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Emoticon Effects in Facebook Brand Fan Pages: The Roles of Product Type, Brand Status, and the Perceived Value of Brand Fan Pages

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Abstract: Companies use emoticons in the content of their brand fan pages as a means to enhance their relationships with consumers. Few studies have been conducted on how emoticons work on Facebook brand fan pages. In addition, previous research on emoticons does not provide any obvious mechanism for emoticons' effects, and their findings also have certain limitations as a result that reveal mixed results. This study was designed to clarify the mechanism for emoticons' effects. Two studies were conducted in total. In Study 1, we conducted a one-way ANOVA on 82 subjects recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and PROCESS macro model 4 for the mediation analysis. We confirmed that emoticons lowered the perceived functional value of brand fan pages and increased the perceived hedonic value. In addition, we found that the influence of emoticons on consumer attitudes toward brand fan page was only mediated by the hedonic value. In Study 2A, which examined the influence of product type and brand status, we conducted a 2 (emoticons) × 2 (product type) × 2 (brand status) ANOVA on 233 subjects recruited through Amazon MTurk, and contrast analysis and PROCESS macro model 6 were used for the interaction effect analysis and mediation analysis. We found that the positive effect of emoticons only occurred in utilitarian products with high brand status and hedonic products with low brand status. Study 2B, conducted using an Instagram version, yielded results identical to those of Study 2A. Finally, this study's theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: emoticons; Facebook brand fan page; product type; brand status; perceived value



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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, emoticons have emerged as a prevalent means of communication tools in the digital world. These days, emoticons are everywhere and ubiquitous in our lives [1]. The term “emoticons” (also known as “smileys” or “emojis”) refers to a graphical representation of facial expression or body posture used to convey emotion in computer-mediated communication (CMC) [2–4]. Emoticons are widely used in various digital communication media such as messaging (WhatsApp and Facebook messenger), email (Outlook and Gmail), and social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) applications [3]. For example, 92% of the Internet population use emoticons [5], and 90% of Facebook users

adopt emoticons [6]. In addition, an average of over five billion emoticons are sent daily via Facebook Messenger, and over 60 million emoticons are used each day on Facebook [7].

Facebook has a relatively long history of over 20 years, with a staggering 3 billion monthly active users as of April 2024. It is the most used social network in the world. Currently, more than 50% of Facebook users are between the age range of 18 and 34 years, dispelling the misconception that Facebook primarily caters to older people [8]. Additionally, Facebook is the predominant platform used by marketers. According to a report, approximately 90% of global marketers were using Facebook as a marketing tool as of January 2023 [9]. Since most Facebook users use emoticons, companies are catching up with this trend. Today, most brands have at least one fan page on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Fan pages are important online channels for brand communication [10] and Facebook users can become fans of certain brands by clicking the “Like” button. Brand fan pages are important marketing tools that can provide a wide range of content and can communicate and interact with their consumers and fans [11]. Companies use emoticons with content on their fan pages to increase the marketing effectiveness of their brand fan pages and communicate more effectively with their consumers.

Despite the wide and varied use of emoticons on Facebook, there is surprisingly no research on how emoticons work on branded fan pages. Previous studies on emoticons have focused on how recipients respond to emoticons in text-based communication such as email and messaging [3,4,12]. In addition, previous studies have not provided a clear mechanism for emoticons’ effects, and show mixed results. In other words, various previous studies have shown both the positive [3,4,12] and negative [13] effects of emoticons. This means that previous studies have not provided companies with any clear mechanism related to the use of emoticons. We examined how the use of emoticons on Facebook brand fan pages influences consumer attitudes. In addition, based on previous studies that show how emoticons influence consumers’ social judgments such as warmth and competence [14], we examined how the influence of emoticons on the functional and hedonic value of brand fan pages is connected to consumers’ attitudes. We aim to determine whether emoticons positively influence consumers’ attitudes toward brand fan pages by examining their differential impact on the functional and hedonic values perceived by consumers.

Furthermore, we examined the moderating roles of product type and brand status to provide more practical implications for companies. Previous studies have shown that consumers pursue different motives or values according to product type or brand status, and consumers have different types and levels of expectations for products [15–17]. This means that consumers’ perceived values and attitudes, which are influenced by the use of emoticons, may vary according to product type and brand status. This is expected to help improve the understanding of when the use of emoticons on Facebook brand fan pages is most effective.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. The Perceived Value of Brand Fan Pages

The brand fan page is a communication channel with high potential for managing the relationship between companies and consumers. A brand fan page is a special form of online brand community created around a single brand, product, or company [10].

A brand fan page is similar in form to a Facebook page created by ordinary users, but brand fan pages are created by companies that are looking to attract consumers as fans instead of friends, and the focus is on communicating with fans. Facebook users can access whatever brand fan page they want through searching, and become fans of brands by clicking the “Like” button within the brand page. Each brand fan page is a new marketing platform that enables direct communication and relationship formation between companies

and consumers [10,18,19]. While companies often create brand fan pages, they can also be created by users. Users can create and manage the fan pages of their favorite brands. However, our study focused on brand fan pages created by companies rather than those created by users. This is because our study aimed to examine the influence of companies' use of emoticons in the process of communicating with consumers via brand fan pages created by companies. On the corporate side, the main purpose of running a fan page is to communicate and interact with consumers. Specifically, companies use fan pages to retain consumers, to develop friendly and long-term relationships with them, and to promote their brand or service to potential consumers. In addition, companies can directly sell products via fan pages, so they are emerging as online shopping channels beyond brand communication channels.

Additionally, companies can employ brand fan pages to elicit positive emotions from consumers, thereby strengthening brand loyalty. This is because social media is an internet-based application that allows consumers and companies to interact by creating, sharing, and exchanging information [20]. Companies deliver brand-related content to consumers through their brand fan pages, which users can like, comment on, or share [21]. The interactivity of social media facilitates consumer engagement by enabling the use of hashtags and emoticons when interacting with companies [22]. In other words, companies leverage brand fan pages on social media to foster active consumer participation, engagement, and interaction. They are implementing interactive marketing, a bilateral communication approach that encourages active consumer participation in the marketing process through brand fan pages [22,23].

The interaction between companies and consumers through brand fan pages has the advantage of eliciting positive emotions from consumers. Although consumers cannot communicate face-to-face, interactions with virtual entities on the platform enable them to recognize a "social presence". This social presence enhances consumers' positive experiences and influences their purchase intentions [24]. Despite being an intangible entity, a brand can enhance its perceived authenticity among consumers by actively sharing information and engaging with them on its fan page, which includes responding to their posts. This interaction fosters a positive relationship with the brand, thus boosting consumer engagement and ultimately increasing brand loyalty [25].

Consumer-brand relationships on brand fan pages are also explained through the lens of positive emotions that arise from experiences and engagement with fan culture and fandom behavior [22]. Becoming a fan of a particular entity entails idolizing that entity and creating experiences related to it. For example, a study on idol fandom examined "idol pilgrimage tours", where fans travel specifically to engage with their idols [26]. The study revealed that, in the context of travel, idol worship can directly stimulate positive relationships, shared experiences, travel satisfaction, and loyalty. The positive feelings experienced by fans as consumers have a direct marketing impact, making it vital to cultivate fans or fandoms. In the realm of sports, fans are essential in generating revenue by engaging in various activities related to sports teams [27]. Consumer engagement is the key driver for actual consumer behavior, which can be promoted through online brand communities, such as Facebook fan pages. According to the self-determination theory (SDT), Bilro and Loureiro [28] contended that consumer engagement positively impacts brand advocacy and subjective well-being within online brand communities. Furthermore, Huang, Zhu, Hao, and Deng [24] identified that the perception of social presence in live video commerce can influence purchase intentions through consumer engagement. This effect is particularly strong when there are positive emotions, which can be fostered by actively interacting with consumers and meeting their social and psychological needs [24].

