

Emojifying Instant Affinity: Investigating the Influence of Emojis on the Affectivity towards Instant Food Products

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Abstract

Emojis as ubiquitous symbols of expression in the new media age, are examined for their potential to evoke and enhance emotional responses in the context of food choices. Leveraging emoji symbols to enhance marketing initiatives and attract attention to pre-packaged or immediately prepared food items is considered as emoji marketing within the convenience foods segment. This research investigates how the use of emojis influences the affectivity of consumers towards instant food products and the findings revealed that there is a positive significant relationship established between the influence of emojis on the affectivity and purchase decisions of instant food products among young consumers. Additionally, the emotional impact generated by the inclusion of emojis also resulted in increased recommendations to friends and family. The incorporation of emoji marketing is appreciated by young consumers in digital media more often especially Instagram the social media platform, followed by television and other media. The findings of the study may help marketers recognize the role of emojis in fostering emotional connections and can guide in crafting more compelling and relatable messaging, ultimately contributing to increased consumer satisfaction and loyalty in the competitive convenience foods segment.

Keywords: Affectivity, Emoji Marketing, Emotional Response, Purchase Decision, Instant Food Products.

Introduction

Emoji humanization is a marketing tactic that employs emojis, visual symbols representing feelings, thoughts, or notions, to establish a brand image that is relatable and personalized. This technique strives to foster a deeper emotional connection with the customers and creates a brand association. Using emoji symbols to amplify the marketing efforts and generate attraction for pre-packaged or instantly prepared food items, constitutes emoji marketing for the convenience foods segment. (Bai et al., 2019) Researchers in psychology have directed their attention toward the utilization of emojis to explore the link between user actions and personal dispositions. Additionally, emojis find application in marketing endeavours to boost engagement with the brand and stimulate

consumers' inclination to make purchases.(Jaeger et al., 2017)social media has emerged as a pertinent means of obtaining insights into the immediate emotional responses of consumers toward products. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a rising quantity of corporates had already begun incorporating emojis into their online advertising and communication strategies. After the pandemic situation, people tend to increasingly rely on social media for purposes such as product exploration, information acquisition, product assessment/reviewing, and making purchase decisions (Mladenović et al., 2023).With the growing use of computer-mediated communication, consumers have different platforms for discussions, creating influences, providing reviews for the products and the easiest and lightest form of communication in digital messages are nonverbal indicators that convey personal traits, viewpoints, and feelings. In fact, several researchers acknowledge that people adjust to the constraints of computer-aided communication like linguistic barriers, and emotional barriers by engaging in non-verbal cues (Ganster 2012; Hayes et al., 2020).(Chairunnisa & A.S., 2017) The advanced technology has the capability to fulfil communication goals without requiring physical presence, achieved through the utilization of verbal and non-verbal cues such as emoji, stickers, emoticons. Emojis are best described as visual symbols or ideograms that depict not only facial expressions but also broader concepts and notions, encompassing celebrations, weather conditions, cuisine, emotions, sentiments, actions and so forth.

When a brand successfully adopts a conversational approach, it introduces a level of authenticity that is hard to replicate otherwise. The brand ceases to be a faceless entity; instead, it assumes a distinct personality that echoes the values, interests, and humour of its target audience. This alignment of personalities plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of kinship and shared identity between the brand and its customers. In an era where an array of choices awaits consumers in every market, brand differentiation is key. (Dzulhidayat, 2022) Building a unique personality through relatable communication allows a brand to carve out its own niche, one that resonates with a specific set of customers. (Garcia-Collart, 2020)Customers are naturally inclined to gravitate towards brands that align with their

own personality traits and values. When a brand mirrors these attributes through its communication style, it stands a better chance of winning over customer loyalty and trust. The power of relating to customers through a conversational, friend-like communication style cannot be underestimated. This approach bridges the gap between brands and consumers, allowing the former to infuse its identity with the latter's values and interests. (Arya et al., 2018)When a brand mirrors its customers' communication habits, it adds depth to its personality, creating lasting emotional connections and influencing purchasing decisions.

