# CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS ON EMOJIS: A RESEARCH ANALYSIS ON THE IMPACT OF EMOJIS ON GEN-Z IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING & BRAND IMAGE

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Abstract

This master's thesis studies the modern phenomenon of emoji marketing, and more specifically how the use of emojis affects the social media performance of companies inside generation z, the largest generation of users inside social media platforms.

Emoji marketing is a relatively new concept, that is still yet to be studied to its full potential. The author of thesis felt there was a need to study emojis as a phenomenon, seek out information from their history and investigate how important part emojis are in modern day marketing communications.

The author utilized semi-structured research interviews and thematic analysis as the data analysis method to collect and analyse data for the thesis. The data and the results of the study indicate, that emojis play a major role on the way generation z perceives social media marketing. Two main themes, the way generation perceive the characteristics and usages of emojis, and the effects of exposure to emojis were found. The study identifies a total of 11 sub-themes, divided on to 5 different parent themes.

The study supports some previous studies made from the topic, by suggesting that by utilizing emojis companies can gain a competitive advantage in the digital marketing environment. These benefits include increased engagement, relatability, and a more positive perception of brand image. The study also indicates that the use of emojis hold some risks in them as consumers see the unfitting use of emojis as more harmful than the positive effects of successful emoji usage. The study indicates that the use of emojis should be planned in a way so that they match the rest of the brand communication efforts of a company to gain maximum benefits from emoji marketing.

As a theoretical concept, the concept of emoji marketing is relatively new. This study was successful in filling a gap of understanding in the perceptions of generation z to emojis in the marketing efforts made by companies. The study contributes to marketing theory by highlighting the importance and effects emojis play in the modern world of digital marketing.

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# 1  INTRODUCTION

Emoticons, or shortly known as, emojis, go beyond than just being tools used to express emotions, as it has been studied and argued, that emojis play a role also in enhancing the level emotional commitment (Jeon, 2020) of communication and in strengthening relationships (Smith & Rose, 2020).It has been confirmed in a study by Jeon Hye-Jin (2021), that animated emojis have the ability to positively affect the strength of communication by increasing the social presence and message clarity. It was also confirmed by the same study, that when the emojis also contained emoji's prosocial gestures, such as waving, smiling and other social expressions, the meaning of the message was strengthened and also provoked a positive reaction (Jeon, 2021). This study gives a clear indication about the power emojis can have in the modern-day marketing communication scene, which makes it a topic attractive to research.

The global effect of developing technology has altered the modern-day marketing communications scene. Marketing is a dynamic concept, that constantly evolves and changes (Muthu, 2016). Social media marketing has become an essential part in how customers are reaching their desired target groups and customers. According to Gary Henderson from Digitalmarketing.org, social media is the most important and influential space to advertise your brands and products (2020). The incredible number of users who use these platforms can be studied easily from the data these social media services. According to datareportal, 61.3 % of the world population has joined social media in the month of October in 2023. Even more astonishingly, during the last 12 months, social media has gained 215 million new users. This means, that there are 6.8 users joining social media every single second on a worldwide scale (Datareportal). These huge numbers and the importance of social media in the marketing scene of the modern world, make it a very important and topical topic to conduct research on.

Emoticons, or emojis, as they are more commonly known, are icons that are very commonly used in communications these days to express different emotions. The word emoticon has been combined from the words 'emotion' and 'icon' (study.com). It can be argued, that emojis are a very essential part of marketing communications. Sean Peek, a writer for business.com states, that in business communications the usage

of emojis in a message is meant to draw reactions and emotions in the receiver of the message. Emojis and emoticons are especially useful when the communicating parties cannot see each other's body language physically, so the emojis are used to create the expression of body language. The article also states, that using emojis in business communications can add an effective, personal touch to your communication efforts, but they also have some drawbacks. For example, emojis are not considered as 'universal', so communicating using emojis with people from different cultures could prove to be a challenge. When used wrong, emojis can also be sometimes seen as 'unprofessional'. (Peek, 2023)

The author of this thesis is aiming to find out how are emojis perceived in social media marketing communications, and how the perceptions of emojis are seen amongst generation z. The aim of this master's thesis was to conduct thematic analysis by conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting relevant data. The target group of the study is generation z.

## 1.1 Research problem, objectives & demarcation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the rapidly developing technology in a global scale has altered the marketing scenery, due to marketing also being a dynamic concept that evolves continuously, for example with technological advancements (Muthu, 2016). This is where the author noticed a gap in the current research about emojis. The author aimed to research the importance of emoji use in the modern-day social media marketing.

From the research topic, three research questions were formed to help the author navigate the process of research. The research questions were decided as the following:

1. RQ1: To what extent and how do emojis contribute to increased consumer interaction on social media posts?

2. RQ2: How does gen-z engage with social media content that incorporates emojis compared to content without emojis?

3. RQ3: Does the use of emojis in social media advertisements affect the entire brand image of the company?

The research questions aim to fill the gap in the current understanding of the emojis as tools of communication in social media. The first research question is aimed to investigate the strength of emojis in creating engagement inside social media. The second research question was formed to investigate the direct and concrete differences between social media content that is created with emojis, versus without emojis. Finally, the third research question was formed to investigate the affects only the use of emojis might potentially have on the entire brand image of a company. This is highly important for companies, as successful branding means consumers are seeing the brand as an added value in addition to the product of service itself (Kotler & al., 2010).

After researching the topic of emoji marketing, the author decided that demarcation of the topic would be necessary. In the process of the demarcation for this project, it was decided that the research would focus on generation z as the target group. Generation z refers to people born between the years of 1997 to 2012. At the time of writing this sentence, the age of the generation z therefore varies from 11 to 26. The reasoning for the selection of this particular generation can be argued from multiple viewpoints. According to World Economic Forum, generation z is the most active and has the biggest amount of user base inside popular social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp & Twitter. (World Economic Forum, 2019) According to research conducted by PrakashYadav & Jyotsna (2017), generation z also prefers large social media sites, where the generation is allowed to be "involved and informed" with other accounts on the platform. According to the same study, Generation z also is also very happy, and even feel vital, that they are able to share feedback and communicate with the products and services they feel are good (PrakashYadav & Jyotsna, 2017).

Online research pointed out, that since generation z is the most active, and also has the largest amounts of users in social media across all generations, this generation would be suitable for this research. (World Economic Forum, 2019) Generation z is also spending more time on their cell phones than preferable (Howarth, 2023), as we can see from the below table 1.

Table 1 - Smart phone use amongst different generations (Howarth, 2023)

| Generation | On Phone More Than Preferable | Taking Steps to Reduce Screen Time |
|---|---|---|
| Baby Boomers | 51.6% | 31.3% |
| Gen X | 66.7% | 40.7% |
| Millennials | 67.3% | 30.5% |
| Gen Z | 76.3% | 41% |

The large user numbers and the amount generation z spends on their smart phones and on different social media platforms justified the selection of the target group. It can also be argued that generation z being a still young generation, the oldest in the generation currently being 26 years old, understanding the consumer behaviour of this particular generation in social media can be important in the future, due to the years of social media usage the generation still has in front of them.

For these reasons, generation z was selected as the main target group for this master's thesis. Emojis are tools of emotional communication between companies and customers, and generation z has the largest number of users and feel the importance to communicate with companies and organizations, making them an ideal target generation to study in this research.

## 1.2 Justification, benefits and importance of the research

The research aims to fill the gap in understanding customer behaviour inside social media of a certain generation, the generation z. Emojis have become an essential part of our everyday communications, and they are already a very large part of companies marketing efforts (Alshenqeeti, 2016). It can also be argued that some traditional elements that relate to marketing, like for example imagination and creativity can be enhanced with the use of emojis in social media marketing (Mathews & Lee, 2018). Already during the year 2021, inside the popular social media platform

Twitter, a whopping 21.54% of all tweets contained at least one emoji (Emojipedia, 2021). This is a justification of how large the phenomenon of emojis is, and a clear implication of how important emojis can have for companies in their social media marketing efforts, and the potential the emojis hold in marketing communications.

According to Sümer (2017), being successful in the modern-day marketing environment requires careful planning of the marketing actions. According to the article, businesses that have the abilities to explain and communicate about their goods in a more efficient way are able to beat the companies that are not able to compete in these aspects. (Sümer, 2017) So, to clarify, success in clarity of communication can bring more success to companies in social media marketing communications. From the findings of the study by Sümer (2017), we can also argue, that emojis have many characteristics that make them an essential part of communications in the modern marketing era. These characteristics include the characteristics of high visibility, short and colourful way of communications, variety of different kinds of emojis and the ease to attract consumers due to the colourful nature of them.

A study done by Casado-Molina, Rojas-De Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo & Romero-Charneco (2022), the importance of emoji usage in brand communications is also confirmed as a topic that is a very important element in brand communications and one that should be studied in more detail. To summarize, the study argues, that the emoji usage of brands in digital marketing communications is not an occasional effort to enhance an individual message, but rather as a strategy to enhance the brand communications and emotional perceptions made by the consumers. (Casado-Molina & a., 2022) It should be noted however, that the study was done in a particular industry (beer industry), and the case study only involved four companies, but the findings of the study still support the need to investigate the research questions presented in this master's thesis. This is also another indication that emojis hold substantial value for businesses aiming to bolster their social media marketing efforts.