Brand fan pages, therefore, elicit positive emotions in consumers, enabling them to have positive experiences through engagement.

From a user's perspective, why would they use Facebook brand fan pages? Uses and gratification theory (U&G theory) explains why individuals use new media or platforms such as online communities, social networking services, and Facebook fan pages [29–31]. According to U&G theory, people use media to fulfill diverse needs. Most of their needs can be divided into three types: a content-oriented area, a relationship-oriented area, and a self-oriented area. A content-oriented area refers to the functional and hedonic value of information conveyed by media. From a content-orientated perspective, users use fan pages because the provided content satisfies their functional value or hedonic desires [10]. For example, fan-page users can be provided with the latest news and information about products, obtain advice on their purchases, share emotional content to experience a brand through its brand fan page, and post comments on the fan page. Therefore, when valuable content, i.e., hedonic or functional content, is provided, users perceive the brand fan page favorably and develop positive purchase intentions [32]. A relationship-oriented perspective is related to social interactions with others. Users use brand fan pages because they provide value related to their interactions with others and with the brand. Finally, a self-oriented perspective is associated with an individual's specific needs, such as status and impression management. Users use fan pages because brand fan pages provide value that can positively change their image or position. Verma, Jahn, and Kunz [10] showed that these values can positively affect the fan page participation of consumers and consumer–brand relationships.

In this study, we investigate the influence of emoticons used on fan page contents. In this approach, we focus on the content-oriented aspects, rather than the relationship-oriented and self-oriented aspects of the brand fan page. Therefore, we will investigate how the difference between functional value and hedonic value according to the presence or absence of emoticons in the fan page contents affects consumer responses.

2.2. Emoticon as the Hedonic Value

An emoticon is a compound word made up of a combination of "emotions" and "icons", meaning letters and punctuation marks (e.g., ":-)") or graphical symbols ("😊" for a smile) designed to mimic facial expressions [2,3,33]. Unlike face-to-face communication, where nonverbal means such as gestures and facial expressions can be used, digital communication has no elements that can be used as nonverbal means. Therefore, emoticons are often used as paralinguistic cues to convey emotional meanings in computer-mediated environments [34]. Furthermore, emoticons can express a variety of rich emotions such as goodness, dislike, joy, sadness, frustration, and surprise in digital communication [35]. For companies, emoticons can help communicate emotions and build close relationships with consumers [2,14,36]. Previous studies have shown that the use of emoticons has positive effects on consumers' positive affect, purchase intentions [37], and high-level understanding of messages [12,34]. Emoticons are pivotal in enhancing the expressiveness and emotional depth of digital communication. Additionally, it influences consumer behavior by effectively delivering user-generated content on digital communication platforms (social media). According to Neel et al. [38], emoticons possess a powerful ability to express emotional states. The study demonstrated that the identical affectively neutral text message is interpreted as more positively valenced when accompanied by positive emoticons than no emoticons at all and more negatively with negative emoticons. Viola [39] referred to emoticons as a type of "affective attractor", enabling the sender and receiver to synchronize their emotional states. Emoticons provide insights about public sentiments (attitudes) toward social issues on social media platforms [40]. This study assumed that the frequency of

emoticons in public communication reflects societal norms, whereas the intensity indicates hedonic values and loss aversion. This study confirmed these assumptions by analyzing comments on controversial social issues on Weibo. The results indicated that the frequency of positive and negative emoticons aligned with the social norms (majority sentiment) toward the issues. Notably, the intensity of the emoticons was stronger for negative emoticons than for positive ones, indicating the public's tendency toward loss aversion.

Previous research has used the S-O-R theory to assess the effectiveness of emoticons. The S-O-R theory is an approach to predicting individual and group behavior in response to new and emergent external stimuli [41]. The authors contended that environmental stimuli are associated with behavioral responses via emotional responses such as pleasure and dominance. Anwar et al. [42] argued that behavior responses could also be influenced by other indirect stimuli or external factors. These factors might have mediating effects that may result in the subject (organism) exhibiting different behaviors. That is, emoticons are an effective marketing communication tool for companies [43].

The use of emoticons also influences consumers' social judgments about people, brands, and companies [14]. In the consumer domain, emoticons play a significant role as nonverbal persuasive cues in computer-mediated communication (social media). Emoticons enhance the persuasiveness of electronic word-of-mouth eWOM on social media by increasing recipient empathy and trust toward the sender. Specifically, the persuasive effect of emoticons is observed in both positive and negative eWOM when recipients and senders have a close relationship [44]. Effectively utilizing emoticons enhances consumer engagement in the digital communications of tourism brands. Wang et al. [45] found that for the content of aesthetic experiences, emotional emoticons drive more consumer engagement compared to semantic emoticons. Furthermore, the study showed that emotional emoticons boost consumer engagement by eliciting higher levels of emotional responses to aesthetic experience content. In contrast, semantic emoticons enhance consumer engagement by generating greater credibility for promotional content. These results elucidate the matching effect between emoticons and content types on consumer engagement. Additionally, emoticons also influence the evaluation of new products [46]. According to the previous research, using emoticons in the user guide for a new product enhances consumers' fluency in information acquisition. This increased perceived fluency of information acquisition causes consumers to evaluate the perceived product's competency more favorably. Ultimately, the use of emoticons plays a positive role in the evaluation of new products.

According to Fiske et al. [47], consumers' perception of an individual, brand, or company is driven by one of two fundamental dimensions (warmth and competence) [47–50]. Warmth perception is associated with friendliness, kindness, and helpfulness, while competence perception is associated with intelligence, skillfulness, and effectiveness [48,51]. The use of emoticons affects the perception of warmth and competence. First, the use of emoticons has a positive effect on consumers' perception of warmth. In this regard, previous studies have found that emoticons are used more frequently in conversations with friends and family than others [2]. Emoticons also cause the recipient to perceive the sender as having more personality traits related to warmth, such as agreeableness or sociability [52,53]. However, the use of emoticons has a negative impact on consumers' perception of competence. Since emoticons aim to express emotional information [4], perception of the sender's competence is lowered [14]. For example, the literature on business etiquette suggested that employees restrict the use of emoticons when sending work-related emails, because using emoticons can seem too casual and unprofessional [13,43,54]. Similarly, the use of emoticons increases consumers' perception of warmth but lowers their perception of competence. Indeed, Li, Chan, and Kim [14] found that consumers perceive more warmth and lower competence for service employees who use emoticons in email

than for those who do not. As a result, communal-oriented consumers were more satisfied with service employees who use emoticons than with those who did not, while the opposite was found for exchange-oriented consumers.

In summary, emoticons positively influence consumers' perceived warmth but negatively affect perceived competence. In this study, we aim to determine whether emoticons positively influence consumers' attitudes toward brand fan pages by examining their differential impact on the functional and hedonic values perceived by consumers. Considering the perceived value of the Facebook fan page, the use of emoticons is expected to increase the hedonic value of the Facebook fan page but lower the functional value. Functional value relates to information and efficiency [55], while hedonic value relates to fun, playfulness, and emotional worth [56,57]. Warmth and competence are associated with different value types. Functional value conveys to consumers the value related to capability (competence dimension), while hedonic value conveys to consumers the value associated with positive emotions (warmth dimension) [58–60]. Therefore, the use of emoticons, which raises perception of warmth and decreases perception of competence, is expected to increase the hedonic value and lower the functional value of brand fan pages. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was derived:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Use of emoticons on a brand fan page will (a) increase hedonic value and (b) decrease functional value.*

