

Emoji use and its effects on customer engagement in a social media marketing context



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Abstract

In recent years, the use of the emoji's has increasingly enjoyed more attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of social media marketing. Numerous studies, especially regarding the effects of emoji use on customer engagement provided different frameworks of how and in which ways this relationship could be established. In this research, we aimed to compare two different routes of how this relationship might function: on the one hand an emotional route, where the effect of emoji's on customer engagement through positive affect was assessed. On the other hand an associative route, where the effect of emoji's on customer engagement through perceived playfulness was assessed. The key difference between the two routes lies in their effects based on time: the emotional route is oriented at short-term effects, while the associative route was oriented at long-term effects. The comparison was made while focusing on the directive speech act oriented emoji, which was directly aimed at creating customer engagement. The goal of this research was to compare the two routes and possibly identify the dominant route within this framework and answer the research question '*What is the effect of 'directive move' oriented emoji's in brand communication on customer engagement through positive affect and perceived playfulness?*'. To test the effects, a scenario-based experiment in the form of a survey was created. The results showed that the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji influences customer engagement through perceived playfulness, thus establishing proof for the possible long-term effect emoji use has on customer engagement. Furthermore, we found that positive affect, thought to be oriented at the short-term effects, plays a role in establishing an effect on the long-term. Testing the effects on product category indicated that the effects do not differ between hedonic and utilitarian products. The findings in this research offer theoretical and practical implications oriented to how emoji's can influence customer engagement and thus make brand communication practices on social media more effective.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social media has become an increasingly important part of the lives of consumers (Guesalaga, 2016). Because of this rapid growth of importance over the last few years, more companies are orienting themselves in the field of social media and are becoming more aware of the effect of their social media content on customers (Lee et al., 2013).

The main question that comes forward from the growth in social media use is how organizations can effectively use their social media channels to create favorable outcomes for their organizations, for example through the generation of more customer engagement.

Customer engagement is defined as *'a psychological state reflecting customers' interactive, co-creative experiences with a firm, which highlights the active role of the consumer'* (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Studies towards the creation and enlargement of customer engagement through social media channels have identified numerous content related aspects of a social media message that have an effect on customer engagement, such as topic, length, style of language and paralinguistic tools (Schreiner et al., 2019). One of these paralinguistic tools available for content creators is the use of emoji's.

Emoji's, which are defined as *"pictographs that represent facial expressions, people, places or things"* (McShane et al., 2020) have become increasingly popular in use over the past years as a way for organizations to enlarge customer engagement (Riordan, 2017b). Due to this rise in popularity, it becomes even more important for organizations to better understand the effects emoji use has on their customers (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017; McShane et al., 2021; Schreiner et al., 2019). This paper focuses on emoji's as a paralinguistic tool and the effects it has on customer engagement.

The use of emoji's in social media messages has been the subject of numerous studies. For example, Lohmann, Pyaka and Zanger (2017) investigated the effects emoji use could have on the emotions provoked within a customer. They found that a sender of an emoji can steer the receiver of an emoji towards a desired emotion that they wish to transmit in a more effective way than through text (Lohmann et al., 2017). In another study, McShane, Pancer, Pool and Deng (2021) found a connection between emoji use in twitter messages and customer engagement and how this emoji use would lead to more customer engagement, by influencing the perception of the brand as 'playful'. Although all these articles provide us with interesting information about the effects of emoji's, there appears to be a difference in the way the

theoretical framework regarding the effects of emoji's is built up, especially the way in which emoji's have an effect on customer engagement. More specifically, there appear to be two main routes on how emoji's have an effect on customer engagement: an emotional route and an associative route.

The emotional route is mainly aimed at how emoji's directly influence the emotion of the receiver of the social media message. Das, Wiener and Klareklas (2019) investigated the effects of emoji use on customer engagement through positive affect, which entails the influencing of the emotion of the receiver. According to the literature concerning positive affect, this direct influence on the emotion of the customer appears to be more short-term oriented, as it mainly aims at evoking emotions within the customer after being exposed to the post (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Das, Wiener and Klareklas (2019) found that emoji use in social media messages has a positive effect on purchase intention, due to the fact that the receivers felt happier and more aroused when emoji's were present (Das et al., 2019). Lohmann et al (2017) investigated whether emotions could be provoked by the use of emoji's and found that emotions, expressed by an emoji, affect the emotions within a receiver. For example, a positive emoji like a smiley face leads to a receiver feeling more happy (Lohmann et al., 2017). They concluded that organizations should be aware of the positive benefits emoji's could have on creating engagement with consumers.

On the other hand lays the associative route, aimed at the brand association a consumer makes based on the use of emoji's by the organization. When consumers associate a brand with a positive human characteristic, it provides the opportunity to build long-term customer brand relationships in addition to simply influencing the emotion of a consumer on the short term, which is the case with affect (Aaker, 1997; Das et al., 2019; Keng et al., 2013). McShane et al. (2021) found for example that a company could be perceived as more 'playful' if they use emoji's in their brand communication and that this perceived playfulness had an effect on customer engagement. Casado-Molina et al. (2019) assessed the effects of emoji use on brand communications in the beer industry and found that emoji's are a way in which brands can differentiate themselves from the rest and build long-term brand relationships, as they add additional positive emotional loading to the message which would lead to a more positive image of the brand in the long run (Casado-Molina et al., 2019). For example, adding a smiley face to a message can lead to a company being perceived as more friendly by consumers.

In this research, we aim to take both routes into consideration at the same time, as it would provide us with a great insight into the strength of both routes in comparison with each other. By doing so, we can see if the effects on the short-term (emotional route) or on the long-term (associative) route are dominant in the emoji context. The two paths will be constructed by using two mediating variables: positive affect (for the emotional path) and perceived playfulness (for the associative path)

Besides that, these paths will be tested by assessing a specific type of emoji: the ‘directive move’ type (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). The directive move type, explained in more detail below, is aimed at persuading a receiver to engage with the sender (Ge & Gretzel, 2018), being the brand. An example could be ‘Share our message and have a chance to win a big prize 😊’. By doing so, we will be able to understand how emoji’s can enhance customer engagement in the most direct way possible. This differs from previous research, where mainly visual characteristics of emoji’s were targeted and differentiated upon such as smile and size. This classification on function instead of visual characteristic builds further upon the calls of numerous authors for example Das et al. (2019) for further research on the different types of emoji’s and their effects in social media marketing.

1.2 Research aim and question

This research aims to investigate the relationship between ‘directive move’ emoji’s and customer engagement, through positive affect and perceived playfulness on the social media platform Facebook, while investigating the differences between different product categories. The research goal is thus to investigate whether the use of directive move emoji’s has a positive effect on customer engagement explained by positive affect (emotional route) and perceived playfulness (associative route) and potentially compare these effects based on relative strength. To capture this research goal, we state the following research question ‘*What is the effect of ‘directive move’ oriented emoji’s in brand communication on customer engagement through positive affect and perceived playfulness?*’

1.3: Theoretical relevance

The researchers in the field of emoji use and the effect of the use of emoji's all express the benefits of additional research in this field (Yakın & Eru, 2017). The main point of relevance of this research however, lies within the clear distinction in emoji type aimed at creating customer engagement by specifically focusing on the directive speech act. This directly answers the call of Ge and Gretzel (2017), where they ask for the further exploration of customer responses to different 'speech acts' which are in their research assessed through emoji's. Ge and Gretzel (2017) state that although emoji's are found to be an effective paralinguistic tool, the literature currently does not provide a holistic and systematic view of how emoji's are used to accomplish persuasion, as they are in most cases generalized as being very similar (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Furthermore, testing and comparing previously found effects of emoji's in general in the context of the function of an emoji, instead of the visual characteristics which are far more common, create a comparable and generalizable foundation and direction for researchers, which was also called for in the work of Casado-Molina et al. (2019).

Besides that, this research will contribute to the existing research by comparing two main explanatory mechanisms as ways of how emoji's could influence customer engagement. As both routes were found to be significant and plausible, a comparison of both routes on existence and strength provides the relevance of this paper as it is yet unknown which of the two routes has the largest effect in a direct comparison. To the knowledge of the researcher, this is the first research that takes both routes into consideration at the same time. Our findings could therefore contribute to the knowledge of the effects of emoji use and steer research towards the dominant route to create more efficient knowledge in this field, providing opportunities for researchers to build upon our findings.

1.4: Practical relevance

As social media platforms keep developing and new trends arise in rapid tempo, it is beneficial to keep the research in these fields up to date (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The

practical relevance of this article lays within the possible chances for marketers to use their social media platforms in a more effective way. As social media has proven to be an effective way for marketers to advertise their products (Yakın & Eru, 2017), it is beneficial for these marketers to understand the underlying dynamics behind the different aspects that a social media platform has to offer.

Our research potentially gives managers the ability to make evidence-based decisions on the use of specific types of emoji's in social media marketing campaigns. While the use of emoji's in advertisements is growing, little is known about whether or how managers can use emoji's effectively when communicating with customers (Das et al., 2019). Our research provides a concrete direction to marketers and organizations on a specific type of emoji and the effects this emoji could potentially have in the long- or in the short run on customer engagement, allowing these practitioners to become more aware of the specific effects of the directive move emoji type and optimize their online communication strategies (Das et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Mathews & Lee, 2018; McShane et al., 2021)

Lastly, an increased understanding of how emoji's could influence customer engagement could possibly also benefit brands and organizations indirectly in other ways. Customer engagement has been a critical dimension in the marketing field work as it is an important antecedent of brand performance (Cabiddu et al., 2014). Besides that, customer engagement can lead to a stronger brand equity, which came forward as an outcome variable in the research of Prentice, Han, Hua and Hu (2019) . All of these outcome variables have identified to be of a positive influence on brand performance (Prentice et al., 2019; Verma, 2021).

