



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Are emojis an effective inclusive marketing strategy?

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Católica Porto Business School
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Final Dissertation Work presented to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain the master's degree in Management

by

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Abstract

In the current marketing environment, social inclusion has gained increasing relevance. Therefore, companies must become more socially responsible and address inclusion transparently in their branding strategies. Social Networking Sites, in particular Twitter, are very important means for sharing topics related with social inclusion. Furthermore, brands are increasingly using emojis as a strategy to get closer to consumers and stimulate the co-creation process. Thus, the objective of the present investigation is to understand to what extent inclusive emojis affect consumers' behaviour towards brands on Twitter, testing whether this effect is maximised when consumers have positive perceptions of the brand warmth and a favourable brand attitude. Additionally, we analyse whether the congruence between the tweet text and the emojis enhance the perception of brand warmth. In the Serial Mediation Analysis with Moderation that we proposed, we concluded that, when the effects of brand warmth and brand attitude are isolated, the effect of inclusive emojis on tweets is not statistically significant to support the initial hypothesis. However, when we consider all effects, we can verify that consumer responses are more positive when brands include inclusive emojis on tweets. This study puts forward a relevant contribution to the social inclusion of brands in social media literature, helping to identify which paths brands should follow to strengthen their relationship with targeted consumers. Nevertheless, this dissertation opens doors for future studies on social marketing, emphasising the importance of studying social inclusion.

Keywords: social media marketing, inclusion, inclusive emojis, brand warmth, brand attitude, consumer-brand engagement

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Resumo

No atual mundo do marketing, a inclusão social tem cada vez mais relevância. Assim, as empresas devem tornar-se mais socialmente responsáveis e abordar a inclusão de forma transparente nas suas estratégias de marca. As Redes Sociais, em particular o Twitter, são meios importantes para a divulgação de temas relacionados com a inclusão social. Além disso, as marcas estão cada vez mais a usar emojis como estratégia para se aproximarem dos consumidores e estimular a co-criação. Deste modo, o objetivo da presente investigação é perceber em que medida os emojis inclusivos afetam o comportamento dos consumidores face às marcas no Twitter, testando se este efeito é maximizado quando estes têm percepções positivas de *brand warmth* e uma atitude favorável à marca. Além disso, analisamos se a congruência entre o texto do tweet e os emojis aumenta a percepção de *brand warmth*. Na *Serial Mediation Regression Analysis with Moderation* que propusemos, concluímos que, quando isolados os efeitos de *brand warmth* e da atitude da marca, o efeito dos emojis inclusivos nos tweets não é estatisticamente significativo para sustentar a hipótese inicial. No entanto, quando consideramos todos os efeitos, verificamos que as respostas dos consumidores são mais positivas quando as marcas incluem esses emojis nos tweets. O presente estudo apresenta contribuições relevantes para a literatura sobre inclusão social das marcas nas redes sociais, ajudando a identificar quais são os caminhos que as marcas devem seguir para fortalecer a relação com os consumidores *target*. Não obstante, esta dissertação abre portas a futuros estudos sobre marketing social, enfatizando a importância de estudar a inclusão social.

Palavras-chave: marketing de redes sociais, inclusão, emojis inclusivos, *brand warmth*, *brand attitude*, *consumer-brand engagement*

Contagem de palavras: 9973

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Society is increasingly surrounded by technology, and people communicate with each other more and more through social media, using Social Networking Sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to communicate, express feelings and needs. Thus, SNS are increasingly relevant in brand communication, and they are an important instrument to influence consumers' brand perception. Therefore, and as previously put forward by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), SNS play a significant role in a company's branding strategy.

Moreover, topics such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly social inclusivity on the part of brands, are growing in relevance (Licsandru & Cui, 2018). Since socially responsible actions are fundamental to create a stronger relationship between consumers and brands, companies that use them consistently have a competitive advantage (Farooq et al., 2014; C.-Y. Lee, 2019; Raza et al., 2020). Combining the literature of SNS and CSR, some studies have already proven that Twitter is a very interesting disseminator of these messages and has significant impact on the image consumers have of brands (Lee et al., 2013). Previous studies have concluded that inclusive communication on Twitter leads to more positive effects on brands, strengthening their relationship with consumers and encouraging co-creation (Araujo & Kollat, 2018).

Ogilvy (1963) proved that consumers are more willing to create a relationship with brands they feel connected to regarding its image and visual communication, which explains the importance of creating imagery that is appealing and positively perceived. By following this guiding principle, brands improve retention of consumers' attention, as well as strengthen their relationship with the brand (Arya et al., 2018; Goransson & Fagerholm, 2018; Paivo, 1991).

There is a growing interest in studying the extent to which emojis, a new language of symbols that help people express feelings as visual stimuli, impact consumers' attitude towards brands, even though literature on this topic is not yet deeply studied. Emojis are increasingly being adopted on SNS as a relevant part of brands' digital communication, being used as communication strategies in User-Generated Content (UGC) of brands' social media (Ko et al., 2022). Hence, the findings of extant literature motivated the present investigation, which is to study the impact of the use of inclusive emojis (emojis that represent different races, religions, etc) in brand communication on consumer-brand engagement.

Accordingly, this investigation intends to answer the question *Are emojis an effective inclusive marketing strategy?*. We want to understand if the usage of inclusive emojis favourably influences relevant consumer responses, analysing their effects on Brand Warmth (BW), Brand Attitude (BA) and, consequently, on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE) on Twitter. In addition, we analysed the impact of Emoji-text Congruence (Cong) on the relationship between the use of inclusive emojis and BA.

The present research is divided into six chapters. Firstly, we present the literature review on social media and SNS and on the relationship between the use of inclusive emojis and BW, BA, CBE, and as well the relevance of ensuring Cong. Then we formulate the hypotheses for the research model. Following, we design the research methodology, and present and discuss the results. Lastly, we present the main theoretical and managerial implications of this research, as well as conclusions, limitations, and future research directions.

Chapter 2

Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Social media and Social Networking Sites (SNS)

Social media is a means of communication that incorporates an extensive set of online tools, such as chat rooms, blogs, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, company-sponsored discussion boards, forums, consumer product or service ratings websites and SNS. Thus, social media has brought consumers closer together, eliminating a lot of limitations, such as time and place for communication (Beig & Khan, 2018).

Nowadays, social media is an essential element of communication as it allows fast information sharing by consumers and brands alike. Thus, it unlocks a mechanism for brand communication to quickly influence consumer behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Hence, the role of social media in contemporary marketing is prevalent, and it has transformed the way customers relate to brands (Zadeh et al., 2019). Therefore, it is imperative that managers of companies across all industries be attentive to communication through social media (Meng et al., 2015). Therefore, companies ought to start increasingly incorporating social media components into their broader marketing communication strategy to improve real-time interaction with consumers (Platon, 2013).

As this investigation is based on Twitter brand communication, we will now focus on SNS. SNS have initially been used as a tool for social interaction, however, they have evolved into various unexpected forms of communication (Yang et al., 2021). Accordingly, SNS are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to create profiles of their own, public, or semi-public, to communicate and maintain relationships (Dwyer et al., 2007). SNS create a list of users with

whom consumers share content within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These profiles can include personal information like photos and videos, that allow consumers to strengthen relationships with other members, with organisations or with brands (Dessart et al., 2015; Koh & Kim, 2004). Thus, SNS are a “network of consumers and brands and networks among brands” (Gensler et al., 2013, p. 249), besides being a network for consumers exclusively.

2.1.1. The SNS of the 00s: Twitter

Twitter was founded in 2006, and, according to Murthy (2013), it has modelled modern social communication. Twitter fosters a collaborative atmosphere by being available in 33 different languages, and empowering users to actively shape the platform through their individual usage practices (Weller et al., 2014). This SNS is both open to all types of content and is simple to work with, which makes the co-creation process easier (Halavais, 2014). Twitter’s usage in business markets is a relatively recent phenomenon since companies are now using this SNS more actively to interact with customers more actively. Twitter, as well as other SNS, like blogs, has become an increasingly relevant element in individuals’ lives, organisations’ strategy, and society, offering the possibility to held debates in real-time (Andzulis et al., 2012; Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2019).

Researchers have proved that Twitter is an excellent diffuser of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) statements. Indeed, this SNS provides a positive environment for CSR communication, which is why some organisations view Twitter as their social media priority (Tao & Wilson, 2015). In this direction, some authors have proven that companies and brands which have better CSR ratings tend to have larger Twitter communities (Lee et al., 2013). This urge to engage

stakeholders in CSR communication makes SNS, and particularly Twitter, key tools for social and inclusive marketing.

Studies suggest that CSR communication on Twitter will allow brands to obtain better outcomes since this type of communication tends to stimulate a stronger relationship between the brand and its customers and lead to positive outcomes regarding co-creation (Araujo & Kollat, 2018). Research on the impact of CSR on communication on Twitter has proven that organisations can effectively use this SNS to communicate about CSR and foster a stronger sense of consumer identification with the brand. This leads to higher levels of consumer trust and commitment towards the organisation (Araujo & Kollat, 2018). Furthermore, previous studies concluded that Twitter communication about CSR can cause favourable consumer brand attitude (Chernev & Blair, 2015; Du et al., 2010; K.-H. Lee & Shin, 2010; Wigley, 2008).

2.2. (Inclusive) emojis in brand communication

Emojis were created by Shigetaka Kurita, in 1999 (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019). These are miniature symbols, used through text messages or social media, that can represent a variety of faces with different moods, types of weather, types of food and drinks, and races, genders, or sexual orientation (Miltner, 2020). This new language contributes to a more informal way of communication, letting people express their emotions more intuitively than through regular text messages (Marengo et al., 2017). The analysis of emoji usage can provide relevant insights about individual personality traits (Marengo et al., 2017; Unicode Consortium, 2022). Emojis are commonly employed as a means of communication in SNS, in interpersonal and group conversations (Casado-Molina et al., 2022; Vidal et al., 2016).

