BOOSTING PURCHASE INTENTIONS WITH EMOJIS
(How Somethinc's Firm-Generated Content On Social Media X Attracts Consumers)

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Abstract

Emojis have rapidly evolved with the advancement of online communication, becoming a staple in various marketing communications, including Firm-Generated Content (FGC). Despite their prevalence, research on the impact of emojis in FGC, particularly on purchase intentions, remains limited. This study aims to explore the influence of emoji usage in FGC on purchase intentions, focusing on the brand Somethinc in the beauty industry. The study targets followers of Somethinc's account on Platform X, investigating emojis as a dependent variable affecting purchase intentions as an independent variable, with positive affect as a mediator and product type as a moderator. This descriptive research employs a quantitative method using SEM-PLS to analyze data collected via purposive sampling in a one-shot cross-sectional manner. Findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between emojis and purchase intentions, mediated by positive affect. The product type, whether hedonic or utilitarian, moderates the positive affect induced by emojis in FGC. These results highlight the impact of emojis in enhancing positive affect and purchase intentions in FGC.

Keywords: *Emoji, Purchase Intention, Digital Marketing, Firm Generated Content*

1. INTRODUCTION

The beauty product sector is a significant driver of sales growth within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market in Indonesia. Sales in this category increased by 1.03% year-over-year compared to 2022, with beauty products accounting for 49% of total purchases. Notably, 39.4% of respondents frequently buy facial care products, followed by body care products at 13.7% (Yonatan, 2024). Beauty product purchases hold the largest share at 49%, followed by food and beverages at 20.4%, health products at 18.7%, and mother and baby products at 11.9%. The FMCG market in 2024 is projected to exceed a value of 59 billion, indicating substantial growth potential (Yonatan, 2024). The significant impact of beauty product purchases could be attributed to several factors in 2022 and 2023, including the emergence of local brands intensifying competition (Annur, 2024). The number of beauty product manufacturers in Indonesia increased from 2022 to 2023. The market size of this industry nationally in 2023 is estimated to reach 476,919 products, potentially growing more than tenfold over the past five years. Globally, the market size is projected to reach USD 473.21 billion by 2028, with an average annual growth rate of 5.5%.

Sales of personal care and cosmetic products have seen rapid growth in recent years, paralleling the massive expansion of e-commerce in Indonesia. From 2018 to 2022, personal care and cosmetics consistently ranked among the top three sales categories on marketplaces, with transaction values reaching Rp13.287,4 trillion and transaction

volumes hitting 145.44 million (Waluyo, 2024). Ten local brands dominate Indonesia's beauty industry, with Somethinc, Scarlett, MsGlow, Avoskin, Whitelab, Azarine, Wardah, Erha, Emina, and BeautyLab being the top performers (Compas, 2022). To sustain and competing against each other for the position as the leading skincare brand, a brand must develop a competitive advantage strategy, focusing on differentiation through unique product and marketing strategies (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Leveraging information technology and digital marketing, including social media, websites, banners, video ads, and online shops, is essential for competing in the global market (Mardotillah & Ariyanti, 2023). A significant percentage of businesses use the internet for digital marketing (63.52%), followed by raw material procurement (55.52%), internal communication (44.31%), and customer management (41.06%) (Humaira, 2022). Thus, identifying a differentiated digital marketing strategy is crucial for achieving competitive advantage and maintaining Somethinc's leading position. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), businesses can exploit profitable niches with significant growth potential. Digital marketing strategies, particularly social media marketing, significantly boost purchase intentions (Ariyanti & Sahal, 2023; Erlangga, 2021; Moslehpour et al., 2021; Savitri et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, popular social media platforms for marketing include TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) with X being a niche platform for marketers (Kemp, 2024). Somethinc actively uses social media, including TikTok, Instagram, and X, for marketing. Engaging with consumers through social media content is essential for promoting products or services (Q. Yang et al., 2022). The use of emojis in marketing can elicit emotional responses from the target audience (Mladenović et al., 2023). Digital communication advancements have introduced new ways for consumers and brands to interact using non-textual cues like emojis (McShane et al., 2021). Popular emojis vary across platforms, with specific emojis frequently used on X, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitch, and Instagram (Galliot & Tarasova, 2023). In Indonesia, the "rolling on the floor laughing" emoji is widely used on Twitter (Lancu, 2022).