1.5: Thesis outline

After this introduction, we will discuss the most important concepts in chapter 2 and build our conceptual model based on previously published scientific literature. In chapter 3 we will give the methodological overview of this research. In chapter 4 we will discuss the results of this paper followed up by chapter 5 which will include discussions and the conclusion. Lastly, chapter 6 will critically reflect through limitations, suggestions for further research and implications for theory and practitioners.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1: Defining customer engagement

Customer engagement has become one of the keystones in academic research regarding social media marketing over the last few years (Sashi, 2012). Although the concept of customer engagement is a rather broad term that is defined differently across the literary field, an overall definition is given by De Vries and Carlson (2014): *‘a psychological state reflecting customers’ interactive, co-creative experiences with a firm, which highlights the active role of the consumer’*. Within this concept of customer engagement, two dimensions seem to be differentiated by researchers: customer engagement behavior, which is defined by Hollebeek et al (2014): *‘A customer’s level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular customer/brand interaction’*. On the other hand, Prentice et al (2019) define the concept of customer engagement as a psychological state, where an emotional connection between the brand or firm and the consumer is established. As we aim to focus on the behavioral dimension of customer engagement, meaning that the customer will act on its engagement through for example liking or sharing a post, we will define customer engagement by the definition given by Hollebeek et al. (2014).

2.2: Emoji’s and their functions

As presented earlier in this paper, emoji’s can be defined as *“pictographs that represent facial expressions, people, places or things”* (McShane et al., 2020). Emoji’s were originally created in Japan, however, their popularity has spread across the entire world, being an established part of digital communication today (Lu et al., 2016). Emoji’s supplement or replace written language such as words, but also symbols, images, punctuation, demarcations, or any combination of these elements (Das et al., 2019). Although emoji’s are similar to images, they carry a distinctive advantage that is the core of their strength: they function as a part of language, sometimes acting as a substitute for a written word and other times

functioning as a form of punctuation (Das et al., 2019).

A body of text can even be supplemented by the use of an emoji in order to express certain emotions in a more detailed way, without having to express that emotion through words, which is one of the distinctive capabilities of an emoji (Arya et al., 2018). Lohmann, Pyka and Zanger (2017) identified in their literature review that *'emoji's express the same emotions as respective emotional expressions in the face-to-face context. Additionally, they function in the same way like non-verbal cues in face-to-face-communication'*. Therefore, a sender of an emoji can steer the receiver of an emoji towards a desired emotion that they wish to transmit in a more effective way than with text (Lohmann et al., 2017).




Throughout the years, emoji's have also been created to express more than direct emotions and various categories exist such as food, animals, places, buildings, flags and symbols (Das et al., 2019; Leung & Chan, 2017; Lohmann et al., 2017). These emoji's offer users more opportunities to enhance decoration, modify tone and deliver additional information (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Firms and organization have also begun using these emoji's in their advertising campaigns across the different social media platforms (Arya et al., 2018). The benefits for these businesses are very similar to the benefits for other users of emoji's: the common alphabet of the emoji's and the effectiveness they have on bringing an emotion towards consumers, while diminishing the chance of wrong perceptions of text (Yakin & Eru, 2017).

2.2.1: Specifying the emoji type: The directive speech act

Because of the fact that the quantity and difference in emoji is so large, Ge and Gretzel (2018) took emoji use in the broad term of the word one step further and tried to classify emoji's based on their function in text. In their research, they assessed the different speech acts, which indicated the goal of a social media message. These speech acts are oriented at the goal a sender of a message wishes to communicate to the receiver. Three main different speech acts were differentiated in their research: the assertive speech act, indicating 'getting the viewer to form or attend to a belief' and the expressive speech act which is 'the sender expresses opinions and emotions' (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). The directive speech act, which this paper

focuses on, has the intention to ‘ask a customer to perform an action, such as a repost or comment’(Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

Specifying the effects of one single emoji, for example the smiley face, is almost impossible to access as one emoji would work better than the other, depending on what the goal of the sender is. Therefore, the text accompanying the emoji is of great importance (Ge & Gretzel, 2018), which was also shown in other articles, such as Huang et al (2008), McShane et al (2020), Lohmann et al. (2017) and many others.

<i>Speech act</i>	<i>Properties of speech act</i>	<i>Example of speech act</i>	<i>Example of speech act with emoji</i>
Assertive	Statements of fact, getting the viewer to form or attend to a belief.	This attraction will be open to the public until the end of the national holiday.	Enjoyed my weekend 
Directive	The sender uses this to get the receiver to do something (that is, request actions or responses).	What do you think about our recommendations?	To lose 10 pounds, what should I eat 
Expressive	Sender expresses opinions and emotions.	Ha ha, this is so cute.	Congratulations, dear 

Overview of the speech acts enhanced with their emoji's (Ge & Gretzel, 2018)

The main goal of the directive speech act for the sender is to persuade social media users to engage with them or their posts (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Therefore, it seems the most direct way to aim for customer engagement, as a request for engagement is directly sent to the receiver. According to Ge and Gretzel (2018), emoji's can help persuade receivers in a way that they add appeal(s) to the textual component that does per se not contain persuasive content (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Also, emoji's can enhance further amplification of persuasive content, for example ‘This poor child is calling for our love. Let's repost the positive energy

’ (Ge & Gretzel, 2018)..

Based on these considerations, we find our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The use of the directive speech act oriented emoji has a direct positive effect on customer engagement

2.3: The emotional route

2.3.1: Emoji use and positive affect

As brought forward earlier in the text, this research aims to compare two explanatory mechanisms in which the use of directive speech act oriented emoji's influence customer engagement besides this direct effect. In this section we will explore the first of the two main paths: the 'emotional route'.

There is a substantially large body of research that investigated the emotional effects emoji's have on receivers of these messages. The main entity that comes forward across the literature is the concept of positive affect. Positive affect is defined as *'the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert'* (Watson et al., 1988).

Theories of why this positive affect is created by emoji's are mainly oriented at the concept of 'emotional contagion'. Emotional contagion is defined as *"the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally"* (Hatfield et al., 1993). The emotional contagion framework consists out of two sides of one coin. On the one hand, the concept of subconscious emotional contagion is defined in the paper of Das et al. (2019) by studying the paper of Lohmann et al. (2017) as 'the simple "catching" of an emotion depicted by the emoji and the matching of this emotion on their own emotions'. On the other side of the coin there is the conscious side of emotional contagion. Conscious emotional contagion is oriented at seeing which emotion the sender aims to transmit through the use of an emoji, and the receiver thus sees this emoji and connects it to the emotion the sender must have with the message (Smith & Rose, 2020) and takes over this emotion. For example, using a smiley face expresses that the sender is positive or happy and the receivers copies this happiness or positivity after seeing the emoji, thus being happier after exposure. This deliberate transfer of emotions is what is perceived to be driving the underlying mechanism while using emoji's (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; McShane et al., 2021; Yakın & Eru, 2017).

Ganster, Eimer and Krämer (2012) found that emoji's have an effect on the emotions of the receiver, finding for example that a receiver feels more happy if a message is supplemented by a positive emoji. Skovholt, Grønning and Kantaanranta (2014) found that emoji's have a positive effect on positive affect as emoji's enhance the recipients positive emotions and softens negative emotions in workplace emails.

Remarkably, this does not have to mean that all emoji's should be explicitly emotional oriented as not all emoji's are directly related to an emotion: not all emoji's are for example sad and smiley faces. This means that the receiver of an emoji can also feel more positive when for example a 'confetti canon' emoji is placed, indicating that the sender aims to celebrate something. Riordan (2017) investigated the use of emoji's in a face emoji (emoji that expresses an emotion like a smiley face for happy) and a non-face emoji (clapping hands, buildings etc.) and found that both indeed have an effect on positive affect for receivers. The reason for this is explained by the fact that both face and non-face emoji's can increase the level of positive affect in a readers interpretation and transfer additional emotional information about the sender, which results in the receiver being better aware of the emotional loading of the message (Riordan, 2017a). This conclusion thus steers us more to the direction that an emoji can have an effect through the emotional contagion side when explicit emotional oriented are present to steer emotion, but it can also provoke positive affect by simply being present, as it arouses receivers and provokes positive affect (Kelly & Watts, 2015; Riordan, 2017a, 2017b). As the directive speech act can contain all types of emoji's which could according to the theory be capable of leading to positive affect (Das et al., 2019; Riordan, 2017a, 2017b), we assume the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on positive affect

2.3.2 Arousal and positive affect: customer engagement on the short-term

The question that remains now is how positive affect would lead to customer engagement. According to the article of Berger and Milkman, this has to do with the arousal aspect of a social media message (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Arousal was defined as a key dimension of positive affect by the work of James Russel (1980) in which he constructed the Circumplex

model, a model to describe how different emotions are dependent on each other and together can form a certain mood. In the case of positive affect, these grouped emotions were mainly related to high arousal. Typical emotions in this range consisted out of astonished, excited, delighted and happy (Russel, 1980). The key sidenote of this research is that these arousal effects are oriented in the short-term (Russell, 1980).