According to Unicode Consortium (2022), the organisation responsible for the internationalisation of emojis, 92% of the world population who is present online uses emoji language to communicate with their community, helping them express their feelings, ideas, and beliefs (Arya et al., 2018; Unicode Consortium, 2022). During the expansion of this ubiquitous language (Lu et al., 2016), several people criticised the evolution of these symbols, saying they induce racism (Chaey, 2013; Holdeman, 2013) and lead to cultural misrepresentation (Shade, 2015).

Initially, emoji faces were only yellow-coloured. Later, people emojis were available in one more colour: light skin colour. However, it was only in 2014, that it became available in five different skin tones (Unicode Consortium, 2022). In addition to racial inclusive emojis, new emojis related to religion, disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation inclusivity have been added in the past few years. For example, emojis include nowadays the hijab emoji (Miltner, 2020; Vonberg et al., 2017), the representation of grey and red coloured hair, deaf people, people in wheelchairs (Hashmi et al., 2021) or even accessibility related emojis (Burge, 2018).

Social inclusion is a multidimensional concept, defined as “the degree to which individuals experience treatment from the group that satisfies their need for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). Sayce (2001, p. 122) also defined inclusion as a “virtuous circle of improved rights of access to the social and economic world, new opportunities, recovery of status and meaning and reduced impact of disability”. Hence, companies began developing strategies to effectively use emojis as a social inclusion strategy and, thereby, to attract and retain customers. By using emojis as visual stimuli, brands may be able to shorten the decision-making process through the generation of emotions (Arya et al., 2018). Hence, brand communication that includes a significant range of inclusive emojis should be perceived as more inclusive, since it appeals to the

sense of belongingness of consumers and contributes to the reduction of social disparities.

2.3. Impact of inclusive emojis

2.3.1. The impact of inclusive emojis on perceived brand warmth (BW)

CSR has become an important marketing instrument for firms to build long-term relationships with customers and increase value creation, which culminates in boosting their competitive advantage (Farooq et al., 2014; Lee, 2019; Raza et al., 2020). Researchers have found that customers tend to respond more favourably to firms that are more socially responsible, being more likely to become emotionally attached to those firms (Abbas et al., 2018; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Sen, 2006).

Enderle & Tavis (1998) suggest that CSR encompasses a wide range of normative obligations and define it as the practice of a company's social commitment beyond its legal responsibilities. These include environmental interests, charitable contributions, ethical treatment of stakeholders, and its moral behaviour (Gustin & Weaver, 1996; Xu, 2014). Meanwhile, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1999) defines CSR as an ongoing commitment by businesses to act ethically, contribute to economic development, and enhance the quality of life of society. Hence, CSR is perceived by consumers from four different perceptions: environmental causes, no discrimination, recycling reasons and, communication. These could be also sum up in four different aspects: economic, ecological, recycling, and social (Rodrigues & Borges, 2015).

As stated in the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), “brands differ in how well-intentioned brands seem to be, as well as on how able they are

perceived to be” (Kervyn et al., 2012, p.9). This framework explains that BW clarifies the perceived positive or negative intentions of a brand (Kervyn et al., 2012). BW is determined by the extent to which brands are perceived to act in society’s best interest (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). Brands can exhibit BW through various strategies, namely: by demonstrating benevolence; by engaging in CSR initiatives, such as supporting social programs; by adopting a mainstream positioning; or even by emphasising consumer health and safety (Andrei & Zait, 2014; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). In this study, we will focus on the social perception of CSR and analyse the variable BW as a proxy to the social perceptions of CSR.

Some authors have proven that emojis positively influence first impressions in digital interactions (Byron & Baldrige, 2007; Glikson et al., 2018; Hsieh & Tseng, 2017). These conclusions motivate further investigation into the effects of emojis on BW perception (Boutet et al., 2021).

To examine the dimension of BW, the focus should be its implications on individual behaviour which is a vital aspect of consumer’s personality (Fiske et al., 2007). Given the relevance of these traits in digital interactions, perceptions of warmth might theoretically moderate online behaviour (Derks et al., 2007; Walther, 1992). Some studies have concluded that the presence of positive emojis increases BW perceptions. The differences between the effects of brand communication with and without emojis were most noticeable for neutral sentences, i.e., that did not incorporate strong messages, like inclusivity. Consequently, the perceptions of BW in these neutral groups tend to be reduced (Boutet et al., 2021).

Therefore, a few studies have aimed to understand the potential effect of emojis on BW perceptions, on building personal connections with consumers, and creating favourable emotional responses (Agnew, 2017; Kelly & Watts, 2015;

Luangrath et al., 2017). Based on the findings of prior studies, we propose our first hypothesis:

H1: The presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has a positive effect on consumers' perceived Brand Warmth (BW).

2.3.2. The impact of inclusive emojis on brand attitude (BA)

Mitchell & Olson (1981, p. 318) provide a concise definition of attitude towards the brand as an "individual's internal evaluation of the brand". Some studies, as the one conducted by Brodzik et al. (2021), proved that 57% of consumers seem to have a more positive attitude towards the brands that address social disparities in their brand actions. In this regard, authors proved that customers tend to invest in establishing more positive relationships with socially responsible companies, because they appear to be more trustworthy (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2019; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Raza et al., 2020; Sen, 2006).

Hence, empirical studies have identified that corporate responsibility (which in this study is addressed through BW perceptions) enhances outcomes such as customer satisfaction, brand identification, brand trust, and brand loyalty, but also BA (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2019; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; E. Park, 2019; Raza et al., 2020). Moreover, it was also proven that using inclusive strategies, like inclusive emojis, in brand activities induce more positive BA (Joo & Wu, 2021). In the same direction, Park (2019) found that socially responsible activities significantly influence customer satisfaction and attitude, specifically in the airline service industry, which will be the industry we will be addressing in the study. Thus, we hypothesise that:

H2: Consumers' perceived Brand Warmth (BW) has a positive impact on Brand Attitude (BA).

H3: The presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude (BA).

2.3.3. The impact of inclusive emojis on consumer-brand engagement (CBE) and its impact on brand attitude (BA)

CBE is an important concept that is frequently used in studies related to social media (Brodie et al., 2011; Machado et al., 2019). Thereby, previous research has defined CBE in many ways. Academics define it as a consumers' psychological state that mirrors their relationship and association to a brand based on the connection that they build with it (Brodie et al., 2011; Read et al., 2019). Others conceptualise CBE as a "consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer-brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 3). However, the present study is more focused on the behavioural side of CBE, which according to van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254), involves "customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or a firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". This engagement enriches brand awareness and brand response, influencing the behavioural outcomes of the relationship between consumers and the brand (D. Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; C. T. Lee & Hsieh, 2019; van Doorn et al., 2010).

EvLee & Hsieh (2019) refer that there is still a research gap regarding the lack of studies on the effects of emojis on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE) and brand behavioural intentions. Previous studies have shown that different tools, such as emojis, have distinct effects in social media platforms like Twitter, as reported by Casado-Molina et al. (2022). In 2019, Das et al. (2019) highlighted the need to investigate the impact of emojis on consumer reactions to advertisements featuring this "ubiquitous language". Additionally, the authors mentioned the

importance and benefits of studying the effects of different types, quantities, positions, and sizes of emojis on consumer reactions.

Nevertheless, there are some studies that have proven that emojis enhance CBE as they possess rhetorical and aesthetic value (Bai et al., 2019; Casado-Molina et al., 2022; Das et al., 2019; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2022).

Firstly, Casado-Molina et al. (2022) proved that emojis are a significant component in brand communication. The authors' analysis revealed that emojis were not just occasional elements in messages, but rather a crucial component for brand positioning. The same study found that communications that employed emojis for customer service, as well as those used in positive contexts and for emphasis, were associated with increased user engagement. Companies, organisations, and institutions are increasingly incorporating resources such as emojis in their digital communications with customers to enhance CBE and using these characters in expressive communication (Arya et al., 2018). This can have a significant impact in the business world, particularly in building interpersonal relationships (Das et al., 2019). In addition, by using emojis in branding, companies tend to adopt a language similar to their customers', which humanises the brand (Hede & Watne, 2013).

Furthermore, it was also proven that using inclusive strategies, as inclusive emojis, in brand actions tends to positively influence BA (Joo & Wu, 2021), which in turn directly influences CBE (Li et al., 2020). Hence, it would be interesting to help understand consumers' propensity to engage with a certain brand in social media when inclusive communication is being used.

Moreover, results show that socially responsible companies, that use, for example, no discriminatory/inclusive communication, tend to gain the trust and confidence of their customers, leading to stronger relationships and increased CBE (Rodrigues & Borges, 2015). Furthermore, van Doorn et al. (2010) proved that consumers that see a firm as more responsible are more likely to have a

positive BA towards the brand, which impacts positively CBE. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: The presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has a positive effect on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE).

H5: Consumers' Brand Attitude (BA) has a positive impact on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE).

2.3.4. The moderator effect of emoji-text congruence (Cong) in brand communication

Previous studies have indicated that the level of congruence plays a moderating role in the effectiveness of an advertisement on its intended audience (Lee & Schumann, 2004). Congruence can be defined in multiple ways, such as the alignment between a specific message and the recipient's existing schema, the suitability between an advertisement and the context in which it appears, and the harmony between different marketing components (Dahlén et al., 2008; Kamins, 1990; Lee & Mason, 1999; Schmitt et al., 1993).

Heckler and Childers (1992) introduced a two-dimensional categorisation of incongruity: expectancy and relevancy. Expectancy is the degree to which a piece of information conforms to a preconceived pattern or structure stimulated by an advertisement, while relevancy refers to the extent to which a piece of information contributes to the identification of the primary message conveyed by the ad. We can assume that congruency also depends on these concepts.

Van Rompay et al. (2010) proposed that the congruence delivered by product visuals and online descriptions increases fluency, since integration of information is present. This enhanced fluency is expected to have a favourable effect on consumer evaluations of the product or service that the brand is

communicating. In the same line, consumer research studies conclude that congruence across or within marketing-mix components is generally considered a crucial precursor regarding the evaluation of a product or a brand (Erdem & Swait, 2004; van Rompay & Ad T. H. Pruyn, 2008).

