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BRAND LANGUAGE IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETPLACE

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Abstract

Language is one of the core elements of branding. While marketing scholars have investigated brand language in various traditional marketing contexts such as advertising, little is known about the social media realm. With the present monographic dissertation, the author aims to offer new insights in this regard. This work focuses on internet slang, a form of language often used by both consumers and brands in the social media marketplace. Should brands use internet slang in an attempt to enhance brand relevance, or should they avoid it to reduce consumer inferences of co-optation? Bridging classic theories on impression management with the study of language, this dissertation starts by proposing a new conceptualization of internet slang. Most importantly, it studies the consequences of brands' adoption of this language using a multi-method investigation that combines text analysis of thousands of field data, statistical modeling, and controlled preregistered experiments. The findings illustrate an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses. The curve is flattened by higher brand trust, higher brand coolness, and non-promotional message goal. Furthermore, the studies demonstrate that the curvilinear effect of internet slang intensity on consumer responses is driven by two simultaneous underlying mechanisms: On one hand, increasing internet slang intensity elicits perceptions of message playfulness; on the other hand, high internet slang intensity heightens consumers' persuasion knowledge. These results offer new insights into brand language and the debate concerning brands capitalizing on or opposing trends. Additionally, this dissertation represents the first work to offer actionable insights regarding the optimal internet slang intensity to be used in marketing messages, thus assisting marketers in crafting successful communications.

Keywords: Brand language, internet slang, impression management, social media, multi-method

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Chapter 1

Introduction

4.9 billion people use social media globally, and this number should surge to nearly six billion by 2027 (Statista 2022; Wong 2023). Not surprisingly, within the upcoming five years, brands are expected to allocate 23.5% of their marketing budgets to social media spending (Moorman 2022). Having an effective social media presence helps brands to generate social media engagement that, in turn, can drive positive brand evaluations and increase sales (Akpinar and Berger 2016; Hollebeek and Macky 2019; Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2021). Nevertheless, few social media managers are able to compose successful brand messages that get consumers' attention (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019), highlighting the need to identify and leverage factors that may make communications more appealing.

According to recent marketing theorizing, one of such factors is language (Berger et al. 2020; Kronrod 2022; Packard and Berger 2024). Language can influence consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and can thus shape the success of marketing messages. Similarly to more traditional marketing contexts such as advertising (McQuarrie and Mick 1996), brand names (Luna, Carnevale, and Lerman 2013), or customer service (Packard and Berger 2021), language cues play a crucial role on social media. Here too, even a single word can make the difference (Kronrod 2022). For instance, consumers engage more with brand messages that contain negations such as "don't" (Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2022), words expressing certainty such as "must" (Pezzuti, Leonhardt, and Warren 2021), or alliterations such as "deal of the day" (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). This literature provide valuable insights into brand linguistics (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017). However, much remains to be known about the language used by brands on

social media. The overall aim of this dissertation is to offer new insights in this regard. With this goal in mind, I focus on a particular form of language—i.e., internet slang.

Extending prior conceptualizations proposed by linguistic scholars (e.g., Barseghyan 2013), I define internet slang as the set of various forms of casual language that emerge and/or evolve online, and are used to reflect internet culture and trends. Following this conceptualization of internet slang, expressions of this language are diverse and include acronyms and abbreviations (e.g., "thx"), slang words (e.g., "bestie"), emojis (e.g., "🔥"), but also catchphrases (e.g., "POV: You're doing X") and punctuation elements (e.g., writing in lowercase). While these different subcategories of internet slang exhibit distinctive characteristics (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019), I pay particular attention to one characteristic that makes them similar. I argue that all the subcategories of internet slang have a similar social function. In other words, starting from theory regarding slang (Drake 1980; Eble 1996; Yule 2022), I posit that these subcategories should all be imbued with symbolic meaning and similarly serve as signals of identity. In particular, they may help senders self-present as trendy, up-to-date, young social actors. Overall, using internet slang should signal one's ability to fit into the online environment and its current trends (Berger and Heath 2005).

Internet slang is common in the digital marketplace. Both consumers and brands use it on social media, whether to interact with other users or in post copy (Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020). In particular, brands' choice to use internet slang in their messages aligns with the principle of brand relevance, according to which brands should adapt their intangibles and communication themes to contemporary trends to maintain strong equity (Keller 2000). However, marketing and consumer research do not provide a clear understanding of whether brands should or should not use internet slang. Not only is research examining consumer responses to this language scant, but the few existing findings are

contradictory. Popular press too is unclear on whether the use of internet slang may beneficial for brands or not (Hall 2019; Hoover 2023; Grossman 2014).

Accordingly, with the present dissertation, I intend to answer the following research questions: (1) What exactly is internet slang? (2) Should brands use internet slang in their social media messages? (3) If so, how much internet slang should they use and under which conditions? (4) What is the psychological mechanism through which different intensities of internet slang used in brand messages affect consumers?

This dissertation builds on classic works on self-presentation (Goffman 1959/2016; Jones and Pittman 1982; Schlenker 2012), identity signaling (Levy 1959; McCracken 1986; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), as well as works on persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Friestad and Wright 1994; Kirmani and Zhu 2007) and playfulness (Hsieh and Tseng 2017; McShane et al. 2021; Oh et al. 2009) to offer a comprehensive conceptualization of internet slang and make theoretical and practical predictions regarding how consumers perceive it in the social media marketplace. Overall, I argue that there should be an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity in brand social media messages and consumer responses, what I call "the trying too hard hypothesis." I suggest that, while a low intensity of internet slang should be beneficial for brands because it increases perceptions of message playfulness, using a high internet slang intensity may backfire because it activates consumers' persuasion knowledge, the belief that the brand is trying to manipulate them (Friestad and Wright 1994). Consistent with the proposed persuasion knowledge mechanism, I find that the negative effect of internet slang attenuates for higher levels of brand trust, higher levels of brand coolness, and messages that are not perceived to be promotional.

