands, Apple vs. Samsung. Each video had more than 500 comments what was the minimum that was needed for this research. The Coca Cola vs. Pepsi video had 2,870 comments and the Apple vs. Samsung video had 2,584 comments. The Coca Cola vs Pepsi video was posted in 2006 and the Apple vs. Samsung video was posted in 2012.

Procedure

The formality of the language and the identity of the commenter were the two variables for this study. For the variable formality of the language used in the comments the coding was divided into three categories, formal, neutral and informal. The comment was seen as 'formal' when the comment was a complete sentence and did not contain ellipsis, emoticons, symbols and words that were misspelled or when more letters were used than necessary. The comment was seen as 'neutral' when the comment was a complete sentence but did not contain punctuation, a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and did contain abbreviations. The comments was seen as 'informal' when the comment was not a complete sentence and it contained, ellipsis, emoticons, symbols and words that were misspelled or when more letters were used than necessary for example 'perfeeeeect' instead of 'perfect'. In Table 1 an example of each category is given.

Table 1. Examples categories from the variable formality of language

Examples categories formality of language	
Formal	Let me start by saying that the Samsung Galaxy S6 is very impressive looking both inside and out. But all I can think about is the 7 second mark of their own commercial for the Samsung Galaxy S3.
Neutral	Educate me, haha. Unlike 99% of you android fanboys who have never touched an Apple product, I've spent three years rooting and repairing android phones. It's hilarious that you come to the defense of androids music capabilities but when you can't come up with anything you just say you don't need it. The iPhone 3g runs iOS6 no problem, how many 5 year old android phones run jelly bean, 0.
Informal	apple & samsung.. both suck, honestly :)

In Appendix A an elaborated description of the variable and it's categories is given.

For the variable identity of the commenter also three categories were used. The commenter was 'anonymous' when the name was surely not real and the photograph used was not of a real person, but also if the name could possibly be real but the photograph was not, the commenter was still categorized as 'anonymous'. The commenter was seen as 'real' when the photograph and the name were likely to be real. The third category was 'not sure' in this category the commenter used a real photograph but did not use a real name. The reason the third category was created is because a name is not unique but a person's face is. In Table 2 an example of each category is given.

Table 2. Examples categories from the variable identity of commenter

Examples categories identity commenter	
Real	**Jessica Neyland**
Anonymous	**afa1515**
Not sure	**AllThatBeauty1113**

In Appendix B a more elaborated description of the variable and it's categories is given.

In total, 500 comments were collected, 250 from each video. Three coders were used, but the Kohen's Kappa was only taken from two of the coders. The coders that were used were coder number 1 and coder number 3. The Kohen's Kappa from those two coders were the highest. The interrater reliability of the category 'formal' of the variable formality of language was satisfactory: $\kappa = .82$, $p < .001$. The interrater reliability of the category 'neutral' of the variable formality of language was satisfactory: $\kappa = .80$, $p < .001$. The interrater reliability of the category 'informal' of the variable formality of language was satisfactory: $\kappa = .90$, $p < .001$. For the variable identity of the commenter a Kohen's Kappa test was also done. The interrater reliability of the category 'anonymous' of the variable identity of the commenter was satisfactory: $\kappa = .81$, $p < .001$. The interrater reliability of the category 'real' of the variable identity of the commenter was satisfactory: $\kappa = .82$, $p < .001$. The interrater reliability of the category 'not sure' of the variable identity of the commenter was acceptable: $\kappa = .70$, $p < .001$

Statistical treatment

In this research, three Chi-square tests were conducted. The reason the Chi-square tests were chosen is because the relation between the formality of the language, the identity of the commenter and the affordability of the brand were investigated. For the first question the Chi square tested the relation between the formality of the language and the affordability of the brand, for the second question it tested the relation between the formality of the language and the identity of the commenter and for the third question it tested the relation between the affordability of the brand and the identity of the commenter.