Contrarily to incongruent information, congruency, expressed through various digital elements, is more easily interpreted, leading to the development of a clearer impression of the brand communication, and to a more positive consumer attitude. More specifically, the congruence between text and image facilitates the process of shaping an impression of a brand by allowing consumers to build a clear and distinct image of the product or service that the brand communicates. On the contrary, incongruent communication deters the formation of an impression by creating uncertainty among consumers about the product or service being offered (van Rompay et al., 2010).

Thus, assuming that emojis are the non-textual component of brand communication, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: The positive effect that the presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has on consumers' perceived Brand Warmth (BW) is higher when there is Emoji-text Congruence (Cong) in brand communication.

2.3.5. The serial mediation effects – Path analysis

To understand which relationships can be drawn in the research model, we formulate below some mediation hypotheses, to have a deeper understanding on these paths. We intent to analyse if the direct effects between the research variables are amplified when more variables are considered in the regression. This will be computed using a Serial Mediation Regression with Moderation.

Research has examined the impact of emojis on brand perception, suggesting that emojis have the potential to generate positive perceptions of BW and to foster personal and emotional connections with the brand (Agnew, 2017; Kelly & Watts, 2015; Luangrath et al., 2017). Additionally, some investigations have also highlighted the significance of BW, previously associated to CSR, in influencing BA (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2019; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; E. Park, 2019; Raza et al., 2020). Researchers have proven that using inclusive strategies in branding, here considered as the usage of inclusive emojis, leads to more positive consumer responses to the brand, including BA (Joo & Wu, 2021). Other authors concluded that positive BA directly and positively influences CBE (Li et al., 2020). Thus, we propose the following three hypotheses:

H7: The positive effect that the presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has on consumers' Brand Attitude (BA) is mediated by Brand Warmth (BW).

H8: The positive effect that the presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE) is mediated by Brand Attitude (BA).

H9: The positive effect that the presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication has on Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE) is mediated by Brand Warmth (BW) and Brand Attitude (BA).

The research model of the present investigation is presented in Figure 1.

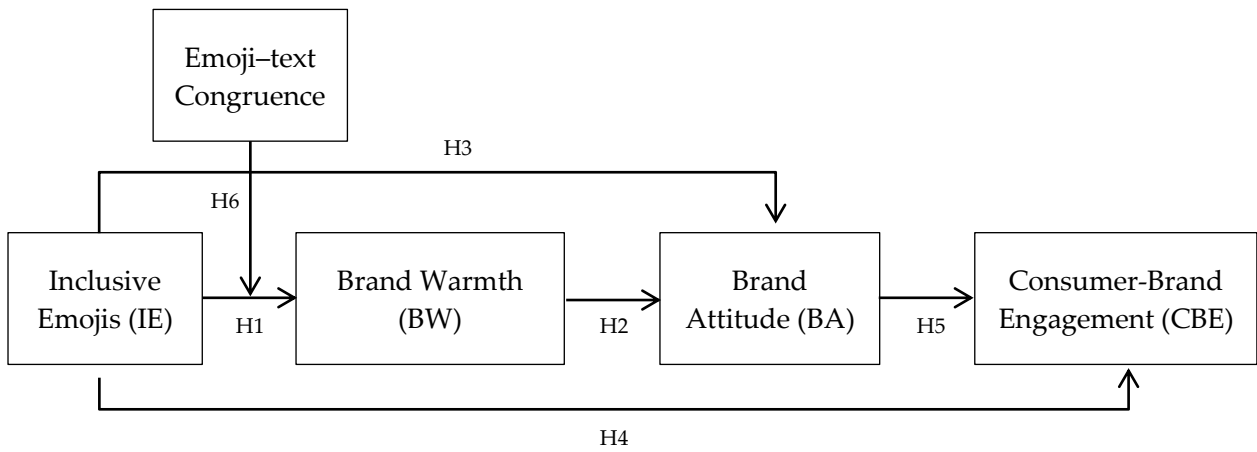


Figure 1: Research Model

Chapter 3

Methodology and data collection

3.1. Research approach

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the presence of inclusive emojis in brand communication and some key variables that measure consumer engagement with the brand, in the specific context of Twitter. While literature related to emojis presence in brand communication is available, there is still a lack of research focused on inclusive emojis as a strategy of communication and branding.

This research intends to produce new insights to fulfil this gap in the literature, by exploring the relationship between the following variables: presence of inclusive emojis, BW, BA, and CBE. Moreover, it intends to explore the moderating effect that the congruence between text and inclusive emojis might have on the relationship between the use of inclusive emojis and BA. While there are studies in this field of marketing that examine how the presence of emojis in brand communication affects consumer responses, none of those studies considers the usage of inclusive emojis. The new strand that we intend to explore is related to the presence of inclusive emojis specifically, and how they impact consumer-brand engagement on Twitter.

This study is based on quantitative analysis, where the numerical outcomes generated by the evaluated measures can be used to draw inferences about the underlying theoretical constructs (Field, 2009). This type of approach offers the opportunity to analyse data using statistical procedures, that enables studying a sample of the population, which in turn will allow to generalise into a theory applied to the population itself (Newman & Benz, 1998). The research is based on the methodology of an experimental research design, applying questionnaires

as the mean to collect data from consumers. An experiment is a research methodology where theoretical hypotheses are defined and then samples of individuals are selected to respond to different experimental conditions or stimuli (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This way the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables in study, mirrored in the hypotheses, will be tested using the data collected. In the present research, a survey was developed using the online questionnaires' tool "Google Forms". This mechanism of collecting data provides an opportunity to easily and inexpensively reach groups of individuals who might otherwise be difficult to inquire in such a narrow time period (Wright, 2006). Additionally, since all the questions are the same for all respondents, the online surveys minimise the effects caused by the interviewer's interference (Bryman, 2008). Regarding the estimation of the serial mediation regression, we used IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS Software to help in reliability, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and significancy analysis.

3.2. Study design

The study is based on a between-subjects experimental design, to measure different consumer responses to different situations of inclusive emoji usage on Twitter. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four subjects (inclusive emoji usage on tweets: presence vs absence; inclusive message in brand communication: presence vs absence) in an online questionnaire. All the tweets presented to the respondents included a brand action for the fictional brand "Invicta Airlines", simulating an actual post from the brand. Stimuli A and B were related to the promotion of the Traveller's International Day, including only one "plane" emoji, and the other one including a "plane" emoji and a set of inclusive emojis, respectively. Stimuli C and D had the same difference between

each other regarding emoji presence, but the message was different: both included a text related to Diversity's International Day. In sum, the difference between the tweets is in the inclusive emojis usage and the inclusive textual communication. It is worth mentioning that, before conducting the questionnaire, the content adequacy of the stimuli was tested in a pre-test, which is explained in detail in the next section.

The use of a fictional brand, with a fictitious name and logo, instead of a real brand name or celebrity, allows us to minimise the effects of extraneous variables, such as brand familiarity and BA, which represents an advantage in experimental studies (Till & Busler, 2000). The logo was created based on images from free image databases, aiming to create a scenario as credible as possible.

Studying the effect of including inclusive emojis in brand communication on Twitter using a fictitious airline company was due to various factors. There is already some literature that focuses on inclusive behaviour towards customers by organisations belonging to this industry. Furthermore, this industry is an industry where, from the outset, no one would be excluded or self-excluded from having a positive experience for reasons of inclusivity, since the service it provides is not allusive to anything that is directly associated to the way people relate to society, nor how they are inserted or feel inserted in society. Hence, by focusing on this industry, we minimise the risk of analysing brands that could possibly be associated with certain genders, ages, religion, and, thereby, we reduce possible bias.

3.3. Pre-test and results

3.3.1. Pre-test on congruence and inclusivity

As previously mentioned, prior to the main study, a pre-test was conducted to analyse if the stimuli were appropriate representations of inclusive text and inclusive emoji usage in tweets and to test the congruence between the text and the emojis (the pre-test and the stimuli are presented in Appendices 1 and 2). The purpose of this pre-test was to compare inclusivity perceptions and the perceptions of congruence between text and emojis between stimulus A, which was a tweet that had a set of inclusive emojis but did not include a text related to inclusivity, and stimulus B, which was a tweet that had both a set of inclusive emojis and a text related to inclusivity and diversity. Hence, it was essential to guarantee that each attribute was well designed, so that congruence was perceived differently between stimuli. The use of a fictitious brand, “Invicta Airlines”, an airline from Portugal, allows for more experimental control, since it minimises the effects of brand familiarity and brand attitude, strengthening the statistical relevancy of this analysis (Till & Busler, 2000).

In this pre-test, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two versions of the pre-test, Tweet A and Tweet B, incongruency vs. congruency between text and emojis (Table 1). Congruency was measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale: congruent/non-congruent. Inclusivity was also measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale: inclusive/non-inclusive.

Pre-test	Presence of inclusive emojis	Presence of inclusive text	Congruence
A	Present	Present	Congruency
B	Absent	Present	Incongruency

Table 1: Versions of the pre-test based on different levels of attributes (present/absent)

3.3.2. Results

The pre-test was conducted on Google Forms and was distributed online via SNS. A total of 110 participants answered to the pre-test (65.5% female) with a mean age of 39.9 (SD = 16.098). From all the 110 responses collected in the pre-test, 61 (55.5%) answers were in stimulus A, with inclusive emojis and no inclusive text, and 49 (44.5%) were in stimulus B, with inclusive emojis and inclusive text.

The expectation was that the stimulus with the tweet including inclusive text was perceived as more congruent than the one that did not have inclusive text. Also, it was expected that there would not be a significant difference between responses regarding the inclusiveness question since both had inclusive emojis.

Therefore, two independent-samples *t*-tests have been conducted, one for the pre-test on inclusivity and another for the pre-test on congruency between text and emojis, to understand if the stimuli were perceived as expected.