Emojis have also formed their own theoretical part into marketing theory, called "Emoji marketing" (Sümer, 2017). Due to importance, efficiency and the common nature of emojis in modern day marketing efforts, it can be argued that conducting research on the perceptions of emojis in social media is an important topic, and the topic should be researched more in marketing communications. The author aimed to research the consumer perceptions of generation z relating to emoji marketing so that marketing efforts and particularly, the strategies of companies relating to the emoji-use in the adverts could be planned in more detail and with more knowledge. The benefits of the research could provide companies a way to reach the desired target group of generation z. It is generally known that the numbers in social media users have gone up yearly, which at the same time increases the use of social media

advertising. This also makes the topic of research very topical, important, and justified in the field of academic research in marketing communications.

## 1.3  Research process design

The author started the research process in the summer of 2023 with a process of researching and conducting research for potential topics of research. From the possible topics, the author narrowed the potential topics down, and eventually selected a topic. The first selected topic, that was originally presented to the thesis supervisor, was eventually cancelled by the author himself. The current topic relating to social media and emojis was deemed more topical, and important by the author himself.

After the process of researching and defining the research topic, a research plan was designed by the author. The research plan involved important theoretical backgrounds, timetables, and research questions that all related to the research project. The author started to gather the theoretical background by defining key concepts used in the research process. After the theoretical background, the design of the data collection was started by the author. The research project design is described in the below process flow figure (Figure 1)

Defining the research topic and onducting research about potential topics

Gathering theoretical background for the masters thesis
• Defining key concepts
• Studying relevant theoretical background and themes

Designing the data collection methods
• Studying semi-structured interview methods and interview planning
• Gathering and contacting respondents

Interpretation of research data
• Coding the data
• Thematic analysis process

Presenting findings and conclusions based on the data collected

Figure 1 - The research process design

## 1.4  Artificial intelligence disclosing

Artificial intelligence was largely absent from this research process. The author resulted in to using ChatGPT 3.5 in the process of forming the questions for the semi-structured research. The author did not use any the suggestions the AI was able to make directly, but rather used the artificial intelligence as a "sparring" companion to bolster and boost the personal ideas and goals the author had thought himself. Some of the answers provided from the GPT-platform were edited and used partly in the process of creating the template for interview questions for the semi-structured interview. Artificial intelligence was not used in any other part of the research.

# 2  SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media can be defined by Merriam-Webster as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)" (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Social media has become a phenomenon almost every single company has started to utilise to better reach their desired target audience (Saravanakumar & SugantaLakshmi, 2012). It has quickly become a standardised and highly impactful channel of communication in the modern digitised world (Dwivedi, Kapoor & Chen, 2015).

Social media marketing has become an atrractive option for companies in the modern and digital era of marketing. This is due to multiple of reasons. Social media is used daily by 4.95 billion people (Datareportal, 2023). Social media marketing also offers companies a chance to achieve marketing goals and gain brand awareness with somewhat low costs (Ajina, 2019). A study conducted by Madhala & al. (2018), states well that customers are human beings who like to express émotions on the different social media platforms available for use. Emotional connectedness can be very useful in companies in terms of profit : according to some research, emotionally invested customers can be worth 52% more on average when compared with customers who are just highly satisfied (Magdis, Zoorfas & Leemon, 2015). There are some huge potential benefits when customers are engaged emotionally. For example, a major bank decided to introduce a credit card that was designed specifically for millennials. The bank was able to raise the usage of credit cards in that customer segment by 70%. The percentage of new accounts opened inside that segment also rose by 40%. (Magdis, Zoorfas & Leemon, 2015). Previous research shows, that the emotional motivators behind purchase decisions can be sometimes difficult to find out. According to an article published in the Harvard Business Review, companies often knowledge that it is highly important to engage customers and create emotional motivators to affect

purchase decisions, but companies do not know consistent ways to determine what these emotional motivators might be. (Magdis, Zoorfas & Leemon, 2015)

## 2.1 Big data

It can be argued from the basis of research and data that is available in the modern digital world, that social media has constantly raised its level in terms of importance in marketing. The similar process of fastly growing importance is also happening with large data sets, more commonly known as big data (Uskali, 2015). An article published in the Harvard Business Review researched how the Fortune 1000 companies are using big data and how happy they are with the measured results. The survey was sent to the executive personnel of these companies. The study found out, that 48.4 percent of Fortune 1000 companies are at the time of the release of the article, getting measurable results from investments made to big data. A much larger number, 80.7 percent of executives that answered the survey, considered the investments made to big data as "successful". (Bean, R, 2017) The importance of big data is also brought up in research conducted by Zhang & Song (2022). The research points out, that big data is one of the most effective ways to increase market orientation, together with AI technologies & social media marketing research. The study conducted, that below-average firms can gain more benefits on focusing on big data in particular. (Zhang & Song, 2022) From the results of this research, a conclusion can be drawn that big data, is in fact a very important part in gaining potential market share and providing companies with measurable and successful returns. Large datasets, or big data, is also very important in social media marketing. Advertisements shown to consumers on social media can be optimized to match a certain target group, audience or location. The data that has been gathered from the users of social media is therefore very important in reaching the right audiences with the marketing efforts of a company. Using big data to differentiate content between different target groups can also be problematic, and one should proceed with caution. An example of a case where big data caused problems was when Netflix used big data to target the adverts and the content of the streaming platform to different ethnic groups (Powell, 2018)

## 2.2  Social media marketing strategies

Companies can face challenges when designing and determining social media strategies that fit their desired communication and brand images. Parsons & Lepkowska-White conducted a study in 2018 to determine a framework, that aims to help companies to better understand and plan social media strategies. The study conducted and concluded, that a framework that consists of four different elements can be used to achieve the desired results. The framework consists of messaging/projecting, monitoring, assessing & responding. (Parsons & LepkowskaWhite, 2018) Humour & emotion can also be considered very important inside the social media marketing communication framework. A study conducted by Lee & al. (2018), analyse over a 100,000 Facebook messages inside 782 companies' Facebook pages. The research conducted found out, that using humour and emotions in the marketing communication strategy can lead to greater customer engagement numbers (Lee & al., 2018). Emojis can offer a lot of added value and meaning to different social media campaigns. This is argued in a study conducted by Yakin & Eru (2017), in a study where the effectiveness of emojis in social media advertisements is studied. The study concludes, that emojis are in fact important factors in social media marketing campaigns, and they were able to increase the emotion that is attached to the social media advertisements. (Yakin & Eru, 2017)

## 2.3  Social media marketing metrics

One of the biggest benefits of social media advertising for companies with smaller marketing budgets, is the fact that social media marketing campaigns are very much affordable, and they have the potential to reach large audiences. But also, the fact how measurable social media marketing campaigns are, and how easily data can be gathered from the social media marketing campaigns is a large benefit. (Yakin & Eru, 2017) It can be generally argued, that in order for social media marketing to be successful, it is important to keep track of the marketing. Social media offers different kinds of Key-performance-indicators, that help to utilise the full potential of social media marketing. The benefits of tracking the effectiveness of social media marketing through different metrics, include for example, but are not limited to: increased customer engagement, increased brand awareness & better return on investment

(Kočišová & Štarchoň, 2023). There are several different metrics used to measure social media marketing. Reach communicates how large of an audience has viewed the content in question. Impressions measure the total times the advertisement has been displayed, regardless of how many times it has been viewed by an individual. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) Conversion metrics, in social media marketing are evaluating how much the advertising can capture and cause desired actions. Click-through rates, or CTR for short, determine the number of users who click an advertisement, or react to a callto-action inside an advertisement. Conversion metrics, such as the CTR, or number of clicks leading purchases made' are mostly important when designing and researching the impact of social media advertising on revenue, sales, and lead generation. (Kočišová & Štarchoň, 2023)

In addition to metrics involving the reach and impressions and conversions, engagement metrics are also used. Likes, shares & other engagement metrics, like retweets on the social media platform X, much like the click-through-rate, are direct indicators about the effectiveness of the content. Kaplan & Haenlein argue (2010) that these indicators tell how the advertisement is able to "capture attention and generate conversations". Brand awareness metrics are another one of the more commonly used social media marketing metrics. These awareness metrics, such as 'brand recognition', 'social media mentions', 'share of voice' & 'hashtag performance', help marketers to identify the effectiveness of the social media campaigns and how much conversation the said campaigns are able to generate. (Hajli, 2014)

# 3 BRAND & MARKETING COMMUNICATION

According to Keller, Aperia, & Georgson (2011), brand management has taken an increased importance in the field of marketing. Achieving successful brand image can hold substantial benefits for companies, as a strong brand can "simplify consumer decision-making, reduce risks and set expectations", making branding an invaluable asset (Keller, Aperia & Georgeson, 2011).

## 3.1 Definition of a brand

According to Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen (2010), the term "brand" can be defined as a name that is given to a certain service a product, and the definition "brand" exists so that companies can differentiate themselves from competition. According to Kotler & al. (2010), brand is a sustained effort by the business, and the goal of it is to encourage people to see the business in the light the "brand" is trying to present itself. According to Kotler & al. (2010), a brand can present itself in many forms, it can be a name, symbol, logo, design or an image. When a brand is successful, it means that consumers are seeing the brand as an added value in addition to the product of service itself. (Kotler & al., 2010) Branding is not by any means a new concept. According to the book by Kotler & al. (2010), the first signs of branding in Europe happened already during the medieval times, when craftsmen started to put trademarks on their products, so that the products could be protected from inferior products of competitors. Interestingly, according to Kotler & al. (2010), consumers also feel the willingness to express themselves through different brands. If we investigate for example the clothes worn, music listened to or social media behaviour, people like to brand themselves through personal branding by selecting to prefer certain brands over others (Kotler & al., 2010)

Although both terms "brand image", and "brand identity" relate to the term brand, the two terms are different in their definitions. Kotler & al. (2010) defines the terms and how they differentiate from each other. The definitions can be seen from the below table (table 2)

Table 2 - Difference between brand image and brand identity (Adapted from data presented by Kotler & al., 2010)

| Brand image | Brand identity |
|---|---|
| The visual or verbal expressions of a brand, which then leads to different emotional or psychological perceptions amongst consumers | The way company is aiming to identify themselves or their product and/or service |

When we look at the definitions by Kotler & al. (2010), it can be argued that for this master's thesis, the emoji usage of brands in their social media marketing relates to the brand image of a company, therefore why this was selected as an investigative question for this master's thesis. The goal was to investigate how the emoji use of brands affects the perceived brand image amongst consumers, particularly amongst generation z.

