The Effects of Emoji on Influencer Advertising and Temporal Orientation on Purchase Intentions

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Introduction. Digital advertising yields more than 100 billion dollars in the year 2018 in the U.S. (Maloy, 2018). Contemporary digital advirtisng exibits unprecedented growth of *influencer marketing* on social media by grabing maximum consumers' attention through high-impact conversations about brands or products (Traackr, 2019). In social media promotion, marketers prefer to use influencer-generated content than brand-generated content because of its prevailing reliability among consumers (Traackr, 2019). Despite many studies investigated the effects of influencer-generated contents on digital advertising (Kim, Spiller, & Hettche, 2015), little examined the role of emoji used in influencers' generated contents on consumer responses. An emoji refers to an image representing facial expressions, objects, or numbers that is used as a language in online communication (Grabowski, 2016). Previous studies mainly focused on the emotional valence caused by emoji while failed to consider consumers' emoji elicited emotional arousal level (Das, Wiener, & Kareklas, 2019). Gorn, Pham, and Sin (2001) found that the emotional arousal level influences ad evaluation more than emotional valence. Meanwhile, researchers suggest that temporal orientation–individuals' differences in their cognitive focus on either the present or future–may interact with their emotional valence or arousal level and influence subsequenct consumption behaviors (Bergadaa, 1990; Mogilner, Adker, & Kamvar, 2012). Accordingly, this study is to examine the effects of emoji arousal level as well as its interaction effect with consumers' chronic temporal orientation on their purchase intentions toward an influencer-advertised product.

Literature Review. Social media marketers, including brands and influencers, usually use emojis in their commercial/content (Das et al., 2019). To date, research in marketing context mostly related to the effects of absent versus present emojis (Das et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018). Das et al. (2019) found that positive (vs. absent) emojis in brand-generated tweets increased consumers' purchase intentions and this effect was mediated by a positive emotion. However, no research has ever investigated the effct of emoji elicited emotional arousal level on consumers' responses of digitial advertising. Given the nature of marketing communication, this study focused on the emojis that convey positive emotions. Prior research suggested that emotional arousal level is positively related to behavior intention, such as repurchase intention and positive word-of-mouth (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007). Wu, Lee, Fu, and Wang (2013) proposed that a well-designed online webstie would lead to a higher level of consumers' emotional arousal and thus in turn positively influences their purchase intentions. Therefore, a high (vs. low) arousal level caused by emoji will lead to greater purchase intentions (H1).

According to the construal level theory (CLT, Trope & Liberman, 2010), higher arousal levels were

found to elicit more abstract mental construal compared to lower arousal levels (Agerstrom, Bjorklund, & Carlsson, 2012; Trope & Liberman, 2010). CLT was widely used in previous studies to explain consumer evaluations and behaviors (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Temporal orientation is a personal characteristic that has been largely examined in CLT (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006). According to Bearden et al. (2006), individuals focusing more on future or long-term values (i.e., future-oriented) tend to have a more abstract mental construal; whereas individuals focusing more on current or short-term values (i.e., present-oriented) tend to have a more concrete mental construal. Construal level fit would strengthen consumers' information evaluation and maximize marketing promotional effects (Lee, Lee, & Kern, 2010). Mogilner et al. (2012) proposed that future-oriented consumers prefer an option that makes them more excited (i.e., high arousal) while present-oriented consumers prefer an option that makes them more clam (i.e., low arousal). Thus, for present-oriented consumers, a low arousal emoji will elicit greater purchase intentions than a high arousal emoji (H2a); Whereas, for future-oriented consumers, a high arousal emoji will elicit greater purchase intentions than a low arousal emoji (H2b).

Methodology. An online pretest was conducted to select emojis and check the manipulations of emotional valence and arousal level of emojis. Thirty-seven female college students at a Southeastern University participated in exchange for extra credit (female = 97.3%, M_{age} = 20.5,). Participants were asked to rate the valence and arousal level of 10 emojis. Significant differences were found in arousal levels of the selected highest and lowest arousal-level emojis (M_{lowest} = 2.61, $M_{highest}$ = 5.72, t = 11.69, p < .001) based on paired-sample t test and both were rated as positive emotions (M_{low} = 4.59, M_{high} = 6.46). Thus, emoji selection and manipulation were successfully achieved. This study was based on Instagram advertising as it is one of the top social media platforms for influencer marketing campaigns (Bailis, 2019). A fictitious influencer and unknown branded earphones were selected for advertising stimuli. A total of 130 college students (95.4% female, M_{age} = 21.15) at a Southeastern University were recruited in the main study. An online experiment was conducted using a one-factor (emoji arousal level: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Following stimuli exposure, participants responded to measures of chronic temporal orientation, purchase intentions, a covariate variable (i.e., attitudes toward ad), manipulation check questions, and demographic questions. All measures were culled from existing scales and rated on 5-point scales.

Results. The manipulations were successfully achieved based on an independent samples t test results for emoji arousal level (M_{low} = 2.54, M_{future} = 4.03, t = 8.11, p < .001). A two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to test hypotheses H1-H2. The emoji arousal level (low vs. high), and temporal orientation (present vs. future) were employed as independent variables, while purchase intention was dependent variable with attitude toward ad as the covariate. No significant main effects were found for emoji arousal level (F [1, 125] = 1.146, p = .286) and temporal orientation (F [1, 125] = 1.350, p = .247). This result rejected H1 showing that there was no difference in consumers' purchase intentions between influencer ads with high and low arousal levels of emojis. Further, a marginally significant interaction effect between emoji arousal level and temporal orientation was found on purchase

intentions (F [1, 125] = 3.551, p = .062). Results revealed that present-oriented consumers showed greater purchase intentions when viewing an ad with emojis in a low (vs. high) arousal level, M_{low} = 2.931, M_{high} = 2.474, p = .032; but no significant difference were found for future-oriented consumers, M_{low} = 2.819, M_{high} = 2.944, p = .582. This result supported H2a but rejected H2b.

Discussion. This research provides new insights into CLT and influencer marketing literature. First, this would be the first study that examines the interaction effects between emoji arousal level on influencer' ad and temporal orientation on purchase intentions. An important finding of this study is that consumers do not necessarily give equal weight on different arousal level emojis. Rather, their purchase intentions to the advertised product with different arousal level emojis varies for individual consumer characteristic, such as temporal orientation. Specifically, we demonstrated high arousal emoji effect is only effective for the present-oriented consumer group. Taking into consideration the evidence discussed above, social media marketers might be able to develop useful Instagram ads with different types of emoji with various promotion codes (i.e., present- vs. future-oriented) and segment their consumer groups.

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