Empirically, I test my theorizing in a multi-method investigation that combines (a) the development and validation of the Internet Slang Dictionary, (b) an observational

field data analysis employing text analysis and statistical modeling, and (c) a set of controlled preregistered experiments. Together, Study 1A and Study 1B, are aimed at proposing a new conceptualization of internet slang, and creating a dictionary to automatize the assessment of this language in texts. Precisely, in Study 1A, I adopt a top-down approach (Humphreys and Wang 2018) to create the Internet Slang Dictionary. This approach involves three stages: in Stage 1 (dictionary creation), I scrape and code a sample of over 10,000 tweets posted by 13 major brands across various industries. In Stage 2 (dictionary validation), I rely on different steps aimed at showing construct validity (e.g., asking three external coders to evaluate the dictionary). In Stage 3 (post-measurement validation), I further assess construct validity of the Internet Slang Dictionary by comparing computer and human coding through Krippendorff's alpha. The final version of the Internet Slang Dictionary contains four subdictionaries of internet slang: a catchphrase dictionary, an emoji dictionary, a netspeak dictionary, and an emphasis symbol dictionary.

Study 1B is an experiment intended to test the social function of different expressions of internet slang. Building upon theory regarding slang (e.g., Drake 1980) and contrasting existing research favoring a different categorization of internet slang (e.g., Li, Chan, and Kim 2019), I suggest that various forms of textual language (and paralanguage) can be considered expressions of internet slang if they assist the sender in signaling a trendy, up-to-date, and youthful identity. Consistent with this proposition, in Study 1B, I find that, when a brand uses either acronyms, emoticons, emojis, teen slang words, or other linguistic cues, participants perceive it to be trendier, more up-do-date, and younger than a brand not using any of these languages.

Study 2 to Study 6 examine the consequences of internet slang adoption by brands in their social media communications. In other words, in these studies, I test my full conceptual model, thus establishing process evidence consistent with the proposed simultaneous underlying mechanisms (i.e., message playfulness and persuasion knowledge). In Study 2, I use field data to test my hypotheses. Relying on a scraped dataset of more than 18,000 tweets from 26 major brands, I show that there is an inverted U-shaped association between internet slang intensity and social media engagement, and that such relationship is moderated by brand trust, brand coolness, and message goal (promotional vs. not promotional).

The following studies are all preregistered online experiments. Study 3A replicates the inverted U-shaped effect on message evaluations in a controlled setting by experimentally manipulating internet slang intensity. In Study 3B, I seek further evidence of the main effect by using a different brand/product category and different internet slang elements compared to the ones used in Study 3A. Study 4 tests the role played by message playfulness and persuasion knowledge as the psychological mechanisms explaining the curvilinear effect of internet slang intensity on different consumer responses (i.e., message evaluations and brand evaluations).

Study 5A to Study 6 focus on the difference between low and high internet slang intensity (i.e., the "trying too hard" side of the curve). Study 5A rule out two theoretically relevant alternative explanations of the negative effects of high internet slang intensity (i.e., processing fluency and brand competence). Study 5B controls for another possible alternative explanation and shows that similar negative effects occur even if the brand uses only emojis as a form of internet slang. Finally, in Study 6, I explore the underlying mechanism through moderation. Specifically, I adopt a moderation-of-process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005) and manipulate persuasion knowledge accessibility.

This study is also aimed at showing robustness of the effects by exploring another product category and a different dependent variable (i.e., behavioral intentions).

Overall, these studies confirm the power of language in influencing consumers' perceptions and attitudes, and provide new and compelling evidence that internet slang is one form of language that deserves scholarly attention. It is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to the marketing and consumer literature. First, it may deepen our understanding of how brand language in social media messages influences consumers, thus contributing to this emerging research area (Pezzuti 2023). Particularly, it may provide novel evidence regarding internet slang. Scant research investigates it, and the few existing findings are contradictory (Liu et al. 2019; Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020; Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021). By providing an updated definition of this construct and validating it with the creation of Internet Slang Dictionary, this dissertation provides new evidence about the consequences of internet slang use by brands. Thus, I may contribute to the ongoing debate about whether brands should or should not conform to cultural trends (i.e., relevance vs. co-optation; Keller 2000; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Vasavi 1996).

Second, this dissertation may offer new insights to the literature on self-presentation and identity signaling. While prior research in this area mostly focuses on physical goods as a way of symbolically communicate something about oneself (e.g., Argo et al. 2005; Berger and Ward 2010; Folwarczny, Otterbring, and Ares 2023), I add to this work by examining language as a specific form of non-physical signal that brands may use to self-present online. Additionally, although existing theorizing demonstrates that a signal must be visible to be effective (Spence 1978; Veblen 1899; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), thereby suggesting a positive, linear association between number of signals and impression formation, I find a curvilinear relationship between internet slang intensity

and consumer responses, contributing to existing work on unsuccessful impression management (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013). Too many signals of a particular identity seem to suggest observers that the sender is "trying too hard."

Third, results from this dissertation may extend prior research on persuasion knowledge. I propose and test a parallel mediation model that integrates literature on playfulness (McShane et al. 2021) with works on persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994). Although consumers perceive messages with high internet slang intensity as more playful (e.g., entertaining, fun to read), they also recognize the manipulative intent of the brand and consequently penalize it. These results provide evidence that marketers' language on social media serves as a message cue that can influence perceptions of ulterior motives. Further, as demonstrated by the rich body of work in this area, two factors shaping the success of persuasion are the source and the message (e.g., Campbell 1995; Kirmani and Campbell 2009; Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). I identify two characteristics of the source (i.e., brand trust and brand coolness) and one characteristic of the message (i.e., message goal) that attenuate the negative effect of high internet slang intensity. Prior work already established the importance of trust and message goal in the persuasion knowledge framework (e.g., Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b). I extend this work to the context of brand language on social media, and I introduce perceptions of brand coolness as a new factor that may influence the effectiveness of persuasion.

