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Emoji and Gender: Analysis of Tweets of Chevy's Emoji-based Campaign, #ChevyGoesEmoji

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This study examines Chevrolet's #ChevyGoesEmoji campaign to understand whether there are any gender differences in responding to a campaign when emojis are used in companies' promotional activities. To examine whether there are more females than males among those who posted tweets that include the campaign hashtag (#ChevyGoesEmoji), tweets were collected that included the campaign hashtag and posted six months after the announcement of the campaign. To examine whether the proportion of females who posted tweets including the product-related hashtags (e.g. #ChevyCruze) significantly increased after the launch of the campaign, tweets that included the product-related hashtags that were posted over the three-month period before the launch of the campaign and over the three-month period after the launch were collected. Based on the analysis of the tweets that included the campaign hashtag, it was found that more females than males posted tweets related to this emoji-based campaign. Based on the analysis of the tweets that included the product-related hashtags, it was found that the proportion of females who posted tweets that included the product-related hashtags significantly increased after the launch of the campaign. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on the use of emojis in corporate communications messages and also provide important practical implications by suggesting that it may be a good idea for companies to use emojis in their promotional activities if their target audiences are female.

Keywords: social media, campaign, emoji, Twitter, hashtag

Emojis are increasingly being used in computer-mediated communications as a way to express emotions (Jaeger et al., 2019). Previous literature has found that strategically incorporating emojis into companies' promotional activities can lead to positive results (Das et al., 2019). Hoping to effectively deliver their message to their target audiences and increase brand engagement, many companies in different industries, including entertainment, food, fashion, and automobile brands, have incorporated emojis in their promotional campaigns (Mathews & Lee, 2018). The automobile company Chevrolet incorporated emojis into the campaign promoting their 2016 Cruze model by conducting a hashtag campaign called #ChevyGoesEmoji.

Many studies have been conducted to help understand the factors that may impact people's frequency of use of and attitudes toward emojis (An et al., 2018; Brandwatch,

2018; Chen et al., 2017; Prada et al., 2018; Shah & Tewari, 2021) and have found that in general, females tend to use emojis more frequently than males (Chen et al., 2017; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017; Perez-Sabater, 2019; Prada et al. 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018) and that they tend to have more positive attitudes toward their use (Prada et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018). Several studies provide important insights into the effectiveness of using emojis in companies' promotional activities (Das et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019) and other studies revealed that females are more likely to use emojis and consider emojis as being more familiar, clear, and meaningful than their counterparts (Chen et al., 2017; Prada et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018), whether females are more likely than males to engage in conversations regarding a promotional campaign that incorporates emojis has not yet been examined. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand whether there are any gender differences in responding to a campaign when emojis are used in companies' promotional activities by examining Chevy's emoji-based campaign, #ChevyGoesEmoji. Specifically, this study examined whether there are more females than males among Twitter users who posted tweets that include the campaign hashtag (i.e., #ChevyGoesEmoji). A successful public relations campaign can raise awareness about the product and have people voluntarily engage in product-related conversations. Therefore, this study also examined whether more females posted tweets that include the product-related hashtags (#Cruze, #ChevyCruze, or #ChevroletCruze) after the launch of the campaign. Publicly available tweets on Twitter were analyzed in this study because Twitter is one of the most widely used social media platforms on which users can easily talk about the same hashtagged subject (Moorley & Chinn, 2014), and this hashtag campaign was largely promoted on Twitter.

The #ChevyGoesEmoji campaign

To announce the new 2016 Cruze model, General Motor's Chevrolet targeted the younger generation with an emoji-based campaign, which was executed over four days. On June 22, 2015, the automaker began the campaign by posting a press release written entirely in emojis on their website and encouraged their audiences to decipher the press release ("#CHEVYGOESEMOJI," 2015). In addition to the press release, they also released the first two episodes of a four-part video series, "Emoji Academy," featuring comedian Norm Macdonald learning how to decode the emoji press release from three

young celebrities popular with millennials ("Chevrolet captures Millennial attention," n.d.). On day two, the last two episodes were released along with the decoded press release that announced the 2016 Cruze debut event in Detroit that was scheduled to be held the next day ("Emoji explained," 2015). The company also commissioned a famous YouTuber to direct a music video for the 2016 Chevy Cruze, which was released on the day the new model was unveiled (Smith, 2015). On the last day of the campaign, the automaker introduced the #ChevyGoesEmoji hashtag via a promoted Twitter trend ("Chevrolet captures Millennial attention," n.d.). This unusual #ChevyGoesEmoji campaign received a lot of media attention and created a buzz on social media (FleishmanHillard New York, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Use of Emojis in Corporate Communication Messages