Emojis are used in various marketing communications, including online advertising, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), user-generated content, and firm-generated content (Maiberger et al., 2024; Mladenović et al., 2023; X. Wang et al., 2023; Q. Yang et al., 2022). Firm-generated content created by marketers to promote and introduce products, has gained prevalence with the rise of social media platforms. Social media content, including text, hashtags, images, videos, links, and emojis, enhances content credibility (Wang et al., 2023). Emojis can clarify or obscure messages depending on their use (Maiberger et al., 2024). Marketers must use emojis to evoke emotional responses from their target audience (Mladenović et al., 2023).

Informative and clear firm-generated content can be supported with using emojis, which can entertain and attract consumers, leading to increased engagement and purchase intentions (Mardhatilah & Omar, 2023). McShane et al. (2021) found that firm-generated content with more emojis received higher consumer likes and shares due to increased perceived enjoyment. However, consumer emotional responses to emojis vary by product type, whether hedonic or utilitarian (Mladenović et al., 2023; Das et al., 2019). Hedonic products typically elicit stronger emotional reactions than utilitarian products, though both can generate emotional responses (Bettiga et al., 2020). Emotions associated with

hedonic products are consciously reported, whereas those related to utilitarian products are subconsciously generated.

Previous research has examined the impact of emojis in marketing, particularly in online advertising, on purchase intentions and positive affect (Das et al., 2019; Mladenović et al., 2023). Purchase intention refers to the influence of emoji usage on consumers' buying intentions, while positive affect denotes the emotional response triggered by stimuli like emojis, affecting perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, including purchase intentions (Das et al., 2019; Mladenović et al., 2023). These studies also explored the moderating effect of hedonic and utilitarian product types on the relationship between online advertising and consumer responses. This research will investigate the impact of emoji usage in firm-generated content on X, focusing on purchase intention, with positive affect as a mediator and product type as a moderator.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the consumer's predisposition towards making a purchase before actually deciding to buy. This intention is influenced by various factors, including income, perceived benefits, and brand preferences. It can be shaped by both internal factors, such as personal preferences, and external factors, like others' attitudes or unexpected situational events (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Consumer loyalty also plays a role in shaping purchase intention, reflecting a positive attitude towards a brand and leading to future buying commitments (Charviandi et al., 2023). It is a critical aspect of business success, contributing to revenue goals (Suryawan et al., 2022).

As a significant indicator of consumer behavior, purchase intention reveals the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase after interacting with a brand. In digital marketing and social media contexts, factors such as the quality of information provided by the brand, consumer engagement with content, and brand familiarity influence purchase intention. Brands offering high-quality, relevant content are more likely to affect purchase intentions and build long-term relationships (McClure & Seock, 2020). Additionally, promotional scenarios and discount patterns impact purchase intention, with discount patterns being particularly influential. Gender differences in purchase intention are minimal, though perceptions of price attractiveness may vary (Büyükdağ et al., 2020).

2.2. Emoji

Emoji are small images, symbols, or icons standardized by the Unicode Consortium for use in electronic communication platforms (Heidari, 2023). They serve as symbols of emotional expression in digital communication, with meanings that vary based on the context of the message (Fischer & Herbert, 2021). Originally created by Shigetaka Kurita in 1999, emojis replace words and sentences in text messages to convey feelings more effectively (Wagner et al., 2020). As of now, there are approximately 3,782 emojis covering categories such as faces, weather, and food, making emojis an integral part of daily communication (Unicode, 2024).

Emojis are considered more realistic and communicative compared to traditional text messages and have gained significant popularity, especially among millennials. For instance, the "tears of joy" emoji was recognized as the word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary in 2015 (Wirza et al., 2020). They have also been shown to influence consumers' emotional responses and play a crucial role in digital marketing communication, including increasing email open rates and motivating actions through calls-to-action (Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023).

In marketing contexts, emojis are widely used to express sentiments and emotions across various social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram, where they enhance marketing communication and impact consumers' purchase intentions (Wijeratne et al., 2020). Emojis can strengthen marketing communication by capturing consumer attention and encouraging higher engagement. However, their impact on purchase intention may vary depending on consumer characteristics and the context of their use (McShane et al., 2021). While emojis are often seen as effective and engaging tools in digital communication, marketers should be aware that their use does not always result in positive outcomes and that their effects can differ based on consumer perceptions and preferences (Cavalheiro et al., 2022; Mladenović et al., 2023).