Research on the short-term effects of arousal came forward in the work of Berger and Milkman (2012), where they investigated what drives a social media post to ‘go viral’. A post going ‘viral’ means that the post gets a lot of views, attention and shares in a relatively short period of time (Berger & Milkman, 2012) and is basically a kind of ‘short-term hyper engagement’. They found that positive social media messages are found to result in higher arousal, which in its turn would lead to a higher likelihood of engagement, meaning that it is more likely for a positive oriented message to go viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Arousal was seen as a state of mobilization (Berger & Milkman, 2012) and that it drives social transmission. In the research of Casaló et al. (2020) they found that positive affect, in their research provoked by perceived creativity, had a positive effect on customer engagement, similar to the research of Ahn and Back (2018) where they found that *‘When customers have a positive sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experience with integrated resort brands, they tend to engage with the brand in behavioral way.’*

Based on these considerations, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: positive affect has a positive effect on customer engagement

2.4: The associative route

2.4.1 Emoji’s and perceived playfulness as brand personality

Besides the direct contagion of emotions through emoji’s in the short-term, the use of emoji’s is conceptualized to have an effect on the consumer brand relationship over the long-term. A critical dimension in social media brand communications that has been described by recent theory is the concept of brand personality (Keng et al., 2013). Brand personality is defined as *‘a set of human characteristics associated to a brand’* (Keng et al., 2013). Brands are

acknowledged to be capable of possessing human-like personality traits (Aaker, 1997). This means that a brand can have certain human-like personality traits in the eyes of the consumer, for example Tesla being smart and dynamic or Ikea being down to earth and environmentally aware. These associations a consumer has for a brand can positively or negatively influence the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and can be very different for each single person (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013). Brand personality is mainly considered to be unwarily constructed by the consumer and is built upon direct or indirect contact between the customer and the brand and the previous brand experience the consumer has had with the brand. Contact with the brand, directly or indirectly, can for example consist out exposure to online and real life advertisement, products in store but also word-of-mouth from other consumers (Keng et al., 2013).

The reactions on these contact points are called brand experience. Brand experience is defined as *'private events that occur in response to stimulation'* (Keng et al., 2013) and basically consist out of the cognitive response to direct or indirect contact with the brand. This means that if a consumer associates certain positive traits from previous experiences to the brand, the brand will be perceived to possess that trait within the 'character' of the brand. An example could be that when a brand shows dynamic and joyful advertisement according to the consumer, the brand will be perceived to have a joyful and dynamic character itself.

One important dimension of this brand experience is the concept of perceived playfulness (Aaker, 1997; Hsieh & Tseng, 2017; Keng et al., 2013; McShane et al., 2021). This perceived playfulness, defined as *'the extent to which the individual is curious regarding an interaction and finds an interaction enjoyable and interesting'* (Moon & Kim, 2001) has been conceptualized as a critical factor in the emoji context (McShane et al., 2021). In this emoji context, it concerns the association that a brand itself is perceived as playful due to the fact that it uses emoji's in their social media messages. It differs greatly from the concept of affect as it is oriented more to associations on the long term. With the concept of affect, we try to capture how a social media message is perceived and which emotions are provoked by the use of emoji's in organizational communication. With perceived playfulness however, we intend to capture the customers' perspective on the organization itself.

Hsieh and Tseng (2017) assessed the use of emoji's in their article regarding the effect of playfulness in mobile instant messaging. They highlighted the supplementing power of an emoji in an online setting, which allowed a sender to be perceived as playful due to the fact

that he or she used emoji's in his or her messages (Hsieh & Tseng, 2017). This was the case because the message was now able to carry an additional load of information about the character of the sender itself and their perception of the situation and message, enabling the receiver to better understand the message and tone, referred to as media richness. This effect was also found by Oh et al. (2009), where they again indicated this media richness, meaning the amount of information in a message (factual and emotional) has a positive effect on perceived playfulness.

McShane et al. (2021) found a direct link between emoji use and perceived playfulness in their study. They assessed that emoji use would lead to more playfulness if emoji's were placed in messages. Although the main consideration came forward that the messages were found explicitly playful when the emoji's matched the loading of the text, meaning the two were related to each other. This provides us with an interesting point to build further upon, as the directive speech act oriented emoji are text related as well (Ge & Gretzel, 2018), allowing us to presume that this finding could play a role in our research.

Based on these considerations, we state the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on perceived playfulness

2.4.2 Building positive brand associations: customer engagement on the long-term

But why would customers be more likely to engage with a brand that has a positive brand personality, for example playfulness? According to Maehle, Otnes and Suphellen (2011) and Aaker (1997), this has to do with the human-like characteristics a brand has. As customers 'humanize brands' and perceive them as human entities, it is possible for them to build relationships over the long term. It works very similar to a friendship between humans: if a person perceives another person to have positive characteristics and find these characteristics favorable and important, it is likely for him or her to become friends with that other person.

This way of reasoning has been examined in numerous studies. Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) suggest that playfulness is important to build relationships, as it creates a sense of security and stability that fosters the strength of the relationship. Hsieh and Tsjeng (2017) stated that perceived playfulness was necessary in building strong customer relationships as it enhances

the enjoyment felt by the customer in their brand interactions. They also found that perceived playfulness would lead to a higher intention in online word of mouth, by many considered as a way of online customer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Sashi, 2012).

Most interesting in the social media and emoji use context is the work of McShane et al. (2021). McShane et al. (2021) assessed the effects of perceived playfulness on customer engagement in an emoji context. They found that perceived playfulness was stronger when emoji's were added to the text and that this perceived playfulness would lead to more engagement, especially if the emoji's were related to the text in a way that they would enhance the positive message of the post (McShane et al., 2021).

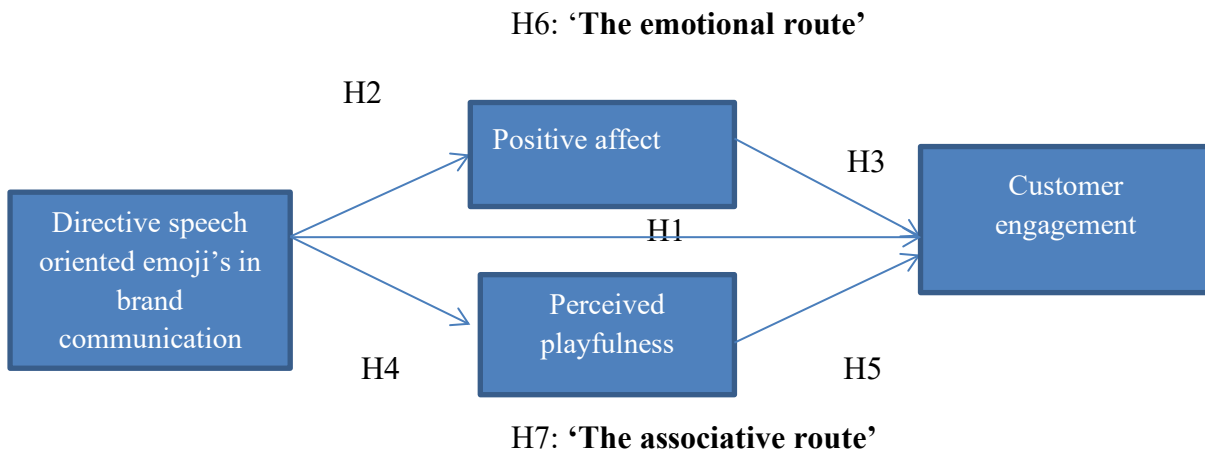
Overall, we see reason to formulate our fifth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: perceived playfulness has a positive effect on customer engagement

Lastly, besides the effects within the two 'routes' and the main effect emoji's are hypothesized to have on customer engagement, we aim to investigate if emoji's are able to influence customer engagement through positive affect and perceived playfulness in the form of partial mediation. As the previously discussed theory suggests that two 'routes', mainly differentiated in short-term effects (emotional route) and long-term effects (associative route) can be established, we conclude with two final hypotheses to test the full effects within our conceptual model, which is shown below:

Hypothesis 6: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on customer engagement, which is partially mediated by positive affect

Hypothesis 7: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on customer engagement, which is partially mediated by perceived playfulness



The conceptual model

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 we will describe the methodology used for testing the hypotheses made in chapter 2. Therefore, the research design will be determined in this chapter together with information regarding the sample and lastly we will share the operationalization of the different variables that will be assessed in this research. After this, we will discuss the results of the data analysis.

3.2 Scenario and experimental materials

To test our hypotheses, a scenario-based experiment was created. A survey was constructed and distributed through social media. For generalizability purposes, we aimed to test the effects of our conceptual model within two different product categories: hedonic and utilitarian products. Numerous authors such as Das et al. (2019) and Kronrod and Danziger (2013) highlighted the possibility that differences in outcomes between the two product categories could occur. As consumers of hedonic products are more oriented towards fun and excitement whereas for utilitarian products they are more oriented towards credibility and competence, they suggested that consumers expect a difference in advertisement between

these products (Das et al., 2019). To control for this phenomenon, the main analysis contained both hedonic and utilitarian products to see if general main effects could be established. Later on, the effects were tested for the hedonic and utilitarian product categories to assess the generalizability of our findings.

Participants saw one Facebook ad of a fictional company about which the participants were asked to answer questions after reading the ad carefully. The between-subjects design featured four randomly assigned conditions: (1) a hedonic product with emoji's (HM), (2) a hedonic product without emoji's (HZ), (3) a utilitarian product with emoji's (UM) and (4) a utilitarian product without emoji's (UZ). The texts within the ads were identical for the hedonic products and the utilitarian products. The emoji's used in the ads were placed to match the directive speech style by Ge and Gretzel (2018) and mainly consisted out of face emoji's.