Currently used by many people around the globe, emojis were initially used in Japanese electronic messages (Danesi, 2016). The word emoji is an English adaptation of Japanese that simply means a "picture-word" (Danesi, 2016). They are preconstructed, standardized pictorial characters that have word-replacement functions (Danesi, 2016) that are used to represent a variety of emotions, gestures, and objects (Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Today, emojis are widely used in computer-mediated communications (Tang & Hew, 2018); they have also been considered the fastest growing language in history (Doble, 2015). Many companies have not only included these graphic symbols in their daily social media posts but have also incorporated emojis in their promotional campaigns in an effort to increase consumer engagement (Mathews & Lee, 2018). For example, Domino's has announced that they will start allowing customers to order pizza by tweeting a pizza emoji (Lorenz, 2015), and Pepsi has introduced an emoji-clad packaging campaign called #PepsiMoji (Bomey, 2016).

Several studies have examined the influence of using emojis in marketing and public relations activities and found that effective use of emojis can lead to positive outcomes (Das et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018). Li et al. (2018) found that the use of emojis can be beneficial in enhancing service satisfaction, especially among communal-oriented

customers. Das et al. (2019) examined the effects of using emojis in advertisements and found that the presence of emojis in promoting hedonic products leads consumers to experience higher positive affect that ultimately results in higher purchase intentions.

Gender and the Use of Emojis

With the proliferation of emoji use and the positive effects of using them in marketing efforts, there have been many attempts to understand the factors that may influence people's frequency of use of and attitudes toward emojis (An et al., 2018; Brandwatch, 2018; Chen et al., 2017; Prada et al., 2018). An important insight provided by existing literature in this regard is that in general, there exists a significant difference between female's and male's frequency of use of (Chen et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Perez-Sabater, 2019; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2018) and attitudes toward emojis (Prada et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018). Specifically, it was found that females are more likely than males to use emojis (Chen et al., 2017; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017; Perez-Sabater, 2019; Prada et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018). In addition to the frequency of emoji use, Prada et al. (2018) looked into the attitudes toward using emojis and found that younger women tend to have more positive attitudes toward emoji use than males. Rodrigues et al.'s (2018) study also found that females were more likely than males to consider emojis more familiar, clear, and meaningful.

Hashtag Campaigns on Twitter

Twitter is one of the most widely used social media platforms, and it contains large amounts of user-generated information (Garg & Kumar, 2019). On Twitter, users can interact with others and engage in conversations related to their topic of interest by adding a hashtag, which refers to the practice of adding a pound sign (#) in front of a word or phrase (Veletsianos, 2013). Using a hashtag is an effective way to categorize a tweet because it makes indexing and retrieval easy (Veletsianos, 2013), allowing users to find people talking about the same hashtagged subject to easily find each other and see what is being discussed regarding the topic regardless of geographical location (Moorley & Chinn, 2014). By adding hashtags, tweets can be exposed to a larger audience that is interested in the hashtagged subject (Small, 2011).

Many companies use these hashtags in their public relations campaigns by launching a hashtag campaign as a way to have people participate in brand-related

conversations (Abitol et al., 2018; Laestadius & Wahl, 2017). In other words, by creating their own hashtag related to the purpose of the campaign, companies try to create buzz and mobilize their target customers to post about their brands and products (Laestadius & Wahl, 2017). As hashtags are used to identify tweets on a specific category or topic (Kim et al., 2018), analyzing tweets that share the campaign hashtag can reveal important insights into the popularity of the topic and the users who participated in the conversation on the social media platform. Several existing studies have analyzed tweets related to corporate hashtag campaigns to find out about their impact and reach (Abitbol et al., 2018; Zayer et al., 2019). This study will look into the tweets that include the campaign hashtag #ChevyGoesEmoji, which Chevy used to promote its new model.