2.3. Positive Affect

Positive affect refers to the emotional state characterized by feelings of cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and energy. According to Naragon-Gainey and Watson (2021), positive affect is relatively independent of negative affect and shows a strong positive correlation with self and happiness, in contrast to the negative correlation observed with negative affect. Positive affect encompasses a range of pleasant emotions such as motivation, energy, a desire to interact, achievement, and success. In contrast, negative affect involves unpleasant emotions like fear, obstacles, insecurity, frustration, and failure.

Individuals with high positive affect tend to experience satisfaction, enthusiasm, energy, cohesion, affirmation, and self-confidence (Salavera et al., 2020). In marketing, positive affect plays a crucial role as it influences consumer purchase intentions. According to Mantel et al. (2022), consumers with positive affect are more sensitive to information, meaning that missing details in product descriptions or advertisements can reduce their purchase intention. Individuals with positive affect are more likely to consider detailed information and be sensitive to information gaps in product descriptions or advertisements.

Positive emotions, such as joy, happiness, satisfaction, and enthusiasm, can impact consumer behavior. For example, an emoji with a smiling expression can convey positive affect, potentially influencing the recipient's desire for advertised products or services (Mladenović et al., 2023). Shiota et al. (2021) also noted that positive affect has significant potential to encourage desired behaviors, such as engaging in healthy, pro-environmental, or social actions. Thus, strategically incorporating positive affect in branding can effectively foster desired behavioral changes and sustain positive impacts.

2.4. Product Type

There are two types that are distinguished by their underlying purposes and the nature of consumer satisfaction they fulfill. Hedonic products are designed to meet higher-level needs, aiming to provide aesthetic pleasure, enjoyment, and sensory experiences to

consumers. Examples include perfumes and flowers. When purchasing hedonic products, consumers prioritize emotional satisfaction and pleasure (Das et al., 2019). In contrast, utilitarian products are created to fulfill functional needs, such as quality, quantity, and practicality. Examples include tea and microwaves.

Consumers buying utilitarian products focus on product features and practical aspects rather than emotional satisfaction (Mladenović et al., 2023). However, a research from Bettiga et al. (2020) argue that the primary distinction between hedonic and utilitarian products lies not in their ability to evoke emotions but in the nature of the offerings themselves. For instance, coffee can be seen as a utilitarian product when consumed out of necessity, but it can be considered hedonic when enjoyed for its sensory attributes. Similarly, skincare products can serve both hedonic and utilitarian motives.

Faza et al. (2022) identified three primary motives for purchasing skincare: basic need, adventure shopping (pleasure from discovering new products), and social shopping (seeking advice from trusted individuals). This is supported by Ho et al. (2020), who found that skincare purchases are mediated by both hedonic and utilitarian motives, with hedonic motives also driving impulsive buying (Dwiputrianti et al., 2023). Fonseca et al. (2020) and Kousi et al. (2023) further indicate that utilitarian products can also achieve high status depending on their popularity, and the balance between hedonic and utilitarian traits can significantly impact consumer happiness.

Despite a tendency for hedonic traits to dominate, there remains an important balance, as even utilitarian purchases can offer substantial hedonic value. Islam et al. (2021) highlighted that in online reviews, incorporating hedonic elements can enhance the appeal of utilitarian products, and vice versa. Effective marketing strategies should thus consider both hedonic and utilitarian aspects to improve consumer experience and satisfaction (Chang et al., 2023).
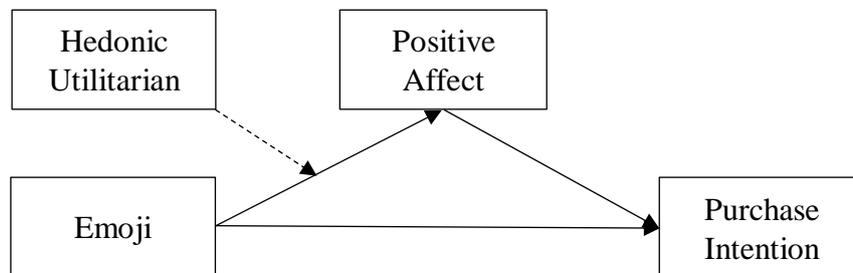