## 3.2  Content Marketing

Content marketing and how it succeeds plays a major role in modern day marketing (Yogesh & al, 2021). According to literature that has been published from the topic itself, having emotional attachments to communication can significantly affect consumer behaviour. A study conducted by Hutchins & al. (2018) supports this claim. The research, which involved several B2B companies, was able to conclude, that companies who use emotional attachment in their contenYt marketing, were able to achieve superior results in their content marketing efforts (Hutchins & al., 2018).

Content marketing has become the driving force of business audience (Gamble, 2016). In a book by Gamble & Sons, the importance of visual content marketing is brought up. The book argues, that adding visuals, like infographics or pictures to be used with text can have multiple benefits that relate to the engagement of the text. The following table lists benefits that are brought up by the book. (Gamble, 2016)

Table 3 - Benefits of visuals used together with text. Adapted from an infographic presented originally by Gamble & Sons (2016).

| Benefit: | Amount of benefit: |
|---|---|
| Visuals with colour used together with text improve the willingness to read the text | Up to 80% |
| Adding visuals illustrations to be used with text improves the ease of understanding | Up to 80% |
| Ability to retain the information longer when visuals are used with text | Up to 80% |
| Visuals are easier to understand, due to the brain's ability to process visuals better than text | Up to 60 000 times faster processing time inside brain |
| Visual infographics are liked more than presentations or other documents | 4 times more for presentations, 23 times more for other documents |

When we look at the benefits listed in table 3, it can be argued that visuals have a substantial difference to how to the content is perceived by the observer of the content. The willingness to read, the ability to retain information longer and the ease of understanding that could all arguably increase the engagement of a social media post. In a study conducted by Mathews & Lee (2018), emojis as a marketing tool were analysed. The study found out, that the companies main reasoning and objective (89,1% of companies) behind the use of emojis was to increase the engagement in the posts. This supports the argument presented in the previous chapter about visual emojis being a tool that supports the engagement and effectiveness of social media marketing. According to a theory by Heinze, Fletcher, Rashid & Cruz (2020), the most important part of social media marketing is the content itself. The content marketing process is defined even more detail in the article by arguing that a very important part of the marketing process is finding out the needs of the target group the marketing is planned for, and by tailoring the content to fit the needs of the target group can have massive successful benefits to the marketing efforts. Also, importantly, the individual talent of the content creation team is also mentioned being an important factor, which can have substantial improvements to the marketing efforts of companies. (Heinze & al., 2020)

## 3.3  Online and offline media marketing

Online media has largely taken over the offline medias in marketing communications. According to experts, the offline medias even face the threat of extinction. Online medias provide a much easier platform for companies to reach the desired target audiences with tailored content. Due to the ease-of-use of these online media channels, even small companies are able to compete with big companies in their marketing efforts. (Pollak, 2022) The presence and emergence of social media networks have accelerated the usefulness of online media and online-based retail, e-commerce. According to research, one of the most important factors why e-commerce has benefitted so much from online marketing is the interactive nature these social media platforms are built on. (Pollak, 2022) The presence of online media and online marketing has provided a substantial difference to traditional offline media marketing, which are the factors relating to geographical locations. The presence of the online media channels enables companies from all over the world to interact with consumers around the world. (Pollak, 2022)

Frantisek Pollak defines online marketing in his book 'Brand management' (2022), online marketing as 'an avenue to communicate and target consumers with the use of digital technologies'. According to Pollak, this definition entails the contention that online marketing is in fact dependent on the interaction of the users inside the social media. This characteristic is one of the key differences between online and offline marketing.

# 4   EMOTICONS

Emoticons, or emojis for short, have become a part of modern-day communications amongst consumers and companies alike. Emojis are colourful pictures, that can be included in almost every single one of modern-day communication platforms together with text. Emojis have multiple uses and forms, and they are highly visible in many types of communication platforms.

## 4.1   Emojis – a part of modern-day language

The emoji language is made of concepts that are universal and global, which enables different cultures to have different comprehensions about different emojis (Alshenqeeti, 2016). Emojis are often used in combination with traditional text-based words in a hybrid-like format, but the use of emojis alone to replace certain words are also possible in communication (Danesi, 2017). In a research paper by Mathews & Lee (2018), it is brought up that emojis enable a certain amount of imagination and creativity, due to the nature of using them in different combinations, than just using text and words in communication. Emojis hold a resemblance to ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, but they are presented in a more, modern-day-esque manner and style (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

According to Study.com the word emoticon is a word combined from the words emotion' and 'icon'. It is generally known that emoticons are used in everyday communications in the modern world. Mobile phone technologies have accelerated the popularity of emoticons in communications, one reason for this can be the increased number of people who have access to emoticons in communications.

Emoticon is generally abbreviated to the word 'emoji' in the English language. The word emoji, originally comes from Japanese words. In Japanese language, the e of the word stands for picture, and the moji stands for letter, character. So, the definition of emoji is essentially a picture-word. (Danesi, 2016) The origins of the first emojis also come from Japan. According to a a book written by Danesi (2016), the first emojis were created in Japan in the year 1998. A telecommunications worker in Japan, who was highly interested in the style of manga comic books, created more visually appealing options for emoticons. Previous to this, in 1997 emoticons had been used in e-mails and websites, but these were only emoticons formed from the options available in a standard keyboard. An example of this type of an emoticon would be ':)'. If we go even further down in history, emoticons were in use already in the year 1972, where a journalist called Franklin Loufrani trademarked the smiley face emoticon he had used in his news articles. With the smiley face, Loufrani wanted to bring a positive atmosphere to news articles, in comparison to the traditional formal and pessimistic style news had been reported in. Due to his positive mentality, Loufrani became a symbol of 'positivity' and 'cheerfulness, all around the world. (Danesi, 2016)

## 4.2   Emojis in marketing & communications

Emojis have taken over the communication on social media platforms. According to a study conducted by Emojipedia in 2021, 21.54% of all tweets on the popular social media platfom Twitter contained at least one emoji. This is a clear indicator, that using emojis is highly popular in modern day communications. (Broni, 2021) There are also differences in the popularity of different emojis. Emojipedia conducted a statistical analysis on what are the most popular emojis inside Twitter. The below table shows the most used emojis during the year 2021.

Table 4 - Top 10 most popular emojis on Twitter in the year 2021. (Adapted from the data from Broni, 2021)

| Name of Emoji | Times used (per 10 000 tweets) |
|---|---|
| Loudly Crying Face | 193.34 |
| Face with Tears of Joy | 178.81 |
| Pleading Face | 109.28 |
| Rolling on the Floor Laughing | 98.87 |
| Red Heart | 90.3 |
| Sparkles | 87.26 |
| Folded Hands | 67.91 |

| Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes | 59.89 |
|---|---|
| Smiling Face with Hearts | 56.13 |
| Smiling Face with Smiling Eyes | 54.1 |

A good example of how quickly emojis have taken over the modern-day communications is the Oxford Dictionary's competition for the word of the year. In 2015, Oxford dictionary selected an emoji of a laughing face with tears falling from eyes (presented in the below figure 2) as the word of the year for 2015. This is an indication, that emojis have already been part of our language for many years, and the users of the language are starting to connect individual emojis to certain meanings and words.



Figure 2 - The Oxford Dictionary's selection for 'Word of the year 2015'. (Oxford Dictionary Press, 2015)

During the same year, the social significance of emojis and the use of emojis instead of words also started to grow in popularity. Musicians like Sir Paul McCartney of The Beatles created his own set of emojis in collaboration with Skype titled the 'Love Mojis'. (Danesi, 2016) The use of emojis in popular culture can also be seen in other instances. In 2021, a British pop/rock band Coldplay released their album 'Music of the Spheres'. The album consists of 12 songs. Five of the songs released on the album are titled only as emojis with no traditional words used to title the song names.

