Not a Mirror Image: The Differential Effect of Emojis on Judgments of Positively and Negatively Valenced Messages

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Abstract

While previous research has shown the effects of emojis on individuals' perceptions and judgments, little is known about the effect that emojis have on messages with positive or negative valence. We may intuitively expect that a negative emoji (😡) would increase the negative effects of a negative message, and a positive emoji (😁) would increase the positive effects of a positive message. In contrast to this mirror-image hypothesis, in this research we find that the presence of a negative emoji makes a negative message appear to be less negative, while a positive emoji has no substantial effect on positive messages.

Method

- 112 undergraduate students
- 3 (Emoji: control vs. face vs. non-face) x 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects design

Positive Condition

Amazing. This gave me chills, so excited for this. Wow. It's sad to see that some people aren't going to buy this game. I CAN'T WAIT TO GET THIS GAME! If you buy this game, you are giving money to one of the best game developers in the world. Please buy this game. (😁 , 🔥)

Negative Condition

This game looks soooo bad. Pure garbage. It's sad to see that some people are going to buy this game. Say what you want about it, but PLEASE DON'T BUY IT! If you buy this game, you are willingly giving money to one of the worst game developers in the world. Please don't buy this game. (😡 , 🔥)

Results

- Positive comments were rated as more positive (M = 5.353) compared to negative comments (M = 2.044; $F_{(1, 110)}$ = 121.710, $p<.001$).
- Product perception higher in negative condition (M = 3.238) compared to positive condition (M = 4.371; $F_{(1, 108)}$ = 22.754, $p<.001$)
- Significant interaction between message valence and type of emoji as predictors of product perception ($F_{(2, 104)}$ = 4.103; $p<.05$; η^2 = .073)
- In negative valence condition, differences among emoji type significant ($F_{(2, 104)}$ = 4.946; $p<.01$; η^2 = .087)
- In positive valence condition, differences among emoji type insignificant ($F_{(2, 104)}$ = .704; ns; η^2 = .013)

Product Perception
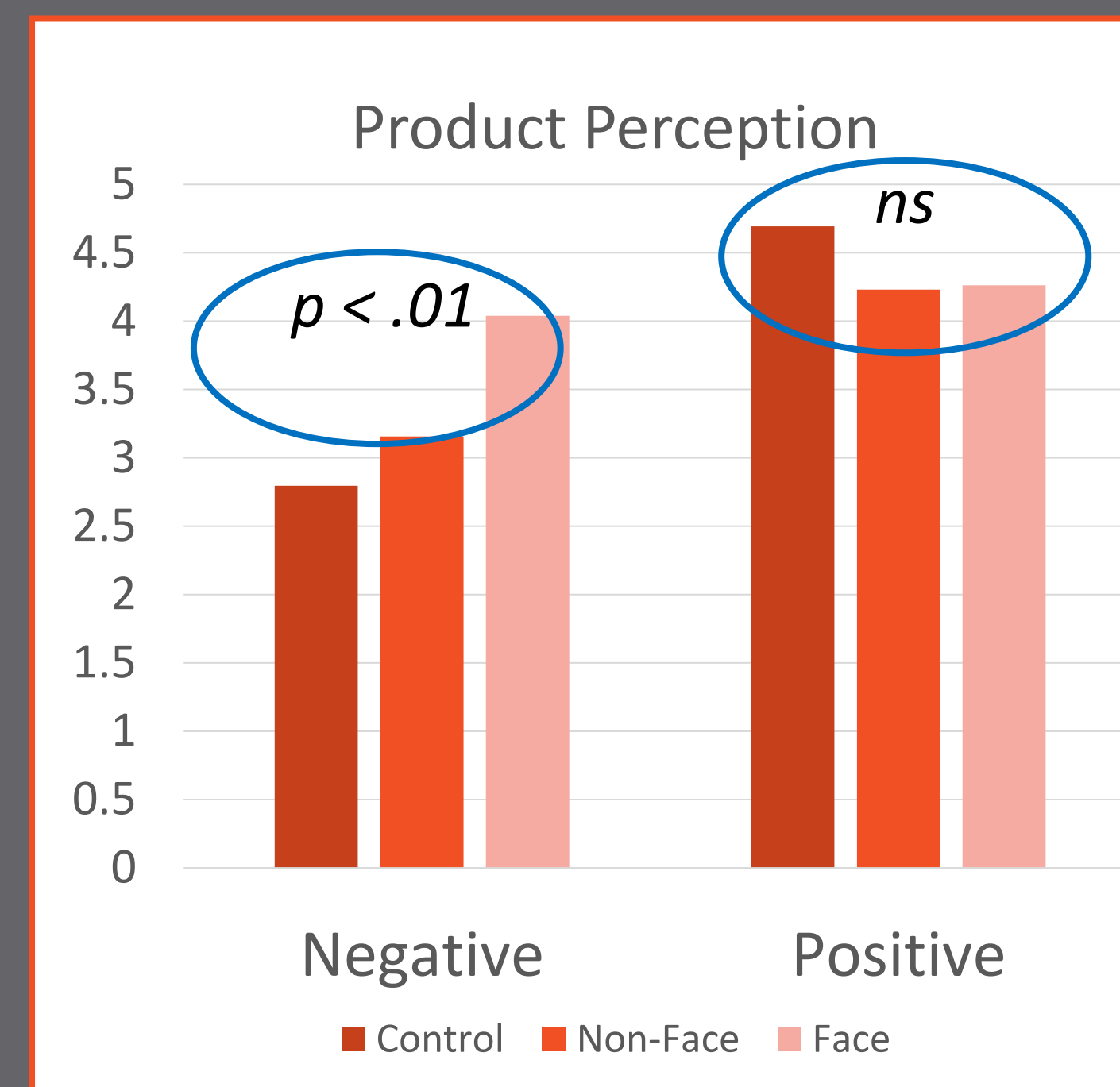
Discussion

Our results challenge the intuitively compelling notion that the use of emojis should have similar effects for positively and negatively valenced messages. Particularly, the presence of a negative emoji at the end of a negatively valenced message heightens product perception.

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