Figure 1. Research Framework
Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Based on Fig.1 the research framework used in this research includes dependent, independent, mediation, and moderate variables to examine the effect of emoji use on purchase intention. Based on the theoretical review presented, the researchers use emoji in social media content from businesses as the independent variable, which influences purchase intention as the dependent variable, with positive affect serving as the mediator variable. Moreover, the research also examine effect of emoji use on positive affect, and influence of product type which are hedonic and utilitarian as moderate variable on positive affect. Hence, this research has four hypothesis:

H1: Emojis have a positive and significant effect on positive affect
H2: Emojis have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention
H3: Positive affect mediates the effect of emojis on perceived purchase intention
H4: Emojis on product with hedonic and utilitarian attributes can enhance positive affect

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a quantitative research method, which is suitable for collecting and analyzing data through primary sources, such as surveys and questionnaires. Primary data will be collected through questionnaires, and the survey method will be utilized to gather both quantitative and qualitative information relevant to the research statements, after that the data was analyzed using statistical techniques partial least square to test the hypothesis. The research population comprised all followers of Somethinc on social media X who have intention to buy Somethinc products.

Table 1. Sample Size

G*Power				
Effect Size	α (error probability)	Power (1−β err prob)	Number of Predictors	Total Sample Size
0.15	0.05	0.95	4	129

Source: Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

The calculation of the sample size to be used in this study will be based on the use of G*Power. According to Hair et al. (2017), to determine the minimum sample required in a construction model, one can use the G*Power software by specifying the number of observations, effect size, significance level (α), and power (1−β). Based on this guideline, this research needs sample of 129 individuals. The data underwent analysis using the partial least square analysis method, with the assistance of SmartPLS data processing, to substantiate the research hypothesis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1. Research Results
4.1.1. Respondent Characteristics

The research questionnaire was distributed through various social media platforms to reach target respondents who met the desired criteria, specifically followers of Somethinc on X. This resulted in a final sample size of 342 respondents. All respondents were then screened using four screening questions provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. The first question pertained to the ownership of an X account, the second to their knowledge or awareness of the Somethinc skincare brand, the third to whether they were followers of Somethinc on X, and the fourth to whether they had any intention or interest in purchasing Somethinc products. As a result, 181 respondents has passed all the screening questions.

Table 2. Gender-Based Respondent Characteristics

Gender	Percentage	Total

Male	9,9%	18
Female	90,1%	163
Total	100%	181

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Based on Table 2, the questionnaire response rate shows that 9.9% of respondents are male, while 90.1% are female. This significant disparity is likely due to the nature of the research focus, which is on Somethinc, a skincare brand that tends to attract more attention and interest from women.

Table 3. Age-Based Respondent Characteristics

Range	Percentage	Total
17-24 years	58%	105
25-34 years	37,6%	68
35-44 years	3,9%%	7
45-54 years	0,6%	1
Total	100%	181

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Based on Table 3, respondents categorized by generation, the dominant respondents in this research are from Generation Z and Millennials, specifically those born between 1997 and 2012 and between 1981 and 1996.

Table 4. Time Follows-Based Respondent Characteristics

Range	Percentage	Total
<1 month	16,6%	30
1-3 month	16%	29
4-6 month	35,4%%	64
>6 month	32%	58
Total	100%	181

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Based on Table 4, the respondents of this questionnaire are dominant by those who have followed Somethinc for 4-6 months, as well as those who have followed Somethinc for more than 6 months on social media platform X. This indicates that the results of this study are primarily influenced by individuals who have been accustomed to seeing and interacting with Somethinc's firm-generated content on X for a substantial period.