Results

For the three research questions three Chi square tests were carried out. The first research question was if there was any relationship between the use of formal language in comments and the affordability of brands on YouTube's brand rivalry ads. It was questioned whether cheaper brands attract more informal comments compared to the more expensive brands. The Chi square test showed that there was a significant relation (χ^2 (2) =16.83, $p <$ .001) between the use of the formality of language and the affordability of the brand. In Table 3 the exact numbers of each category from the variable formality of language are presented. The video Samsung vs. Apple had 155 (44.2%) informal comments out of 250. The Coca Cola vs. Pepsi video had 196 (55.8%) informal comments out of 250. Out of the 43 formal comments 25 (58.1%) were from Samsung vs. Apple and 18 (41.9%) were from Cola vs. Pepsi. Out of the 106 neutral comments 70 (66%) were from Samsung vs. Apple and 36 (34%) were from Coca Cola vs. Pepsi.

Table 3. The percentage of each category of the variable formality of the language used in comments

Video/Type comment	Formal	Neutral	Informal	Total
Samsung vs. Apple	25 (58.1%)	70 (66%)	155 (44.2%)	250
Cola vs. Pepsi	18 (41.9%)	36 (34%)	196 (55.8%)	250
Total	43	106	351	500

In order to answer the second research question, 'is there any link between the formality of the comment and the identity of the commenter', a Chi square was done. According to the Chi square there was no significant relation (χ^2 (4) =6.62, $p =$ .158) between the identity of the commenter and the formality of the comment. As shown in Table 4, most of the comments were informal when the commenter was anonymous.

Table 4. Identity of the commenter and formality of the language

Identity/Formality	Formal	Neutral	Informal	Total
Anonymous	38 (88.4%)	81 (76.4%)	301 (85.8%)	420
Real	3 (7%)	19 (17.9%)	35 (10%)	57
Not sure	2 (4.6%)	6 (5.7%)	15 (4.3%)	23
Total	43	106	351	500

For the third research question, 'is there is any link in the affordability and the identity of the commenter' a Chi square test was done. The test showed a significant relation (χ^2 (2) =12.51, p = .002) between the identity of the commenter and the affordability of the brand. In Table 5 the results of the third question are presented. Out of the 420 comments with an anonymous commenter 199 (47.4%) were from the Samsung vs. Apple video and 221 (53.6%) were from the Coca Cola vs. Pepsi video. Out of the 57 comments with a commenter with a real identity 41 (72.9%) were from the Samsung vs. Apple video and only 16 (28.1%) were from the Cola vs. Pepsi video. Finally 57 commenters were difficult to recognize and were coded as 'not sure'. From the Samsung vs. Apple video 10 (43.5%) commenters were coded as not sure and from the Cola vs. Pepsi 13 (56.5%) were coded as not sure.

Table 5. The type of identity found in each video.

Video/Type identity	Anonymous	Real	Not sure	Total
Samsung vs. Apple	199 (47.4%)	41 (71.9%)	10 (43.5%)	250
Cola vs. Pepsi	221 (53.6%)	16 (28.1%)	13 (56.5%)	250
Total	420	57	23	500

Discussion and Conclusion

Rival advertisements of different major brands are common on YouTube. A few of the greatest and most rivalling brands are Coca Cola vs. Pepsi and Apple vs. Samsung (Muniz & Hamer, 2001; Sponga, 2013). In this research, the formality of the language and the identity of the poster were investigated. The main findings are discussed below.

The first research question was 'what is the relationship between the use of formal language in comments and the price affordability of brands on YouTube's brand rivalry ads; do cheaper brands (Cola & Pepsi) attract more informal comments compared to the more expensive brands (Apple & Samsung)?' The results show that there is a difference in the formality of the language and the affordability of the brand. This is contradictory to earlier studies, according to Herring (1998a) the lack of correct and formal language is not related to a lack of knowledge or inattention but posters choose for it. Nevertheless people still feel that they have to use more formal language when they comment on advertisements of two brands that are big and famous and have a certain level of prestige. The feeling posters get from commenting on two brands with a higher level of prestige is different than commenting on

two brands that are more casual and used on a daily basis.