Finally, the findings may have practical implications too. Marketers often leverage internet language trends with the intention of crafting more appealing social media posts. However, they not always succeed (Grossman 2014). This dissertation would represent the first work providing practical suggestions in this regard. The results from the field study show that, on average, for a 38-word post, engagement starts decreasing when the post includes 2.5–3 elements of internet slang. This turning point changes depending

on the level of trust toward the brand, brand coolness perceptions, and the intent of the brand message.

The rest of the manuscript is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a literature review and the conceptual development of my theorizing. Specifically, I first review the literature on (a) consumer language research, (b) brand language on social media, (c) internet slang, and (d) impression management (specifically, self-presentation and identity signaling). Then, I build on this review to advance the hypotheses aimed at investigating the effects of internet slang adoption by brands on consumers. Chapter 3 (Empirical Studies) describe and discuss the empirical test of the theory proposed in this dissertation. Finally, Chapter 4 (Conclusion) offers a discussion on the main theoretical and managerial contributions of this dissertation, as well as its limitations and avenues for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Development

In this chapter, I begin by providing a review of the literature relevant to define my research objective. Building on the literature review, I then describe the conceptual development of my theoretical model. The literature review is organized as follows: First, I introduce the broad topic of language in consumer research (Packard and Berger 2024). Second, I narrow my review to the specific field of brand language (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017) in the social media realm. Third, I focus on internet slang (Barseghyan 2013), the type of language on which my dissertation centers. Finally, I review the existing literature on the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation to examine the consequences of brands' adoption of internet slang: impression management (Goffman 1959)—specifically the theories on self-presentation (Schlenker 2012) and identity signaling (McCracken 1986). In the conceptual development section, I describe the proposed hypotheses of my theorizing, starting with the main effect, then addressing the underlying psychological mechanism of such effect, exploring some boundary conditions of this effect, and, finally, identifying possible downstream consequences for brands. To do it, I emphasize the role of brands as social actors, language as a self-presentational tool, and internet slang as a signal of identity.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Language in Consumer Research

Language is everywhere. It is a fundamental part of our life as human beings and

as consumers. In the marketing realm, consumers use language in word-of-mouth communications, product reviews, social media posts, and interactions with service providers. On the other side of the dyadic relationship, brands use language in advertising, website copy, social media content, and interactions with customers (Kronrod 2022).

Not surprisingly, consumer and brand language are central topics in consumer research. In a recent bibliometric review, Packard and Berger (2024) elaborate on how the study of language in this field has emerged and evolved over time: from the examination of broader concepts such as rhetoric (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1996) to analyze smaller wording choices such as pronouns (e.g., Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017). Marketing scholars focus on linguistics behaviors such as psycholinguistics (i.e., the study of how psychological factors and cognitive processes influence language acquisition, comprehension, and production), pragmatics (i.e., the study of how context, social cues, and shared knowledge impact the interpretation of language), or cognitive linguistics (i.e., the study of how mental processes and conceptual structures shape language, emphasizing the connection between language and thought) to study various "language-in-marketing" problems (Kronrod 2022).

Packard and Berger (2024) further show the intense growth that consumer language has experienced over time (e.g., the number of articles on consumer language research increased by 300% in the last decade).

One factor that facilitates the study of language in marketing contexts is the availability of large digital databases, such as social media conversations or online product reviews. While the study of language was already a topic of interest in marketing and consumer research (e.g., rhetoric in advertising; McQuarrie and Mick 1996), the digital boom of the early 2010s made it possible for researchers to analyze both consumer and

brand language more in depth, and identify subtle language cues that can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. For instance, when consumers read product reviews with more abstract language like "my shirt *has faded*" instead of concrete language like "my shirt is of *poor quality*," they infer that the sender had a particularly negative experience with the product (Schellekens, Verlegh, and Smidts 2010). In the context of online reviews, scholars also show that using explicit language like "I *recommend* this product" instead of more implicit language like "I *liked* this product" to endorse a product is more persuasive (Packard and Berger 2017). Furthermore, in marketplace conversations, consumers display higher purchase intentions when service providers use more concrete language like "the *shoes*" instead of more abstract language like "the *order*" to discuss a product (Packard and Berger 2021).

This literature highlights two main issues that are relevant for the current dissertation. On one hand, it clarifies the importance of language in consumer research, and how such language can significantly influence consumers' psychological processes and decision-making. On the other hand, it shows the need for further exploration in this field. Indeed, the availability of large online texts makes it possible for researchers to delve into any possible broad or small feature of language (Boegershausen et al. 2022). Thus, while consumer language research has for sure experienced a huge growth in recent years, significant opportunities for exploring and understanding language in the marketing realm still remain. This is particularly true for brand language rather than consumer language. Although brand language in advertising is one of the most researched topics in this stream of research, the analysis of brand language in the social media context (e.g., the language used by brands in their social media posts, the language used by brands in brand-consumer conversations on social media) remains one of the most unexplored research themes (Packard and Berger 2024; Pezzuti 2023; Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). In other

words, although scholars recently started investigating the effects of brands' language choices on social media, much remains to be known.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to this specific area. Precisely, I aim to start from the following broad research question: How does brand language on social media influence the success of marketing messages, and, thus, affect consumers? Next, I review the existing literature on this narrower topic.