However, we do not expect the impact of perceived values on consumers' brand fan page attitudes to be the same. Specifically, we anticipate that the relationship between emoticons and brand fan page attitudes will be mediated by hedonic value rather than by functional value. This is because the effects of emoticons are context-dependent. According to Li, Chan, and Kim [14], emoticons have positive effects in relationship-oriented situations, but negative effects in performance-based situations. In relationship-oriented situations, the weight of warmth is higher than that of competence, so emoticons have a positive effect, but in performance-oriented situations, the weight of competence is higher and emoticons have a negative effect. Facebook is fundamentally a social network site that values social interaction [61]. Facebook, unlike commercial websites such as Amazon and Wal-Mart, is a social website focused on communal that activates the purpose of social connections in the mind of consumers [62]. Therefore, Facebook brand fan pages have a greater weight of warmth, not competence. We expect consumers' attitudes toward brand fan pages to be mediated by hedonic rather than functional value. Based on this, we derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The influence of emoticons on consumer attitudes toward brand fan pages will be mediated by hedonic rather than functional value.*

2.3. Emoticons and Product Type in Facebook Brand Fan Pages

Product type has been recognized as a very important factor in the area of marketing or advertising [63–66]. In general, products are divided into two types: utilitarian and hedonic. Utilitarian products emphasize the value of functionality, usefulness, and practicality. Purchasing a utilitarian product is mainly cognitively driven and is driven by necessity as a means for an end [67,68]. When consumers purchase utilitarian products, they expect functional aspects related to resolving their main concerns rather than psychological rewards [69,70]. Hedonic products, on the other hand, are products that emphasize values such as fun, enjoyment, and excitement. Purchasing a hedonic product is caused mainly emotionally and arises from the desire to pursue an aesthetic sensory experience, sensual pleasure, fantasy, and fun [17,56,64,71,72]. Hedonic products are associated with

sensory pleasure, exclusivity, sophistication, and luxury [73]. Hedonic products promote emotional responses to products or brands because they are associated with signaling status or self-expressive nature [15,69,74–78].

Which product type are emoticons more effective for in the context of a Facebook brand fan page? Hedonic products align closely with the entertainment and personal identity gratifications in the U&G theory [79,80]. Consumers typically use hedonic products for the emotional and sensory experiences they offer. Notably, utilitarian products are better aligned with the information-seeking and functional aspects of the U&G theory. Consumers use these products, such as online retail platforms, to meet practical needs and solve everyday problems, seeking efficient solutions and reliable information [81]. Although hedonic and utilitarian products emphasize different gratifications, they are not mutually exclusive [68]. However, we expect product type to interact with brand status rather than simply dictating emoticon effect by itself. Previous studies showed that consumers pursue different motives or values depending on product type or brand status, and they have different types and levels of expectations for products [15–17]. Accordingly, we expect the emoticon effect to vary depending on product type and brand status.

2.4. The Moderating Role of Brand Status

Brand status refers to how much consumers perceive not only quality, reputation, and price, but also meaning associated with status or success from the brand [82,83]. Brand status can vary depending on consumer experience, knowledge, and awareness of the brand and its competitors [84]. In other words, brand status is a ranking based on the associations consumers have with brands [85]. We defined brand status as the consumer's perception of the relative strength of a particular brand over its competitors.

Previous studies have noted that high-level brands, called topdog brands, have many advantages over low-level brands, called underdog brands [86,87]. Generally, topdog brands are well-known and dominate the market, compared to underdog brands. Underdog brands have limited resources available compared to topdog brands [88,89]. In addition, aside from clear effects such as market share and economies of scale, topdog brands benefit from more favorable ratings by consumers than underdog brands. Consumers have higher brand familiarity and brand recall for topdog brands than underdog brands. Differences in consumer familiarity and recall of brands affect not only the brand but also consumers' evaluation of the brand's advertising [90,91]. In other words, consumers tend to be more positive about the advertising of stronger brands.

Brand status is also closely linked to consumer confidence in the brand [16]. Brands provide consumers with information relating to symbolic and hedonic attributes as well as functional and physical attributes of the product [92]. At this point, a strong brand effectively delivers information about the key attributes of the product to consumers. Brands also influence consumers' trust toward companies and products. In other words, a high-ranking brand raises consumer trust in the brand's position and raises confidence in the brand by making consumers aware that the company provides what they promise [16,92].

In this study, we anticipate that the influence of emoticons and product types on consumer responses will be moderated by brand status. Consumers expect functional or practical benefits for utilitarian products, whereas experiential or pleasure benefits are expected for hedonic products [17,71]. Furthermore, the relationship between the U&G theory and brand status highlights that consumer engagement is driven by different gratifications depending on the perceived brand status. High-status brands thrive on personal identity and social interaction gratifications [10,93], whereas low-status brands cater to information seeking and utility [94]. The high status of a brand in utilitarian or hedonic products also implies that consumers have confidence that the brand will provide

the benefits expected for each product type. Therefore, it is expected that regarding the high brand status of hedonic products giving consumers confidence in key attributes such as pleasure, emoticons that provide similar benefits will not have a significant impact. In contrast, it is expected that regarding the high brand status of utilitarian products, emoticons will have a positive impact. As mentioned earlier, the high brand status of utilitarian products is a sign of superior quality [16,92], increasing confidence in the practical benefits of consumers. Interestingly, however, consumers tend to want more hedonic than practical benefits if the brand meets or exceeds their practical expectations [95]. Previous studies have described this as the principle of precedence or the principle of hedonic dominance [16,95]. Hedonic benefits are at a higher level in the needs hierarchy than practical benefits [96,97]. As a result, the desire for practical benefits occurs before the desire for hedonic benefits, and the need for hedonic benefits increases when the desire for practical benefits is satisfied. Consumers are therefore willing to gain additional hedonic benefits from a high-status brand in a utilitarian product with high confidence in practical benefit. Indeed, Chitturi, Chitturi, and Raghavarao [16] showed that the higher the brand's status in utilitarian products, the higher the impact of hedonic benefits on consumers' preferences, while reducing the impact of practical benefits. This means that if the brand status of a utilitarian product is high, the influence of emoticons providing hedonic benefits such as warmth will be increased. Based on this, the following hypothesis was derived:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Unlike hedonic products, if the brand status of utilitarian products is high, consumers will have more positive (a) brand fan page attitudes and (b) purchase intentions when presented with emoticons than when they are not.*

In contrast, low brand status means low consumer confidence in the company's commitment to the product, entailing uncertainty as to whether the consumer's desires will be met through the product [16]. In this case, consumers want to find clues that can reduce uncertainty about the product. This means that when the brand status is low, the influence of emoticons has a more positive effect on hedonic than on utilitarian products. This is because emoticons can be an effective tool to increase the uncertain hedonic value of hedonic products with low brand status. However, the low brand status of utilitarian products causes consumer anxiety about solving problems [17,95,98]. Therefore, emoticons that increase warmth and lower competence cannot affect consumer responses in utilitarian products with low brand status. Based on this, the following hypothesis was derived:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Unlike utilitarian products, if the brand status of hedonic products is low, consumers will have more positive (a) brand fan page attitudes and (b) purchase intentions when presented with emoticons than when they are not.*

3. Overview

This research examines the emoticon effects and their mechanisms on Facebook brand fan pages. Study 1 explores whether emoticons increase the hedonic value and lower the functional value of brand fan pages, and whether the hedonic value mediates between emoticon use and the brand fan page attitudes. In other words, we test hypotheses 1 and 2 in Study 1. Study 2 investigates the roles of product type and brand status (testing hypotheses 3 and 4). The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