With the rise of urbanization and increased exposure to a variety of cuisines, instant food products offer the opportunity to experience global taste that might have been less accessible otherwise. (Banerjee 2021) The global markets are witnessing a rise in the instant food sector, attributed to the busyness of consumers in managing their work-life equilibrium.(Närvänen et al., 2013) online platforms like social media, blogs, and forums are significant reservoirs for obtaining and exchanging food-related encounters. People assimilate and adopt the beliefs and consumption habits of others, often attempting to modify their own dietary choices towards more convenient and healthiest options.(Imtiyaz et al., 2022) Consumers typically do not distinguish or give preference to convenience foods based on their nation of origin, given that many multinational corporations offer a diverse range of products in the marketplace.

The idea of attachment theory in marketing elucidates emotional connections that consumers establish with brands, which serve as a barrier preventing them from switching to other options.(Hinson et al. 2019)the attachment concept was viewed from two context as identity attachment construct which characterized consumer's sense of unity with a brand, and bonding attachment, which arises from an emotional bond between consumers and brand.(Boateng et al., 2020) This is plainly explained as brand identification and brand trust, and the greater the value customers derive from a brand's offerings, the stronger their trust, identification, and engagement with the brand become, leading to increased loyalty towards the

brand. (Heidari et al., 2023) Brand loyalty and trust will grow if it develops a strong connection with the customer and they will feel a sense of pride in using the brand's products or services and will continue to use them over the long term. (Shimul & Phau, 2023) When consumers view a brand as a relational partner, they become inclined to support the brand by repurchasing it, sharing positive feedback through various expressions, and recommending it both online and offline. In the light of the above, the study tries to explain how the inclusion of emojis in advertising and social media platforms enhances the relatability and emotional connection between consumers and instant food products. The research is also directed to establish the expression of the attachment towards the instant food products by consumers through various digital platforms leading to trust and association.

Materials and Methods

The study employed descriptive research pattern where the data relating to the emoji marketing of instant food brands in advertisements and through social media interaction was captured and assessed. As the youngsters are more inclined towards the use of digital media, the sample was taken from the youngsters aged 18-35. (Chassiakos & Stager, 2020) Centennials are accustomed to using digital media, they are digital natives who owns different types of digital accessories and use digital platforms for sharing their views, communication, and engaging their emotions in their day to day lives. (Montgomery, 2000) Young people are adopting latest technologies at a significantly faster pace than adults and due to their greater purchasing influence, the youth demographics is one of the major target audiences for marketers and advertisers. The sampling frame is youth from the state of Kerala, (Nithya N R 2013) as the state is viewed as a consumer state in India, where the living standards of people in both rural and urban areas are determined by market trends and consumption patterns, emphasizing Kerala's consumer-oriented culture. Purposive sampling was used for locating the samples, a total of 290 samples were approached to collect data on the emotional influence of emojis in marketing and to assess how well the interaction is made through the digital platforms. The data was collected using a structured

questionnaire which is divided into three sections, the first section covered the demographics of the samples, second section deals with the emoji advertisements through various medias and emotional attachment towards instant food brands and the third part deals with use of digital platforms and brand association.