4.1.2. Outer Model

There are two types of measurement models, the first is for exogenous latent variables, which are constructs that explain other constructs in the model, and the second is for endogenous latent variables, which are constructs explained within the model (Hair et al. 2017). The model used in the present study is as follows.
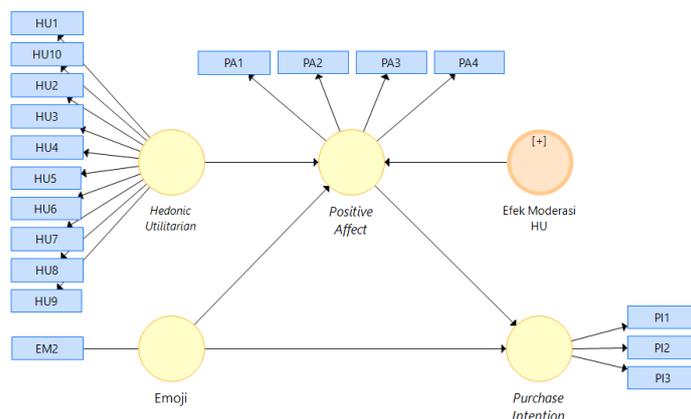
Figure 2. Research Model
Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

4.1.3 Convergent Validity

Table 5. Outer Loadings Results

Variable	Indicator	Value
Emoji	EM	1,000
Positive Affect	PA2	0,799
	PA3	0,835
	PA4	0,790
Purchase Intention	PI1	0,804
	PI2	0,862
	PI3	0,782
Hedonic Utilitarian	HU5	0,826
	HU6	0,810
	HU9	0,829

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

After the dropping process as shown on Table 5. the outer loading analysis results have been accepted, as all indicators now meet the criteria for convergent validity. Therefore, no further dropping is required, and the remaining indicators are considered reliable and meet the necessary criteria.

4.1.4 Discriminant Validity

Table 6. Cross Loadings Result

Indicator	Variable			
	Emoji	Purchase Intention	Positive Affect	Hedonic Utilitarian
EM	1,000	0,161	0,185	0,051
PA2	0,134	0,799	0,471	0,451
PA3	0,159	0,835	0,429	0,465
PA4	0,098	0,790	0,443	0,535

PI1	0,171	0,450	0,804	0,416
PI2	0,142	0,449	0,862	0,357
PI3	0,139	0,458	0,782	0,323
HU5	0,074	0,500	0,370	0,826
HU6	0,033	0,480	0,360	0,810
HU9	0,020	0,501	0,373	0,829

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Result for the cross-loadings analysis indicates that the correlations between constructs are higher than the correlations between individual indicators. Moreover, result for the Fornell-Larcker criterion shows that the construct values for all variables are greater than the correlations between constructs, indicating that all variables meet the Fornell-Larcker criterion. To further support the results from the cross-loadings and Fornell-Larcker tests, an HTMT test was conducted, the result shows that all values do not exceed the threshold of 0,90. Therefore, according to the cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and HTMT criterion this research pass the discriminant validity test.

4.1.5 Internal Consistency

Table 7. Internal Consistency Results

Criteria	Variable			
	Emoji	Purchase Intention	Positive Affect	Hedonic Utilitarian
Cronbach's Alpha	1,000	0,749	0,734	0,760
Composite Realibility	1,000	0,857	0,849	0,862

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

The results of the internal consistency test show that the values for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are all above the threshold of 0,70 this indicates that each indicator is reliable and effectively measures the intended concept.

4.1.3. Hypothesis Results

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Criteria		
	Original Sample	T-Statistic	P-Values
H1: EM⇒PA	0,130	2,995	0,001
H2: EM⇒PI	0,099	2,416	0,008
H3: EM⇒PA⇒PI	0,070	2,966	0,002
H2: HU⇒PA	0,096	1,972	0,025

Source: Processed Primary Data (2024)

Based on Table 8. all hypotheses were supported, hypothesis I states that emojis have a positive and significant effect on positive affect, with a p-value of 0,001 (less than 0,05), a t-statistic of 2,995 (greater than 1,65), and an original sample value of 0,130, indicating a positive relationship. Hypothesis II states that emojis positively and significantly affect purchase intention, supported by a p-value of 0,008, a t-statistic of 2,416, and an original sample value of 0,099. Hypothesis III suggests that positive affect mediates the effect of emojis on purchase intention, confirmed by a p-value of 0,002, a t-statistic of 2,966, and an original sample value of 0,070, indicating a positive relationship. Hypothesis IV asserts that hedonic and utilitarian attributes enhance positive affect, supported by a p-value of 0,025, a t-statistic of 1,972, and an original sample value of 0,096. Thus, all hypotheses meet the criteria for acceptance, demonstrating significant and positive relationships among the variables.