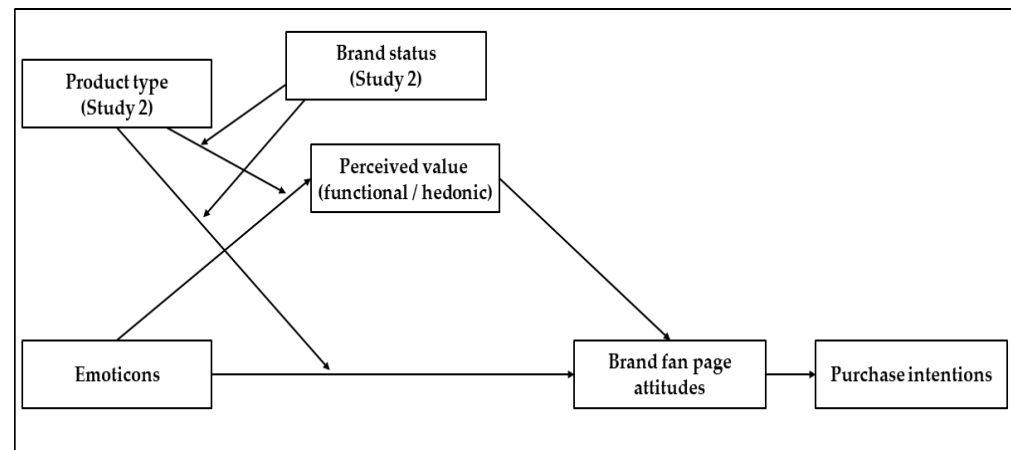


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

4. Study 1

4.1. Study Design and Participants

Study 1 aims to explore how the emoticons affect the perceived value of brand fan pages, and how the emoticons' effect on brand fan page attitudes is mediated by the perceived value. The study was conducted on two groups depending on whether emoticons were used. A total of 82 participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk), and monetary rewards were provided to participants. Online surveys conducted via Mturk provide greater demographic diversity than traditional college student samples [99,100]. Participant ages ranged from 20 to 70 years (20–29: 40.2%, 30–39: 41.5%, 40–49: 12.2%, 50–59: 3.7%, 60–69: 0.0%, over 70: 2.4%; $M = 33.78$, $SD = 925$) and 58.6% were male participants ($n = 48$). This survey was conducted between 5 to 7 March 2019. SPSS version 21.0 was employed to analyze the results. In Study 1, we conducted a one-way ANOVA and PROCESS macro model 4 for the mediation analysis.

4.2. Stimulus Materials and Procedure

The product category used in Study 1 was coffee makers, which were adopted in the previous study [101]. We created a virtual brand of coffee maker called Morning Maker and made two different versions of a Facebook brand fan page: one with emoticons and the other without (see Appendix A).

Participants were asked to carefully look at the presented fan page. They then responded to brand awareness, the perceived value of fan pages (the functional value and the hedonic value), and the attitudes toward fan pages. Finally, they responded to demographic questions.

4.3. Measures

The perceived value of the fan page was measured by four items on the functional value ("The content of fan page is helpful/useful/functional/practical for me", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.943$) and four items on the hedonic value ("The content of fan page is fun/exciting/pleasant/entertaining", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.916$) used in Verma, Jahn, and Kunz [10]. Attitudes towards brand fan pages were measured with five items ("I think it is a good idea to use this brand fan page", "It is fun to use in this brand fan page", "I think it is a positive idea to use this brand fan page", "It is pleasant to connect to this brand fan page", "I enjoy participating in this brand fan page", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.938$) used in Ruiz-Mafe, Martí-Parreño, and Sanz-Blas [19]. Each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), and Cronbach's α for each item was higher than 0.9, making it reliable.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Perceived Value

One-way ANOVA on the hedonic value of brand fan page showed in a higher perception of the hedonic value when emoticons was presented ($M = 4.99$) than when they were not ($M = 4.24$; $F = 5.084$, $p < 0.05$), thus supporting H1a. The one-way ANOVA on the functional value also showed that it was perceived as higher when the emoticons was not presented ($M = 5.09$) than when they were presented ($M = 4.46$; $F = 4.211$, $p < 0.05$). This means that H1b is supported.

4.4.2. Attitudes Toward the Brand Fan Page

One-way ANOVA on brand fan page attitudes showed that participants had more positive attitudes when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.23$) than when they were not ($M = 4.20$; $F = 10.889$, $p < 0.01$).

4.4.3. Mediation Analysis

We conducted a mediation analysis to identify the mechanism of emoticons effects on the brand fan page attitudes. Model 4 of the PROCESS macro was applied [102] and bootstrapping analysis was performed with 10,000 resamples [103].

The results of mediation analysis with the emoticons as the independent variable, the functional value as the mediating variable, and the brand fan page attitudes as the dependent variable showed that the indirect effect was not significant. (indirect effect = -0.10 , 95% CI: $-0.32 \sim 0.01$). However, the indirect effect was significant when the hedonic value was input as a mediator instead of the functional value (indirect effect = 0.50 , 95% CI: $0.06 \sim 1.09$). This indicates that H2 was also supported.

4.5. Discussion

The results of Study 1 suggest that emoticons lower the functional value but increase the hedonic value of a brand fan page. These findings also show that, as predicted by our hypothesis, the influence of emoticons on attitudes of consumers is caused by the hedonic value, not the functional value.

5. Study 2A

5.1. Study Design and Participants

Study 2A examined whether the effects of emoticons and product type on brand fan page attitudes and purchase intentions differed according to brand status. A 2 (emoticons: yes vs. no) $\times$ 2 (product type: utilitarian vs. hedonic) $\times$ 2 (brand status: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design was adopted. A total of 233 American participants were recruited using Amazon Mturk, and monetary rewards were provided for participation in the experiment. Of the participants, 53.2% ($n = 124$) were male, and the average age was 37.69 years ($SD = 11.12$, 21–75 years; 20–29: 27.5%, 30–39: 39.9%, 40–49: 15.0%, 50–59: 12.4%, 60–69: 3.5%, over 70: 1.7%). This survey was conducted between 20 to 31 March 2019. SPSS version 21.0 was employed to analyze the results. For Study 2A, we conducted a three-way ANOVA and contrast analysis using PROCESS macro model 6.

5.2. Stimulus Material

We reviewed previous studies to select product categories [104–106] and initially selected milk, mineral water, coffee, soda, beer, chocolate, shampoo, ice cream, sandwiches, and hamburgers. We performed a pretest ($n = 19$) for product type. We selected milk as the utilitarian product and chocolate bars as the hedonic product. The pretest results revealed that participants perceived milk as a utilitarian product ($M = 5.63$) rather than a

hedonic product ($M = 2.74$; $t = 5.470$, $p < 0.001$) and chocolate bars as a hedonic product ($M = 6.16$) rather than a utilitarian one ($M = 3.63$; $t = -5.136$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, milk ($M = 5.63$) was perceived as a utilitarian product more than chocolate bars ($M = 3.63$; $t = 3.815$, $p < 0.01$), whereas chocolate bars ($M = 6.16$) were perceived as a hedonic product more than milk ($M = 2.74$; $t = -8.407$, $p < 0.001$).

We then conducted a second pretest ($n = 33$) to select experimental brands, depending on the high and low brand status. After selecting 10 brands each for milk and chocolate bars based on sales and market share, we asked participants to respond to the brand status (1 = low status, 7 = high status). Based on the pretest results, Trader Joe's Milk ($M = 4.91$) was finally selected as the utilitarian product with high brand status, and Natrel Milk ($M = 2.91$) as the utilitarian product with low brand status ($t = 5.434$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, Reese's ($M = 5.97$) was selected for the hedonic product (a chocolate bar) with high brand status, and Big Hunk ($M = 2.73$) was selected for the hedonic product with low brand status ($t = 8.177$, $p < 0.001$). For each of these four brands, two versions of Facebook brand fan pages, with and without emoticons, were created (see Appendix B).