Regarding congruence, both tweets presented in each stimulus were considered inclusive (M=4.73, SD=1.807). The *t*-test for the congruence stimuli verified that it is significant ($p < .001$), with a confidence level of 95%. Thus, there is statistical evidence to conclude that there is a significant difference between means of stimuli A and B, leading to the conclusion that the use of inclusive emojis in the tweet affects the perception of congruence between the text and the

emojis. The stimulus with the highest mean was stimulus B ($M = 5.27$; $SD = 1.668$), which was the one with both the text and emojis with inclusive basis. Stimulus A ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 1.811$) had a difference of .970 in its mean ($MDiff = -.970$; $SD = .335$). The results sustain the expected, where the stimulus with more congruence between text and emojis was in fact perceived, on average, more congruent than stimulus A. The statistical support for pre-test results is presented in Appendix 3, Tables 10 and 11.

On the contrary, the *t-value* estimated for inclusivity, which is above 0.5, shows no statistical evidence of difference between the mean between stimuli A and B. Therefore, using or not using IE in the tweet does not significantly affect the perception of inclusiveness, which was the expected since both tweets had emojis. The stimulus with the highest mean was stimulus B ($M = 5.53$; $SD = 1.634$), which was the one with both the text and emojis with inclusive basis. Stimulus A ($M = 5.34$; $SD = 1.721$) had a difference of 0.186 in its mean ($MDiff = -.186$; $SD = .323$). The statistical support for pre-test results is presented in Appendix 3, Tables 12 and 13.

3.4. Questionnaire, measures, and scales

3.4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire had four versions (Table 2), corresponding to the four different stimuli, that were randomly assigned to the respondents, who answered to only one of the four conditions. To guarantee random assigning to groups, at the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked to choose at random one of the versions, represented by letters A, B, C or D, without knowing the content of each one. Each version had a different stimulus, that was

a simulation of a tweet from the fictitious brand “Invicta Airlines”. All versions had a brief description of the brand and a contextualisation of the simulation. The depiction of the stimulus was followed by a set of thirteen questions, which were distributed by seven different sections. In addition to questions asked for the variables in study, demographic characterisation, and consumers’ Twitter behaviour, we also added a question where participants would agree or disagree to collaborate in the present investigation. Only the positive answers were considered in the study. The target for this study is people that have Twitter account. The stimuli are presented in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5. For reference, the questionnaire and stimuli are in Appendices 4 and 5.

Questionnaire	Inclusive emojis	Inclusive text
A	Absent	Absent
B	Present	Absent
C	Absent	Present
D	Present	Present

Table 2: Versions of the questionnaire based on different levels of attributes (present/absent)



Figure 2: Stimulus A from the questionnaire



Figure 3: Stimulus B from the questionnaire



Figure 4: Stimulus C from the questionnaire



Figure 5: Stimulus D from the questionnaire

3.4.2. Measures and scales

To measure the hypotheses defined in the research model, we thoroughly selected multi-item scales based on previous research and made some necessary adaptations so that they would fit this investigation. The variables in study were measured using scales commonly adopted in the marketing literature.

The initial questions of the questionnaire regarded participants' Twitter usage and are not presented in the conceptual model. The first two questions were related to the presence on Twitter. The first one asked respondents if they have or not a Twitter account, excluding already in this section the ones that do not have an account. The second question was related to the personal consumption of content on this SNS. The scale used was adapted from Allahverdi (2022), where respondents chose how many times they visit the SNS, on average, from the following options: (1) never, (2) less than 1 time, (3) 1–5 times, (4) 6–10 times, (5) more than 10 times a day. Finally, a third set of questions measured consumers' general engagement on Twitter (Table 3), using a three-item scale, adapted from Kabadayi and Price (2014). Despite the original scale not including the "retweeting" factor, it was important to include it in this study, because the act of retweeting represents an action of interest on Twitter. Thus, the scale was adapted to assess this behaviour. For this measurement, we used a 7-point Likert-type scale, with endpoints ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (7) "strongly agree".

Twitter users' behaviour scale	Liking	I enjoy liking brand page posts on Twitter	Kabadayi and Price (2014) (adapted)
	Commenting	I enjoy commenting brand page posts on Twitter	
	Retweeting	I enjoy sharing brand page posts on Twitter	

Table 3: Twitter behaviour scale, adapted from Kabadayi and Price (2014)

Concerning the analysis of BW, this variable was measured using a scale designed by Fiske et al. (2002) (Table 4). This scale has four items to characterise the way consumers' view the position of the brand in society. This is a 7-point Likert-type scale, with endpoints ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (7) "strongly agree". Hence, respondents indicate how much they agree that the brand is "friendly", "good-natured", "kind" and "warm".

Brand Warmth (BA)	Invicta Airlines is a friendly brand	Fiske et al. (2002)
	Invicta Airlines is a good-natured brand	
	Invicta Airlines is a kind brand	
	Invicta Airlines is a warm brand	

Table 4: Brand Warmth scale, from Fiske et al. (2002)

Regarding BA, the present study followed the scale proposed by Spears & Singh (2004) (Table 5). In this scale, the researchers measure BA using five items. Thus, we asked the respondents to classify the feelings Invicta Airlines evoked using a five-items 7-point semantic differential scale: unappealing/appealing (Spears & Singh, 2004); bad/good (Grossman & Till, 1998; Henderson & Cote, 1998; Kim et al., 1996; Machado et al., 2012; Pham & Avnet, 2004; Samu et al., 1999; Simonin & Ruth, 1998); unpleasant/pleasant (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Grossman & Till, 1998; Kim et al., 1996; Machado et al., 2012; Samu et al., 1999); unfavourable/favourable (Machado et al., 2012; Milberg et al., 1997; C. W. Park et al., 1996; Simonin & Ruth, 1998); unlikable/likable (Spears & Singh, 2004).

	Endpoint (1)	Endpoint (7)	
Brand Attitude (BA)	Unappealing	Appealing	Spears and Singh (2004)
	Bad	Good	
	Unpleasant	Pleasant	
	Unfavourable	Favourable	
	Unlikable	Likable	

Table 5: Brand Attitude scale, from Spears and Singh (2004)

Concerning the measurement of CBE with the brand, as we are studying the effect of using inclusive emojis by a fictitious brand, it was clear the need to use a scale that could be applied to an unknown brand. Hence, the chosen scale is based on the likelihood of a set of consumer-brand interactions (behaviour), when interacting with the exact stimulus that it is presented to them (Ángeles Oviedo-García et al., 2014). Thus, the scale that served as the foundation for the scale used in this research was the one formulated by Smith (2013) (Table 6), that measured the likelihood of respondents engaging with brands in certain SNS actions (i.e., like, comment and share). This is a 7-point Likert-type scale, with endpoints ranging from (1) “very unlikely” to (7) “very likely”. In the specific case of “share”, we also adapted it to “retweet”. However, to overcome the need to study consumers’ engagement with a fictitious brand, two more items, regarding unobservable behaviours, were added to the scale, as proposed by Paraty et al. (2018), based on the findings of prior studies. The first was “catching attention”, that describes the action of the consumer stopping scrolling in SNS and wanting to extract more information from the post; and the second, “garnering interest”, that represents the actions that consumers make to engage “indirectly” with the post (i.e., clicking on the profiles mentioned in the post, or consulting the number of “likes” in the post (Ángeles Oviedo-García et al., 2014)).

The last three represent the observable behaviours of the consumer regarding the tweet: like, comment or retweet.

Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE)	Catching your Attention	Smith (2013) (adapted)
	Garnering your Interest	
	Like	
	Comment	
	Retweet	

Table 6: Consumer-Brand Engagement scale, adapted from Smith (2013)

Regarding the analysis of the moderator variable Cong, the scale adopted was proposed by Söderlund & Dahlén (2010) (Table 7). Though, this scale was adapted to represent the congruence between inclusive emojis, and the text used in the tweet, as the original scale characterised the congruence between text and image in ads. Thus, we asked participants to categorise the level of emoji-text congruence in Invicta Airlines' presented tweet, using a five-items 7-point semantic differential scale: low fit/high fit; poor match/good match; not consistent/very consistent; low level of wholeness/high level of wholeness; unclear/clear (Söderlund & Dahlén, 2010).

	Endpoint (1)	Endpoint (7)	
	Low fit	High fit	
	Poor match	Good match	Söderlund and Dahlén (2010) (adapted)
Emoji-text Congruence (Cong)	Not consistent	Very consistent	
	Low level of wholeness	High level of wholeness	
	Unclear	Clear	

Table 7: Emoji-text Congruence scale, adapted from Söderlund and Dahlén (2010)

Chapter 4

Results

4.1. Preliminary analysis

4.1.1. Data collection and screening

All the data gathered to this investigation was collected through a questionnaire, between 26th June 2023 and 30th June 2023. All the respondents were randomly assigned to one of four versions of the questionnaire: version A's tweet had no emojis and no inclusive text; version B's tweet had emojis but no inclusive text; version C's tweet had no emojis but had inclusive text; version D's tweet had emojis and inclusive text (Table 2).

We managed a careful filtering of the responses, considering the questions of age, gender, marital status, education level, and having twitter account. In total, we collected 505 responses, 293 of which were valid for the purpose of the study, being excluded from the sample participants that do not have a twitter account: 75 valid responses for condition A, 72 for B, 73 for C, and 73 for D. All respondents were subject to a question of consent to the use of their responses in the present investigation, where participants who did not give consent have been excluded.

4.1.2. Demographic characterisation

Regarding age (Appendix 6 – Figure 7), between the ages of 18 and 24 years old we collected 85 respondents (29.0%). 20.1% were between 25 and 34; 18.8% between 35 and 44; 19.8% between 45 and 54; 8.9% between 55 and 64; and 1.4% above 65. The other 2.0% were from respondents that are less than 18 years old.

Regarding gender (Appendix 6 – Figure 8), 174 respondents (59.4%) were female; 118 respondents (40.3%) were male; and 1 respondent preferred not to answer (0.3%). Regarding the marital status (Appendix 6 – Figure 9), most respondents, 59.7%, are single and have never been married; 32.8% are married or cohabiting; 5.8% are divorced; and 1.7% are widowed. Concerning the educational level (Appendix 6 – Figure 10), 45.7% of the participants have a college degree; 24.9% have a master’s degree; 10.0% have a post-graduation degree; 1.4% have a PhD; 15.2% finished high school; and 2,8% finished the elementary school.