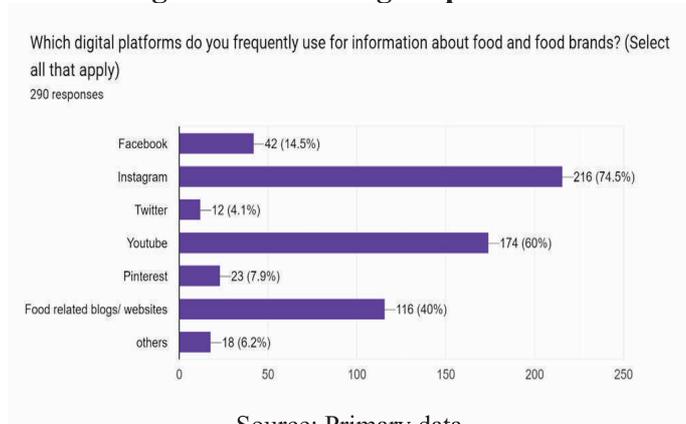
Results

The demographic profile of the respondents depicts a total of 106 male and 184 female respondents and their educational qualification indicated that 4 respondents had completed matriculation, 61 qualified higher secondary, 152 graduates, 67 post-graduates and 6 other qualifications. Majority of the respondents were students; 202 respondents were students falling under the age group selected for the study. The employment status being 47 full time employed, 19 respondents have part time employment, 15 were self-employed and 7 were in others category. Out of 290 respondents, 164 individuals observed promotions featuring emojis in instant food brands, while 34 respondents did not observe such advertisements. Additionally, 92 participants expressed uncertainty regarding whether they had come across emoji-based advertisements in instant food brands. Those who have encountered these advertisements were majorly through social media, followed by mobile apps, websites, television and other media like newspaper, articles, and posters. Food-related emojis were recognized as most effective in expressing emotions associated with Instant Food Brands, followed by smiley faces and other emoji categories. 60% of the respondents identified food related emojis to be most effective in advertising instant foods followed by 32.1% mentioning the smiley faces. Nearly half of the respondents, specifically 46.2%, refrained from following or interacting with instant food brands on social media due to the use of emojis in their content. On the contrary, 24.1% did engage with these brands that have used emojis, while 29.7% expressed uncertainty regarding their engagement with instant food brands on social media in relation to emojis.

The digital platforms were more frequently used to connect with the instant food brands by emojis. The most used were social media platform Instagram which is widely accepted

by the young generation, as confirming the previous literature, (Lim 2014) on Instagram, marketers can engage with their customers through the exchange of various medias, commenting and sharing relevant and related contents, and receiving feedback from customers through comments and likes.

Figure 1: Use of digital platforms



The study further explored the frequency of consumer engagement with instant food brands on digital platforms, such as actions like following, liking, and commenting. The findings indicate that most respondents, comprising 54.5% engage with these brands occasionally. A significant

portion, 32.1%, reported rare engagement, while a smaller percentage, 9%, engage frequently. A minority, representing 4.5%, reported never engaging with instant food brands on digital platforms. The factors influencing trust in instant food brands on digital platforms, are strongly tied to positive reviews and ratings, indicating a favorable customer experience. Additionally, the importance placed on creative and visually appealing content highlights the role of effective digital marketing and presentation in building trust and engagement with consumers.

Gender and emotional responses towards emoji marketing

A test for normality was carried out on gender and emotional responses towards emoji marketing for instant food products. The observed significance level was below 0.05, leading to the inference that the data does not adhere to a normal distribution. As a result of this deviation from normality, the Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to examine whether notable differences in emotional responses towards emoji marketing exist among different genders.

. H0: There is no significant difference between gender and emotional responses towards emoji marketing

Table 1: Mann Whitney U Test- Gender and emotional responses towards emoji marketing

Group	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U Test	P Value
Male	142.16	9398.000	.574
Female	147.42		

(Source: Software package-primary data)

The mean rank for females is slightly higher than that for males, indicating that, on average, females may have a slightly higher emotional response towards emoji marketing compared to males. The U test statistic (9398.000) suggests how well the two groups are differentiated based on their emotional response scores. In this case, a higher U test statistic would indicate a greater difference. A p-value greater than 0.05 suggests that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there may not be a significant difference in emotional response towards emoji marketing between

genders. The asymptotic significance value of the two sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is 0.742, indicates that the probability of obtaining a test statistic as extreme as the one observed, assuming that the two samples come from the same distribution.

Educational qualification and total affectivity towards emoji marketing:

The educational qualification is categorized as Matriculation, Higher secondary, Graduation, Post Graduation, and others, as there are five independent

variables that are to be compared with the dependent variable affectivity towards emoji marketing and as the normality is not maintained Kruskal Wallis one-way analysis of variance is adopted to identify the significance.

H0: There is no significant relationship between educational qualification and affectivity towards emoji marketing of instant food products

Table 2: Educational qualification and Affectivity towards emoji marketing

Total N	290
Test Statistics	10.007
Degrees of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Significance	0.040

(Source: Primary data)

A p-value of 0.040 is less than the significance level of 0.05, therefore it is concluded that there are statistically significant differences in affectivity towards emoji marketing across different levels of educational qualification. To identify the pairs of groups that varies in affectivity towards emoji marketing a paired comparison was done and the comparison between Higher Secondary and Graduation yielded a p-value of 0.015, falling below the significance threshold of 0.05. Consequently, the hypothesis that the distributions of affectivity towards emoji marketing are the same for these two groups is rejected. Similarly, the comparison between Higher Secondary and Post Graduation, with a p-value of 0.003,

leads to the conclusion that these pairs do not exhibit similarity in terms of affectivity.