5.3. Procedure and Measures

The research method was the same as in Study 1. Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight brand fan pages, and after looking closely at the fan page, they responded to the product type and brand status as a manipulation check. The product type was measured with five items for the utilitarian products ("This product is effective/helpful/functional/necessary/practical") and five items for the hedonic products ("This product is fun/exciting/delightful/thrilling/enjoyable") used in Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann [68]. Brand status was measured with a single question ("What do you think of the status of the brand in the fan page above?") used in Wang and Muehling [87]. Participants then responded to questionnaire items on the functional value, the hedonic value, brand fan page attitudes, and purchase intentions. The functional value, hedonic value, and brand fan page attitudes were measured with the same items as in Study 1. Purchase intentions was measured by three items ("The likelihood of my purchasing this product is very high", "The probability that I would consider buying this product is very high", "My willingness to buy this product is very high") used by Li et al. [107]. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for each question was found to be higher than 0.9, which was reliable.

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Manipulation Check

A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA for the utilitarian products showed that the main effect of the product type was significant ($F = 23.654$, $p < 0.001$). Participants perceived milk ($M = 4.94$) as a utilitarian product more than chocolate bars ($M = 4.13$). The influence of other variables, except for the main effect of product type, was not significant (all, $p > 0.1$). A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA for the hedonic products showed that the main effect of the product type was significant ($F = 118.324$, $p < 0.001$). Participants perceived the chocolate bar ($M = 5.48$) as more hedonic than milk ($M = 3.75$; $F = 118.324$, $p < 0.001$). Apart from the main effect of the product type, the influence of other variables was not significant (all, $p > 0.1$). This means that the utilitarian products and the hedonic products had been successfully manipulated.

Finally, 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA for brand status showed that participants perceived the high-status brand ($M = 5.46$) more as a topdog brand than the low-status brand ($M = 3.32$; $F = 113.185$, $p < 0.001$). Except for the main

effect of brand status, the influence of other variables was not significant (all, $p > 0.1$). This indicates that manipulation was also successful for brand status.

5.4.2. Perceived Functional Value

A 2 (emoticons: yes vs. no) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (status: top vs. underdog) ANOVA for the functional value of brand fan page showed only the main effect of emoticons. Participants were found to perceive the functional value as higher when no emoticons were presented ($M = 4.76$) than when presented ($M = 4.20$; $F = 8.988$, $p < 0.01$). Otherwise, the influence of the other variables was not significant (all, $p > 0.1$).

5.4.3. Perceived Hedonic Value

The results of 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA on the hedonic value of the brand fan page showed significant main effects of the product type (hedonic products: 4.79 vs. utilitarian products: 4.30; $F = 7.531$, $p < 0.01$), brand status (high: 4.97 vs. low: 4.16; $F = 27.515$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 4.75 vs. N: 4.32; $F = 4.839$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, an interaction effect between the three variables was significant ($F = 4.614$, $p < 0.05$). In detail, the utilitarian products with high brand status had more hedonic value when an emoticon was presented ($M = 5.38$) than when not ($M = 4.71$; $F = 3.698$, $p = 0.056$), whereas for the utilitarian products with low brand status, hedonic value did not differ according to whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticons Y: 3.71 vs. N: 3.36; $F = 1.024$, $p > 0.1$). On the other hand, the hedonic products with lower brand status had more hedonic value when an emoticon was presented ($M = 5.03$) than when not ($M = 4.21$; $F = 3.698$, $p < 0.05$). However, the hedonic products with high brand status did not show a difference in the hedonic value depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticon Y: 4.73 vs. N: 5.06; $F = 0.937$, $p > 0.1$).

5.4.4. Attitudes Toward the Brand Fan Page

A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA on brand fan page attitudes showed that main effects of product type (hedonic products: 4.88 vs. utilitarian products: 4.51; $F = 4.382$, $p < 0.05$), brand status (high: 5.07 vs. low: 4.35; $F = 23.756$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 4.98 vs. N: 4.48; $F = 5.812$, $p < 0.05$) were significant.

A notable result is that the three-way interaction effect between the three variables is significant ($F = 9.641$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, for the utilitarian products with the high-status brand, participants had more positive attitudes toward the brand fan page when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.40$) than when not ($M = 4.70$; $F = 4.471$, $p < 0.05$), whereas for the utilitarian products with the low-status brand, there was no significant difference depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticon Y: 3.86 vs. N: 4.01; $F = 0.226$, $p > 0.1$) (see Figure 2a).

On the other hand, for the hedonic products with the high-status brand, there was no significant difference in attitudes according to emoticons (Y: 5.02 vs. N: 5.13; $F = 0.104$, $p > 0.1$). However, for the hedonic products with low brand status, participants had more positive attitudes when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.13$) than when not ($M = 4.06$; $F = 11.301$, $p < 0.01$) (see Figure 2b). These results support H3 and H4.

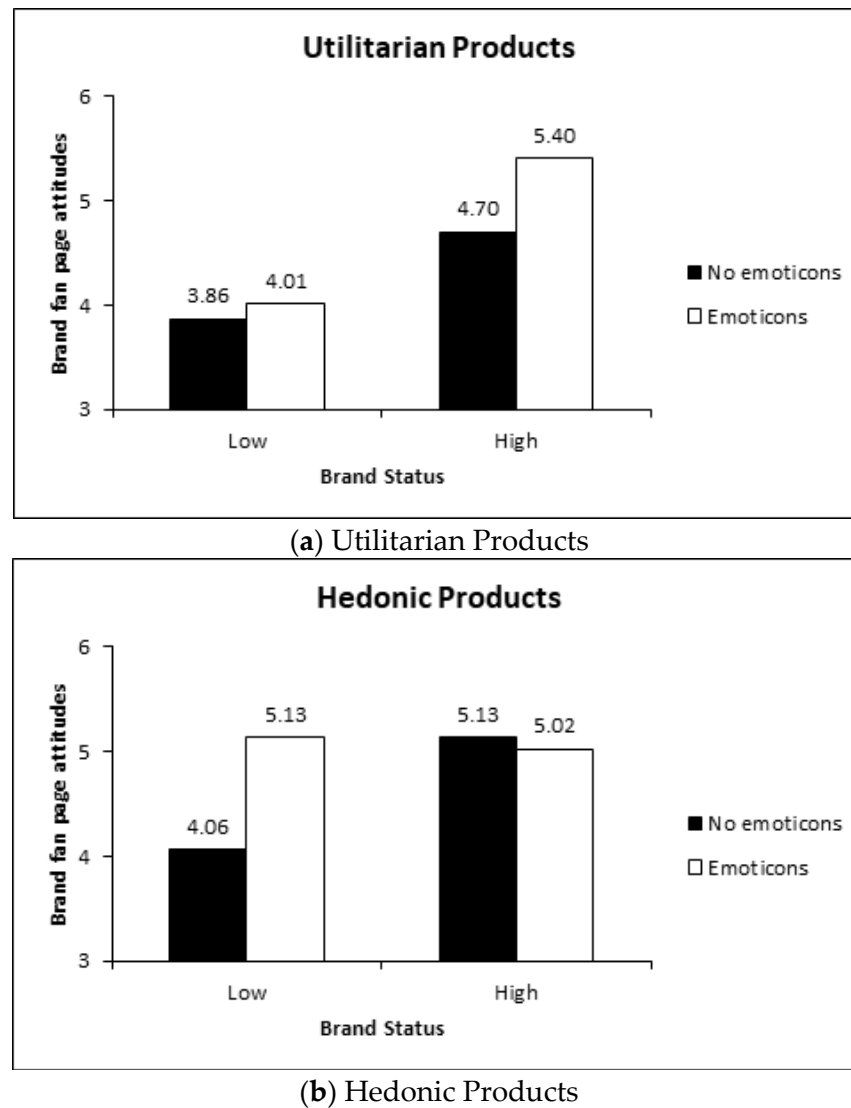


Figure 2. Interaction effects on brand fan page attitudes.