4.1.3. Social media usage characterisation

Regarding the presence online, specifically on Twitter (Appendix 6 – Figure 11), 37.2% of the participants say that they use Twitter, on average, less than 1 time a day, whether just reading or reading and interacting. 27.6% go to Twitter between 1 and 5 times a day, 13.0% use between 6 and 10 times and 9.9% more than 10 times. 12.3% state that, even though they have Twitter, they never use it.

Additionally, participants classified their behaviour on Twitter according to the adapted scale from the proposed by Kabadayi & Price (2014). We used a 7-point Likert-type scale, with endpoints ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree”. In average, in a scale from 1 to 7, participants classified “enjoying liking brand page posts on Twitter” as 3.2. In average, in a scale from 1 to 7, participants classified “enjoying commenting brand page posts on Twitter” as 2.7. In average, in a scale from 1 to 7, participants classified “enjoying retweeting brand page posts on Twitter” as 3.2 (Appendix 6 – Figure 12).

4.1.4. Data reliability

To assess data reliability, we used the method developed by Cronbach (1951), the Cronbach's Alpha. The results from the measurement of the present research variables are in Table 8.

Hill & Hill (2005) classify as excellent in internal consistency all the scales that have a value greater than $\alpha > .9$, confirming the reliability of all scales.

Dimensions of scales	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Warmth (BW)	4	.947
Brand Attitude (BA)	5	.949
Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE)	5	.930
Emoji-text Congruence (Cong)	5	.966

Table 8: Scales' Reliability Test. Source: SPSS Output

4.1.5. Descriptive statistics

The dimensions of each scale were evaluated in a scale between 1 and 7, except for the variable IE, which is a binary/dummy variable. This variable was built based on the stimuli, where we isolated the conditions with the presence of emojis, which assumes the value of "1" in the dummy, and "0" the conditions that do not include emojis.

The mean of the dummy variable IE was .4949 (SD = .50083). Regarding BW and BA, the means were 4.5836 (SD = 1.35194) and 5.0874 (SD = 1.20035), respectively. The mean of CBE was 3.1331 (SD = 1.44825). Lastly, Cong had a 4.7290 mean (SD = 1.32949). The variable with the highest mean is BA and the

lowest is CBE, since the mean of a dummy variable, like IE, does not compare directly to the other, because it is not in a scale from 1 to 7, but from 0 to 1. All this information is presented in Table 9.

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Inclusive Emojis (IE)	.4949	.50083
Brand Warmth (BW)	4.5836	1.35194
Brand Attitude (BA)	5.0874	1.20035
Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE)	3.1331	1.44825
Emoji-text Congruence (Cong)	4.7290	1.32949

Table 9: Descriptive statistics. Source: SPSS Output

4.1.5.1. Descriptive statistics: Stimuli comparison

Four separate *t-tests* were performed to examine whether there is a distinction between means of the variables within the presented research model. The independent samples were divided into two groups: presence and absence of inclusive emojis. The variables tested were BW, BA, and CBE. The tests' results are reproduced in Table 14 (Appendix 7). The difference between the two samples was significant ($p < .001$) for all variables considering the presence or absence of IE, with a confidence level of 95%. The highest mean difference occurs between the presence and absence of IE in CBE variable (MDiff = -.90521), then presence and absence of IE in BW variable (MDiff = -.94720) and, finally, presence and absence of IE in BA variable (MDiff = -1.05309).

Additionally, to understand the difference between means of the variable Cong, the data collected was subject to an ANOVA test. This variable requires

the specific comparison between the four stimuli, that is, between the combinations of presence and absence of IE and inclusive text in the tweets. This way, the ANOVA test is used due to the need to compare more than two samples. This analysis is presented in Table 15 (Appendix 7). Thus, the test confirms that the difference between the four samples was significant ($p < .001$), with a confidence level of 95%. Also, post-hoc tests were included in the analysis to help understand and validate the results, determining specific differences between the samples. These tests are represented in Table 16 (Appendix 7).

4.1.6. Correlation Analysis

Data collected was analysed regarding correlation, using Pearson Correlation to establish relationships between variables: IE, BW, BA, CBE, and Cong (Appendix 8 – Table 17). BW, BA, and CBE have a positive and significant correlation ($p < .001$) with IE, however there is no significant correlation between IE and Cong (-.36). Thus, H6 is rejected. On contrary, IE has a positive and significant correlation with BW (.351). BW has a positive and significant correlation with BA (.729). IE has a positive and significant correlation with BA (.439). BA has a positive and significant correlation with CBE (.592). And lastly, IE has a positive and significant correlation with CBE (.313). Therefore, H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 seem to be supported, in terms of correlation, but we will conduct a more robust analysis to examine the hypotheses in the serial mediation regression analysis, since some of these correlations are not very strong.

4.2. Serial Mediation Analysis with Moderation

To conduct the previously proposed research model and examine the impact of the mediator variables BW and BA, and the moderation effect of Cong in the relationship between IE and CBE, a serial mediation analysis with moderation was performed using the SmartPLS Software. CBE was defined as the dependent variable (Y) and IE as the independent variable or predictor (X). BW was defined as mediator variable number 1 and BA as mediator variable number 2.

To understand if the hypotheses are supported, a path analysis was conducted, using a PLS algorithm that accounts for moderating and nonlinear effects (mediation), examining the statistical significance of the paths of each hypothesis, that can be measured by the direct or indirect effects between variables. The analysis was computed based on a confidence level of 95%.

Regarding direct effects, the results support that the presence of IE positively predicts BW, $\beta_{H1} = .736$, $t(293) = 7.524$, $p = .000$. On the same hand, BW positively predicts BA, $\beta_{H2} = .658$, $t(293) = 16.157$, $p = .000$. Also, BA positively predicts CBE, $\beta_{H4} = .573$, $t(293) = 11.618$, $p = .000$. IE positively predicts BA, $\beta_{H3} = .411$, $t(293) = 4.494$, $p = .000$. However, the moderator effect of Cong does not affect the relationship between IE and BW, $\beta_{H6} = .085$, $t(293) = .741$, $p = .459$. Neither IE directly predicts CBE, $\beta_{H5} = .134$, $t(293) = 1.157$, $p = .247$ (Figure 6). Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported. Nevertheless, H5 and H6 are rejected. To test the other hypotheses, indirect effects between variables should be analysed to understand the significance of the pathways, i.e., the mediation effect.

Hence, considering the indirect effects, results indicate that BW mediates the relationship between IE and BA, β_{H7} (indirect) = .484, SE = .064, $t(293) = 7.540$, $p = .000$, 95%, CI[.363, .611]. Thus, H7 is supported. On another hand, indirect effects indicate that BA mediates the relationship between IE and CBE, β_{H8} (indirect) = .236, SE = .064, $t(293) = .053$, $p = .000$, 95%, CI[.135, .342]. Consequently,

H8 is supported. Lastly, regarding the serial mediation as a whole, estimates support the conclusion that the relationship between IE and CBE, mediated by BW and BA, is in fact observable, β_{H9} (indirect) = .277, SE = .064, $t(293) = 6.032$, $p = .000$, 95%, CI[.194, .373]. This pathway fully accounted for the overall impact of the presence of IE on CBE, with the direct effect being non-significant (Tables 18 and 19). Thus, H9 is supported, even though H5 is rejected.

To wrap up, results reveal that 36.6% of the variance in CBE is explained by the model [$R^2=.366$].

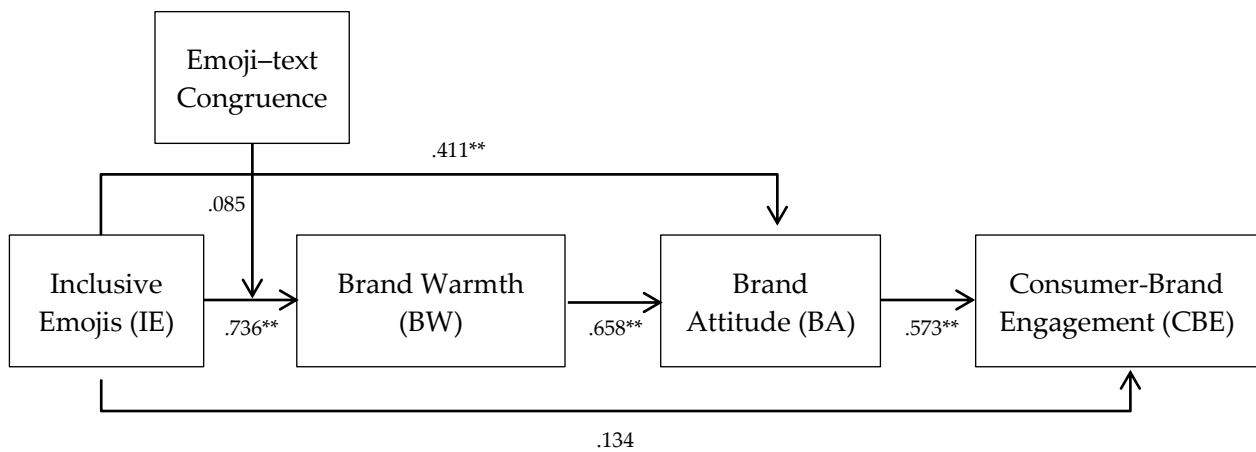


Figure 6: Serial Mediation Regression with Moderation results. ** $p < .001$. Source: SmartPLS Output

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine how the presence of IE in brand communication impacts CBE, namely by increasing perceptions of BW and BA. Moreover, we examined to what extent the tweet having congruency between the inclusive emojis and text presented in the tweet strengthens the effect of the emojis on perceived BW.