4.2. Discussion

Based on results, emojis have a positive effect on the formation of positive affect among Somethinc followers on X when viewing firm-generated content. Using emojis compared to not using them can enhance the effectiveness of Somethinc's firm-generated content on X, as emojis are positively correlated with the consumers' affirmative cognitive states. Positive affect resulting from emoji use includes feelings of joy, happiness, enthusiasm, and excitement, which are considered positive emotions (Mladenović et al., 2023). Emojis impact social interaction by aiding in deeper interpersonal relationships (Gesselman et al., 2019).

In some situations, emojis are more efficient for communication than words, as words can have longer latency to explain conditions or feelings compared to emojis (Kaye & Schweiger, 2023). Emojis can evoke various emotions; for example, emojis showing anger and happiness have the highest emotionality scores, while those depicting fear, sadness, and surprise are moderately stimulating, and neutral emojis have the least stimulus (Maiberger et al., 2024). Therefore, the use of emojis can support the increase of positive affect. It was also found that emojis have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Firm-generated content that uses emojis helps better perceive consumer interest or desire to buy.

Using emojis can increase purchase intention, as exposure to emojis results in a higher desire to purchase (Mladenović et al., 2023). Besides increasing purchase

intention, as found in this study and also by Das et al. (2019) and Mladenović et al. (2023), emojis can enhance engagement. Emojis presented before the message content can evoke greater positive emotions compared to those placed after the text. Research by McShane et al. (2021) indicates that simply including emojis in messages or content is not enough; the way emojis are used also affects outcomes. Nevertheless, emojis strongly correlate with brand engagement and can enhance consumer engagement.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of emojis in business content has multiple impacts on consumers, including increasing positive feelings towards the brand, forming purchase intention, and enhancing consumer and brand engagement. It was also found that positive affect mediates the influence of emojis on purchase intention. Firm-generated content using emojis enhances consumers' positive affect, which in turn increases their purchase intention. This finding aligns with previous research by Das et al. (2019), which found that consumers exposed to emojis in online advertising have a higher formation of purchase intention compared to those not exposed to emojis.

Consumers feel more positive emotions when seeing online advertising that includes emojis. This leads to the conclusion that the use of emojis increases positive affect, which then boosts purchase intention. In contrast, research by Mladenović et al. (2023) found that emojis alone do not influence purchase intention; positive affect must mediate this effect. Comparing these studies, the present research aligns with Das et al. (2019), showing that emojis influence both positive affect and purchase intention, with positive affect mediating this relationship. It was also found that hedonic and utilitarian attributes influence the strength of positive affect. Somethinc products, which combine hedonic and utilitarian attributes, moderate positive affect from firm-generated content.

This finding differs from previous research by Das et al. (2019) and Mladenović et al. (2023), which found that hedonic product advertisements using emojis generate higher positive affect, while utilitarian product advertisements using emojis do not significantly increase positive affect or purchase intention. However, this research supports Bettiga et al. (2020), which posits that both hedonic and utilitarian products elicit emotions when purchased or consumed. While traditional views distinguish these products based on necessity versus pleasure, Bettiga et al. (2020) argue that both types elicit emotional responses, with hedonic products consciously and utilitarian products subconsciously.

5. CONCLUSION

The research concludes that emojis significantly enhance the positive affect experienced by Somethinc followers on X when interacting with firm-generated content. This positive emotional response, characterized by feelings of joy and enthusiasm, underscores the effectiveness of emojis in boosting consumer engagement and forming purchase intention. The use of emojis not only fosters a stronger emotional connection but also amplifies the likelihood of purchase, aligning with previous research that emphasizes the role of emojis in increasing consumer interest and engagement.

Furthermore, positive affect was found to mediate the relationship between emojis and purchase intention, indicating that emojis increase positive emotions which, in turn, drive higher purchase intentions. This result supports the notion that the emotional impact of emojis is crucial in shaping consumer behavior. Additionally, while the study confirms

that hedonic and utilitarian product attributes influence positive affect, it challenges earlier findings by suggesting that both types of products can evoke emotional responses, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how product attributes and emojis interplay in consumer engagement and purchase behavior.

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