5.4.5. Purchase Intentions

A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA on purchase intentions indicated that the main effects of product type (hedonic products: 5.15 vs. utilitarian products: 4.38; $F = 13.861$, $p < 0.001$), brand status (high: 5.41 vs. low: 4.19; $F = 39.770$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 5.03 vs. N: 4.48; $F = 6.538$, $p < 0.05$) were significant.

More importantly, the three-way interaction effect of the three variables was significant ($F = 6.094$, $p < 0.05$). In detail, for the utilitarian products with high brand status, participants had more positive purchase intentions when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.48$) than when not ($M = 4.58$; $F = 4.471$, $p < 0.05$). Compared to these results, for the utilitarian products with lower brand status, purchase intentions did not differ depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticons Y: 3.62 vs. N: 3.76; $F = 0.119$, $p > 0.1$) (see Figure 3a).

On the other hand, for the hedonic products with high brand status, purchase intentions did not show significant differences according to emoticons (Y: 5.83 vs. N: 5.65; $F = 0.190$, $p > 0.1$). However, for the hedonic products with low brand status, participants' purchase intentions were more positive when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.08$) than when not ($M = 3.92$; $F = 11.301$, $p < 0.01$) (see Figure 3b).

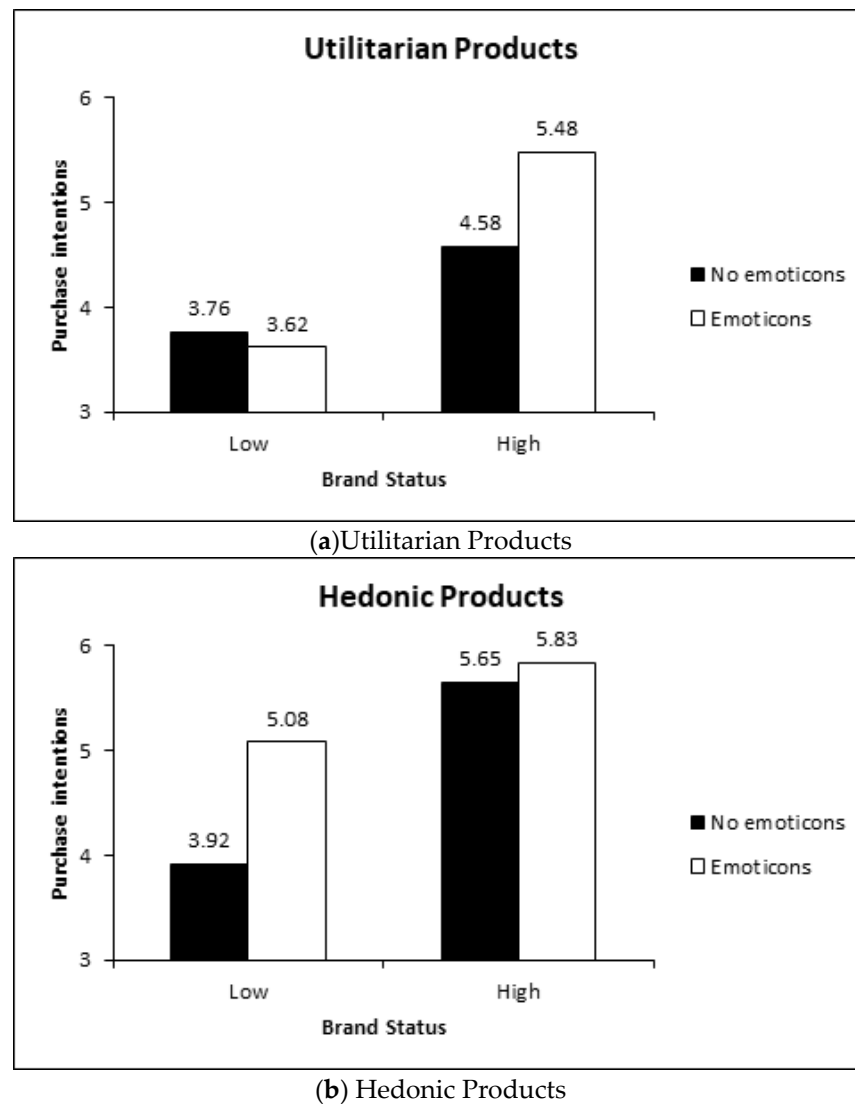


Figure 3. Interaction effects on purchase intentions.

5.4.6. Mediation Analysis

The mediation effect between the emoticons, the perceived value, brand fan page attitudes, and purchase intentions was analyzed. We conducted a mediation analysis around product type and applied model 6 of the PROCESS macro [102]. To do this, we ran a bootstrapping analysis with 10,000 resamples [103] (see Table 1).

The mediating effect of the functional value was not significant in either the utilitarian or the hedonic products. Compared to this, the mediating effect of the hedonic value was found in the utilitarian products with high brand status (indirect effect = 0.30, 95% CI: 0.02~1.03) and in the hedonic products with low brand status (indirect effect = −0.31, 95% CI: 0.02~0.91). In the utilitarian products with low brand status (indirect effect = 0.24, 95% CI: −0.18~0.79) and in the hedonic products with high brand status (indirect effect = −0.13, 95% CI: −0.54~0.10), indirect effects were not significant. This suggests that the emoticons influence brand fan page attitudes and purchase intentions differently depending on the brand status as well as on the product type.

Table 1. Mediation analysis results.

Utilitarian and High status					
IV	MV 1	MV 2	DV	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Emoticons	Perceived functional value	Fan page attitudes	Purchase intention	0.08	−0.08~0.71
	Perceived hedonic value			0.30	0.02~1.03
Utilitarian and Low status					
Emoticons	Perceived functional value	Fan page attitudes	Purchase intention	0.06	−0.25~0.48
	Perceived hedonic value			0.24	−0.18~0.79
Hedonic and High status					
IV	MV 1	MV 2	DV	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Emoticons	Perceived functional value	Fan page attitudes	Purchase intention	−0.01	−0.18~0.17
	Perceived hedonic value			−0.13	−0.54~0.10
Hedonic and Low status					
Emoticons	Perceived functional value	Fan page attitudes	Purchase intention	0.30	−0.06~0.96
	Perceived hedonic value			−0.31	0.02~0.91

Note: IV = independent variable; MV 1 = first mediating variable; MV 2 = second mediating variable; DV = dependent variable.

5.5. Discussion

The most important finding of Study 2A is that the role of brand status has been identified. In other words, we found a three-way interaction effect between emoticons, product type, and brand status. In detail, the positive effects of emoticons on perceived value, brand fan page attitudes, and purchase intentions occurred for both the utilitarian products with high brand status and the hedonic products with low brand status.

6. Study 2B

6.1. Methods

We conducted Study 2B to investigate whether the results of Study 2A, which was conducted in the Facebook context, would be the same in the Instagram context. Study 2B was identical to study 2A except that the experimental stimuli presented to the participants were changed from the Facebook versions to the Instagram versions (see Appendix C). A total of 300 American subjects participated in study 2B via Amazon Mturk. Of the participants, 43.7% ($n = 131$) were male, and the average age was 39.39 years ($SD = 10.17$, 21–75 years). This survey was conducted between 13 to 17 September 2024.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight brand fan pages, and after looking closely at the fan page, they responded to the product type and brand status as a manipulation check. Participants then responded to questionnaire items on the functional value, the hedonic value, brand fan page attitudes, and purchase intentions. All items were the same as study 2A, and Cronbach's alpha for each question was found to be higher than 0.9, which was reliable.

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Manipulation Check

A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA for the utilitarian products showed that only the main effect of the product type was significant ($F = 38.831$, $p < 0.001$). Participants perceived milk ($M = 5.39$) a more utilitarian product than the chocolate bar ($M = 4.44$). A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ 2 (product type) $\times$ 2 (brand status) ANOVA for the hedonic products showed that only the main effect of the product type was significant ($F = 68.393$, $p < 0.001$). Participants perceived the chocolate bar ($M = 5.23$) as more hedonic

than milk ($M = 3.80$). This means that the utilitarian products and the hedonic products had been successfully manipulated.