Emojis have developed into a language that is understood well worldwide (Mathews & Lee, 2017). It is the rapid growth of popularity of the emojis that makes them an essential part of modern-day marketing communication efforts, and in this way increase the customer engagement of online marketing strategies and campaigns

(Grennan, 2016). Being successful in a highly competitive modern day marketing environment, is to carefully plan the marketing actions of a company. (Sümer, 2017) A research article about emojis and their use in the marketing activities of companies and businesses argues, that "companies who introduce and explain their goods in a more efficient way, could succeed in an intense and competitive environment". So, to summarise, companies who are able to communicate with the consumers in an efficient and effective way, are able to gain a competitive advantage and perform better than the competition. (Sümer, 2017) Emojis have some characteristics, that make them an effective tool in the fast-paced online media environment available for consumers in the moder marketing-era. The following characteristics, originally brought up by Sümer in a research paper (2017) are mentioned in the table below:

Table 5 - Typical characteristics of emojis in marketing. Adapted from the research article by Sümer (2017).

| *Typical characteristics of emojis in marketing:* |
|---|
| They have high visuality. |
| They are the shortest and colourful way of communication |
| Emojis include smileys, food icons, objects, symbols etc. |
| Since they are colourful, they can attract the attention of people easily. |

There are generally three types of emojis that can be used in marketing communications (Mathews & Lee, 2018). A non-profit organization called The Unicode Consortium have made emojis standardized, so that a set of emojis are readily available on multiple different devices and platforms (Unicode, 2017). Brands can also utilize and create their own custom emojis that can be used to further enhance the marketing efforts. These custom emojis work utilizing the sticker function of the devices rather than the traditional emojis that can be incorporated into text. A company called Appmoji for example, offers a service where they create custom-made emojis for different companies. (Henry, 2016)

## 4.3  Emoji marketing

The research article published by Sümer in 2017, specifically highlights the beforementioned efficient and effective way of communication and their importance in digital marketing. The research paper investigates a new, emerging digital marketing trend, which the paper calls "emoji marketing". According to the research, emoji marketing is the shortest way of sharing thoughts between companies and consumers. (Sümer, 2017) This makes emoji marketing a marketing trend, that should be investigated and in the field of marketing. The research paper by Sümer investigated online databases and research materials utilizing the keywords "emoji marketing". From the materials found available, the paper created a definition of emoji marketing. According to Sümer, emoji marketing can be defined as a new marketing trend, that has enabled companies to be closer with their customers. It has also enabled companies to better understand the emotions of their customers, due to the common universal emoji language used between the two parties. The article concludes that emoji marketing is a new way to communicate between companies and consumers, and both parties will gain a lot from this emerging trend. (Sümer, 2017) Some of the biggest companies in the world have also started to utilize emoji marketing in their marketing efforts. Domino's Pizza, one of the largest pizza chains in the world, have started to utilize pizza emojis on their orders, in a vision and a goal to simplify the order process. In addition to Domino's, companies like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Pepsi, CNN, Ikea & Chevrolet are some of the businesses that have started to prefer the use of emoji marketing when trying to capture the attention of target markets. (Sümer, 2017)

Discourse stands for the use of language for psycho-emotional reasons. In 2016, a study was conducted where specific text messages containing emojis were studied. The study aimed to find what emojis are adding to interaction in text messages. The study conducted, that the strategic use of emojis inside a text message allows the critical discourse functions to take place. One particular function of discourse, the phatic discourse function, originally studied by Jakobson in 1960, stood out. One particular phatic discourse function was, that emojis seemed to cover the concept of 'small talk' in a visually appealing ay, therefore adding meaning to the text messages. (Danesi, 2016)

According to a study conducted by Casado-Molina, Rojas-De Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo & Romero-Charneco (2022), emojis play a significant role in the brand communications of companies. The study was conducted as a case study in the beer industry, and it studied the emoji usage of four different brands inside social media. The study was able to confirm through correspondence analysis, that emojis were not

used as an occasional tool to enhance a particular message but were rather used as a tool to differentiate the positioning of a brand (Casado-Molina & al., 2022). The same study also argues that more research on the topic is needed to better understand the effects of emoji usage in brand positioning. The study argues, that while the use of emojis is still not seen as a usual resource in digital marketing communications, they should be investigated and considered more in brand communications as an "important element" (Casado-Molina & al., 2022).

# 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the figure 1 "The research process" lists, the data of this master's thesis was collected through semi-structured interviews. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis.

## 5.1 Research design & data collection

The term 'research design' is often used as a term that refers to experimental research, more specifically, to extend design of the research (Byrne, 2016). There are many ways to conduct research, The research design of this master's thesis consists of of research questions that have been collected through researching academic studies conducted from the topic of emoji marketing on social media. Field research and content analysis are both very suitable tools for collecting rich, descriptive data (Abbott & al., 2012). There are two kinds of research methodologies one can utilize in research, qualitative and quantitative. Often, qualitative research is used when the topic of research requires an approach that is able to provide more descriptive, open-ended responses and data sets. While the two different research methodologies are often placed in opposite corners as models that exclude the other, this may not be true in some cases (Alasuutari, 2012).

## 5.2 Semi-structured interviews

The data collection method selected for this master's thesis is the semi-structured interview model. According to Galletta, (2012), the key in conducting semi-structured interviews is to pay attention to the unfolding narrative as it unfolds through the interview process. Therefore, the author decided to pay attention to any possible follow-up questions regarding the answers of the participants in order to achieve the best possible efficiency in the data collection process. This can be achieved by listening closely to the responses received in the interview (Galletta, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews incorporate and include both open-ended questions and more theoretically driven questions (Galletta & Cross, 2013). A guide to qualitative semi-structured interviews was used to establish the beginning of the interview in a fluent and flowy manner. The author felt, that especially in the case of a semi-structured interview, that aims to collect answers from more open-ended questions, the beginning of the interview is very important in setting the right mood for the questions and the answers. The opening segment of a qualitative semi-structured interview should include the following steps (the following steps are adapted from the book by Galletta & Cross, 2013):

1. First, one should establish a level of comfort by ensuring the rights of the participant.
2. Next, the interviewer should move into broader questions, that allow the participant to express their feelings and experiences, to get the participant to a talkative mood. These questions act as warm-up questions.
3. When the interviewer feels it is the correct time to interfere, to both probe for more details, and to interfere and explain on parts that might be returned later during the interfere, the interviewer should interfere occasionally. The interviewer should also constantly support the flow of the conversation with small probes.

Semi-structured interviews can often include material that is not text-based. The interviewer is allowed to use visual aids to guide and explain the questions in a more detailed manner. Images, symbols, or visuals can evoke "analytically rich" conversations (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Therefore, the author felt, that including visual aids to the interview questions in the form of different examples of emoji-usage in social media marketing would lead to the best possible thoughts and ideas from the respondents.

## 5.3 Qualitative research data

Semi-structured interviews provided the author with qualitative data. The research methods of qualitative research should be selected in a way, that they are relevant to the selected research topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For this master's thesis, it was selected that qualitative research with semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection would be used as the method of research. It can be generally argued that qualitative research suits the study better than quantitative research, due to the subjective nature of research questions presented in this master's thesis. A book about the theory and methods of qualitative research titled "Designing qualitative research", written by Uwe Flick (2007), presents a table that presents the different research perspectives of qualitative research. The table presented in the book is presented below (Table 6).

Table 6 - Different approaches to qualitative research (Flick, 2017)

| | Approaches to subjective viewpoints | Description of the making of social situations | Hermeneutic analysis of underlying structures |
|---|---|---|---|
| Theoretical positions | Symbolic interactionism Phenomenology | Ethnomethodology Constructionism | Psychoanalysis Genetic structuralism |
| Methods of data collection | Semi-structured interviews Narrative interviews | Focus groups Ethnography Participant observation Recording interactions Collecting documents | Recording interactions Photography Film |
| Methods of interpretation | Theoretical coding Content analysis Narrative analysis Hermeneutic methods | Conversation analysis Discourse analysis Analysis of documents | Objective hermeneutics Deep hermeneutics |

This master's thesis presents subjective viewpoints, which is why an interview-based approach was selected, with semi-structured interviews selected as the method of data collection. Qualitative research can be differentiated from quantitative

research in many ways. The science and practice of quantitative research is above all, interested in the texture of the human experience. Qualitative research does not use, random sampling, but rather purposeful sampling. (Lincoln, 2021) The reasonings and the characteristics of qualitative research make it a fitting research method for this master's thesis, which is focusing on finding out subjective or symbolic viewpoints. Qualitative data is typically open-ended data, and it is often related to a specific temporal and spatial domain. Qualitative research methods can be especially useful and purposeful for certain uses because they tend to combine the rational with the intuitive approach to knowledge. (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001)

## 5.4   Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis stands for aiming to identify themes and patterns withing qualitative data. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify both implicit and explicit ideas and themes within data (Guest, 2001). From these ideas and themes found on the datasets, codes are then often formed, which represent the identified themes found on the research (Guest, 2001). The author decided, that due to thematic analysis being the most common research method used in qualitative research, and due to its usefulness in capturing the complexities of meanings within a textual data set (Guest, 2001), thematic analysis would be chosen as the method of data analysis for this master's thesis. According to Guest (2001), text segmentation is often used as a tool to interpret collected data. However, according to Guest (2001), it is also mentioned that when the sample size is not considerably large, an explicit segmentation strategy does not need to be created.

The benefits of thematic analysis include, that it is rather a research method than a methodology. This is useful in many studies, as it enables flexibility in research. (Braun & Clarke 2006) The author of the thesis used abductive reasoning from the material that was available and decided that the flexibility of thematic analysis would be highly suitable for the thesis, as the semi-structured research model and the interview questions created involved the personal views and opinions of respondents, that could potentially vary in high amounts.

Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a research method meant for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within the collected data. Thematic analysis can present and describe a data set in rich detail. As thematic analysis involves the identification of themes from datasets, researcher must be aware of what can be counted as an individual theme. Themes are concepts that capture an

important part of the data in relation to the set research question. (Braun & Clarke 2006). Braun & Clarke have also developed a six-step guide for conducting thematic analysis (2006), which the author decided to utilize in the thesis writing process. The process is as follows:

1. Become familiar with the data – After the data collection process it is important to immerse into the database, and make sure the collected data is well familiarized. At this stage the researcher can already start to think about preliminary codes and themes from the data

2. Generate initial codes – The second phase then involves generating the codes from the data, while taking into account the preliminary ideas taken already in the first phase.

3. Search for themes – Stage three then involves extracting the different themes, while simultaneously making sure that all data from each theme is extracted.