Employment status and total affectivity towards emoji marketing:

Employment status is categorised as student, full time employment, part time employment, self-employment and others and are compared to identify the significance with the dependent variable affectivity towards emoji marketing using Kruskal Wallis one way analysis of variance.

H0: The distribution of total affectivity is the same across categories of Employment Status.

Table 3: Employment status and Affectivity towards emoji marketing

Total N	290
Test Statistics	9.573
Degrees of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Significance	0.045

(Source: Primary data)

Based on the p-value, the significance is less than 0.05, there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there are significant differences in the distribution of total affectivity across different categories of Employment Status. Paired comparisons are conducted to identify which specific pairs of groups differ significantly from each other, for the pair 'Self-Employment-Full time employment' (.044) and 'student- full time employment' (.006) the similarities are not exhibited.

Gender and Type of platform:

The type of platforms through which emoji marketing have been incorporated to drive engagement is listed as television, social media, websites, mobile apps, and other medias. To check whether there is any association between gender and types of platforms encountered chi square test was used, as both the variables are categorical.

H0: There is no association between gender and type of platform encountered to drive engagement.

Table 4: Chi square test of gender and type of platforms

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.358 ^a	3	.039
Likelihood Ratio	8.062	3	.045
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.015	1	.156
N of Valid Cases	290		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.21.

(Source: Primary data, SPSS)

The p-values associated with the Pearson Chi-Square and Likelihood Ratio tests are 0.039 and 0.045, respectively, which are less than the significance level of 0.05. This suggests that there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no association between gender and types of platforms. The Linear-by-Linear Association test yielded a p-value of 0.156, surpassing the 0.05 threshold. This test is designed to scrutinize the existence of a linear trend within the association, the findings do not provide statistically significant evidence supporting the presence of a linear trend. To identify the association among the variables adjusted standardised residuals were taken and identified that for the Male category, adjusted residual for television media is 0.2, for social media is -2.0, for websites is 2.5, and for mobile apps is 1.1 and for the Female category, adjusted residuals follow a similar pattern with opposite signs. To check the strength of association among the variables Phi

and Cramer's V value was taken, and depicted a value of 0.170, which suggests a small strength of association between the variables. The p-value of 0.039 is less than the significance level of 0.05 and indicates that the association observed is statistically significant.

Emotional influence and recommendations on instant food use:

Emotional attachment towards the instant foods due to emoji marketing have been assessed to measure whether there is a possible relationship with the recommendation of the products to kith and kin. A correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between the emotional attachment and recommendations on instant foods.

H0: There is no relationship between emotional attachment due to emoji marketing and recommendations on instant food products.

Table 5: Correlation between emotional attachment and Product recommendation

		Recommendations	Emotional attachment
Recommendations	Pearson Correlation	1	.450
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	290	290
Emotional attachment	Pearson Correlation	.450	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	290	290

(Source: Primary data analysis)

The Null hypothesis is rejected as the p value is less than the threshold limit, therefore there exists a relationship between emotional attachment and recommendation of instant food products that uses emoji in their marketing.

The positive correlation of 0.450 suggests that there is a moderate statistically significant relationship between recommending instant food brands using emojis and feeling emotionally attached. As individuals are more

likely to recommend such products to friends or family, as they are highly likely to have a higher emotional connection to these products when emojis are part of their marketing efforts. This finding implies that the use of emojis in advertisements for instant food products is associated with increased emotional attachment which leads to higher recommendation.

Affectivity and purchase decision on Instant foods:

Affectivity or emotional connection towards emoji marketing is measured using metric variables of affectivity under the study namely sensory feelings, marketing communication capability, connection with the product,

and likeliness of recommending the product. Regression analysis is made to identify the effect of Independent variable affectivity on the purchase decision of instant food products.