The reason that the messages contained mostly face emoji's came from the results of a pilot-test, where similar emoji's needed to be placed within the messages of the different product categories to assess differences in realism within the product category. If large differences in emoji's in combination with different product categories were maintained, it was difficult to assess where problems in perceived realism of the post could lay. A high perception of reality would later ensure us that the responses of our participants in the main study would not be biased due to the fact that the messages were not found realistic in nature. In this pilot study, participants saw four Facebook messages, two hedonic (sneakers and beer) and two utilitarian (batteries and alarm-systems). The messages differed between participants in order in which they were presented. The goal of this pilot study was to identify one hedonic product and one utilitarian product which were perceived by the participants as truly hedonic or truly utilitarian, in combination with low product affinity, due to the fact that a high product affinity could lead to higher engagement intentions later on and therefore biasing our research. The participants were asked whether they perceived a product to be hedonic or utilitarian, after a description of both concepts was given. After that, participants were asked about their affinity with the product category and how realistic they perceived the message to be. After analyzing the results, we concluded that for the hedonic product category 'beer' was perceived more hedonic than sneakers and showed higher levels of realism and lower levels of product affinity. For the utilitarian product category, alarm-systems were found to be perceived more utilitarian, showed lower levels of product affinity and were perceived more realistic than batteries. Therefore, beer was chosen as our hedonic product and alarm-systems were chosen as our utilitarian product. The two chosen Facebook messages are shown below

in figure 1 and 2. These are the messages that do contain the stimulus of emoji presence; messages without the stimulus are completely identical, obviously apart from the inclusion of emoji's.

Figure 1 (the hedonic product 'beer')



Figure 2 (the utilitarian product 'alarm-systems')



3.3 Participants and procedure

Respondents were gathered through the distribution of the survey across different social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp and Instagram. The sample was established based on convenience sampling, which is a non-random sample method where respondents meet certain practical criteria such as age, Facebook use and previous experience with Facebook (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016), in this case easy accessibility, availability at a given time and the willingness to participate.

The sample for this experiment consisted only out of Dutch participants and counted 162 responses in total. The sample ranged between the ages of 16 and 67 ($M=28,53$ $SD=12,51$) and consisted out of 35.3% males and 63.4% females. 1.3% wished to not answer this question. Due to the fact that this non-random sample method was used, the amount of feminine responses is rather large and the average age is rather low. This possibly is as a result of the chosen data gathering method, as mostly younger audience was targeted when using social media to collect responses. However, this did result in a large pool of suitable respondents, as many have experience in using Facebook.

Respondents were randomly assigned across the four conditions: HM ($N=45$), HZ ($N=39$), UM ($N=43$) and UZ ($N=35$). The survey began with an introduction which contained information about our experiment as well as information about the research ethics, which is explained in more detail below. After (not) agreeing with our conditions, respondents were asked if they have used or use Facebook. If they did not use Facebook, they were thanked for their participation and no further questions were asked. If they did use Facebook, they were given access to the main survey, in which they were asked to fill in the questions linked to the main concepts of this research. Before each question block where the questions relating to the main concepts were asked, the Facebook message was first shown so that respondents remembered the content of the post.

3.4 Research ethics

No incentive was provided to take part in the study. For ethical reasons, respondents were asked if they accept that their answers will be saved in order to conduct this experiment. Their personal information such as their name would not be saved as we ensure anonymity of our respondents. Furthermore, respondents were free to withdraw from the experiment at any time and were not pressured in any way to participate in this experiment. Respondents were also able to leave their e-mail address behind in order to be kept up to date with the process of this research. The full page containing the introduction to our survey is shown in appendix 3.1.

3.5 Measures

First, respondents were shown the message followed up by questions about engagement intentions. To assess this concept, the scale described by Solem and Pederson (2016) for behavioral customer engagement was used. Customer engagement measurement in the number of likes, comments and shares is common practice across different articles (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). As it is not possible to measure likes and shares on a profile that does not exist, we use the behavioral customer engagement intention scale by Solem and Pederson (2016). This scale has two items measured on a 7 point Likert item scale (totally disagree – totally agree). An example item of this scale is ‘I would comment on this post’. No specific Dutch translation was found on this scale and was therefore created by the researcher.

After the concept of customer engagement, positive affect was assessed. For this concept, the adapted PANAS scale was used. The PANAS scale was first introduced by Watson et al. (1988) but was later adapted to serve specifically for affect by Das et al. (2019). The scale is constructed by four items measuring affect and is measured through the use of a 7-point Likert item scale (totally disagree – totally agree). An example item of this scale is ‘While exposed to this advertisement I felt ... happy’. For this research, the translated Dutch version constructed by Peeters, Ponds and Vermeeren (1996) was used which was later tested on validity by Engelen, de Peuter, Victoir, van Diest and van den Bergh (2006) and was proven to be valid after testing.

After answering these questions regarding to positive affect, perceived playfulness was next in order. The scale described by McShane et al. (2020) was used to assess this concept. In their research, they measured playfulness of the brand based on four different items: playful, clever, smart, fun, and creative. Each of these four items was measured according to a 7 point Likert scale (totally disagree – totally agree). An example item of this scale is ‘I perceive this company to be playful’. Unfortunately, no previous Dutch translation was found. Therefore, the scales were translated by the researcher and later double checked by the thesis supervisor and a co-student.

Furthermore, some control variables could explain variance in our model and therefore, the following are taken into account:

For perceived realism of the post which was asked after perceived playfulness, we used a 2 item 7 point Likert scale (totally disagree – totally agree) from Tiggemann, M., Slater, A., Bury, B., Hawkins, K., & Firth, B. (2013). An example of a question was ‘The text of this Facebook message looks realistic’.

To measure the perception of the participant in which product category the product is best placed, we used the scale by Kivetz and Zheng (2019), in which they used a single scale to measure perceptions regarding hedonic and utilitarian products. The item consisted out of a 7 point Likert scale (totally utilitarian – totally hedonic). Respondents received definitions adapted from Kivetz and Zheng and translated into Dutch for hedonic products (“something that is for fun, excitement and sensual pleasure and often involves products or services that are frivolous or luxurious”) and for utilitarian products (“something that is for fundamental needs and often involves products or services that are practical or necessary”).

The affinity with the product category will be controlled for by measuring it in the survey in this research, as increased affinity or involvement with the product category might influence the engagement (Eigenraam et al., 2021). To do so, the scale of Mittal and Lee (1989) was used and this consisted out of a three item 7 point likert scale (totally disagree – totally agree). An example question is: ... is important to me.

After that, a manipulation check was added in order to see if they indeed did or did not notice the presence of an emoji. They were then asked about their age, gender and Facebook use time and were thanked for their participation. A full overview of the items and scales used and their translations can be found in appendix 1. The full survey is found in appendix 3.1 for one

product however the questions are completely similar for all conditions, together with the social media messages used found in appendix 3.2.

3.6 Statistical analysis

The conceptual model was tested according to the PROCESS MACRO model by Hayes for double mediation (model 6), as this is suited for a double mediated regression analysis. To test these conditions within the hedonic and the utilitarian context, model 59 of moderated mediation of the PROCESS MACRO software by Hayes was assessed and ran twice: one time for the hedonic product category and one time for the utilitarian product category as the PROCESS Macro software can only account for one moderator at the time.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Reliability analysis

To start our analysis, we have to guarantee the reliability of our constructs. To do so, we executed a reliability analysis to test the reliability of the constructs of customer engagement, positive affect, perceived playfulness, perceived post realism and product affinity. The results of the reliability analysis are shown in table 1.

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Customer engagement	2	0.824
Positive affect	4	0.927
Perceived Playfulness	5	0.878
Perceived post realism	2	0.890
Product affinity	3	0.884

Table 1: Reliability analysis of the constructs

According to Field (2013), Cronbach's alphas of 0.7 and higher are acceptable. As all of the constructs have Cronbach's alphas above 0.7, it can be assumed that the constructs used are

reliable. Based on this confirmation of reliability, average scale scores of the respondents across the constructs were created.

4.2 Manipulation checks

Before the start of the analysis of our data, we assessed the manipulation checks. To test whether people noticed the emoji presence in the messages, a manipulation check was placed within the survey using a Chi-Square test. For the 69 respondents placed in the ‘with emoji’ category, 67 correctly remembered that they indeed saw an emoji. Of the 67 respondents placed in the ‘without emoji’ category, 55 respondents correctly remembered that they did not see an emoji. As the Chi-Square test was significant ($2, N=153 = 93,162; p>0.05$), the 14 respondents that answered the question wrong were still included. Furthermore, a manipulation check regarding the relationship between perceived realism and emoji presence and hedonic-utilitarian products was executed. Although respondents did not find emoji presence to influence perceived realism, they did find that the messages regarding hedonic products were perceived as more realistic in comparison to utilitarian products. Lastly, a similar manipulation check with a factorial ANOVA was executed regarding the product being hedonic or utilitarian and the participant also perceiving it to be so. This manipulation check was also successful and people who perceived a product to be for example hedonic in most cases also were subjected to the hedonic product

A full list of the manipulation checks is given in Appendix 2.1, and a summary is given in the table below

<i>Dependent variable:</i>	F	Sig
<i>Realism</i>		
Emoji presence	1,145	0.286
Hedonic – Utilitarian product category	10,569	0.001
Emoji * Hedonic – Utilitarian product category	0,159	0.691
<i>Dependent variable:</i>		

<i>Perceived Hedonic- Utilitarian product category</i>		
Emoji	0,029	0.865
Hedonic – Utilitarian products	167,929	0.000
Emoji * Hedonic – Utilitarian product category	0,763	0.384

Table 2: manipulation checks

4.3 Assumptions testing

To conduct a regression analysis, several assumptions have to be met before the analysis can be executed correctly. These assumptions are the following: an adequate sample size, multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, constancy of variance and the independence of error terms. SPSS outputs regarding the assumptions can be found in Appendix 2.2 of this thesis

4.3.1 Sample size

To guarantee an adequate sample size, the sample in most cases must be larger than the following formula $N > 50 + 8m$ (where m =number of independent variables) (Field, 2013). In our largest analysis of model 59, we only have 4 independent variables (emoji presence, perceived playfulness or positive affect, hedonic-utilitarian product category and product affinity) we have to have at least 82 respondents in our sample. As we have 162 respondents in our sample, we meet the first assumption.