Results showed that the presence of IE in brand communication directly and positively affect BW perceptions as well as BA. Moreover, BW affects positively BA and mediate part of the effect of the presence of IE in BA. As expected, BA is a positive predictor of CBE. Results indicate that the positive effect of the presence of IE is exerted through full mediation, which means that, IE promote CBE by means of increasing both BW and BA, being the direct relationship between the presence of IE in brand communication and CBE not statistically significant. We did not find support for the moderation of Cong. It is relevant to mention that all the regression conclusions contemplate a confidence level of 95%.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The topic of brand inclusivity is gaining prominence in marketing and branding research (Licsandru & Cui, 2018). The present investigation makes a considerable contribution to the literature on brand communication, in particular on the use of inclusive branding strategies on SNS, namely the use of inclusive emojis. Although previous studies already have some foundation on the effects of emojis on certain consumer behaviour, this study is pioneer in studying the effect of inclusive emojis on consumer behaviour.

Globally, companies are increasingly using emojis in their digital communications with consumers to enhance engagement, which is the basis of this discussion (Arya et al., 2018). Arya et al. (2018) proved the effect of emojis as visual stimuli for consumers, affecting their decision-making process towards companies. In parallel, some authors explained that the use of emojis in communication were impactful in brand warmth perception (Boutet et al., 2021). Nonetheless, inclusive emojis have not been given specific attention in previous studies. Inclusive emojis are defined in this research as emojis that represent different races, religions, etc.

In the present study, we could establish that the presence of IE in brand's tweets shapes the perception of BW, that is, participants see the brand as more friendly and good-natured when it uses inclusive emojis. This corroborates and adds to the conclusions made by authors in previous literature that explain the effect of inclusive strategies on brand warmth (Boutet et al., 2021; Byron & Baldrige, 2007; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012; Glikson et al., 2018; Hsieh & Tseng, 2017).

At the same time, when IE are present in tweets, not only is the BW higher, but also the BA towards the brand. The results show that using IE makes consumers feel that the brand is more appealing and pleasant. The use of IE helps to make the brand more interesting and, in part, make consumers react better to brand beliefs. Thus, we were able to give even more support to the existing literature in this regard (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2019; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; E. Park, 2019; Raza et al., 2020). These results also support previous research stating that when consumers characterise the brand as, for example, interesting, pleasant, and favourable, they tend to engage more with that brand (D. Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; C. T. Lee & Hsieh, 2019; van Doorn et al., 2010).

The most important finding of this research is that that using inclusive emojis generate more engagement of respondents, however only if these emojis are able

to generate brand perceptions of warmth and a general positive attitude towards the brand (as good, appealing, likeable, for example).

Finally, although authors like Lee and Schumann (2004) had managed to establish that text-image congruence moderates the effectiveness of ads, in the case of tweets, it was not possible to find support for the hypothesis that the relationship between inclusive emojis perception of BW is intensified when there is inclusive text together with IE.

5.2. Managerial implications

From a managerial viewpoint, this research will help brands understand to what extent the use of IE makes their social media communication and branding strategy more effective, particularly in the industry on which the study is based on, the airline industry.

Our study reinforces the need to use inclusive strategies in brand communication, namely inclusive emojis, if brands want to increase customers' perception of warmth about their brand, as well as increase perceptions of brand interest and goodness. If the brand's goal is to get closer to customers and be perceived as a brand that is really kind and moved by good-natured causes, then maybe it's a worthy strategy to incorporate IE in the brand's tweets. If brands recognise that consumers already have this feeling for the brand, whether they feel the brand as warm and that acts good, then using inclusive emojis in their tweets can potentially generate more engagement with the tweet, increasing the number of likes, retweets, and comments. On the other hand, the results show that, using inclusive emojis in tweets, having or not having a text that matches the emojis, that is, an inclusive text, has the same effect in creating a feeling that the brand is good-natured and warm.

If we want to generalise, this model also brings some good insights into online consumer behaviour towards brands on Twitter, which can be useful for companies' managers. Firstly, it was proved in this model that when consumers perceive the brand as, for example, good-natured and friendly by the tweets it creates, then they will perceive it as a more interesting and pleasant brand. Secondly, when brands' tweets make consumers characterise it as good and likeable, they are more likely to engage with the tweet, potentially promoting an increase in the interest capturing and retention of consumers, as well as an increase in the number of likes, retweets, and comments in the tweet.

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1. Main Conclusions

The aim of this investigation is to understand the impact of different variables in the relationship between the presence of IE in brand communication on CBE on Twitter. The analysis considers a confidence level of 95%. These variables are placed in the research model as to have mediator effects, perceive BW and BA, and a moderator effect, Cong, in the relationship between the dependent variable and the predictor. Results showed that the effect of IE in brand communication in BW is positive, as well as in BA. Also, BW also affects positively BA. Thus, BW does mediate the effect of the presence of IE in brand communication in BA. Additionally, BA was proven to affect CBE in a positive scale. Findings also suggest that BA mediates the relationship between the presence of IE in brand communication and CBE.

In conclusion, despite the direct relationship between the presence of IE in brand communication and CBE is not statistically relevant, if we consider perceived BW and BA as mediators of this relationship, then this serial mediation pathway is significant and positive, meaning the presence of IE in brand communication affect CBE positively, when there is mediation of BW and BA. The effects of Cong on the relationship between IE and BW was not supported.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This investigation has some limitations, which will be presented together with the future research avenues that they stimulate.

Regarding the methodology used, the principles of the experimental design method were followed, using the quantitative data collection process. Although this provides greater coverage of responses, there may be less detail about the respondents' opinion, affecting the model's output. Also, the data was collected only through a questionnaire, where it is more difficult to provide a context to the study, which may limit the conclusions. As a suggestion, in future research, it would be interesting to collect data using qualitative research methods for a greater methodological scope, e.g., semi structured interviews with consumers or focus groups to increase the understanding on the relationships studied.

As far as the sample is concerned, it also has some limitations. Regarding age, almost 50% of respondents are over 35 years old, which may imply less engagement on SNS, such as Twitter, right from the start. In future investigations, it may be relevant to expand the sample, ensuring that the dispersion between ages, as well as gender, is symmetric. The fact that the questionnaire is in Portuguese also limits the quality of the sample, being restricted to Portuguese-speaking people. In future studies, it would be relevant to collect data in other languages and ensure that the sample is culturally more diversified.

Furthermore, the fact that the stimuli were designed by the researcher, despite having been validated in the pre-test, may be a limitation to this investigation. Furthermore, including only emojis of different skin tones and religious traditions can be reductive in the inclusiveness analysis of emojis. Thus, the suggestion for the future would be to expand the set of emojis considered. Also, it may be interesting in the future to study stimuli that are more contrasting, and

that each participant could be exposed to more than one stimulus, so that the analysis regarding emoji-text congruence is supported on more evidence. Moreover, the fact that study is based on Twitter stimuli may also condition the response of participants, who may, at this moment, have more engagement in other SNS in their daily lives, such as Instagram or Tik Tok. Another limitation is the fact that the brand presented in the stimuli is fictitious. Despite implying a greater control in estimating the results and avoiding bias, this conditions the responses of participants, since they do not have any attachment to the brand. Using brands known by participants could result in greater brand familiarity and induce a higher engagement in the response to the questionnaire.

To conclude, the research model itself can create some barriers to the investigation. In the future, we suggest expanding the set of variables under study, to better understand the effect of using inclusive emojis in brands' social media marketing strategies. For example, including variables such as familiarity with each type of emojis can reduce any bias that may have existed due to lack of knowledge of their meaning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pre-test

O presente questionário insere-se no âmbito de dissertação de Mestrado em Gestão da Universidade Católica Portuguesa | Católica Porto Business School. O objetivo desta investigação é examinar o comportamento de consumidores a conteúdos nas suas redes sociais, focando na inclusividade social das marcas.

O questionário é anónimo e confidencial e a informação recolhida vai ser utilizada apenas para o propósito desta investigação. As suas respostas são essenciais para o desenvolvimento da nossa investigação. O preenchimento deste questionário tem a duração de aproximadamente 2 minutos.

Agradecemos, desde já, a sua disponibilidade e participação neste estudo.

Section 1

Li e compreendi as informações descritas acima e concordo em participar neste estudo voluntariamente.

- Sim
- Não

Section 2

Por favor, escolha uma das seguintes letras (este passo é necessário para que lhe seja atribuída uma versão aleatória do questionário):

- A
- B

Section 3 - Version A

Nesta investigação, será estudado o impacto de determinado conteúdo digital na rede social Twitter de uma companhia aérea fictícia chamada "Invicta Airlines".



Por favor, classifique o tweet que observou quanto à:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Congruência entre texto e emojis							
Inclusividade social da mensagem							

Section 3 - Version B

Nesta investigação, será estudado o impacto de determinado conteúdo digital na rede social Twitter de uma companhia aérea fictícia chamada "Invicta Airlines".



Por favor, classifique o tweet que observou quanto à:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Congruência entre texto e emojis							
Inclusividade social da mensagem							

Section 4

1. Idade (ex: 25): _____
2. Género
 - Feminino
 - Masculino
 - Prefiro não dizer
 - Outra: _____

Appendix 2 – Pre-test stimuli

Stimuli A



Stimuli B



Appendix 3 – Pre-test results

Congruence	Mean	Standard deviation
Stimulus A	4.30	1.811
Stimulus B	5.27	1.668

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics for Congruence. Source: SPSS Output

Differences	Mean difference	Std. deviation difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Stimulus A and B	-.970	.332	-2.918	.004

Table 11: Congruence Independent Samples Tests for selected subjects. Source: SPSS Output

Inclusivity	Mean	Standard deviation
Stimulus A	5.34	1.721
Stimulus B	5.53	1.634

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics for Inclusivity. Source: SPSS Output

Differences	Mean difference	Std. deviation difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Stimulus A and B	-.186	.321	-.580	.563

Table 13: Inclusivity Independent Samples Tests for selected subjects. Source: SPSS Output

Appendix 4 – Questionnaire

O presente questionário insere-se no âmbito de dissertação de Mestrado em Gestão da Universidade Católica Portuguesa | Católica Porto Business School. O objetivo desta investigação é examinar o comportamento de consumidores a conteúdos nas suas redes sociais, focando na inclusividade social das marcas.

O questionário é anónimo e confidencial e a informação recolhida vai ser utilizada apenas para o propósito desta investigação. As suas respostas são essenciais para o desenvolvimento da nossa investigação. O preenchimento deste questionário tem a duração de aproximadamente 5 minutos.