2.1.2 Brand Language on Social Media

The research area studying how the language used by brands in any marketing context impacts consumer attitudes and behaviors is called brand linguistics (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017). The core idea of this field is that language is one of the key elements of branding. Scholars have investigated the way brand language influences consumers in contexts such advertising (McQuarrie and Mick 1996; Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012; Zemack-Rugar, Moore, and Fitzsimons 2017), brand names (Lee and Ang 2003; Luna, Carnevale, and Lerman 2013; Shrum et al. 2012), and customer service (Cascio Rizzo and Berger 2023; Packard and Berger 2021; Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018). This extensive literature consistently demonstrates that even subtle wording changes in brands' marketing actions (e.g., advertisements) can significantly alter consumer perceptions. For instance, using first-person plural pronouns like "we" (vs. "you and us") can make people feel like they work with the brand (Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012), assertive words like "must" (vs. "could") can drive consumer compliance with a message (Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012), and more granular numerical information like "365 days" (vs. "1 year") can make a communication more credible (Zhang and Schwarz 2013).

Recently, scholars started investigating how brand language shapes the success of marketing communications in the specific realm of social media. As with more traditional channels, language cues have been found to play a crucial role on social media. Here too, even a single word can make a big difference (Kronrod 2022). Research in this area builds on relevant linguistic phenomena, such as semantics (i.e., the study of the meaning of language), syntax (i.e., the study of sentence formation), and rhetoric (i.e., the study of how to persuade with language), to understand how consumers react to social media marketing messages.

To identify articles on brand language in the social media realm, I performed a bibliometric analysis aimed at identifying all marketing and consumer research articles about brand language on social media (the first one was published in 2017, the last one in 2023; $N = 19$). Then, I coded studies' attributes such as *key dependent variables*, *linguistic cue*, *method*, and *social media platform*, as shown in Table 1. In particular, using the Boolean string "*brand*+AND+language+OR+linguistic*+AND+social+AND+media*," I searched Scopus database, Google Scholar, and the publisher databases for the marketing journals classified as 4*, 4, and 3 according to ABS classification (AJG 2021) up to the year 2023 (more details can be found in Appendix A).

The bibliometric review reveals several important factors and recurring themes in the identified empirical works. First of all, existing research in this area mostly focuses on social media engagement (hereafter, engagement) as the key dependent variable. Engagement is usually defined as a compound measure of consumers' intentions to like, comment on, or share the content brands post on their owned social media accounts (Pezzuti 2023). This literature overall demonstrates that various linguistic cues can affect engagement. The linguistic cues that received more attention are the semantic ones. For example, consumers like more brands' social media messages that contain negation

words such as “don’t” (Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023), words expressing certainty such as “must” (Pezzuti, Leonhardt, and Warren 2021), or second person pronouns such as “you” (Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017). In addition to semantic cues, syntactic features of the message can influence consumers’ intentions to engage with it. For instance, high text readability (i.e., a text that is easier to read) drives consumers to reply more to a social media post (Pancer et al. 2018). Similarly, early location of topic-related words in a brand message enhances likelihood of consumers retweeting the message (Jalali and Papatla 2019). Furthermore, also the presence of rhetorical figures such as alliterations (“Deal of the day”) and repetitions (“We really really really really really like potatoes”) in brand posts significantly influences consumers’ sharing of such posts (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). Pezzuti (2023) reveals that, if brands leverage on consumers’ discrepancy about the self (e.g., an inconsistency between the actual and desired self-state) using words such as “should,” the latter will more likely interact with the former.

Importantly, the effect of linguistic choices on engagement does not concern only product brands. Influencers (i.e., person brands), for example, can rely on sensory words such as “juicy” and high arousal words such as “sensational” to make their posts more engaging (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023a; Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b).

While most of this work considers social media engagement as the main dependent variable, however, a few empirical studies assert that brand language can directly impact other relevant brand perceptions, such as brand trust or brand status. Gretry et al. (2017), for example, report that the use of informal language increases (decreases) brand trust for familiar (unfamiliar) brands. Lee (2021), on the other hand, demonstrates that emotional language in brand messages negatively impacts perceptions of brand status. In both cases, the effects are driven by communication norm expectations. Additionally, scholars are beginning to link language to other consumer responses like brand attitudes

and purchase intentions (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023a, 2023b; Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer 2023), suggesting that differences in language choices can also impact attitudes and behaviors. Notably, a recent meta-analysis by Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh (2023) finds that brands' social media content can significantly affect sales, countering popular beliefs that its effects are limited to engagement. These findings may apply also to language style as it is a specific type of brands' social media content brands can leverage on.

The work reviewed above focuses on textual *language* cues in social media communication. Other works, on the other hand, study textual *paralanguage* cues (Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023). Textual paralanguage is "the written manifestations of nonverbal audible, tactile, and visual elements that supplement or replace written language and that can be expressed through words, symbols, images, punctuation, demarcations, or any combination of these elements" (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017; p. 99). Among the paralinguistic elements that received greater scholarly attention, there are emojis. Emojis are pictorial cues used in digital communications that include both facial expressions (e.g., 😀) and a diverse array of non-facial symbols (e.g., 🔥; Bashirzadeh, Mai, and Faure 2021; Li, Chan, and Kim 2019; Smith and Rose 2020). Emojis can enhance engagement with brand messages because of the perceived playfulness of the interaction occurring between consumers and brands (McShane et al. 2021). Interestingly, scholars also tried to disentangle the effects of face vs. non-face emojis. Research indicates, for instance, that using face emojis in digital messages can help brands in persuading consumers by increasing the emotional arousal of the message (Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer 2023). In contrast, the use of non-face emojis can sometimes improve the fluency of messages thus driving favorable consumer responses (Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022).

As previously mentioned, the digital era has witnessed a substantial increase in both the availability of data and the development of tools to analyze such data. Methodologies for studying brand language on social media are thus undergoing evolution. While scholars still heavily rely on experimental studies to examine brand language (i.e., manipulating language stimuli in a controlled manner), there is a growing popularity of multi-method investigations. These investigations blend experimental data with field unstructured data, analyzed through statistical modeling. Depending on the research question, field data may be Facebook or X (formerly Twitter) text messages, but also Instagram pictures and TikTok videos (e.g., Atalay, El Kihal, and Ellsaesser 2023; Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023a; Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017).