As mentioned in the previous section, many studies have found that females tend to use emojis more than males (Chen et al., 2017; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017; Perez-Sabater, 2019; Prada et al., 2018) and they tend to have more positive attitudes toward using them (Prada et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2018); however, whether females are more likely than males to post tweets regarding a campaign that incorporates emojis has not yet been examined. Advertisements that evoke positive feelings may draw engagement, and advertisements that increase engagement may produce greater message effects, such as greater involvement with messages (Wang, 2006). When consumers are more involved, they tend to pay more attention to messages and respond more actively to them (Zaichkowsky, 1986). These findings suggest that females who have more positive attitudes about the use of emojis are more likely to have positive feelings about campaigns using emojis, which could motivate them to participate more actively in campaign-related conversations. Therefore, in this study, the tweets, including the campaign hashtag, #ChevyGoesEmoji, will be analyzed to find out whether more females than males participated in the conversations regarding the emoji campaign by examining the following research question:

> RQ1: Are there more females than males among the Twitter users who posted tweets that include the campaign hashtag (#ChevyGoesEmoji)?

One of the main goals of a company's public relations campaign is to raise awareness of the promoted product and have many people voluntarily talk about it.

Therefore, this study will also analyze the tweets that include the hashtags related to the product that was promoted in the campaign (i.e., #Cruze, #ChevyCruze, #ChevroletCruze) by examining the following research question to see whether there have been any significant changes to the number of females who posted product-related tweets after the launch of the campaign compared to before:

> RQ2: Among the Twitter users who posted tweets that included the product-related hashtags (i.e., #Cruze, #ChevyCruze, #ChevroletCruze), did the proportion of females significantly increase after the launch of the campaign?

METHODS

Tweets used for this study were collected using social media monitoring tool Tweet Binder (http://www.tweetbinder.com/). The downloaded tweets included information regarding the username, date, link to the tweet, and the number of retweets and likes each tweet received. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual Twitter user.

To address the first research question, all publicly available tweets that included the campaign hashtag (#ChevyGoesEmoji) that were posted six months after the announcement of their campaign (June 22, 2015, to December 22, 2015) were collected. After excluding non-English tweets and deleted tweets, the total number of downloaded tweets that included original tweets and retweets was 6,342. Retweets were included in the analysis as they are a way of participating in the conversation that contributes to the information diffusion process (Boyd et al., 2010).

To examine the two research questions, it was necessary to find out the number of unique male users and unique female users. Since information about the type of user was not provided in the dataset, each tweet was coded into the following categories: (1) female (2) male, (3) individual but gender not identifiable, and (4) others. Those coded as 'others' were tweets posted by non-individuals such as companies, news outlets, or Chevy dealerships; those who mentioned in their profile that they work for General Motors, the company that owns Chevy and those that were featured in the videos that Chevy released as part of the campaign. To code the type of user, the description on the user's profile and any additional information provided (e.g., linked webpage) were first examined; if this information was insufficient, then the user's first 10 original tweets were examined to code

for the user type, as done in a previous study (Chung, 2017). Among the 6,342 downloaded tweets, 2,340 tweets were coded as female, 1,538 tweets were coded as male, 387 tweets were coded as individuals without an identifiable gender, and 2,077 tweets were coded as others. The majority of tweets coded as others were posted by Chevy or Chevy dealerships sharing the same promotional message related to the campaign.

For the purpose of this study, only those that were coded as female or male were included in the analysis. A total of 3,878 tweets (N= 2,340 tweets that were coded as female; N= 1,538 tweets that were coded as male) were carefully examined. After excluding spam tweets, there were a total of 3,715 tweets in the final dataset used for analysis (N= 2,241 tweets that were coded as female; N= 1,474 tweets that were coded as male). These 3,715 tweets were posted by 1,738 unique female users and 1,090 unique male users. Females posted 1.30 tweets on average, and males posted 1.35 tweets on average.