H0: There is no significant relationship between emoji marketing affectivity and purchase decision of instant food products.

$$\text{Model: } Y = \alpha + \beta X + e$$

Y denotes the variable Purchase decision based on the emoji marketing of instant food products and emotional connection being the independent variable X, where α and β are constants, e being the standard error.

Table 5: Summary of Regression analysis

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient	Standardised Coefficient Beta	Standard Error
Affectivity	1.127	.809	.049

$r^2=.654$ Adjusted $r^2= .653$, p value =.000 (Source: Primary data analysis)

The affectivity variable has an unstandardized coefficient of 1.127, which indicates that for each one-unit increase, the dependent variable is estimated to increase by 1.127 units. The Beta value of 0.809 is the standardized coefficient, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship. The result suggests a strong positive relationship between affectivity and purchase decisions. The overall model is significant, as indicated by the highly significant p-value (Sig. = 0.000) and the analysis suggests that affectivity is a significant predictor of the influence of emojis in Instant Food brand marketing on purchase decisions. The positive coefficient indicates that as the level of emotion associated with emojis increases, the influence on purchase decisions also increases. The R-squared value specifies that approximately 65.4% of the variability in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable in the regression model.

Discussion

The research indicates that the strategic use of emojis in marketing can significantly influence the consumers' responses, fostering a sense of affinity towards the instant food products. Young consumers have observed the

incorporation of emojis in marketing, and this has positively influenced their decisions when it comes to purchasing instant food products. (Sharma et al. 2020) The utilization of emojis in marketing strategies has surfaced as a novel tool for marketers to establish their visibility in the digital realm. Social media and online platforms were found to be the predominant platforms used by the young consumers to establish emotional connection with the instant food products. Trust in instant food products on digital platforms is heavily influenced by positive reviews and ratings, underscoring a positive customer experience. Furthermore, the significance attributed to imaginative and visually attractive content underscores the impact of proficient digital marketing and presentation in cultivating trust and fostering engagement with consumers.

The findings indicate slightly higher mean rank for females which implies a potential for a slightly elevated emotional response to emoji marketing compared to male consumers (Eru & Yakin 2019, Sharma et al. 2020) which corresponds to the previous research findings. The use of non-face emojis representing specific food items or related symbols resonates strongly with individuals when expressing emotions related to instant food, (Orazi et. al. 2023) that

relates to the previous findings the representation of non-face emojis in the total emojis is more and is used more frequently as that of face emojis. Following closely behind are smiley faces and other emoji categories, suggesting a hierarchy of the effectiveness of different emoji types in evoking emotional responses in the context of instant food products. This insight can inform marketers to strategically utilize food-related emojis to enhance emotional connections and communication in their branding and promotional efforts. Further the research findings suggest that integrating emojis into instant food marketing is linked to elevated recommendations and greater emotional attachment. Marketers could gain advantages by thoughtfully integrating emojis into their advertising strategies to amplify both verbal endorsements and emotional involvement with their audience. The research signifies a direct relationship between the intensity of emotional expression conveyed by emojis and the impact on purchase decisions. As the emotional appeal of emojis becomes more pronounced or heightened, there is a corresponding increase in their influence on consumers' choices to make a purchase. This suggests that leveraging emotionally charged emojis in marketing strategies may have a positive effect on consumers, potentially making them more inclined to engage with and buy the promoted products or services.

Conclusion

Emoji marketing is a strategy that involves using emojis in the marketing channels of the products to connect with and engage consumers. Emojis can also be used to highlight specific product features or benefits in a concise and visually appealing manner. Instant food industry is one of the burgeoning markets, where influence of the younger demographic is unmistakably evident, as the vibrant preferences and fast-paced lifestyles of this category of consumers wield a substantial and growing share of the overall consumption landscape. The research examines the notable connection between employing emojis and the emotional involvement of young consumers when it comes to purchasing of instant food products. As the industry is highly competitive marketers need to establish humanized approach to create relatability and emotional connection to

the products, which is much evident in the research. The study established that the purchase decision of instant food products is affected by the emotional connection with the instant food products. For marketers, the findings may offer valuable insights into the potential of incorporating emojis to not only capture attention but also to positively influence purchase decisions through emoji humanization efforts.

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