The use of multiple methodologies and, therefore, different types of data enables researchers to derive highly meaningful insights (Packard and Berger 2024). Overall, conducting multi-method investigations allows researchers to capitalize on the strengths of each approach (e.g., the internal validity for experiments, the generalizability of findings to real-world situations for field studies), while mitigating the limitations inherent in each methodology (e.g., the lack of external validity for experiments, the challenge of establishing cause-and-effect relationships for field studies).

To sum up, while marketing scholars have long recognized the importance of language in traditional branding areas (e.g., advertising, brand names, customer service), the recent surge in social media heightened interest in the language employed by brands in the digital context. Researchers in this area are paying attention to several linguistic phenomena, including semantics, syntax, and rhetoric (Packard and Berger 2024). Further, regardless of the specific focus, whether it is on rhetorical devices like alliterations, sin-

gle-word choices like negations, or textual paralanguage elements like emojis, the literature summarized above affirms the crucial role of brand language in shaping the success of social media marketing messages.

That being said, the vast volume of available language data is in contrast with a relatively low number of academic papers on the subject ($N = 19$). Much remains to be known about how brands should talk on social media. Relatedly, social media managers still struggle to create successful marketing messages, often leading consumers to ignore such messages (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). Accordingly, with the current dissertation, I aim to contribute to the literature on brand linguistics in the context of social media. Drawing upon prior work on textual language and paralanguage, I focus on a specific type of language that brands may use on social media—i.e., internet slang.

Table 1. OVERVIEW OF KEY EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF BRAND LANGUAGE IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA REALM

Author(s), Year	Linguistic Cue	Platform	Method	Key DV(s)	Key Findings
Atalay, El Kihal, and Ellsaesser (2023)	Syntactic surprise	Facebook, Instagram	Field study, field experiments	CTR	Syntactic surprise in brand messages is related to message effectiveness. There is an inverted U-shaped relationship between them: medium-syntactic-surprise messages are the most effective.
Batista et al. (2022)	Assertive vs. sarcastic language	Facebook	Online experiments	Brand attitudes	Consumers respond more favorably to brand messages using an assertive rather than sarcastic tone in the context of controversial issues. This occurs because of the perceived aggressiveness of sarcasm.
Cascio Rizzo et al. (2023a)	Sensory words	Instagram, TikTok	Field studies, online experiments	Engagement, Purchase intentions	Influencers' use of sensory language increases engagement and intentions to purchase sponsored products. The effects are driven by perceived authenticity.
Cascio Rizzo et al. (2023b)	Aroused language	Instagram, TikTok	Field studies, online experiments	Engagement, Choice likelihood	Influencers' use of high arousal language increases engagement with micro influencers, but it decreases engagement with macro influencers. Micro (macro) appear more (less) trustworthy.
Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti (2017)	Pronouns	Facebook	Field study, online experiments	Consumer involvement, Brand attitudes	Second person pronouns enhance consumer involvement and brand attitude. This happens because consumers engage in self-referencing.
Davis et al. (2019)	Text readability	X	Field study	Engagement	For less (more) hedonic brands, easy-to-read (difficult-to-read)

					messages result in greater engagement.
Gretry et al. (2017)	Informal language	Facebook	Online experiments	Brand trust	For familiar (unfamiliar) brands, using informal language has a positive (negative) effect on brand trust. The effects occur because consumers expect brands to behave according to social norms.
Jalali and Papatla (2019)	Location of words	X	Field study, natural experiment	Retweets	Consumers retweets more brand messages where topic-related words are located at the beginning.
Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen (2019)	Pronouns	Facebook	Field study	Engagement	Engagement varies as a consequence of pronoun usage for hedonic vs. utilitarian brands (e.g., the use of first-person singular pronouns has a negative, significant impact for utilitarian service-brands but not for utilitarian good-brands).
Lee (2021)	Emotional language	X, Weibo	Field studies, online experiments	Brand status	There is a negative relationship between emotional language in brand messages and perceptions of brand status. This association is mediated by communication norms.
Lee, Hosanagar and Nair (2018)	Brand personality cues	Facebook	Field study	Engagement	Brand content related to brand personality (e.g., humor) drives higher engagement. Informative content (e.g., deals) leads to lower engagement when included in messages in isolation.
Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer (2023)	Face emojis	Facebook, X	Field study, lab experiments, online experiments	Persuasion measures	Brand messages including facial emojis influence persuasion as a consequences of emotional

					arousal and perceived ambiguity. The effect through emotional arousal is positive. The effect through ambiguity depends on the emoji's function.
McShane et al. (2021)	Emojis	X	Field study, online experiments	Engagement	Brand messages including emojis drive more engagement. Perceived playfulness explains this effect.
Pancer et al. (2019)	Text readability	Facebook, X	Field study, online experiment	Engagement	Easy-to-read posts drive more engagement.
Pezzuti (2023)	Words highlighting discrepancies	Facebook	Field study, online experiments	Engagement	Brand messages including words that direct attention to discrepancies between consumers' actual and desired states leads to increased engagement. This happens because this type of language makes the message more relevant.
Pezzuti and Leonhardt (2023)	Negations	Facebook, X	Field studies, online experiments	Engagement	Brand messages including negations leads to increased engagement. This occurs because brands seem more powerful.
Pezzuti,Leonhardt, and Warren (2021)	Words expressing certainty	Facebook, X	Field studies, online experiments	Engagement	Brand messages including words that express certainty are associated with higher engagement because expressing certainty makes brands seem more powerful.
Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2019)	Alliterations and repetitions	Facebook, X	Field studies	Message sharing	Brand messages using alliterations, repetitions, and cross-message compositions increase message sharing.
Whaid et al. (2023)	Foreign language	TikTok	Field study	Engagement	Global brands operating in an emerging context using English and code-switched language (vs.