4.3.2 Multicollinearity

Next we test the assumption of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity exists when independent variables are highly correlated and we wish that multicollinearity is not present in our model. After testing for multicollinearity ($r=0.9$ and above), we have reason to assume that multicollinearity is not present in our model, as none of the independent variables correlate higher than $r=0.9$ or above (Appendix 2.2.1), and the tolerance levels which would indicate multicollinearity are far above 0, which would indicate that there is no multicollinearity present and therefore meeting the assumption.

4.3.3 Outliers

To spot potential outliers, a Mahalanobis distance statistic was computed (Appendix 2.2.2). After assessing this Mahalanobis distance statistic we see that, since we use three independent variables, these numbers should not exceed 16,27 when we assume a significance level of $p > 0.01$ (Field, 2013). We have no scores higher than this amount; therefore it is not necessary to delete any additional outliers from this dataset.

4.3.4 Normality

To assume normality, the residuals should be normally distributed around the predicted dependent variable score (Field, 2013). To check this, a P-P plot is constructed (Appendix 2.2.3). As the values are very near the center diagonal and the histogram shows a normal distribution, we assume that the residuals are normally distributed, therefore meeting this assumption.

4.3.5 Linearity and constant variance

To assume linearity and constant variance of the model, a scatterplot was constructed where the residuals are set against the predicted values (Appendix 2.2.4). Linearity can be assumed when the dots in the scatterplot are based around the 'zero line' evenly (Field, 2013). This assumption is met. Constant variance can be assumed as there is no clear pattern seen in the scatterplot. This assumption is met as well.

4.3.6 Independence of error terms

To test the independence of error terms, the Durban-Watson statistic should be assessed. Values near 2 indicate that there is no autocorrelation present in the model (Field, 2013). As seen in Appendix 2.2.5, we see that our Durban-Watson statistic is 1.7, which is close to 2. As this slight difference is not problematic and placed closely to 2, the last assumption is met

As all assumptions are met, the main regression analysis can be executed.

4.4 Regression analysis

As the aim is to investigate the overall effect of the model and the effects of the hedonic and utilitarian product categories on the model, it is necessary to run two different models of the PROCESS Macro model by Hayes (2017). In the first regression analysis, we will run a double mediated analysis to test the general effects of the model. To do so, model 6 of the PROCESS Macro tool is used. To test the effects of the hedonic and utilitarian product

categories, we run a moderated mediation analysis with model 59 of the PROCESS Macro tool. This is done once for the hedonic product category and once of the utilitarian product category.

4.4.1 Running the general model

To analyze our general conceptual model, we use model 6 of the PROCESS Macro tool by Hayes. We run the analysis with customer engagement as Y, emoji presence as X, positive affect as M1 and perceived playfulness as M2 (N=162). We control for product affinity as a covariate, as this is the only control variable that turned out to be significant. Path coefficients that are marked in green are significant ($p < 0.05$), those in red are insignificant. The r^2 of the effects of each of the upper row variables is given below.

From → to	Path coefficients		
	Positive affect	Perceived playfulness	Customer engagement
Emoji presence	-0.2696 <i>t</i> =1.2634; <i>p</i> =0.2080	0.4499 <i>t</i> =2.7055; <i>p</i> <0.05	-0.2355 <i>t</i> =1.2680; <i>p</i> =0.2067
Positive affect	-	0.6178 <i>t</i> =10.0392; <i>p</i> <0.05	0,6436 <i>t</i> =7.4836; <i>p</i> <0.05
Perceived playfulness	-	-	0.2036 <i>t</i> =2.3444; <i>p</i> <0.05
Customer engagement	-	-	-
Product affinity	0.2957 <i>t</i> =4.9360; <i>p</i> <0.05	-0.0197 <i>t</i> =-0.3943; <i>p</i> =0.6939	0,1565 <i>t</i> =2.8704; <i>p</i> <0.05
R2 of outcome variables	0.1365	0.4256	0.5535

Table 3: Path coefficients

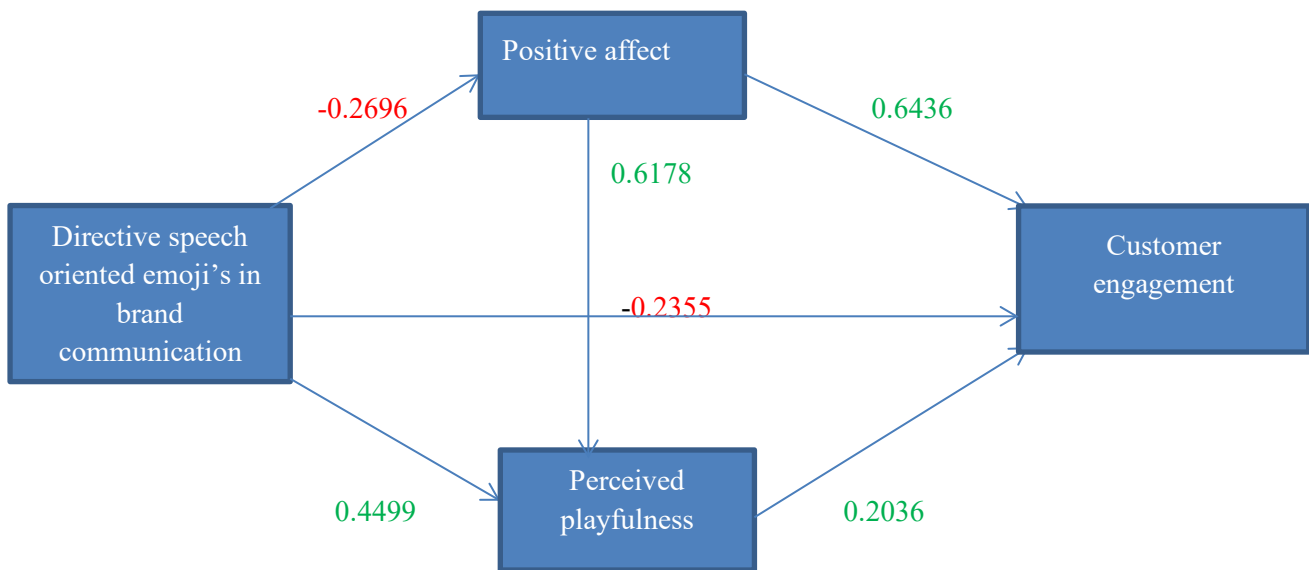


Table 4: path coefficients in the conceptual model

We can now assess what these outcomes mean for our hypotheses. An overview of these results is shown below.

Hypothesis 1: *The use of the directive speech act oriented emoji has a direct positive effect on customer engagement*

The direct effect of the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji on customer engagement was not proven to be significant: (b= -0.235; 95% CI [-0.623; 0.1313]; t=-1.2680; p=0.2067). Therefore there is reason to reject our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: *Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on positive affect*

The direct effect of the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji on positive affect was not proven to be significant: (b= -0.2696; 95% CI [-0.6907; 0.1515]; t=-1.2634; p=0.2080). Therefore there is reason to reject our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: *positive affect has a positive effect on customer engagement*

The direct positive effect of positive affect on customer engagement was proven to be significant (b=0.6436; 95% CI [0.4738; 0.8135]; t=7.4836; p<0.05). Therefore there is reason to accept our third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on perceived playfulness

The direct positive effect of the directive speech act oriented emoji on perceived playfulness was proven to be significant: (b= 0.4499; 95% CI [0.1215; 0.7783]; t=2.7055; p<0.05).

Therefore there is reason to accept our fourth hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: perceived playfulness has a positive effect on customer engagement

The direct positive effect of perceived playfulness on customer engagement was proven to be significant (b=0.2036; 95% CI [0.0321; 0.3752]; t=2.3444; p<0.05). Therefore there is reason to accept our fifth hypothesis

Now we will assess the possible indirect effects of the variables in our conceptual framework.

The results are shown below.

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
<i>emoji presence → positive affect → customer engagement</i>	-0.1735	0.1381	-0.4613	0.0883
<i>emoji presence → perceived playfulness → customer engagement</i>	0.0916	0.0600	0.0026	0.2324

Table 5: indirect effects (mediation)

Hypothesis 6: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on customer engagement, which is partially mediated by positive affect

According to Field (2013), we can speak of a truly significant mediation if the lower confidence interval and the upper confidence interval does not contain zero when indicating a positive effect. In this case, we see that LLCI=-0.4613 and ULCI=0.0883. This indicates that the mediation effect is not significant. Therefore, there is reason to reject our sixth hypothesis.