Agradecemos, desde já, a sua disponibilidade e participação neste estudo.

Section 2

Por favor, escolha uma das seguintes letras (este passo é necessário para que lhe seja atribuída uma versão aleatória do questionário):

- A
- B

Em média, com que frequência utiliza esta rede social, seja ativamente ou apenas para consulta?

- Nunca
- Menos de 1 vez por dia
- 1 – 5 vezes por dia
- 6 – 10 vezes por dia
- Mais de 10 vezes por dia

As afirmações seguintes referem-se a aspetos associados ao seu comportamento, de forma genérica, na rede social Twitter.

Classifique, numa escala de 1 (Discordo Totalmente) a 7 (Concordo Totalmente), o seu grau de concordância com cada uma das seguintes afirmações:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Eu gosto de pôr gosto em tweets de páginas de marcas no Twitter							
Eu gosto de comentar tweets de páginas de marcas no Twitter							
Eu gosto de fazer retweet de tweets de páginas de marcas no Twitter							

Por favor, escolha uma das seguintes letras (este passo é necessário para que lhe seja atribuída uma versão aleatória do questionário):

- A
- B
- C
- D

Section 3 – version A

Nesta investigação, será estudado o impacto de determinado conteúdo digital na rede social Twitter de uma companhia aérea fictícia chamada "Invicta Airlines".

Por favor, responda às próximas perguntas com base no tweet apresentado.



Considerando o tweet que acabou de observar, com que percepção ficou da marca "Invicta Airlines"? Considere a escala de 1 (Discordo Totalmente) a 7 (Concordo Totalmente) para classificar o seu grau de concordância com cada uma das seguintes afirmações:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca amigável							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca de natureza boa							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca gentil							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca calorosa							

Considerando o tweet anteriormente apresentado, e usando as escalas apresentadas abaixo, como caracteriza a marca Invicta Airlines?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Desinteressante								Interessante
Má								Boa
Desagradável								Agradável
Desfavorável								Favorável
Antipática								Simpática

Considerando os seus comportamentos habituais nas redes sociais, indique qual a probabilidade de interagir com o tweet anteriormente apresentado da marca Invicta Airlines, se ele aparecesse no seu feed. Considere a escala de 1 (nada provável) a 7 (extremamente provável).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
O tweet da Invicta Airlines chamar-me-ia a atenção							
O tweet da Invicta Airlines despertaria o meu interesse							
Poria gosto no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Comentaria no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Faria retweet do tweet da Invicta Airlines							

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca amigável							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca de natureza boa							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca gentil							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca calorosa							

Considerando o tweet anteriormente apresentado, e usando as escalas apresentadas abaixo, como caracteriza a marca Invicta Airlines?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Desinteressante								Interessante
Má								Boa
Desagradável								Agradável
Desfavorável								Favorável
Antipática								Simpática

Considerando os seus comportamentos habituais nas redes sociais, indique qual a probabilidade de interagir com o tweet anteriormente apresentado da marca Invicta Airlines, se ele aparecesse no seu feed. Considere a escala de 1 (nada provável) a 7 (extremamente provável).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
O tweet da Invicta Airlines chamar-me-ia a atenção							
O tweet da Invicta Airlines despertaria o meu interesse							

Poria gosto no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Comentaria no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Faria retweet do tweet da Invicta Airlines							

Section 3 – version C

Nesta investigação, será estudado o impacto de determinado conteúdo digital na rede social Twitter de uma companhia aérea fictícia chamada "Invicta Airlines".

Por favor, responda às próximas perguntas com base no tweet apresentado.



Considerando o tweet que acabou de observar, com que perceção ficou da marca "Invicta Airlines"? Considere a escala de 1 (Discordo Totalmente) a 7 (Concordo Totalmente) para classificar o seu grau de concordância com cada uma das seguintes afirmações:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca amigável							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca de natureza boa							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca gentil							

A Invicta Airlines é uma marca calorosa							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Considerando o tweet anteriormente apresentado, e usando as escalas apresentadas abaixo, como caracteriza a marca Invicta Airlines?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Desinteressante								Interessante
Má								Boa
Desagradável								Agradável
Desfavorável								Favorável
Antipática								Simpática

Considerando os seus comportamentos habituais nas redes sociais, indique qual a probabilidade de interagir com o tweet anteriormente apresentado da marca Invicta Airlines, se ele aparecesse no seu feed. Considere a escala de 1 (nada provável) a 7 (extremamente provável).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
O tweet da Invicta Airlines chamar-me-ia a atenção							
O tweet da Invicta Airlines despertaria o meu interesse							
Poria gosto no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Comentaria no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Faria retweet do tweet da Invicta Airlines							

(Concordo Totalmente) para classificar o seu grau de concordância com cada uma das seguintes afirmações:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca amigável							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca de natureza boa							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca gentil							
A Invicta Airlines é uma marca calorosa							

Considerando o tweet anteriormente apresentado, e usando as escalas apresentadas abaixo, como caracteriza a marca Invicta Airlines?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Desinteressante								Interessante
Má								Boa
Desagradável								Agradável
Desfavorável								Favorável
Antipática								Simpática

Considerando os seus comportamentos habituais nas redes sociais, indique qual a probabilidade de interagir com o tweet anteriormente apresentado da marca Invicta Airlines, se ele aparecesse no seu feed. Considere a escala de 1 (nada provável) a 7 (extremamente provável).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
O tweet da Invicta Airlines chamar-me-ia a atenção							
O tweet da Invicta Airlines despertaria o meu interesse							
Poria gosto no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Comentaria no tweet da Invicta Airlines							
Faria retweet do tweet da Invicta Airlines							

Considerando o tweet anteriormente apresentado, e usando as escalas apresentadas abaixo, como caracteriza o nível de congruência entre os emojis e o texto no tweet?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Desajustado								Ajustado
Não combinam								Combinam
Inconsistente								Consistente
Baixo nível de coerência								Alto nível de coerência
Pouco claro								Muito claro

Section 4

1. Idade (ex: 25): _____

2. Género

- Feminino
- Masculino

- Prefiro não dizer
 - Outra: _____
3. Estado civil
- Solteiro, nunca casado
 - Casado ou em comunhão de facto
 - Viúvo
 - Divorciado
4. Educação
- Sem escolaridade
 - Ensino Básico
 - Ensino Secundário
 - Licenciatura
 - Pós-graduação
 - Mestrado
 - Doutoramento
 - Outro

Appendix 5 – Questionnaire stimuli

Stimuli A



Invicta Airlines ✓
@InvictaAirlinesPT

...

✈ Pronto para a descolagem? Venha conhecer as nossas novas rotas! Voamos além fronteiras para proporcionar as melhores experiências durante a sua viagem! #FelizDiaDoViajante invictairlines.com/2023

🗨 4 🔄 617 ❤ 1.855 📄 95,3 mil 📌

Stimuli B

 **Invicta Airlines** ✓
@InvictaAirlinesPT

✈ Pronto para a descolagem? Venha conhecer as nossas novas rotas! Voamos além fronteiras para proporcionar as melhores experiências durante a sua viagem! 🌍👨👩👦👧👶👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤
#FelizDiaDoViajante
invictairlines.com/2023

4 617 1.855 95,3 mil

Stimuli C

 **Invicta Airlines** ✓
@InvictaAirlinesPT

✈ Pronto para a descolagem? Venha conhecer as nossas novas rotas! Voamos para além das diferenças e não esquecemos que a diversidade e inclusão social são parte fundamental da nossa identidade e cultura! #FelizDiaDaDiversidadeCultural
invictairlines.com/2023

4 617 1.855 95,3 mil

Stimuli D

 **Invicta Airlines** ✓
@InvictaAirlinesPT

✈ Pronto para a descolagem? Venha conhecer as nossas novas rotas! Voamos para além das diferenças e não esquecemos que a diversidade e inclusão social são parte fundamental da nossa identidade e cultura! 🌍👨👩👦👧👶👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤
#FelizDiaDaDiversidadeCultural
invictairlines.com/2023

4 617 1.855 95,3 mil

Appendix 6 – Demographic characterisation

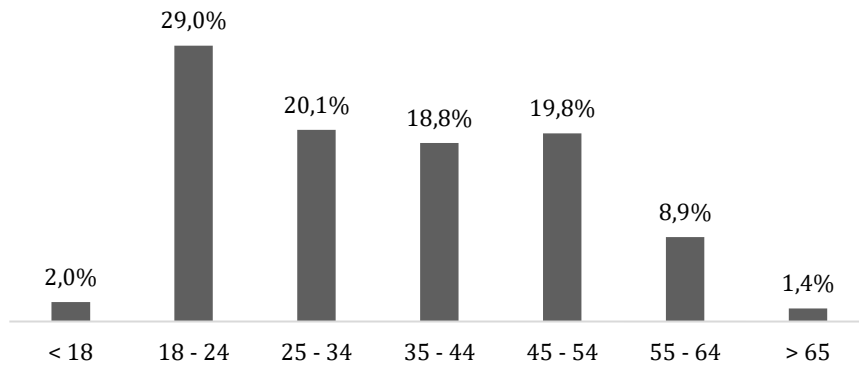


Figure 7: Social demographic characteristics: age distribution. Source: SPSS Output

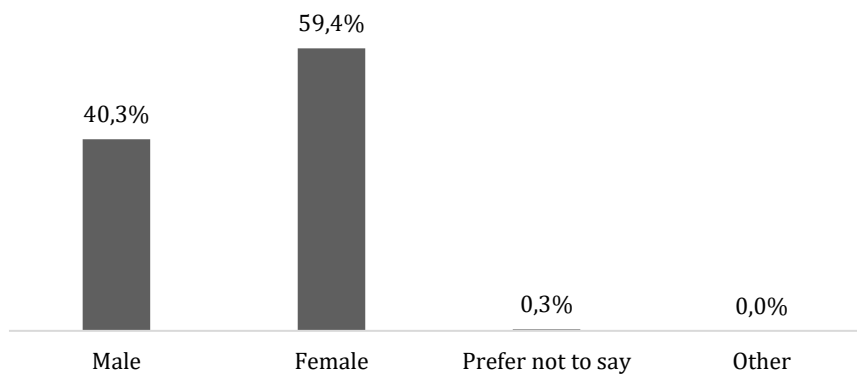


Figure 8: Social demographic characteristics: gender distribution. Source: SPSS Output