Finally, 2 (emoticons) $\times 2$ (product type) $\times 2$ (brand status) ANOVA for brand status showed that participants perceived the high-status brand ($M = 5.78$) more as a topdog brand than the low-status brand ($M = 3.84$; $F = 108.415$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that manipulation was also successful for brand status.

6.2.2. Perceived Functional Value

A 2 (emoticons: yes vs. no) $\times 2$ (product type) $\times 2$ (status: top vs. underdog) ANOVA for the functional value of the brand fan page showed only the main effect of emoticons. Participants were found to perceive the functional value as higher when no emoticons were presented ($M = 4.97$) than when presented ($M = 4.22$; $F = 16.881$, $p < 0.001$).

6.2.3. Perceived Hedonic Value

The results of 2 (emoticons) $\times 2$ (product type) $\times 2$ (brand status) ANOVA on the hedonic value of the brand fan page showed significant main effects of the product type (hedonic products: 5.22 vs. utilitarian products: 4.20 ; $F = 36.310$, $p < 0.001$), brand status (high: 5.19 vs. low: 4.46 ; $F = 37.310$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 5.03 vs. N: 4.45 ; $F = 8.416$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, an interaction effect between the three variables was significant ($F = 4.269$, $p < 0.05$). In detail, the utilitarian products with high brand status had more hedonic value when an emoticon was presented ($M = 5.42$) than when not ($M = 4.49$; $F = 7.535$, $p < 0.01$), whereas for the utilitarian products with low brand status, hedonic value did not differ according to whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticons Y: 3.52 vs. N: 3.31 ; $F = 0.359$, $p > 0.1$). On the other hand, the hedonic products with lower brand status had more hedonic value when an emoticon was presented ($M = 5.31$) than when not ($M = 4.59$; $F = 5.883$, $p < 0.05$). However, the hedonic products with high brand status did not show a difference in the hedonic value depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticon Y: 5.47 vs. N: 5.40 ; $F = 0.040$, $p > 0.1$).

6.2.4. Attitudes Toward the Brand Fan Page

A 2 (emoticons) $\times$ (product type) $\times 2$ (brand status) ANOVA on brand fan page attitudes showed that main effects of product type (hedonic products: 5.22 vs. utilitarian products: 4.36 ; $F = 21.499$, $p < 0.001$), brand status (high: 5.07 vs. low: 4.68 ; $F = 15.226$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 5.11 vs. N: 4.49 ; $F = 9.117$, $p < 0.01$) were significant. In addition, the three-way interaction effect between the three variables is significant ($F = 6.659$, $p < 0.05$). Specifically, for the utilitarian products with the high-status brand, participants had more positive attitudes toward the brand fan page when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.33$) than when not ($M = 4.37$; $F = 7.768$, $p < 0.01$), whereas for the utilitarian products with the low-status brand, there was no significant difference depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticon Y: 4.00 vs. N: 3.74 ; $F = 0.556$, $p > 0.1$). On the other hand, for the hedonic products with the high-status brand, there was no significant difference in attitudes according to emoticons (Y: 5.25 vs. N: 5.37 ; $F = 0.112$, $p > 0.1$). However, for the hedonic products with low brand status, participants had more positive attitudes when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.44$) than when not ($M = 4.51$; $F = 9.522$, $p < 0.01$).

6.2.5. Purchase Intentions

A 2 (emoticons) $\times 2$ (product type) $\times 2$ (brand status) ANOVA on purchase intentions indicated that the main effects of product type (hedonic products: 5.37 vs. utilitarian products: 4.22 ; $F = 31.525$, $p < 0.001$), brand status (high: 5.25 vs. low: 4.57 ; $F = 29.122$, $p < 0.001$), and emoticons (Y: 5.20 vs. N: 4.43 ; $F = 10.830$, $p < 0.01$) were significant. More

importantly, the three-way interaction effect of the three variables was significant ($F = 6.526$, $p < 0.05$). In detail, for the utilitarian products with high brand status, participants had more positive purchase intentions when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.28$) than when not ($M = 4.43$; $F = 4.772$, $p < 0.05$). Compared to these results, for the utilitarian products with lower brand status, purchase intentions did not differ depending on whether or not emoticons were presented (emoticons Y : 3.63 vs. N : 3.49; $F = 0.105$, $p > 0.1$). On the other hand, for the hedonic products with high brand status, purchase intentions did not show significant differences according to emoticons (Y : 5.74 vs. N : 5.59; $F = 0.148$, $p > 0.1$). However, for the hedonic products with low brand status, participants' purchase intentions were more positive when emoticons were presented ($M = 5.59$) than when not ($M = 4.20$; $F = 16.384$, $p < 0.001$).

6.2.6. Mediation Analysis

The mediation effect between the emoticons, the perceived value, brand fan page attitudes, and purchase intentions was analyzed. We conducted a mediation analysis around product type and applied model 6 of the PROCESS macro [100].

The mediating effect of the functional value was not significant in either the utilitarian or the hedonic products. Compared to this, the mediating effect of the hedonic value was found in the utilitarian products with high brand status (indirect effect = 0.46, 95% CI: 0.09~1.05) and in the hedonic products with low brand status (indirect effect = 0.24, 95% CI: 0.03~0.71). In the utilitarian products with low brand status (indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI: -0.18~0.61) and in the hedonic products with high brand status (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI: -0.06~0.15), indirect effects were not significant. This suggests that the emoticons influence brand fan page attitudes and purchase intentions differently depending on the brand status as well as on the product type.

6.3. Discussion

We found that the results of Study 2B were entirely consistent with those of Study 2A, indicating that the effects of emoticons are equally present on Instagram.

7. Conclusions

7.1. Discussion

This study explored how emoticons influence consumer attitudes toward Facebook brand fan pages and purchase intentions, focusing on the perceived value, product type, and brand status. The results of this research are summarized as follows. First, the results of Study 1 show that emoticon use on Facebook brand fan pages lowers the functional value of the fan page and increase the hedonic value. However, the influence of emoticons on the brand fan page attitudes of consumers was found to be mediated not by functional value but by hedonic value. Study 2's results show that the influence of emoticons on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions depend on product type and brand status. Specifically, in the case of utilitarian products, the positive effect of emoticons only occurs when the brand status is high, whereas in the case of hedonic products, it occurs only when the brand status is low.

7.2. Theoretical Contributions

The results of this study have the following academic contributions. First of all, previous research on emoticons have mainly focused on the effects on people-to-people relationships in text-based computer-mediated communication situations [108]. Although companies continue to use emoticons as an effective marketing tool and their use extends to social media, there is a lack of academic interest in the subject [37,108]. The findings of this

study provide direct and clear evidence of how emoticons influence a company's marketing performance in the context of a Facebook brand fan page. In addition, the results provide a clear mechanism for emoticon effects in Facebook brand fan pages. Based on the results of a previous study [14] showing that the use of emoticons by companies lowers consumers' perception of competence and increases their warmth perception, we found that using emoticons lowers the functional value of the Facebook brand fan page and increases the hedonic value. In addition, we found that the influence of emoticons on consumer attitudes is mediated by hedonic values, not functional values, due to Facebook's characteristic of stimulation thinking about social relationships [62]. In other words, we expanded our previous research into the context of Facebook brand fan pages and contributed to the research on emoticons as well as consumer-brand relationships.

Second, this study found that the positive effect of emoticons increased the hedonic value of the product. This differs from the findings of Das, Wiener, and Kareklas [37], who found that the use of emoticons is more effective in products framed as hedonic than with products framed as utilitarian. We found that the use of emoticons not only conveys the hedonic value of products, but also increases it.