Hypothesis 7: Use of the directive speech act oriented emoji in brand communication has a positive effect on customer engagement, which is partially mediated by perceived playfulness

As LLCI=0.0026 and ULCI=0.2324, in which the range between the two does not contain zero, we have reason to state that there is a significant mediation effect between the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji on customer engagement, which is partially mediated by perceived playfulness. Therefore, there is reason to accept our seventh hypothesis. However, a key side note in accepting this hypothesis is that the presence of the variable positive affect is crucial to make this mediation significant. When the two indirect effects are analyzed independently in model 4 by Hayes, we see that they are both not significant. As seen in table 3, Model 6 by Hayes allows assessing of the direct effects between the two mediators. Although not hypothesized, a direct effect between positive affect and perceived playfulness is significant ($b= 0.6178$; 95% CI [0.4962; 0.7393]; $t=10.0392$; $p<0.05$) and seems crucial for the outcomes of the positive indirect effect.

4.4.2 Analyzing the general model against product category

To analyze if the effects within the conceptual model are different between the hedonic product category and the utilitarian product category, we use the moderated mediation model, which is model 59 in PROCESS Macro By Hayes. We run the analysis with customer engagement as Y, emoji presence as X, positive affect as M1 and perceived playfulness as M2 (N=162). We control for product affinity as a covariate and have the hedonic/utilitarian product category (HEDU) as a moderator (W). The outcomes are seen in table 6 below. Significant effects ($p<0.05$) are marked in green, insignificant effects are marked in red.

Outcome variables

Main effects	Positive affect	Perceived playfulness	Customer engagement
Hedonic-Utilitarian product category	0.8811 <i>t</i> =2.8467; <i>p</i> <0.05	1.0852 <i>t</i> =3.5890 ; <i>p</i> <0.05	-0.2191 <i>t</i> =-0.3577; <i>p</i> =0.7211
Interaction effects	Positive affect	Perceived playfulness	Customer engagement
<i>emoji presence</i> x hedonic/utilitarian product category	-0.2736 <i>t</i> =-0.6622; <i>p</i> =0.5088	-0.4988 <i>t</i> =-1.2358; <i>p</i> =0.2184	-0.1299 <i>t</i> =-0.3499; <i>p</i> =0.7269
<i>Positive affect</i> x hedonic/utilitarian product category	-	-	0.1949 <i>t</i> =1.1051; <i>p</i> =0.2708
<i>Playfulness</i> x hedonic/utilitarian product category	-	-	0.0030 <i>t</i> =0.0166; <i>p</i> =0.9867

Table 6: path coefficients moderated mediation

Although the hedonic/utilitarian product category itself has a significant effect on the variables positive affect ($b=0.8811$; 95% CI [0.2697; 1.4924]; $t=2.8467$; $p<0.05$) and perceived playfulness ($b=1.0852$; 95% CI [0.4897; 1.6824]; $t=3.5890$; $p<0.05$), the interaction effects of the hedonic/utilitarian product category variable with the presence of an emoji, perceived playfulness or positive affect are not significant anywhere in the model. This indicates that the relationship between the variables is not influenced by the hedonic or the utilitarian product category.

The mediation from emoji presence to customer engagement through positive affect and perceived playfulness are also found insignificant, as in all cases the zero is in range of the confidence intervals. Therefore we can conclude that there is no effect between the product categories in this mediation. The results are shown in table 7.

		Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
<i>emoji presence → positive affect → customer engagement</i>	Utilitarian	-0.0574	0.1394	-0.3540	0.2135
	Hedonic	-0.2691	0.2317	-0.7589	0.1719
<i>emoji presence → perceived playfulness → customer engagement</i>	Utilitarian	0.1082	0.1072	-0.0426	0.3723
	Hedonic	0.0112	0.0709	-0.1045	0.1945

Table 7: the effects of hedonic/utilitarian product category on the indirect effects

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion

The goal of this research was to answer the research question ‘*What is the effect of ‘directive move’ oriented emoji’s in brand communication on customer engagement through positive affect and perceived playfulness?’* and gain more insight into the ways of how emoji’s have an effect on customer engagement and in which ways an emoji can influence customer engagement. To do this, a direct comparison between the short-term oriented ‘emotional route’, which is mainly aimed at how emoji’s directly influence the emotion of the receiver of the social media message through positive affect and the ‘associative route’, aimed at the association a consumer makes based on the use of emoji’s by the organization and is oriented on the long-term was established. Also, the effects of a specific type of emoji in this comparison, the ‘directive move’ type (Ge & Gretzel, 2018), were researched. This directive speech act oriented emoji is oriented at persuading a receiver to engage with the sender (Ge & Gretzel, 2018), therefore allowing to serve a direct goal in creating customer engagement.

First of all, there is reason to assume that the direct speech act oriented emoji positively influences the perceived playfulness of the brand, therefore supporting hypothesis 4 and replicating the findings of McShane et al. (2020). This finding indicates that it is possible and viable to create a playful brand image by using emoji’s in brand communications.

Furthermore, also a direct positive effect between perceived playfulness was found, thus supporting hypothesis 5. This finding builds further upon the framework by McShane et al. (2020) as they highlighted that perceived playfulness is a way to create customer engagement.

Furthermore, this finding is also in line with the findings of Oh et al. (2009), Hsieh and Tsjeng (2017), Hollebeek et al. (2014) and Kabadayi & Price (2014) who all indicated that perceived playfulness indeed plays a role in the enhancement of customer engagement initiatives. Customers are thus found to indeed have a higher intention to engage with the brand as this brand is perceived as playful by the customer.

This research has also found that positive affect positively influences customer engagement and thus supports hypothesis 3. This finding corresponds with the findings of Casaló et al. (2020), Ahn and Back (2018) and Berger and Milkman (2012), who all earlier described the same effect: short-term positive affect can enhance customer engagement.

Moreover, a significant indirect effect from the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji, through perceived playfulness on customer engagement was found, which supports hypothesis 7 of this research paper and proves the existence of the ‘associative route’. This means that use of directive speech act oriented emoji’s in social media messages positively influences customer engagement, as the organization is perceived as more playful when including emoji’s in their brand communication. This highlights the importance of perceived brand characteristics in online brand communication. As this way of creating a brand characteristic through the use of emoji’s has enjoyed little attention by practitioners in the emoji context, this research could be an interesting contribution to the small existing scientific knowledge about this phenomenon. This is rather exciting, however this effect is not as straightforward as it may seem: a not hypothesized surprising outcome could possibly shed an entire new light on the concept of positive affect: positive affect strongly influences perceived playfulness which lies on the other side of the model in the ‘associative route’.

The relationship between these two mediating variables is even of such an importance, that the indirect effects on the ‘associative route’ side of the model are insignificant when positive affect is left out of the model. This suggest that there are not two independent routes in which the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji can influence customer engagement, but rather one large chain. Possible explanations for this phenomenon perhaps lay in the concept of accessibility (Clark, 2014). Originally published in 1982, this theory suggests that feelings of arousal, which form positive affect when positively oriented (Berger & Milkman, 2012) are able to influence judgment. The most important statement in this article comes in the form that ‘affective states activate material congruent in effective tone’(Clark, 2014). According to the theory of Clark, experienced arousal may result in information related to this affective

state being more consciously processed. This would indicate that when somebody is happy, they are more likely to process information in a more positive way. When taking this theory into account, it would explain the effect of positive affect on perceived playfulness in a way that when the customer enjoys high levels of positive affect, he or she would be more likely to process the positive characteristics of a brand (in this case positive affect). Positive affect therefore strengthening perceived brand characteristics such as perceived playfulness could lead to a higher customer engagement. This is rather viable, as characteristics of the brand—actual and perceived by the customer—can strongly influence customer engagement behavior. This finding does unveil a new additional dimension of how emoji's work in brand communications. It is possible to create more customer engagement by adding emoji's in their brand communication on social media due to the fact that organizations are perceived as more playful when doing so. It remains however crucial that the short-term emotional state of the customer plays a unique role in this relationship and should thus be taken into account.

These findings bring new questions on the table. The effects of the directive speech act oriented emoji on positive affect were not found significant and therefore hypothesis 2 was not accepted. This is rather surprising, as numerous scientific articles such as the work of Das, Wiener and Klareklas (2019), Ganster, Eimer and Krämer (2012) and Skovholt, Grønning and Kanttaanranta (2014) all found that emoji use did have a positive effect on positive affect and even found indirect effects such as increased purchase intention (Das et al, 2019). The absence of this effect thus indicates that although positive affect is capable of creating customer engagement and plays a role in the indirect effect on the 'associative route', there is no reason to assume that it can be created by the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji. Possible explanations for this effect could lay in the nature of the directive speech act emoji itself. Ge and Gretzel (2018) suggest that emoji's can amplify positive emotions through conveying affection, however this mainly concerns expressive speech acts, where the emotional state of the sender is often also indirectly expressed in words, in combination with emoji's and therefore more explicit. Directive speech acts, aimed at creating engagement through persuasion, might miss the emotional loading in the text itself, indicating that emoji's alone are not strong enough to create positive affect within this speech act. Adding up to that, these findings do not provide the overwhelming evidence that an indirect effect from the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji through positive affect on customer engagement is proven to exist. Although numerous theories describe the effects

from emoji use on positive affect and positive affect on customer engagement, there is no reason to assume that they all hold in an indirect relationship, therefore rejecting hypothesis 6.