Indonesian) drive more engagement.

2.1.3 Internet Slang

Linguistics defines internet slang—also known as *netspeak*, *cyberspeak*, *internet linguistics*, *online jargon*, or *web lingo*—as a set of informal, often abbreviated, and unconventional language and expressions that emerge and/or evolve within the context of online communication (Barseghyan 2013; Coleman 2012; Crystal 2011; Kundi et al. 2014; Liu et al. 2019; Liu, Wu, and Gong 2022; Sundaram et al. 2023)[1]. This language is characterized by dynamism, informality, irregularity, and heterogeneity. For this reason, classifying the different types of internet slang is challenging. This may explain why this construct has not received much scholarly attention.

The few linguistic scholars who attempted to offer a classification of internet slang identify various subcategories. Barseghyan (2013), for example, argues that internet slang consists of (1) *letter homophones* (acronyms such as "LOL," and abbreviations such as "2nite"), (2) *punctuation, capitalizations, and other symbols* (periods such as "……," exclamation points such as "!!!!!," and words in caps lock such as "STOP IT" usually used for emphasis), (3) *onomatopoeic spellings* (onomatopoeic expressions such as "ha-haha" or misspellings such as "sauce" for "source"), (4) *keyboard-generated icons and smileys* (emoticons such as ":-)"), (5) *leet* (alternative spellings such as "h3110" for "hello"), and (6) *flaming* (insulting slang words created in hostile interactions). Other authors add to these subcategories the one of *slang words*—i.e., words or phrases that emerged from cultural sources different from the internet (e.g., AAVE words such as "bae" and "lit;" Liu et al. 2019; Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020; Wu, Morstatter, and Liu 2018). Generally speaking, thus, internet slang refers to all those expressions that evolve and popularize through the internet, regardless of their origin.

[1] Although my dissertation focuses on social media, I use the label *internet slang* rather than *social media slang* following existing research. Both labels refer to the same construct (Sundaram et al. 2023).

Internet slang is frequently consumed in the marketplace (e.g., in product reviews; Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020). On social media, both consumers and brands use internet slang, whether in their posts or interactions with other social media users (Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021). The use of internet slang aligns with the environment characterizing social media. Indeed, one feature that distinguishes social media communication from traditional marketing channels is its relationship-building nature (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023). The language used by social media users is thus much more casual and conversational than that used in other marketing contexts (Gretry et al. 2017). As previously discussed, informality and sociability are among the defining characteristics of internet slang, making this language ideal for the social media realm (Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021).

Although many internet slang expressions emerge as a means of saving keystrokes (e.g., abbreviations and acronyms), this language primarily serves a social function (Barseghyan 2013). Similar to other types of slang, internet slang may be employed to signal group membership, reinforce identity and cohesiveness with a group or trend in a particular environment, and exclude non-members (Drake 1980; Eble 1996; Yule 2022). Relatedly, scholars studying "offline" slang illustrate that, when a community or society is large enough to have subgroups, various forms of slang automatically coexist with standard language (Eble 1996). Therefore, from a sociolinguistic perspective and in line with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1978), slang arises from the need to differentiate from out-group members, establish group membership, and, hence, for "the delineation of 'us' and 'them'" (Drake 1980; p. 65). For example, foodies use food-specific slang words (e.g., the slang word "grub" that means "food") to differentiate themselves from people who go to the restaurant but are not food insiders. Online gamers use game-specific slang terms (e.g., the word "nerf" that means "to downgrade" in the game World

of Warcraft) to gain validation from seasoned players and simultaneously make new players feel excluded (Coleman 2012; Li, Chan, and Kim 2019). Similarly, social media and internet users can employ internet slang as a marker of group membership (Yule 2022). Using internet slang should showcase one's ability to belong to, fit in, and survive in the online environment (Berger and Heath 2008). Furthermore, being able to use internet slang appropriately may signal an individual's familiarity with current online trends, social dynamics, and evolving language patterns (Coleman 2012).

While both brands and consumers use internet slang in the marketplace, I specifically focus on the use of internet slang by brands in this dissertation. Considering the social and cultural value of internet slang, I wonder: What social function does internet slang serve for brands? I suggest that there should be a connection between the use of internet slang and the principle of brand relevance (Keller 2000). This principle posits that, for brands to gain or maintain strong brand equity, they must remain relevant in the marketplace. That is, they must adapt their intangibles and promotional themes to fit current times and contemporary trends. The goal of relevance reflects the external social pressure to which brands must adapt to avoid being forgotten or deemed out-of-date (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006). Given that communication is a primary brand intangible (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017), adjusting the language used in social media marketing messages to linguistic trends should be one way for brands to pursue relevance. It follows that, from a brand relevance perspective and as internet slang reflects online trends, brands may strategically use this type of language to adapt to current online trends and hence look relatable in the eyes of consumers (Swaminathan et al. 2020). Therefore, internet slang may represent a cultural marker for brands that pursue relevance in the online environment.

Then, assuming that internet slang does have a social values for brands aiming to be relevant in the online environment, what could be the consequences of brands' adoption of internet slang in marketing messages? Marketing and consumer research do not offer a clear answer to this question. On one hand, scant research examines it. On the other hand, the few existing findings are contradictory. Indeed, while some researchers provide evidence that the presence of internet slang in advertisements does not affect brand attitudes or product evaluations (Liu et al. 2019; Liu, Wu, and Gong 2022), other report that slang expressions included in a message can drive negative attitudes toward the brand (Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021). Yet other researchers argue that using slang could enhance message effectiveness (Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020). Such contrasting results may depend on four main factors.