Finally, we identified the importance of brand status in relation to the use of emoticons. In other words, we confirmed that the positive effects of emoticons occur only in utilitarian products of high brand status and in hedonic products of low brand status. This means that, as suggested by Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan [95] and Chitturi, Chitturi, and Raghavarao [16], consumers want hedonic value for utilitarian products of high brand status, and that emoticons are effective tools for utilitarian products of high brand status. However, in the case of hedonic products, emoticons were more effective for low-status brands that did not meet consumer expectations of hedonic value. These results show that the use of emoticons is related to consumer expectations. This study contributes to the extensibility of the literature related to brand status and consumer expectations. In addition, this study contributes to the expansion of the U&G theory. The U&G theory offers a robust framework for understanding why consumers engage with media and how these motivations extend to their interactions with brands on their fan pages. By integrating the U&G theory with brand status and type, we posit that brand status moderates the relationship between brand type and the emoticon on the brand fan page. Topdog and underdog brands, regardless of whether they are hedonic or utilitarian, cater to diverse consumer needs through distinct pathways influenced by their market positions.

7.3. Managerial Contributions

This study begins with the question of whether emoticon use on Facebook brand fan pages is beneficial for consumer-based performance. The results of this study have some practical implications.

First, this study shows that prior to the use of emoticons, companies need a clear understanding of the characteristics of social media such as Facebook. In other words, companies need to understand why consumers are using social media and brand fan pages. Previous studies show that consumers use social media for social interaction [62] and prefer brand fan pages to help them manage their impressions [109]. In a similar vein, the results of this study show that consumers perceive hedonic value more importantly than the functional value of Facebook brand fan pages, and that the use of emoticons helps to increase the hedonic value. In other words, companies should use Facebook brand fan pages for social interaction with consumers, and emoticons can be an effective tool for achieving that goal.

Second, as consumers seek hedonic value more than functional value on a company's Facebook brand fan page, companies should focus on providing hedonic value, such as fun

or enjoyment, to consumers on the fan page. For example, brand fan pages are sometimes used to promote or sell a company's products. Companies often implement product-related sales promotion strategies on their brand fan pages. According to prior research, non-monetary sales promotion is more closely tied to hedonic value than monetary sales promotion, and it provides consumers with hedonic value in the form of value expression, entertainment, and exploration [110]. In other words, if companies want to sell products through brand fan pages, they should offer hedonic value to consumers through non-monetary sales promotion rather than monetary sales promotion. Companies also use brand fan pages to provide consumers with information about their products. In this case, companies should also consider ways to provide hedonic value to consumers. Notably, the use of emoticons can be an effective option. Even when the hedonic value of the content presented on brand fan pages is minimal, as shown by the experimental results of this study, companies can provide hedonic value to consumers by using emoticons.

Third, the results of this study show when the positive effect of emoticons is greatest. Many companies use emoticons on Facebook brand fan pages. However, if they believe that using emoticons will always have a positive effect, it is not a desirable strategic approach. That is, the effects of emoticons can vary depending on the situation. This study provides a framework for understanding the variance of these effects. The results of this study show that the emoticon effect is different according to the product type and brand status. Specifically, the use of emoticons is more effective in utilitarian products of high brand status and hedonic products of low brand status. The use of emoticons can be difficult to expect positive effects in utilitarian products of low brand status and in hedonic products of high brand status. This suggests that if a company adopts a strategy of using emoticons in social media such as Facebook, marketers should conduct content marketing considering their company's product type and brand status. These findings can serve as guidelines for the use of emoticons for effective corporate content marketing strategies in social media.

7.4. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the abundant academic and practical implications, this study has some limitations. First, this study classified product types into utilitarian products and hedonic products, and then presented different product categories (utilitarian products: milk, hedonic products: a chocolate bar) to the subjects. However, some products may have both utilitarian and hedonic values, as asserted by Das, Wiener, and Kareklas [37], and either value can be presented to subjects through message framing. In future studies, it is necessary to check whether the same result is achieved even if one of the various values of a product category is delivered to subjects through message framing.

Second, coffee machines (Study 1) and milk and chocolate bars (Study 2) were employed as experimental stimuli. Although the experimental results aligned with our predicted pattern, caution is required in generalizing the results due to the relatively limited product categories included in the study. To enhance the validity of the study's results, future studies should conduct experiments using a wider range of product categories.

Third, the sample sizes for Studies 1 ($n = 82$), 2 ($n = 233$), and 2B ($n = 300$) were rather small. Although the sample sizes exceeded the minimum criterion of 15–20 participants per independent variable [111,112], future research should utilize larger sample sizes to ensure the validity of the experimental results.

Fourth, in this study, emoticons were simply manipulated with or without presentation. Future research needs to look at the impact of the number and type of emoticons. Indeed, previous studies have shown that consumer responses vary according to number of emoticons [113] and type of emoticons [35], such as positive and negative emoticons.

Therefore, in future research, it is necessary to experiment by applying number and type of emoticons variables in analyzing Facebook brand fan pages.

Fifth, the experimental stimuli used in our study were product information on Facebook brand fan pages. To increase external validity, we created the experimental stimuli by modeling them after actual Facebook brand fan pages. However, despite the potential influence of various visual cues, such as product photos or colors used in the experimental stimuli, on the results, we did not account for them in the experiment. Future studies must control the influence of these factors.

Sixth, this study used Facebook as the social network platform. Despite Facebook's dominance in terms of user base [8] and popularity among marketers [9], there are many other types of social network platforms, such as WhatsApp and TikTok. Therefore, future studies need to validate if this study's experimental results occur in other social networks.

Finally, consumers' responses to emoticons can vary depending on their traits and contexts. For example, culture can influence consumers' responses to emoticons [108]. Park et al. [114] found that consumers in Asian cultures favor vertical emoticons with eye-shaped variations, while consumers in Western cultures prefer horizontal emoticons based on different mouth shapes. In future studies, it would be interesting to examine the emoticon effects on Facebook brand fan pages by reflecting these consumer-related characteristics.

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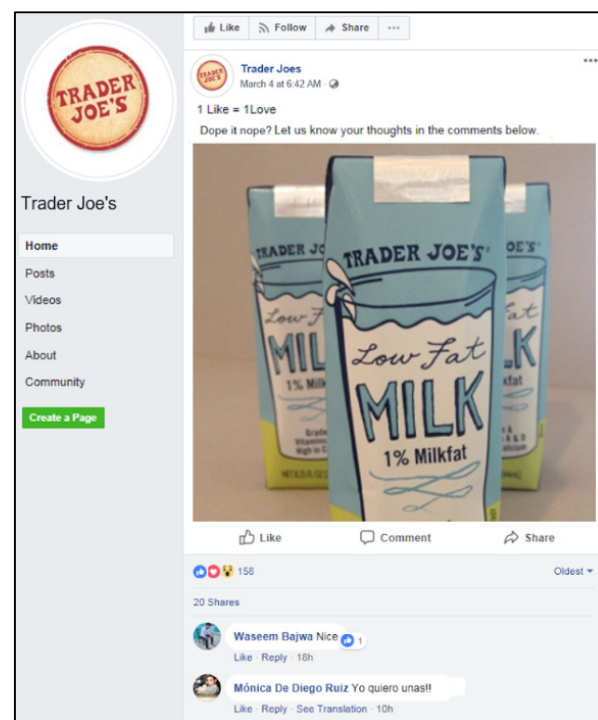
Data Availability Statement: The datasets analyzed during the studies are available on request from corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Stimulus Example from Study 1 (Emotions Condition)



Appendix B. Stimulus Example from Study 2A (No Emoticons and Utilitarian Product and High Brand Status Condition)



Appendix C. Stimulus Example from Study 2B (Emoticons and Utilitarian Product and Low Brand Status Condition)



References

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