The amplification of the persuasive strength of the directive speech act oriented emoji is also not strong enough to directly influence customer engagement itself as hypothesis 1 is rejected. Ge and Gretzel (2018) state that emoji's can help add appeal(s) to the textual component that does per se not contain persuasive content and enhance further amplification of persuasive content. However, the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji, which even is oriented at creating persuasive content, is apparently not influential enough to influence customer engagement in a direct way, as this research did not find a significant relationship between the use of the directive speech act oriented emoji and customer engagement

Lastly, although the product category significantly influences perceived playfulness and positive affect, the outcome effects on customer engagement do not differ within the product category. This indicates hedonic products generate more positive affect and perceived playfulness than utilitarian products. As hedonic products are more oriented towards fun and excitement, whereas for utilitarian products they are more oriented towards credibility and competence (Das et al., 2019), this effect is not so surprising. This increase in positive affect and perceived playfulness however is not strong enough to alter the effects on customer engagement. As consumers expect a difference in advertisement between these products (Das et al., 2019), they might not be more motivated to engage more with hedonic products than utilitarian products purely based on their nature.

Chapter 6: Managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for further research

6.1 Managerial implications

Brands are continuously evaluating and searching for strategies to optimize their brand communication practices (McShane et al., 2021). The discoveries in this research provide us

with interesting possible implications in the field of social media marketing. As we found that when trying to enhance customer engagement, adding directive speech act oriented emoji's within a social media message allows the organization to be perceived as more playful by receivers of the message on the long term. This perceived playfulness leads to a higher intention of receivers to engage with the brand, therefore proving that adding emoji's in these messages is beneficial for organizations and thus can be used as a tool to create more customer engagement. Furthermore, it is beneficial for organizations to think about the implications their messages have on their brand image and that they could influence this brand image in a positive way on the long-run.

Practitioners should however keep in mind that the emotional impact their messages have on receivers on the short-term is equally important. Although not proven to be directly influenced by emoji's, positive affect plays a crucial role in this relationship and should be kept in mind when searching for optimal brand communication strategies. Due to the fact that positive affect is not influenced by the directive speech act oriented emoji, practitioners should search for alternative ways to enlarge positive affect in receivers on social media. It is perhaps possible to gain this positive affect in the textual features of the message instead of the paralinguistic tools such as emoji's. Yu (2014) for example found that the post-type of a brand is crucial in building positive affect towards that brand. It is beneficial for brands to favor more social-posts, meaning posts not directly aimed at promoting a product but rather being humoristic or fun, versus posts directly aimed at promotion as this leads to higher positive affect (Yu, 2014). Yu (2014) found that this would not only lead to more positive affect and arousal than a normal promotional post, but it also increases customer engagement. A combination of the remarks found in this research and other work regarding the enlargement of positive affect in receivers of positive affect could thus perhaps provide practitioners with the perfect cocktail to optimize their social media brand communication strategies.

6.2 Limitations

Several remarks regarding the limitations of this research can be made. First of all, this research measured intention instead of behavior. It is possible that there are differences in what respondents report they would do when filling in a survey and what they would do in a

true situation. These differences could perhaps have strengthened or weakened the outcomes of this research, however this remains difficult to assess. Furthermore, the sample used in this research was not completely representative and at random, due to the data collection through personal social media accounts of the researcher. Therefore, perhaps the effects that some of the respondents are familiar with the researcher itself play a role in this research. Besides that, the sample mainly consists out of a younger age group, mainly 27 and below and also mainly female oriented which could also play a role in the experience with social media messages and more exposure to these messages than other age groups, due to the fact that they would spend more time on social media. Also, the concepts in this research have only been tested in the Facebook context, which could mean that the effects found differ across various social media platforms. Lastly, although oriented towards the text within the speech act framework by Ge and Gretzel (2018), the emoji's used were mainly facial emoji's. Respondents could react differently to different kinds of emoji's which could therefore also alter the findings this research has done.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

Future research can be aimed at further exploring the relationship between positive affect and perceived playfulness in the emoji context and how emotions of receivers on the short-term can help build a brand image on the long-term. Furthermore, the concepts in this research could be replicated and tested across different social media platforms and with different fictional and even real brands and organizations to see if the findings of this research hold across different contexts. The existing theory of the relationship between emoji use and customer engagement through a brand characteristic can also be further developed, by for example testing the effects of other brand characteristics such as innovativeness, reliability, authenticity and so on. Lastly, the effects of the other speech type oriented emoji's can be evaluated, assessed and compared to give practitioners a better idea of which speech style to use in their brand communications to search for optimization of their brand engagement practices.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Scales and translations

Positive affect by Das et al (2019) and translated by Peeters et al. (1996)

Original item	Translated Item
While exposed to this post how did you feel? I feel: Happy	Nadat ik deze post heb bestudeerd voel ik me blij
While exposed to this post how did you feel? I	Nadat ik deze post heb bestudeerd voel ik me

feel delighted	verheugd
While exposed to this post how did you feel? I feel: excited	Nadat ik deze post heb gebestudeerd voel ik me uitgelaten
While exposed to this post how did you feel? I feel enthusiastic	Nadat ik deze post heb bestudeerd voel ik me enthousiast

Perceived playfulness by Mcshane et al. (2020)

Original Item	Translated Item
I perceive this brand as playful	Dit merk komt speels over op mij
I perceive this brand as clever	Dit merk komt vindingrijk over op mij
I perceive this brand as smart	Dit merk komt slim over op mij
I perceive this brand as fun	Dit merk komt leuk over op mij
I perceive this brand as creative	Dit merk komt creatief over op mij

Customer engagement by Solem & Pederson (2016)

Orginial item	Translated item
I would like this post	Ik zou deze post liken
I would comment on this post	Ik zou een comment plaatsen bij deze post

Product affinity by Mittal en Lee (1989)

Oringial Item	Translated Item
I have a strong interest in ...	Ik heb sterke interesse in ..
... are very important to me Zijn erg belangrijk voor mij
For me, ... do not matter	, Maken mij niks uit

Perceived realism by Tiggemann, M., Slater, A., Bury, B., Hawkins, K., & Firth, B. (2013).

Original item	Translated Item
The models in the advertisements were realistic	De tekst van dit Facebookbericht ziet er realistisch uit
The models in the advertisements present a realistic goal for the average woman	De tekst in dit Facebookbericht ziet er uit zoals die er in het echt ook uit zou zien

Hedonic – utilitarian perception by Kivetz and Zheng (2019)

Original statement	Translated statement
Hedonic: something that is for fun, excitement and sensual pleasure and often involves products or services that are frivolous or luxurious	iets wat je voor je plezier gebruikt; producten of diensten die genot bieden en luxe zijn.
Utilitarian: something that is for fundamental needs and often involves products or services that	iets wat voorziet in een fundamentele behoefte; producten of diensten die noodzakelijk en

are practical or necessary

praktisch zijn.

Appendix 2: manipulation checks and assumptions

2.1 Manipulation checks

Emoji use on realism

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Real_tot

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2,624 ^a	1	2,624	,992	,321
Intercept	3438,501	1	3438,501	1299,893	,000
Emoji_p	2,624	1	2,624	,992	,321
Error	423,235	160	2,645		
Total	3865,750	162			
Corrected Total	425,860	161			

a. R Squared = ,006 (Adjusted R Squared = ,000)

Realism on intercept emoji and HEDU

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Real

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	29,999 ^a	3	10,000	3,991	,009
Intercept	3411,077	1	3411,077	1361,465	,000
Emoji_p	2,869	1	2,869	1,145	,286
Hedo_ut	26,480	1	26,480	10,569	,001
Emoji_p * Hedo_ut	,398	1	,398	,159	,691
Error	395,860	158	2,505		
Total	3865,750	162			

Corrected Total	425,860	161			
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a. R Squared = ,070 (Adjusted R Squared = ,053)

HEDU Manipulation

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Hedo_tot

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	369,284 ^a	3	123,095	56,003	,000
Intercept	3462,726	1	3462,726	1575,398	,000
Emoji_p	,064	1	,064	,029	,865
Hedo_ut	369,108	1	369,108	167,929	,000
Emoji_p * Hedo_ut	1,677	1	1,677	,763	,384
Error	347,284	158	2,198		
Total	4282,000	162			
Corrected Total	716,568	161			

a. R Squared = ,515 (Adjusted R Squared = ,506)

Emoji manipulation

Case Processing Summary

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Emoji_p * Is er in beide berichten gebruik gemaakt van emoji's?	153	94,4%	9	5,6%	162	100,0%

Emoji_p * Is er in beide berichten gebruik gemaakt van emoji's? Crosstabulation

Count

		Is er in beide berichten gebruik gemaakt van emoji's?			
		Ja	Nee	Dat kan ik me niet herinneren	Total
Emoji_p	No emoji	2	55	13	70
	emoji	67	12	4	83
Total		69	67	17	153

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	93,162 ^a	2	,000
Likelihood Ratio	111,357	2	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	70,908	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	153		

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7,78.