To address the second research question, it was necessary to compare the proportion of female users who posted the tweets that included the product-related hashtags before and after the launch of the #ChevyGoesEmoji campaign. To address this, all publicly available tweets that included the product-related hashtags (#Cruze or #ChevyCruze or #ChevroletCruze) that were posted over the three-month period before the launch of the campaign (pre-campaign tweets) and over the three-month period after the launch of the campaign (post-campaign tweets) were collected.

Pre-campaign tweets were posted from March 21, 2015, to June 21, 2015. After excluding non-English tweets and deleted tweets, the total number of downloaded tweets that included original tweets and retweets was 3,630. Post-campaign tweets were posted from June 22, 2015, to September 22, 2015. After excluding non-English tweets and deleted tweets, the total number of downloaded tweets that included original tweets and retweets was 7,093.

The type of user was coded for the product-related tweets using the procedure described above. Among the 3,630 downloaded pre-campaign tweets, 519 tweets were coded as female, 610 tweets were coded as male, 62 tweets were coded as individuals without an identifiable gender, and 2439 tweets were coded as others. Among the 7093 downloaded post-campaign tweets, 868 tweets were coded as female, 1,257 tweets were

coded as male, 244 tweets were coded as individuals without an identifiable gender, and 4724 tweets were coded as others.

The tweets that were coded as female or male were carefully examined for the pre- and post-campaign tweets. After excluding spam tweets and tweets unrelated to the promoted product (e.g., "Wow! The #Cruze cafe is serving up amazing meals!" or "#tbt with one of my favorite ppl #cruze #bar #longhairdontcare #babes @ Cruze Bar"), there were 1,055 tweets (N= 455 tweets that were coded as female; N= 600 tweets that were coded as male) in the final dataset for analysis for the pre-campaign tweets. These 1,055 tweets were posted by 274 unique female users and 451 male users. Females posted 1.66 tweets on average, and males posted 1.33 tweets on average. For the post-campaign tweets, there were 2,073 tweets in the final dataset used for analysis (N= 841 tweets that were coded as female; N= 1,232 tweets that were coded as male) after excluding spam and irrelevant tweets. These 2,073 tweets were posted by 647 unique female users and 890 unique male users. Females posted 1.30 tweets on average, and males posted 1.42 tweets on average.

RESULTS

To assess the first research question, one sample test of proportions was used to estimate the proportion of females in a population who posted tweets including the campaign hashtag. The null hypothesis is that the population proportion is equivalent to 0.5, indicating that the gender ratio is equal. Based on RQ1, the alternative hypothesis is that the female proportion is greater than 0.5 (i.e., H_0: $p = 0.5$ vs. H_a: $p > 0.5$). The estimated proportion of females was about 0.614 (61.4%; $\hat{p} = 1{,}738/(1{,}738 + 1{,}090)$). The calculated z-statistic was 12.78 ($z_{stat} = \frac{0.615 - 0.5}{\sqrt{(\frac{0.5 \times 0.5}{2{,}828})}}$), which is greater than the critical value of 1.96 that is associated with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, showing that there are more females than males among the Twitter users who posted the tweets that included the campaign hashtag.

To evaluate the second research question, a two proportion z-test was used to find out whether the difference between the proportions of female who posted the tweets that included the product-related hashtags before and after the campaign was statistically significant. In this case, the null hypothesis is that there is no difference between the two