4. Review themes – In this phase, researcher can often find, that not all of the categorised themes actually are fit to be their own theme. This can possibly be caused by not having enough data to support the theme.

5. Define themes – After the review, you should have a thematic consisting from the main themes extracted from the data. At this stage, the further refinement of the data can begin.

6. Write-up – The final part of the six-stage process is the writing-up, or producing of the report. In this phase, it is important to make sure that there are sufficient amounts of information and data to support the individual themes identified.

The author implemented the six-step system developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) to this master's thesis. After the data was collected and stores after the process of conducting the interviews, the process of the preliminary theme creation was started. The review of themes was done successfully, and sufficient data was found form the semi-structured interview process to support the themes. In the further refinement of themes, the author utilized abductive reasoning, to identify and categorize the themes based on the most accurate available data. The author identified similar words that were found from the dataset of the interviews. With the help of identified keywords

in the coding process, the author was able to find connections and link the found themes together with each other. The well-thought process of interview planning and an easy-to-use structured platform to store and code the data enabled and supported the process of abductive reasoning, and the author was able to follow the six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) from start to finish without encountering issues relating to theme identification.

## 5.5 Interview respondents

For the semi-structured interview, the author selected the respondents in a way that they would match a certain criterion. The criteria of the respondents was selected as the following:

Table 7 - Criteria to selection of the interview respondents

| *Criteria to select the respondents for interviews:* |
| --- |
| 1. The respondent must fit the generation z age group (born between 1997-2012) |
| 2. The respondent must be aware of different social media platforms and must have an account on at least one of the following large social media platforms; Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or TikTok |

The author was able to utilize his own personal network in the attempt of finding potential respondents that fit the criteria. Using respondents that are already familiar to the author before the research is called "backyard research" (Glesne, 1999). This method of selection is however quite a valid and legitimate way of selecting the respondents in the business research context (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

Following the criteria table and utilizing the authors networking skills, the author was able to contact and eventually interview six respondents. The respondents are referred as "respondents 1-6", to protect the personal identities of the respondents according to guidelines of ethical research.

Table 8 - Information table on the respondents

| Respondent number: | Birth year of the respondent: | Uses an account on the following social media platform: Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, X & TikTok | Activeness on social media: | Interview duration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent #1 | 1997 | 4/5 | Daily basis | 34 minutes |
| Respondent #2 | 1997 | 3/5 | Daily basis | 25 minutes |
| Respondent #3 | 1999 | 5/5 | Daily basis | 23 minutes |
| Respondent #4 | 1999 | 5/5 | Daily basis | 21 minutes |
| Respondent #5 | 1998 | 5/5 | Daily basis | 34 minutes |
| Respondent #6 | 1997 | 3/5 | Daily basis | 25 minutes |

The author conducted the semi-structured interview using the video-conference application Zoom using the record-function of the meeting, however, with the camera-function turned off. The recorded material was stored on the computer of the author, and to a cloud server of the university, which is safeguarded by two-step authentication. It was made evident to the respondents, that the recordings would only be kept for the duration of that the author is able to transcript the interviews. After that, the recorded files were removed from all platforms and storages.

## 5.6   Tools used in the research & data collection process

The author used a few different tools in the process of this master's thesis. The interview process was carried out in an online environment to assist in the process of setting up interviews. Zoom was selected as the platform where the interviews were held and recorded, due to the University of Jyväskylä providing access to this particular platform. The data collected from the interviews was then transcribed to a separate Microsoft Excel sheet, where the author was able to code the data. The gathered data was analysed through thematic analysis, which enabled the author to loom for similarities and differences amongst the responses, and therefore enabled the author to draw implications and findings from the dataset.

## 5.7   Ethicality and data protection measures

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was recorded with the Zoom software using the recording function of the platform. The author was therefore able to extract only the audio from the interviews. The audio of the interviews was stored into the cloud service of Jyväskylä University. The files are locked behind a two-factor authentication through an authenticating app, which makes a data breach highly unlikely. It was also clarified to the respondents, that the interview will be recorded, and the permission to record was asked from the participating interviewees before the recording was started. It was also made clear, that after the thesis process has been finished, the files of the interviews would be removed from the cloud service.

The author also made sure to act according to ethical guidelines. The interview questions and structure did not contain any data, that could be considered as "sensitive data", like for example issues relating to the health, or other personal aspects of the interviewees. When analysing the data, the author also made sure that the responses of the interviewees were transcribed accurately, to maintain the ethical principles in the study.

# 6   RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter the author will present the data collected. There were different themes identified from the collected data. The identified themes fall under two main categories that are used to categorise the themes, "The perceived characteristics and use purposes of the emojis", and "The perceived effects of the emojis". Under the two main categories, five parent themes were identified from the data. From these five main themes, eleven sub-themes were identified. The identified themes are presented in the below figure. Chapter 6 lists the research findings and results of the thematic analysis theme-by-theme, and how the themes were presented in the answers of the respondents.
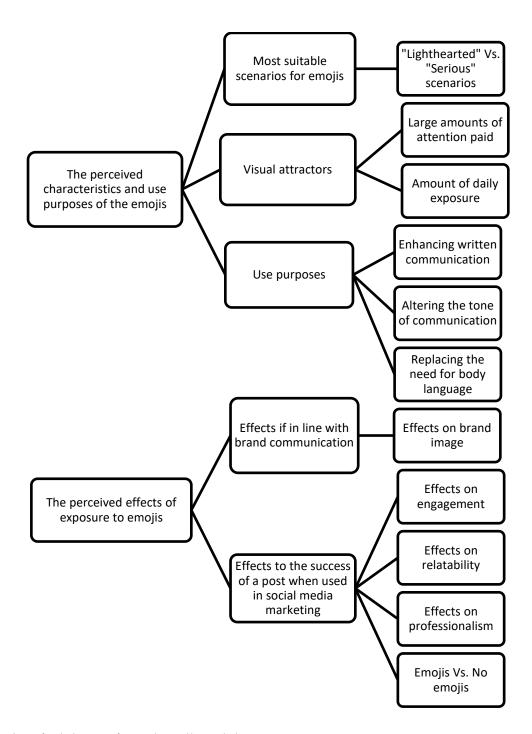
Figure 3 - Identified themes from the collected data

The identified themes presented in figure 3 formed the structure for the results chapter, where the research findings are presented theme-by-theme. The two main categories of themes link the parent themes and sub-themes to create structure for the thematic analysis. The eleven sub-themes present the findings of the study in detail, indicating the similarities and common themes found amongst the responses of the respondents.

## 6.1 The perceived characteristics and use purposes of the emojis

## Use purpose of the emojis

### *Enhancing written communication*

All of the respondents indicated that the use purpose for emojis is to enhance written communication. This theme was found in all of the answers of the respondents. The respondents see emojis as a strong tool to enhance written communication.

*Respondent #1: "Well, I would say that in my opinion, emojis serve to enhance one's message somehow. They allow you to express emotions or feelings that might be difficult to articulate briefly with words alone."*

*Respondent #2: "I see them as a way of enhancing the communication of different emotions in messages. They also clarify the message of the messages. Without emojis, the tone of the message might be invalid."*

*Respondent #3: "I see their meaning as the same the use, for example when i communicate with someone, I use them to enhance the message with emotions. When you do not see the face of the other person, based on the emojis you can better bring out emotions."*

The respondents are seeing emojis as modern tools created to help include emotions or feelings to a text-based format.

### *Altering the tone of communication*

The respondents also described emojis as a tool not only useful in enhancing written communication, but also as a tool to alter the tone of communication. Emojis were expressed as a good and efficient tool to find ways to advantage of this attribute inside different platforms.

*Respondent #2: "They also clarify the tone of the messages. Without emojis, the tone of the message might be invalid. I use them for these reasons mainly myself on different kinds of chatting platforms. I see that emojis are not absolutely needed, you can manage without them, but I still feel the emojis can clarify the tone of the message by a lot."*

*Respondent #5: "So, emojis can for example change the whole meaning and the message of the text. They are a good way to bring things like sarcasm, humour, or irony. All kinds of emotions are possible with emojis."*

*Respondent #6: "And I also feel, i want to make the expression of my message easier for the receiver of the message. With the emoji you can add additional value to written text on a message. Emojis are a good and efficient way to do this."*

### Replacing the need for body-language

Interestingly, the respondents felt that the emojis work as a tool to replace one element present in face-to-face interactions but not in virtual communications, body language. According to the respondents, emojis can generally represent the similar emotions presented by body language in face-to-face interactions, but they are not seen as effective as body language is in face-to-face communications.

*Respondent #1: "It probably, in some way, shapes or concretizes the message, but of course, an emoji is not the same as face-to-face communication. It gives some direction in a way; your gestures or tone of voice convey a certain meaning. So, in some way, emojis might make that easier.*

## Emojis as visual attractors

### Daily exposure

All respondents were in complete agreement, that they are exposed emojis in very large portions in a daily basis inside social media. This indicates their incredible volume these days inside social media and other messaging platforms.

*Respondent #1: "Well, regarding the first one, how I'm exposed to emojis on social media, it's pretty much daily. If I open Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok, which I do quite often, there's usually a lot of emoji use, especially in social media marketing. It's rare nowadays to see marketing without emojis in some kind of form."*

*Respondent #2: "On social media, I am exposed to emojis on a daily basis."*

*Respondent #5: "I am exposed to emojis on a daily basis, all the time. The modern world is so digital, you are exposed to them all the time."*

The 100% answer rate to a daily exposure of emojis is an indication of just how important the optimized use and understanding of emojis is for companies & businesses aiming to optimize social media marketing.