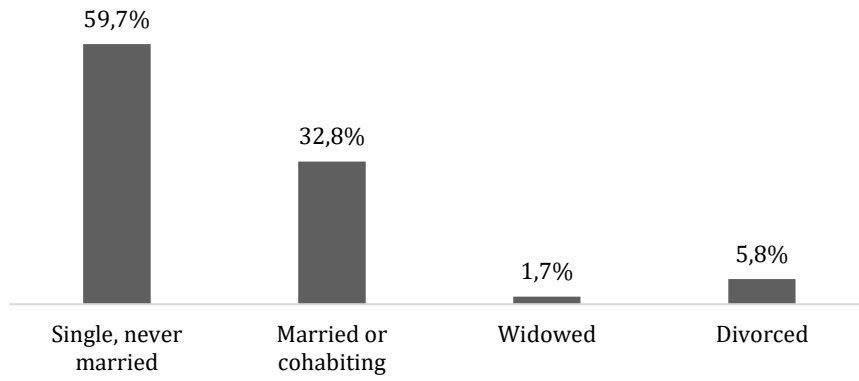


Figure 9: Social demographic characteristics: marital status distribution. Source: SPSS Output

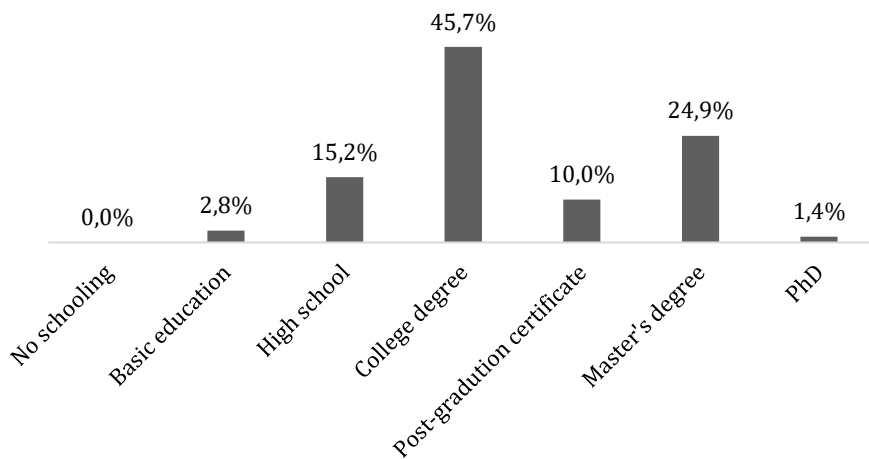


Figure 10: Social demographic characteristics: educational level distribution. Source: SPSS Output

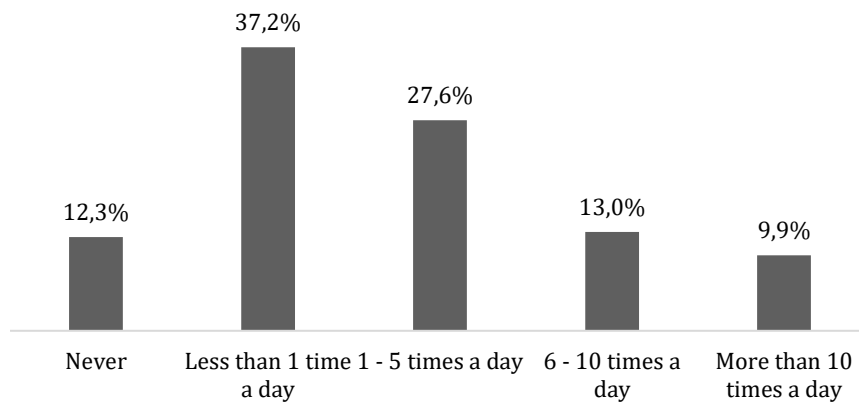


Figure 11: Social media usage: Twitter usage distribution. Source: SPSS Output

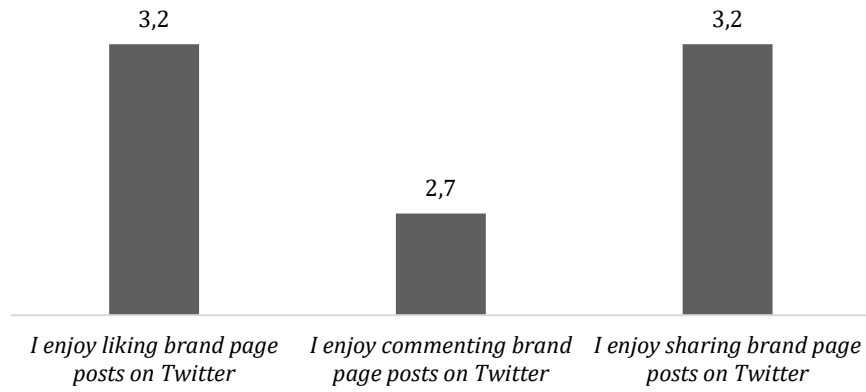


Figure 12: Social media usage: Twitter users' behaviour scale. Source: SPSS Output

Appendix 7 – Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. deviation	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	Mean difference	LLCI	ULCI
Brand Warmth (BW)	4.5836	1.35194					
IE (absent)	4.1149	1.20669	-6.386	<.001	-.94720	-1.23915	-.65526
IE (present)	5.0621	1.32796					
Brand Attitude (BA)	5.0874	1.20035					
IE (absent)	4.5662	1.03632	-8.337	<.001	-1.05309	-1.30171	-.80448
IE (present)	5.6193	1.12307					
Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE)	3.1331	1.44825					
IE (absent)	2.6851	1.26644	-5.614	<.001	-.90521	-1.22262	-.58780
IE (present)	3.5903	1.48293					

Table 14: *T-test* for BW, BA, and CBE. Source: SPSS Output

Cong	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Between groups	33.969	3	11.323	6.787	<.001
Within groups	482.154	289	1.668		
Total	516.123	292			

Table 15: Oneway ANOVA test. Source: SPSS Output

Comparisons		Std. deviation	Mean difference	Significance	LLCI	ULCI
A	B	.21311	.47433	.119	-.0764	1.0250
	C	.21236	-.18857	.811	-.7373	.3602
	D	.21236	-.46528	.128	-1.0140	.0835
B	A	.21311	-.47433	.119	-1.0250	.0764
	C	.21454	-.66290	.012	-1.2173	-.1085
	D	.21454	-.93961	<.001	-1.4940	-.3852
C	A	.21236	.18857	.811	-.3602	.7373
	B	.21454	.66290	.012	.1085	1.2173
	D	.21380	-.27671	.567	-.8292	.2757
D	A	.21236	.46528	.128	-.0835	1.0140
	B	.21454	.93961	<.001	.3852	1.4940
	C	.21380	.27671	.567	-.2757	.8292

Table 16: Post-hoc tests. Source: SPSS Output

Appendix 8 – Correlation Analysis

Variables	IE	BW	BA	CBE	Cong
IE	1	.351**	.439**	.313**	-.036
BW		1	.729**	.645**	.442**
BA			1	.592**	.533**
CBE				1	.285**
Cong					1

** Correlation is significant at the level of .001 (2-tailed)

Table 17: Pearson Correlation Analysis. Source: SPSS Output

Appendix 9 – Serial Mediation Analysis with Moderation

	Path coefficients (β)	Mean	Std. deviation	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	LLCI	ULCI
BA -> CBE	0,573	0,574	0,049	11,618	0,000	0,472	0,664
BW -> BA	0,658	0,657	0,041	16,157	0,000	0,571	0,731
Cong -> BW	0,409	0,409	0,088	4,662	0,000	0,233	0,577
IE -> BA	0,411	0,414	0,092	4,494	0,000	0,234	0,598
IE -> BW	0,736	0,741	0,098	7,524	0,000	0,549	0,927
IE -> CBE	0,134	0,135	0,116	1,157	0,247	-0,093	0,365
Cong x IE -> BW	0,085	0,084	0,115	0,741	0,459	-0,137	0,315

Table 18: Direct effects between variables of the regression. Source: SmartPLS Output

	Path coefficients (β)	Mean	Std. deviation	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	LLCI	ULCI
BW -> CBE	0,377	0,378	0,048	7,821	0,000	0,281	0,471
Cong -> BA	0,269	0,270	0,065	4,127	0,000	0,144	0,400
Cong -> CBE	0,154	0,156	0,044	3,469	0,001	0,076	0,249
IE -> BA	0,484	0,486	0,064	7,540	0,000	0,363	0,611
IE -> CBE	0,513	0,516	0,065	7,879	0,000	0,392	0,649
Cong x IE -> BA	0,056	0,055	0,076	0,740	0,459	-0,088	0,206
Cong x IE -> CBE	0,032	0,031	0,044	0,736	0,462	-0,053	0,119
Cong x IE -> BW -> BA	0,056	0,055	0,076	0,740	0,459	-0,088	0,206
IE -> BW -> BA	0,484	0,486	0,064	7,540	0,000	0,363	0,611
Cong -> BW -> BA	0,269	0,270	0,065	4,127	0,000	0,144	0,400
Cong -> BW -> BA -> CBE	0,154	0,156	0,044	3,469	0,001	0,076	0,249
BW -> BA -> CBE	0,377	0,378	0,048	7,821	0,000	0,281	0,471
Cong x IE -> BW -> BA -> CBE	0,032	0,031	0,044	0,736	0,462	-0,053	0,119
IE -> BA -> CBE	0,236	0,237	0,053	4,438	0,000	0,135	0,342
IE -> BW -> BA -> CBE	0,277	0,279	0,046	6,032	0,000	0,194	0,373

Table 19: Indirect effects between variables of the regression. Source: SmartPLS Output