female proportions (i.e., H_0: $p_{\text{before}} = p_{\text{after}}$, where p_{before} and p_{after} indicate the female proportion of users before and after the launch of the campaign, respectively). Based on RQ2, the alternative hypothesis is that the proportion of females who posted the product-related tweets after the campaign was greater than the proportion of females who posted the product-related tweets before the campaign (i.e., H_a: $p_{\text{before}} < p_{\text{after}}$). The estimated difference between the female proportions before and after the campaign was about -0.044 (-4.4%; $\hat{p}_{\text{before}} - \hat{p}_{\text{after}} = \frac{274}{274+451} - \frac{647}{647+890} = 0.377 - 0.421$). The calculated z-statistic was -2 ($z_{stat} = \frac{-0.044}{\sqrt{0.407\,(1-0.407)\,(\frac{1}{725}+\frac{1}{1,587})}}$), which is less than the critical value of -1.96 that is associated with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, showing that the proportion of females who posted the tweets that included the product-related hashtags significantly increased after the launch of the campaign.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the gender differences in responding to an emoji-based campaign, #ChevyGoesEmoji. By analyzing the tweets, coded as female or male, that included the campaign hashtag, it was found that more females than males posted campaign-related tweets. By analyzing the gender-coded tweets that included the product-related hashtags, the results showed that the proportion of females who posted the product-related tweets significantly increased after the campaign.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on the use of emojis in corporate messages by showing that the positive attitudes of consumers toward the use of emojis may motivate them to become more actively involved in conversations about an emoji-based promotional campaign. Several studies have found that effectively using emojis in a company's promotional activities can lead to positive results by eliciting positive feelings (Das et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018). But there is relatively little research about whether emoji-based campaigns can be effective in generating buzz among those who have positive attitudes about using emojis. Consistent with previous studies showing that promotional messages that elicit positive feelings may encourage consumers to become more involved and to more actively respond to the messages (Wang, 2006;

Zaichkowsky, 1986), the findings of this study suggest that using emojis in campaigns can be especially effective in generating more campaign-related conversations among females whose attitudes toward the use of emojis are more positive than the attitudes of males.

This study also extends the existing body of literature on the use of emojis and gender. Several studies have found that females tend to use emojis more than males (Chen et al., 2017; Prada et al., 2018) and that they tend to evaluate emojis as being more familiar and meaningful than males (Rodrigues et al., 2018), however, it has not been previously examined whether there exist any gender differences in responding to companies' emoji-based promotional activities. The findings of this study advance our understanding in this regard by showing that significantly more females than males posted tweets related to the emoji-based campaign and that the proportion of females posting product-related tweets significantly increased after the launch of the campaign.

The findings of this study also provide important practical implications. Companies that are considering incorporating emojis in their promotional activities need to have a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of using emojis in such activities, including which audience group would actively respond to the emoji-based strategy. The results of this study suggest that it may be a good idea for companies to use emojis in their promotional campaigns when their target audiences are females. Considering that generally the ultimate goal of a successful campaign is to raise awareness and promote the advertised product, it is worth noting that the proportion of females who posted tweets that included the product-related hashtags (i.e. #Cruze, #ChevyCruze, #ChevroletCruze) significantly increased after the launch of Chevy's emoji-based campaign. This is especially relevant to companies that are in industries that generally suffer from low female interest and involvement in their promotional efforts if their goal is to get female audiences to pay more attention to and interact with their promotional activities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This was a case study that analyzed the tweets related to the #ChevyGoesEmoji campaign and the tweets related to the promoted product, so the results of this study are limited to this campaign. It would be meaningful for future studies to look into whether there exist any differences in females' and males' engagement in conversations related to emoji-based campaigns of companies in different industries (e.g., the food industry, fashion

industry, and tech industry). This study was based on tweets shared on Twitter, as this campaign was largely promoted on this platform. It would also be valuable to look into the engagement rate of both genders regarding emoji-based campaigns on different communication platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, and examine whether the findings are consistent across platforms.

Many campaigns conducted by international companies target global audiences; thus, it would be helpful for companies to gain insights into how audiences in different cultural settings react to emoji-based campaigns. Although it has been widely argued that gender differences exist in many domains, depending on the context the differences can sometimes be erased or even reversed (Hyde, 2005). Therefore, it would be meaningful for future studies to examine whether there exist any gender differences among audiences in different countries in responding to campaigns using emojis. It may be a good idea to use different study designs such as a survey or an experiment using a fictitious company to exclude any preexisting behavior towards the company and see whether there exist any differences in females' and males' engagement in conversations related to emoji-based campaigns among audiences in different cultural settings.

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