### Large amounts of attention paid to emojis

Not only the exposure to emojis was seen as a large amongst generation z, but also all but one respondent indicated that when exposed to emojis, the individual attention paid to the emojis is also very large. Respondents are not only exposed to emojis, but they also notify the presence, selection, and use of the emojis. One respondent did not agree with this and mentioned that the emojis used to have this effect, but not anymore.

*Respondent #6: "I do pay attention to the emoji selection, when they are used well they are such a natural part of the post that you dont really pay that specific attention to the emojis, but when they are used badly or you feel the emoji does not "belong" in a place, it caughts my attention even more."*

*Respondent #4: "I often pay a lot of attention to which kind of emojis companies use. In my opinion, it's easy to tell for example the age of the person who wrote that post based on the emoji use. Emojis have often trending emojis, which become popular. I often pay attention to these trendy emojis."*

*Respondent #2: "It is noticeable, when emojis are used in marketing, but nowadays the use of emojis is so common, that I might not pay that much attention to them, because I kind of them take them for granted. Whereas for example, 10 years ago, I paid more attention to them."*

The large amounts of attention paid to the emojis indicates just how important it is to think about the emotional messages companies want to send with their social media marketing, as consumers pay attention to the individual selection of the emojis and this might already create a certain image about the company inside the consumers head.

# Most suitable scenarios for emojis

### *"Lighthearted" Vs. "Serious" scenarios*

One of the most common and largest themes found in the semi-structured interview process was the clarity in the suitability of the emoji-usage between different scenarios. All of the respondents saw, that emojis are most efficient, and cause positive effects like increase engagement, increase relatability and increase professionalism when they are used in scenarios that fit the characteristics of emojis. All of the respondents saw emojis highly suitable for more "light-hearted" scenarios inside social media. As an example, social media posts containing humor, or advertising products like "fast food or clothes" were seen as suitable platforms for emojis. On the flip side of the coin, emojis were largely seen as causing negative effects, when they are used in industries or situations that might require a more cautious approach. Industries not suitable for emoji usage were listed as "public-sector companies, funeral services and medicine companies".

*Respondent #2: "Maybe, as a rough estimate, maybe in advertising concrete products… when marketing services that relate to things like security of a person, the marketing should keep a serious, professional tone of voice. This is where the use of emojis would not be so wise. But, in some products that are more relaxed, I feel emojis are only a good thing. Also, it is good to remember the age group one is marketing to, I feel that especially when targeting target groups that are younger, use of emojis would feel wiser. Generally, public-sector organizations like police, I feel it is not that suitable to use emojis, because they need to keep such a high amount of professionalism, because they deal with more serious matters, whereas emojis a feel are often used to 'lighten the mood. I would say that emojis work better for lighter emotions, or more simple emotions like sorrow, happy, and excitement. But, for more serious or difficult-to-interpret messages or emotions like disappointment, the emojis do not seem so fitting. If used in these sorts of situations, one might get the feeling that is the company being serious enough on this matter. There is a time and place for emojis, but I feel these emotions are not the place to use them. For example, if a company is looking for new employees, or the tone of the message the company is sending not meant to be marketing but rather more official, the use of emojis might seem unnecessary, or even unfitting."*

*Respondent #4: "It depends on what the advertisement is trying to accomplish. Maybe in adverts such as medicine adverts, farming engagement with emojis is questionable in my opinion. Also, in more serious tone industries, it might not fit that well. It is still okay to use them in my eyes in adverts. It is more acceptable in almost every single industry and the emojis are used by almost all of the large companies. I immediately notice and pay attention to the*

*emojis that are used, and sometimes they awaken questions inside me, for example, whether an emoji was used in the correct place by the company. If the topic is quite serious, emojis do not really fit the picture of messages with a more serious tone at all. If there are emojis on posts with a more serious tone, I immediately think if the post is a joke or sarcasm.*

*Respondent #5: "Overall, like i said, emojis are a visual element, so industries where the visuality of products is present, such as retail stores and clothing stores, and design stores where visual elements are very important part of marketing, i also feel that emojis are very important in marketing. Then on the flip side, companies and organizations that have a very traditional and strict way of communicating, like for example funeral services, accounting firms, one should pay extremely close attention to the emojis use. I would say that in situations, where emojis are used, sometimes the old "picture tells more than a thousand words" can also be seen in emoji usage. For example, if you are feeling sad, and you type only sad emojis without text, you tell a certain a message, and that you might be in a situation where written communication about this topic might still be a little too early. I feel that text and emojis support each other. Naturally, there are situations where emojis do not work, they can be interpreted in many ways. So, for example, in more serious or difficult situations i would maybe avoid emojis.*

*Respondent #6: "The emojis are fantastic in sports and in marketing that is aimed strictly towards consumers. Then again, health related products or services or political related topics or media houses, might not be so wise to use emojis. Funeral services also could be an industry where they would not fit the communication style. Originally, the emojis originate from texts between the messages between friends in messaging apps. So, this could be a reason I see them to fit these sorts of relaxed products or services. I feel, that emojis always have a certain relaxed element amongst them. For example, with the funeral services, if they would use emojis with a strict text, it could seem unprofessional in my eyes. Emojis have a certain relaxed atmosphere."*

From the answers of the respondents, it is clear, that according to all of the respondents inside the generation z target group, the entire focus group saw emojis having a certain relaxed element that is combined with the emojis. This is an important finding and could help companies to understand places and scenarios emojis might be wise to use. When the desires tone-of-voice of communication is more relaxed, using emojis together with text can lead to increased results. When emojis are combined to scenarios where the desired tone-of-voice tends to be more serious, emojis can cause confusion, and even negativity amongst the respondents.

## 6.2   The perceived effects of exposure to emojis

## Effects to the success of a post when used in social media marketing

The author wanted to find out how emojis could potentially have an impact on the success of social media posts, and how emojis can affect the perceptions one might get from the social media posts. The author asked the respondents how the use of emojis by companies affects the professionalism, engagement, and relatability of social media content. In addition to this, the author formed a question that involved showing the respondents three different examples of social media posts. One of the posts involved the most emojis, one of them had few, and one of the posts had no emojis. The author wanted to investigate the perceptions the respondents had on these three different posts, to study the strength/weakness of emoji usage even further.

*Effects on engagement*

All the respondents agreed in their own responses, that emojis are seen as tools that boost the engagement when used in social media posts. Three of the respondents thought, that emojis are seen as an excellent tool to especially reach younger audiences, and that it is a way to build a younger, youthful brand image. The reasoning behind this was, that emojis were seen as such a built-in tool of communication inside their generation and in their personal life, that the consumers expect to see the use of emojis by companies. The engagement can be achieved, when emojis are used in the text in combination with text, rather than alone. The respondents thought that not only the positive use of emojis is seen and effective – half of the respondents mentioned, that when used in wrong places, emojis can have a negative effect on the engagement of the content. In more detail, the respondents described the negative effect of bad emoji-use is seen as more negative, than the good use of emojis is seen as positive.

*Respondent #2: "I feel like that emojis bring the text alive a little, so yes, I would say that they increase the engagement. Of course, depending on the context, they might seem unprofessional if used wrong or in wrong situations. For example, if a company is looking for new employees, or the tone of the message the company is sending not meant to be marketing but rather more official, the use of emojis might seem unnecessary, or even unfitting."*

*Respondent #4: "I would say yes, but it obviously links to how the emojis are used. For example, when they are used in a good way, it increases engagement. But, when they are used badly, it can decrease the engagement. So, they have an effect."*

*Respondent #6: "Yes, they do make it. You can easily show emotions such as humour. I feel that humour is the largest unique thing emojis can achieve. They can also be used to summarize certain topics inside topics very well."*

### Effects on relatability

In the question 6, all respondents argued, that they see emojis as a tool that makes the content inside social media more relatable. The respondents argue, that emojis are such a large part of the digitalized generation, that emojis are a very common phenomenon that directly has the effect on relatability. The respondents also saw relatability as an important aspect of social media. As respondent #5 indicates below, emojis are just as important and comparable to even the content itself that is presented and the language used in the social media post.

*Respondent #5: "They do, especially in my digital generation they are such a crucial part of our communication. So, when emojis are used in the correct way and they line up with the brand image and communication style of the company, I feel that emojis can have a massive impact on making the social media post more relatable. I feel that the ability to relate to the post is massively important part of marketing. Emojis are a crucial part of social media posts, as much as the text used or even the image that is used in the post. As an example, if the image that is used in the post is very visual, and the text is colourful language, but there are no emojis, you get mixed feelings about the post. We are so used to seeing emojis, for example positive messages are often communicated with emojis that support the message. If there are no emojis in a positive, happy post, you get mixed feelings about whether the topic is so positive, we are so used to seeing emojis in our everyday communication."*

*Respondent #6: "Yes, they do. Because you can add increased amounts of emotion to the post. You can for example show the ability to show humour, which makes the post more relatable."*

*Respondent #4: "Yes, I think it makes it more relatable. If the emojis that are used are current and topical. When the emojis used are not trendy, or are bad, it is more difficult to relate to the post. When the emojis go "out of fashion", they just do not work that well anymore."*

## Effects on professionalism

All respondents indicated in their answers, that the emoji-use of companies does influence the professionalism of a company. The respondents felt there are clear indications, that the presence of emojis has effects on how professional the perceived image of a company is.