2.2 Assumptions

2.2.1: multicollinearity

Correlations

		Engage_tot	Emoji_p	PosAff_tot	Playful_tot
Pearson Correlation	Engage_tot	1,000	-,073	,718	,540
	Emoji_p	-,073	1,000	-,065	,120
	PosAff_tot	,718	-,065	1,000	,632
	Playful_tot	,540	,120	,632	1,000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Engage_tot	.	,179	,000	,000
	Emoji_p	,179	.	,206	,064

	PosAff_tot	,000	,206	.	,000
	Playful_tot	,000	,064	,000	.
N	Engage_tot	162	162	162	162
	Emoji_p	162	162	162	162
	PosAff_tot	162	162	162	162
	Playful_tot	162	162	162	162

		Coefficients ^a					Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	-,003	,289		-,009	,993		
	Emoji_p	-,175	,189	-,052	-,928	,355	,953	1,050
	PosAff_tot	,719	,084	,614	8,581	,000	,581	1,721
	Playful_tot	,196	,089	,159	2,206	,029	,575	1,739

a. Dependent Variable: Engage_tot

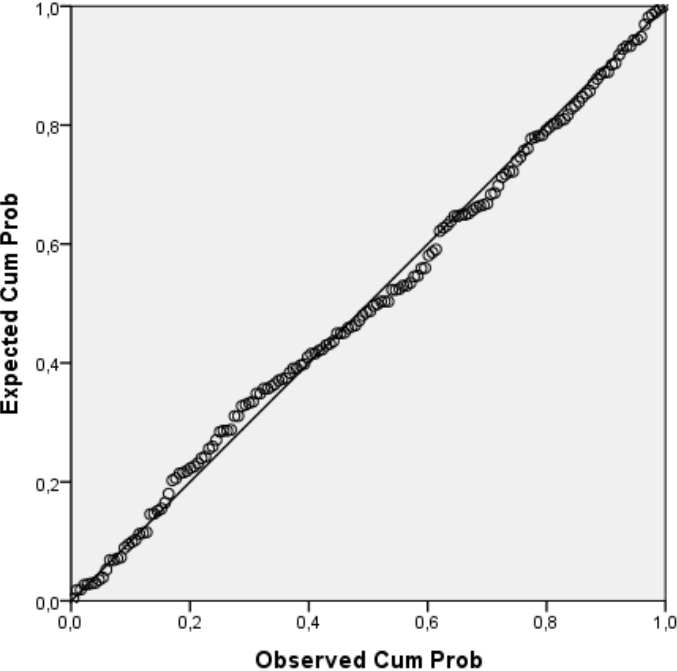
2.3.2: mahalanobis distance

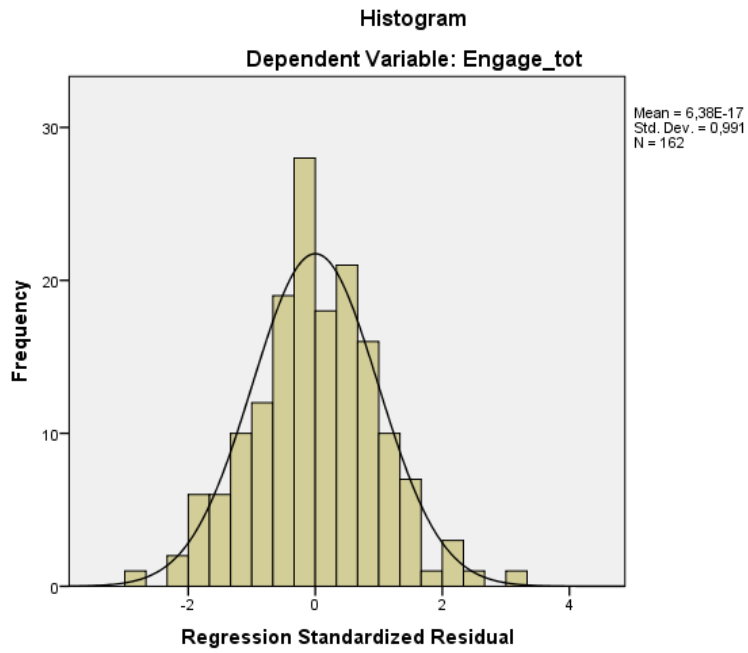
Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mahalanobis Distance	162	,89164	9,30868	2,9814815	1,59758009
Valid N (listwise)	162				

2.2.3: normality P-P Plot and histogram

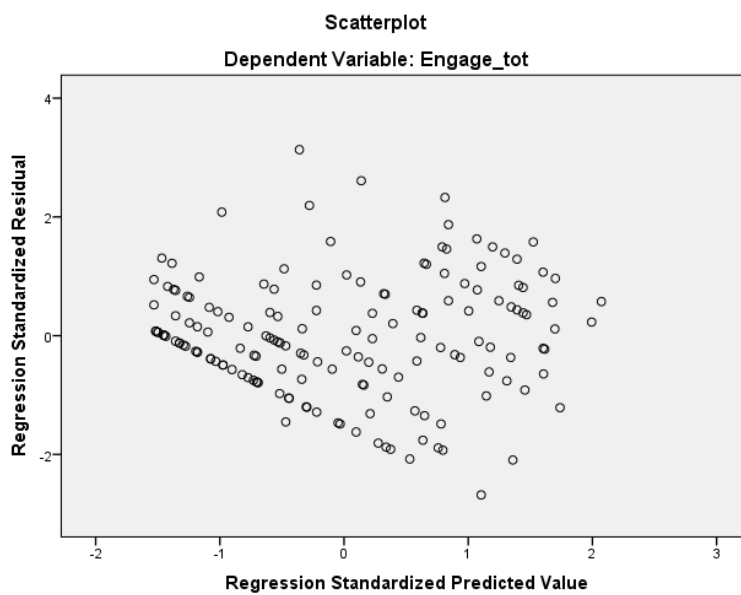
Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Engage_tot





2.2.4: Linearity and constant variance scatterplot



2.2.5: Independence of error terms and the Durbin-Watson statistic

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,728 ^a	,530	,521	1,16971	1,732

a. Predictors: (Constant), Playful_tot, Emoji_p, PosAff_tot

b. Dependent Variable: Engage_tot

Appendix 3: Measurement instruments

Appendix 3.1 Full survey

Beste respondent,

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek! Wij zijn Chiara en Teun, master studenten aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. Voor onze scriptie doen wij - onder begeleiding van Mark Pluymaekers - onderzoek naar het effect van tekstenmerken in berichten van bedrijven op Facebook.

Het onderzoek is volledig anoniem. Deelname is uiteraard vrijwillig en de antwoorden zullen alleen voor dit onderzoek gebruikt worden. U kunt daarbij ook op ieder moment stoppen met de enquête. Tot slot zijn er geen goede of foute antwoorden.

De enquête zal ongeveer 5 minuten duren.

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw deelname!

Als u op akkoord klikt, bevestigt u dat u de informatie hierboven heeft gelezen en akkoord gaat met het gebruik van uw antwoorden voor onderzoeksdoeleinden.

Ik ga akkoord (1)

Ik ga niet akkoord (2)

Einde blok: Start

Start van blok: Blok 1



Maakt u gebruik van het social-mediaplatform Facebook, of heeft u dat in het verleden gedaan?

Ja (1)

Nee (2)

Pagina-einde

Geef aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de volgende stellingen

	Helemaal niet mee eens (1)	Niet mee eens (2)	Enigszins mee oneens (3)	Noch eens noch oneens (4)	Enigszins mee eens (5)	Mee eens (6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Ik zou dit bericht liken (Q4.2_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou een comment plaatsen bij dit bericht (Q4.2_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Pagina-einde

Hoe voelt u zich na het zien van dit bericht?

Ik voel me enthousiast

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Helemaal niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In sterke mate

Ik voel me uitgelaten

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Helemaal niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In sterke mate

Ik voel me verheugd

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Helemaal niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In sterke mate

Ik voel me gelukkig

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Helemaal niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In sterke mate

Geef aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal niet mee eens (1)	Niet mee eens (2)	Enigszins mee oneens (3)	Noch eens noch oneens (4)	Enigszins mee eens (5)	Mee eens (6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Dit merk komt speels over op mij (Q4.10_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dit merk komt vindingrijk over op mij (Q4.10_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dit merk komt slim over op mij (Q4.10_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dit merk komt leuk over op mij (Q4.10_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dit merk komt creatief over op mij (Q4.10_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Pagina-einde



Geef aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal niet mee eens (1)	Niet mee eens (2)	Enigszins mee oneens (3)	Noch eens noch oneens (4)	Enigszins mee eens (5)	Mee eens (6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
De tekst van dit Facebook bericht ziet er realistisch uit (Q4.12_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
De tekst in dit Facebookbericht ziet er uit zoals die er in het echt ook uit zou zien (Q4.12_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Geef aan in hoeverre u het product in het Facebookbericht, bier, een utilitair of hedonistisch product vindt. Hieronder volgt een begripsbepaling:

Utilitair = iets wat voorziet in een fundamentele behoefte; producten of diensten die noodzakelijk en praktisch zijn.

Hedonistisch = iets wat je voor je plezier gebruikt; producten of diensten die genot bieden en luxe zijn.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Volledig utilitair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Volledig hedonistisch

Pagina-einde

Geef aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal niet mee eens (1)	Niet mee eens (2)	Enigszins mee oneens (3)	Noch eens noch oneens (4)	Enigszins mee eens (5)	Mee eens (6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Ik heb sterke interesse in bier (Q4.14_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bier is erg belangrijk voor mij (Q4.14_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voor mij doet bier er niet toe (Q4.14_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 3.2: Social media messages

Hedonic:



Utilitarian

**Safe Haven Alarmsystemen** Vandaag om 15:56 · 🌐

Vorzorgsmaatregelen zijn het halve werk, dus wat doe jij om jouw huis te beschermen tegen inbrekers? 😊
Laat ons weten wat jij doet voor een veilig gevoel in je huis en maak kans op een passend productpakket, samengesteld door onze beveiligingsexperts! 🤖🤖

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#)

👍 34 people like this.

↪️ 45 shares

 Write a comment ...  

**Safe Haven Alarmsystemen** Vandaag om 15:56 · 🌐