

Executive Summary

Emoji Your Story: The Advertising Effectiveness of Emoji-Based Narratives

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Emojis were invented by the Japanese designer Shigetaka Kurita in 1999. Writing or supplementing texts with emojis is said to be the language of today's young generation. At present, users of computers and mobile phone can select among 3.352 emojis (status: May 2021) which can be inserted as pictorial letters in texts. They are contained on the website <https://Emojipedia.org/>. Through "copy and paste", users can select each of these pictorial letters for manifold purposes.

Since 2014, there has been an annual "World Emoji Day", which is celebrated on July 17. In 2015, Oxford Dictionaries in the UK selected an emoji (face with tears of joy) as the "Word of the Year 2015." In 2016, 92 percent of the users of messenger services such as WhatsApp stated that they include emojis in their communication.

No wonder, that marketing practitioners adopted emojis in their market communication. Some products are shaped as emojis, many product labels show emojis, and sometimes, the actors in commercial are emojis. In today's mass media advertising and digital communication, emojis are mostly used for three purposes: 1. They are used as single symbols to express manifold meanings. 2. They are used as symbols in online communication to express emotions and friendship. 3. They are used to create narratives. This study focusses on the latter application which became popular among well-known brands such as Coca-Cola, Axe, DHL, and Ergo and among non-profit organizations such as Peta. We tested the advertising effectiveness of these emoji-based narratives compared to textual narratives. We recommend the following:

If narratives are used to promote products, emoji-based narratives and hybrid forms of narratives (mixtures of texts and emojis) result in more favorable brand attitudes, in higher intentions to recommend the brand, and higher intentions to search for further information than text-based narratives. The complexity of the emoji-based narratives should be low. It does not matter

whether emojis are used to promote brands which promise pleasant events or to promote brand which promise protection against unpleasant events.

If narratives are used for social marketing activities of consumer brands and non-profit organizations, advertisers should be careful when considering emoji-based narratives. If advertisements promote concrete behaviors such as “Don’t drink and drive” or “Don’t text and drive”, emoji-based narratives are advantageous. If advertisements contain messages concerning more abstract issues such as appeals to donate for the reforestation of the Brazilian rainforest or to avoid animal-tested cosmetics, emoji-based narratives are disadvantageous.