First, as discussed in the previous sections, internet slang comprises various subcategories of language. However, the marketing literature offering empirical findings regarding internet slang focuses on specific (and different) subcategories rather than providing a comprehensive account of this language in its entirety. For example, Pyrah, Wang, and Lee (2021) investigate the consequences of incorporating *slang words* such as "bae" in online marketing messages, while Liu, Wu, and Gong (2022) study a broader definition of internet slang that includes also *abbreviations* such as "vid." Second, this literature does not uniformly take into account the social value of internet slang. As a language reflecting online trends and representing specific social groups, internet slang can be easily misused. Some expressions may be highly trendy, while others may be already outdated. Some brands may fit more with the use of internet slang, while others may not align with it. Third, none of the existing works examine internet slang in the field. Relying exclusively on experimental data, thus manipulating internet slang in various ways, may be limiting and lack external validity. Finally, prior work treats internet slang as a binary

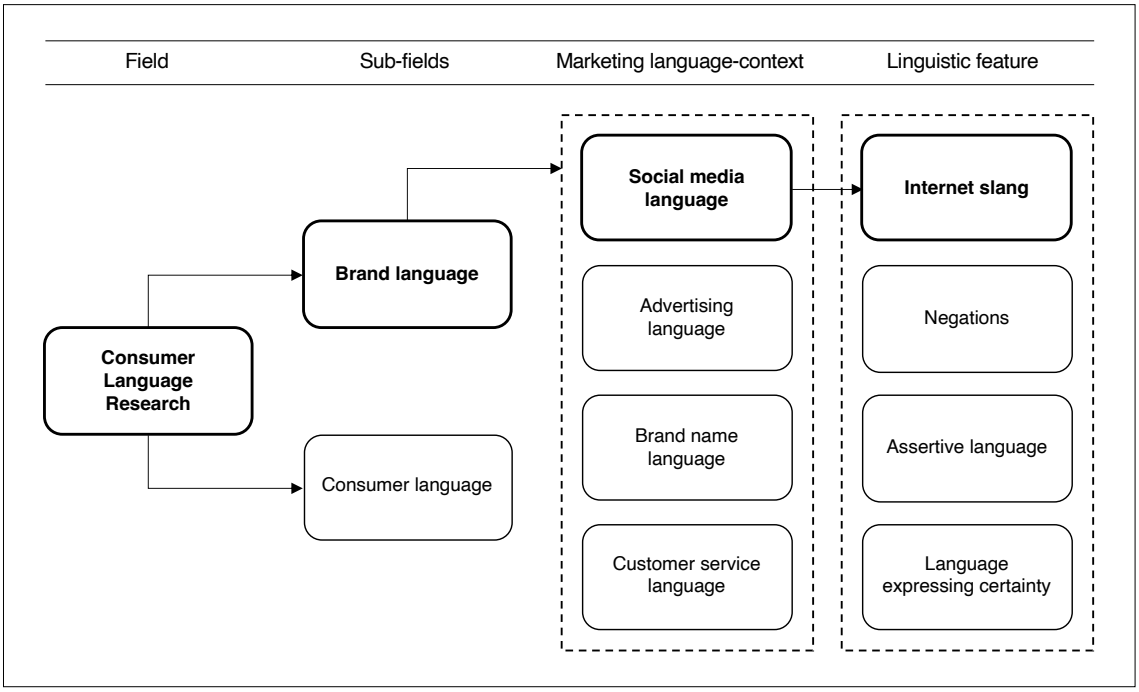
variable (i.e., presence vs. absence of one internet slang expression in a message). However, brands vary in the degree to which they incorporate internet slang in their messages, with some using it more sparingly and others employing a higher intensity. For certain brands, even a low intensity may be sufficient to elicit negative responses, while others may require a high intensity to merely capture consumers' attention. Altogether, these factors characterizing existing marketing and consumer literature on internet slang may explain why consistent findings are lacking.

Thus, the main purpose of this dissertation is to offer new insights to this literature while accounting for the above four factors. More specifically, I aim to offer a clearer and more granular understanding of the consequences of brands' adoption of internet slang in their social media messages. In an attempt to address the inconsistencies identified in previous findings, the present research (1) considers internet slang in its broader form (i.e., investigates different subcategories of internet slang simultaneously) and offers an updated conceptualization of this language by developing and validating an internet slang dictionary, (2) takes a socio-psychological perspective to study the social meaning of internet slang, (3) adopts a multi-method empirical approach to study internet slang both in the field and experimental settings, and (4) considers internet slang as a continuous variable rather than a binary one (i.e., I will talk about *internet slang intensity* instead of *internet slang presence*).

I build on the impression management framework (Goffman 1959) and adopt a theoretical perspective that bridges self-presentation and identity signaling to investigate the role played by internet slang in marketing messages. In this way, I aim to contribute to brand and consumer language research. Figure 1 is a map aimed at representing the research focus of the present dissertation. Beginning with the broader research field of

consumer language research, narrowing it down to the subfield of brand language research, and finally, delving into brand language research in the realm of social media, my specific focus is on internet slang as a linguistic cue that brands can use in this context to shape the success of their marketing messages.

Figure 1. RESEARCH FOCUS



NOTE.—My research focus is highlighted in bold (i.e., consumer language research: brand language: social media language: internet slang). The list of existing findings (in normal formatting) in sections Marketing language-context and Linguistic feature is not exhaustive; examples presented here are just a subset of the existing findings.

2.1.4 Impression Management

Shakespeare's (1599) "all the world's a stage" is the starting point of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of social interactions. Social life is the theatre in which any individual (i.e., actor) enacts different performances in front of other people (i.e., audience), and in which all participants (i.e., both actor and audiences) must work together to maintain order and balance in every social interaction (Tseëlon 1992).

Impression management is the process through which actors manage others' perceptions and evaluations. It consists of any actions undertaken by an individual with the

intent of influencing or manipulating the perceptions and judgments formed about them by others (Tedeschi and Riess 1981). Goffman's (1959) notion of impression management relies on the distinction between individuals' private and public life. The former is referred to as *backstage*, the latter as *front stage*. Impressions are the (mis)match between the back- and front stage (Lehman et al. 2019).