The second research question, 'is there any link between the formality of the comments and the identity of the poster on YouTube?' shows that the identity of the poster and the formality of the language do not have any significant relation. This means that posters that choose to stay anonymous do not use more informal language than posters that use their real identity. This is contradictory to earlier studies. According to Friedman, Khan and Howe (2000) the reason people use fake identities is because they feel they can express themselves more freely and are not afraid to be recognized. Some users choose for a pseudonym that is only recognisable by their friends and not strangers (Thelwall et al., 2012).

The third research question 'is there any link between the affordability of the brand and the identity of the poster on YouTube?' shows that the posters had more often a real identity when commenting on a rival advertisement of the expensive brands Samsung vs. Apple than when commenting on a rival advertisement of the inexpensive brands Coca Cola vs. Pepsi. Their posters often were anonymous, 221 from the 420 comments. There are no earlier studies regarding to this question to be able to compare the results. What could explain the results of this question is that posters use their real identity more often when the brands are not selling products that are disposable after one time or are in the food and beverage industry. Another possible explanation is that Samsung and Apple have a different target group than Coca Cola and Pepsi and their target group are people that prefer to show their identity on YouTube. It could be possible that the target group of Samsung and Apple are people with an higher education because the first research question showed that the comments on the Samsung vs. Apple were more often neutral or formal than the comments posted on the video of Coca Cola and Pepsi. People with an higher education often know how to use language in a better and more formal way (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999).

This study had a few limitations. The videos that were used were posted in different years. The video of Coca Cola vs. Pepsi was posted six years before the video of Samsung vs. Apple. This could have an influence on the results because the comments that were collected were posted in different years. One video was posted in 2006 and the other one in 2012. In those six years, it is possible that the use of language on YouTube could have changed but also the reputation and image of each brand. The reason that the videos differed a lot in the years they were posted is because many videos with the same topic did not have enough comments to be able to select a random representative corpus.

Further studies could also investigate which words are used often in the informal comments and if posters tend to curse often, and which swearing words they chose to use. Besides that, the threads of the comments could be used in other researches and see whether that has an influence on the comments following the thread. Another possibility is to use more videos of the rivalling brands and compare them with each other in order to find out if the comment posted on other videos are similar to the comments that are posted on the videos used in this research. Similarly researchers could investigate if there is any difference in the use of language from the first rival video of two brands until the newest rival video of two brands.

This study could benefit people in the marketing field to have a better insight of how the rivalling commercials they make can have an influence on the users of YouTube. Brands themselves could also have a better idea of how they can promote themselves on YouTube. Furthermore, this research may have benefit the marketing field to understand the use of language on YouTube better. This research may also help the brands to find out if the existing rivalry helps their image in a positive or negative way. Finally, it may benefit them to find out how to approach their target group in a better way.

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Appendix A. Definitions of operational terms for the variable formality of language

Category		YouTube comment example
Formal	Complete sentence	Why do you hate Apple? I buy an iPhone so I can jailbreak it and get free apps. The rest I guess is extra feature, that I rarely use. If you are standing in line waiting to get an iPhone5, this is for you.
	No contraction	I am I have You are
Neutral	Complete sentence	I saw that one, I died laughing
	Contraction	I'm I've You're
	Omission of punctuation	When comma's, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks etc. are missing.
	Type error	Words misspelled, indicating that is was an error not done on purpose, if the rest of the sentence is spelled correct.
Informal	Incomplete sentence	such as omission of grammatical function words
	Contraction without capital letter or single quotation mark	Im Ive Youre
	Missing punctuation	the use of lower case in place of uppercase
	The use of capital letters where not necessary	ok, i LOVE apple. but this is HILARIOUS
	stylistic styles such as ellipses, emoticons and symbols	;) ☺ :P

Appendix B. Definitions of operational terms for the variable identity of the commenter

Category	Example	YouTube comment
Anonymous	No real photo or name	Origins686720 IDK547LOL
	Real name but fake photo	Randy Rogers Jose Díaz
Real	Real photo and real name	Jahvere Gordon Kevin Minatee
Not sure	Real photo but fake name	iiBenii3

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