*Respondent #2: "Yes, it does have an effect. There are situations, where it is very applicable to use emojis."*

*Respondent #6: "Yes, but I think this depends on the platform a lot."*

*Respondent #3: "Yes, they do affect the professionalism. They might have a very large effect on this, especially when the emojis are used in a way that does not fit the style of the place."*

According to the respondents of this study, emojis have significant effects on the engagement of a post, professionalism, and relatability of social media posts. It can be argued that all of these attributes are important, and when optimized and combined with emojis, could provide companies and organizations an improved social media presence and performance.

## Emojis Vs. No emojis

The author was seeking to investigate any direct implications and perceptions relating to emoji usage by providing the respondents three examples from social media posts made by the same company. All posts were highly similar in content, promoting a giveaway to B2C segment. One of the posts did not contain any emojis, one contained a few, and one contained more than a few. In the following part, the post containing most emojis will be referred to as "post #1", the post with a few emojis as "post 2", and the post with no emojis as "post #3". The examples shown to the respondents provided clear themes around the three different examples of social media posts. In the below chapter, the analysis and responses are divided into three parts. The post #1 was selected by five of the six respondents as the post that immediately caught the attention of the respondents in the best way.

*Respondent #3: "There are very notable differences, for example, the top one really differentiates from the group. In this format, the emojis catch my attention immediately, because I can only see the background, the texts, and the emojis. I see that the emojis increase emotion and enhance the emotional message."*

*Respondent #5: "Let's start with the first one, the emojis are used in a way so that they bring additional value to the post. When you compare it to the bottom text, the first one really catches your attention in a much better way. The light-hearted "joke" at the beginning of the first post, works so much better here because it is used with the crying face emoji. In my eyes this is a good context to use emoji."*

Respondent #4 described the post #1 with trendiness, and that the emojis presented were selected well: *"The top one is quite trendy, and there are some good emojis used, and the emojis are used in a good way."*

The post #2, which contained little emojis but not as much as the first one, was described as the second most appealing and engaging from the three presented. It was described by respondent #4 as: *"The middle one, there's the text about the giveaway, and the two emojis work as a visual attraction, that pick my attention very fast."*

The post #2 was selected as the most appealing post by one of the respondents. Respondent #2 described the post in the following way: *"The middle one is the most appealing for me, the amount of emojis and the way they are used make the most sense. It is not too much, but it is still colourful, so it makes it appealing. The top one gets my attention easily, but it is not the best cause it has a little bit of everything, maybe even a little bit too much."*

Post #3 did not gather similar amounts of positive feedback from the group of respondents than the first two did. According to the respondents, the post #3 was clearly the worst in gathering engagement, and all of the respondents described the post as negative.

Respondent #1 described the post as a post that *"resembles a scam message"*. Respondent #4 described the post in the following way: *"The bottom one, does not pick up my interest at all. I dont even want to read it through. It is too formal looking, and it does not pick up my interest."* Respondent #5 indicated clearly that the post #3 did not engage or interest, due to its nature of containing no emojis: *"The bottom one, compared to the two above, it is quite plain. It tries to catch the attention of the receiver, but it just remains as plain, because an emoji is not used in the post to enhance the message or joke. The content of the post is same with the top two, so you have a chance to win a giveaway, but the bottom one does not catch your attention the way the top two does. I would not stop to read this text the same way i would stop to read the top two posts."* Respondents #4 and #6 shared the same view, that the post #3 shares a very different message to the other two and described it with words such as *"different"*, *"formal"* and *"serious"*.

## Effects if in line with brand communication

One of the biggest themes found from the semi-structured interview was something the author did not originally expect to find. The theme of "how emojis line up with the rest of the brand communication of a business" was continuously mentioned in many different parts of the interview in many different questions, clearly indicating the positive and negative effects of whether emojis match the brand image and communication style of a certain company. It was also discovered that the interview group felt that emojis alone in social media posts affect the entire brand image that is perceived from the company, indicating their importance and relevance to generation z in social media marketing. It was also interestingly mentioned by half of the respondents, that the negative effects of when the emoji use is not in line with the rest of the communication style by a brand are larger than the positive effects of when it lines up with the communication style.

*Respondent #6: "They might have a very large effect on this, especially when the emojis are used in a way that does not fit the style of the place. So, emojis can hinder the professionalism of a brand when the emojis are used in an unfitting way. I feel that this would have a larger effect, than when the emojis are used well and in a creative, fitting place. For example, industries like the health industry, where it is important to be quite moderate and professional, emojis might hinder this."*

*Respondent #2: "When you turn it like, the other way around and think about the negative effects. Especially if we talk about, like, big companies or listed companies or even SMEs. So, if emoji usage is somehow applied to a certain context using wrong choices, the consumers can get confused. As an example, one might think why aren't there emojis even at this point, and it can create an unfitting feeling to the emojis."*

*Respondent #5: "This is very dependent on the situation. The emoji use must be in line with the company's brand image and overall visual communication, so yes, in youthful and modern organizations, the emoji use supports the professionalism of companies. Then again, an organization that is very traditional, like an accounting firm, if emojis are used in a wrong way and they are all over the place and no not line up with the rest of the brand image, they can have a negative effect on the professionalism & brand image.*

The interview and data that was collected pointed out that emojis need to line up with the rest of the communication style utilized by the company, or there can be severe negative effects to the perception of the post. Like it was mentioned by the respondents, the negative perceptions seem to also outweigh the positive perceptions,

therefore making the negative perceptions as something that should be avoided when trying to aim content to generation z.

# 7    DISCUSSION

The study aimed to provide answers how large of an effect emojis have in the perception of how generation z interacts and perceives social media. In this chapter, the author analyses the results of the study, and seeks to provide answers to the research questions, and provides managerial implications based on the thematic analysis process conducted, to take into account when designing organizational social media strategies.

## 7.1    Findings & answers to the research questions

The author designed the thesis process based on the research questions (Table 1) formed. The following chapter aims to present the findings made during the study from both according to the previous studies made, and from the semi-structured interview process that was conducted.

### 7.1.1    Research question 1 - To what extent and how do emojis contribute to increased consumer interaction on social media posts?

According to Sümer (2017), companies who are able to utilize emojis in their marketing activities, will be able to succeed in the highly competitive world of online marketing. This argument by Sümer was also confirmed in the qualitative study conducted by the author. According to the data gathered with the second question of this study, the generation z population in this study are exposed to emojis in marketing daily. Moreover, all the respondents clearly indicated, that they pay

attention to the emoji selection used in a particular post. This is a clear indicator of the importance emojis in modern-day communication. This is also backed up the characteristics of emojis found by Sümer in 2017, all of which are characteristics that attract the attention of consumers. In the semi-structured interview, it also became evident, that there are differences in the emojis used in different industries the marketing is done in. The respondents of the study clearly indicated that industries that are more relaxed or light-hearted, for example retail, fast-food and sports industry can achieve greater positive results with emoji usage than more serious or strict industries, like companies from the public sector or medicine companies. This also indicates that the younger generation z pays a lot of attention to the individual selection of emojis made by companies, highlighting the importance of them in communications.

There were also clear indicators in the semi-structured study, that companies should be careful when implementing the emoji use, as the negative effect caused by out of place emoji-use has a greater negative effect against the positive affect gained from positive and fitting emoji use. There are also clear indications from the qualitative study, that emojis used in social media influence how the overall brand image and professionalism are presented. The nature of the desired communication style of the emoji-use needs to be in line with the desired communication style of the brand itself. As an example from this, the respondents felt that since emojis are relaxed and light-hearted by their nature, they are not seen as fitting to industries practicing a stricter communication style in a more serious industry. This study also conducted, that in addition to different industries being seen differently in their emoji-use, also the content of the post influences the emoji selection: emojis were seen as positive factors in communicating light-hearted messages, whereas more serious topics could suffer and lose their meaning if combined with emojis. Therefore, we can argue, that emojis create a certain atmosphere amongst generation z, that consumers are connecting emojis to a relaxed, humorous atmosphere of communications. This should be considered by companies when thinking about the desired style of communication. The study conducted by Casado-Molina & al. in 2022 found, that emojis are a topic that should be studied more when studying brand communications. This argument can also be seen as supported in this master's thesis, which focused on the largest generation in social media, generation z, since this clearly indicates they are paying attention to the individual emoji-usage of brands in social media. All of the respondents pointed out, that emojis have the power to make the social media of companies more professional, relatable and engaging, all of which are positive characteristics companies are trying to achieve, clearly pointing out emojis have a large potential contribution when it comes to seeking consumer interaction inside social media platforms.

### 7.1.2 Research question 2 - How does gen-z engage with social media content that incorporates emojis compared to content without emojis?

In the qualitative study conducted by the author, there were clear differences in the engagement to social media content based on the emoji usage on the content. There were substantial differences in the results of the qualitative study to this. All respondents experienced a positive effect on the posts that contained emojis, and all of the respondents felt negative towards the post containing no emojis. Like it is mentioned in the results section, the example containing no emojis shown to the respondents was even described as something out of an online scam. It was also mentioned by all of the respondents, that the post that did not contain emojis did not pick up their attention at all. This is also argued by Sümer (2017), who characterised emojis as something that can "easily attract the attention of the viewer". The qualitative study conducted by the author supports Sümer's finding, as the posts containing emojis received substantially more positive reaction from the respondents of this study. Based on these findings, we can argue that emojis have a huge potential in social media, to attract the attention of the target group, and to also appear as more trustworthy.

It is however noteworthy to keep in mind, that in this study, the three examples shown to the respondents were from one company, Domino's Pizza. As it is mentioned in the results, the respondents felt that the used emojis need to match the brand image of the posting company. As Domino's comes from the fast food industry, one industry that was mentioned as a suitable industry for emoji-usage, it must be noted that the respondents possibly expected a company from this area of business to use emojis, leading to these results. From this we can however argue that the importance of emojis definitely exists, and companies could potentially identify themselves based on the tone-of-voice with emojis. It is a very noteworthy finding, that the respondents of the study indicated that they connect emojis to emotions, and almost all credibility and engagement was lost from the social media post when emojis were not used. The respondents did not feel the desire to read through the post in the same way the posts with emojis did. Therefore, it can be argued that the presence of emojis can play a major role in the social media and largely affect the performance of a post.

### 7.1.3 Research question 3 - Does the use of emojis in social media advertisements affect the entire brand image of the company?

The research process conducted by the author found out, that there is a substantial effect to consumer perceptions by the emoji selections of a company and how those affect the entire brand image of a business. As it was mentioned in the responses to the interview questions, the emoji usage needs to be "in line" with the rest of the communication & brand image. So, according to the research conducted by the author, emojis are a part of brand communication amongst generation z just like any other style of communication, like word selection, and the content itself. The author feels that this finding is something that should be taken into consideration when designing brand communications for social media. It is also important to take notice, that the negative perceptions caused by emoji usage outweigh the positive perceptions in the eyes of the consumer from generation z, and therefore indicating, that it is better to be neutral than to cause negative perceptions amongst consumers when it comes to the emoji usage in brand image enhancing efforts.

## 7.2   Theoretical contributions

Even though the concept of emoji marketing is relatively new, and still can be presented as a gap in the amount of research conducted in the academic field of marketing, the research conducted by the author was able to fill the understanding in perceptions to emojis. As presented by Mathews & Lee in 2017, emojis have however already developed into a language that is understood well worldwide. Emojis also have the power to increase the customer engagement of online marketing strategies and campaigns (Grennan, 2016). These arguments were confirmed in the study conducted by the author when it comes to generation z as a target group. According to the thematic analysis, emojis have very large effect on the overall perceptions made by consumers. The study conducted by the author was able to fill the gap in understanding emojis as a phenomenon, and in which types of industries and styles of communication emojis are seen as fitting by generation z, which is research and data that had not been studied before.

A study conducted by Casado-Molina, Rojas-De Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo & Romero-Charneco (2022), showed that emojis play a significant role in the brand communications of companies. The study conducted by the author was able to confirm this argument, and the research data presented in the study supports the effect the individual emoji selections made by companies inside social media affect the entire process of creating perceptions about brand image. There had also

previously been a gap in the research of how important emojis are in enhancing the engagement, relatability, and professionalism of social media posts. The data and research conducted by the author supports a claim, that emojis have substantial effects to these three attributes, all of which are often desired outcomes when conducting social media marketing, therefore highlighting the importance of emoji marketing as a topic.

## 7.3   Managerial implications of the study

There are several managerial implications that can be drawn from the study and considered in the processes of social media personnel in the professional industry. The managerial implications are drawn from the findings of the qualitative study, and from previous findings of other studies. The implications aim to summarize the main findings of this study to a useful, easy-to-understand format. The following chapter presents several managerial implications that aim to provide assist in enhancing the emoji marketing. The study was able to confirm the statement originally stated by Sümer (2017), that "the ability to utilize emojis well can enable companies to succeed better in the competitive platform of modern-day online marketing". The research was able to confirm that emojis have large effects to the performance of social media posts, since they have the power to increase the engagement, reliability, professionalism of a social media post. Emojis alone have the power affect the entire brand image of a company when used in only a social media post of a business. The study conducted the author was able to confirm, that emojis have differences depending on the industry the company is operating in. Utilizing emojis is different when it comes to different industries. Generation z sees the use of emojis in social media as positive factors in industries that are more "relaxed" or "light-hearted" by their nature, and more "negative" and "unprofessional" in industries that tend to be more "serious" by their nature. Examples from relaxed industries include B2C segments like fast-food industry and clothing industry, examples from serious industries include public sector companies, funeral services, insurance companies and medicine companies.

The study also confirmed that consumers pay high amounts of attention to the emoji selection of companies, making them an asset to enhance communication efforts. This indicates, that emojis should be included in the entire process of designing social media and brand communication. As visual elements, emojis have characteristics (listed in table 3) that increase the potential of the social media post to be more successful (Gamble & Sons, 2016). The study conducted by the author confirmed that emojis are effective tools in picking up the attention of consumers. The example post used in the interview that contained no emojis and therefore had no visual elements,

did not pick up the attention of the interviewees at all, and was deemed as far inferior to the example posts containing emojis, indicating the importance to combine emojis to text in modern day social media aimed at generation z.

Emojis should always be in line with the rest of the communication style utilized by a company. When emojis are different by their nature or perceptions when compared with the perceived brand image of the business, the consumer can perceive the social media post in a negative way. Therefore, companies should always aim to select emojis that fit with their chosen style of communication. From the results of the interview, it can be argued that when aiming for a more serious nature inside social media, emojis should be used in less frequency, and when the chosen communication style is more light-hearted, emojis can provide benefits, as consumers generally connect emojis to a more relaxed nature of communication. If the relaxed nature of emojis is combined with a more serious tone-of-voice communication, the consumer might feel confused, affecting the entire communication process in a negative way. It is also noteworthy, that consumers generally connect to emojis to "humour", and using emojis with a humorous communication style was seen as the most effective style of communication for emojis.

## 7.4   Possibilities for future research & limitations of the study

In this chapter, the author aims to provide possibilities for future research on the topic and aims to list the limitations of the study process conducted by the author of this study. It is evident, that due to the increasing importance of emoji use, and the increasing number of generation Z users in social media, the research topic should be studied more to optimize emoji marketing in even further detail.

### 7.4.1   Possibilities for future research

From the data that was collected for this study, the author can draw a conclusion, that more data is needed to fully understand the impact of emojis on consumers in social media marketing. In the study conducted by the author, the study was limited to only consumers in generation z. Future research should investigate other generations in social media and compare the results of these studies with the conclusions from this study. Understanding the impact emojis have to other generations would help companies understand and optimize the emoji use in social

media when trying to reach other generations in their marketing efforts. Future research could also include other cultures and their emotional connections to emoji usage, as this study was narrowed down to consumers living in Finland, and who are therefore mainly exposed to marketing efforts by Finnish companies.

The study conducted by the author also found out, as listed in the results section of this study, that "trendy" emojis play a significant role in creating positive images in the heads of the consumers. Therefore, future studies could investigate what makes emojis trendy, how trendy emojis created, and what is the lifespan of a trendy emoji. This would even greatly help companies and social media marketers understand and plan marketing and brand image enhancing campaigns.

The study conducted by the author was also able to confirm, that emojis have to be in line with the brand image and communication of a company. This could be investigated in the upcoming research in more detail, what particular and individual style of emojis are perceived to connect and resonate well with different kinds of target groups.

The study conducted by the author was able to find several industries that are generally seen as "fitting" for emoji marketing by generation z. It can be noted, however, that identifying these industries in greater detail in future research could provide substantial benefits in understanding emojis as a tool of communication.


## 7.4.2   Limitations of the study


Although the study conducted by the author was able to identify several important findings relating to emoji marketing, the study still presented some limitations. One of the main limitations according to the author, was that the study had to be narrowed down to only include one generation of consumers, generation z. Understanding other age groups would greatly help marketers understand the field of emoji marketing, due to then being able to identify and target other target groups with emoji marketing. The study was also limited to only include consumers living in Finland, and since emojis are categorised and seen as part of modern-day language and communications, understanding emoji marketing in other cultural environments could also provide needed data and understanding.

One of the other limitations of the study is the relatively new concept of emojis. Although emojis have been around in different forms for longer periods of time, their studied use in social media, and emoji marketing as a concept is still relatively new. This provided the author with some challenges to find relevant material and studies from the topic. In the future, the material available will most likely be bigger, due to the identified importance and relevance of emoji marketing.

The study conducted was also aimed at consumers who are active social media users themselves, and all the respondents interviewed in the study are active social media users themselves. This provided the author with some limitations in the focus group; future studies could possibly include the impact of emojis on consumers not actively using social media.

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# APPENDICES

| Interview questions: |
| --- |
| 1. *Tell me in your own words, what is the purpose of emojis? What do you use them personally for?* |
| 2. *How often are you exposed to emojis in social media? Do you often pay attention to them in the marketing efforts of companies?* |
| 3. *Can you share an experience where you felt more compelled to interact or comment on a social media post due to the presence of emojis? What about the emojis, was there a specific one that caught your attention, or can you think of a scenario where a certain emoji would catch your attention?* |
| 4. *In your opinion, do emojis make social media content more engaging? Why or why not?* |
| 5. *Are there specific emotions or messages that you think are better conveyed through emojis as opposed to plain text? What about the opposite, have you noticed situations where text would work better and the emojis are used inconveniently? Can you provide/think of potential examples?* |
| 6. *In your view, do emojis play a role in making social media content more relatable? Why or why not?* |
| 7. *When you see emojis in social media advertisements, what impression does it give you about the brand? (Three example social media posts picked with random sampling are shown to the respondent, one that contains no emojis, one that contains some, and one that contains a large number of emojis)* |
| 8. *Do you think the use of emojis in advertisements helps or hinders the brand's professionalism? Why?* |
| 9. *In your opinion, are there certain industries or types of products where the use of emojis in advertisements is more acceptable or effective? What about the opposite, do you feel that there are industries where the emoji usage would not feel wise, and if, what sort of industries come to mind?* |

Appendix 1 - The interview questions