The impression management framework has been formally and experimentally developed by several social psychologists (Jones and Pittman 1982; Leary and Kowalski 1990; Schlenker and Leary 1980; Schneider 1981; Tedeschi and Riess 1981; Tetlock and Manstead 1985). In contrast to Goffman, who saw impression management merely as a tool to define social interactions (Leary and Kowalski 1990), social psychologists have paid particular attention to the specific motives that inevitably drive individuals to engage in impression management (Schneider 1981). Numerous theoretical accounts of motivation have been proposed. Tedeschi and Riess (1981), for instance, argued that social actors' motivations could be explained by various motives, including (1) the desire to gain credit and avoid blame, (2) the urge to maintain self-esteem, (3) the desire to create connotative impressions, and (4) strategic self-presentation. I focus on the latter, self-presentation.

2.1.4a Self-presentation

Self-presentation entails a set of behaviors aimed to make desired impressions on other people and succeed in social groups or interactions (Vohs, Baumeister, and Ciarocco 2005). But to succeed with an audience could mean various things. Put differently, social actors may engage in self-presentation as employing different strategies (Sezer 2022). Indeed, scholars proposes various taxonomies of self-presentation strategies. Jones (1964), for example, focuses on ingratiation, namely, the self-presentation

through which social actors try to gain favor, approval, or acceptance from others. In contrast, other scholars advance wider taxonomies of self-presentation that embrace additional tactics, such as intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification, or supplication (Jones and Pittman 1982). What distinguishes one self-presentation strategy from the other is what Jones and Pittman (1982) define as the *specific attribution searched by the actor*. In the case of ingratiation, for example, actors are seeking the "attribution of likability" (p. 235)—they want to be liked by the target audience (Tedeschi and Riess 1981). Social actors may attain likability through audience-pleasing, conformity, or self-enhancement (Baumeister 1982; Bernheim 1994; Swann et al. 1987). In contrast, social actors engaging in intimidation as a form of self-presentation are trying to convince the audience that they are powerful. They may intimidate others through social control, tension, or fear (Grimes 1978; O'Day 1974; Zoghbi Manrique de Lara 2006). Finally, social actors using self-promotion aim to appear competent. Inferences of competence may be obtained by means of enhancing self-descriptions, confidence, or ability claims (Giacalone and Rosenfeld 1986; Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986; Scopelliti, Loewenstein, and Vosgerau 2015).

Although self-presentation has received massive academic attention (Tetlock and Manstead 1985), most studies have been dedicated to actors' motivations rather than audience's responses (Schlenker and Leary 1982). However, the success of impression management depends on how the audience responds to it. For instance, the audience may form a different impression from the one the actor was hoping for. In other words, there could be a discrepancy between the calculated and secondary impression (Schneider 1981).

On one hand, the calculated impression refers to what the actor has planned to convey to the target. In the case of ingratiation or self-promotion, for example, the actor seeks to be approved (by looking likeable or by looking competent) by the other, and the

decision of what form of ingratiation or self-promotion to use will depend on the nature of the relationship and the setting. The actor must be especially knowledgeable about the impression that s/he wants to create and about the target to succeed (Schneider 1981; Tedeschi and Riess 1981). On the other hand, the secondary impression is the set of possible inferences that the target may draw from the actor's behavior. These inferences may be inconsistent with the calculated impression, leading to undesired outcomes (Baron 1986). For example, enumerating one's past academic achievements to appear smart during a job interview may convey the impression of being overconfident (Gurevitch 1984). Talking about personal successes to be liked may be seen as bragging (Scopelliti, Loewenstein, and Vosgerau 2015). Combining bragging with complaining (i.e., humblebragging) to sound competent and sincere at the same time may be perceived as even worse than just bragging or just complaining (Sezer, Gino, and Norton 2018).

Since a solid knowledge of the desired impression is necessary for an actor to succeed, self-presentation failure likely occurs during a new role acquisition. Acquiring a new role in a social system is a dynamic process characterized by a continuous interaction between the individual and the role, internal and external expectations, and others' responses to such transformation (Thornton and Nardi 1975). Specifically, Thornton and Nardi's (1975) formulation recognizes four stages of this temporal event. The first phase is the anticipatory stage, during which individuals have insufficient and tentative role knowledge. Consequently, proper behaviors to interpret the new role are partially known and superficially understood. The analysis of the desired role is purely stereotypical (Solomon and Assael 1981; Solomon 1983). A clarifying example may be the one of grown men's use of youth culture's symbols such as internet slang and hip clothing to give the impression of still being very young. A reverse yet complementary example is one of

adolescents who buy “macho” products such as cars and cologne to convey the impression of being grownups (Solomon 1983). What these examples illustrate is that the desire to impress combined with the lack of internal cues to behavior drives social actors to strongly depend on situational cues (Aaker 1999), as much as “a theatrical actor who is unfamiliar with a new part certainly relies heavily upon the prompter” (Solomon 1983; p. 326). Unfortunately, failing is very likely, leading the actor to face undesirable consequences (Aaker 1999; Solomon 1983).

New role acquisition failure represents one example of discrepancy between calculated and secondary impressions. Existing research shows that another type of failed impression management is excessive impression management. Scholars have demonstrated that self-presentation tactics penalize rather than improve actors’ performance perceptions whenever they are used excessively (Rosenfeld 1997). For instance, Baron (1986) demonstrates that, during job interviews, if two self-presentation tactics are employed in isolation, they improve applicants’ ratings. Still, if they are employed together, the ratings are lower. Similarly, Crowe and colleagues (2019) show that using humor in combination with self-enhancement in job meetings diminishes the satisfaction of targets because individuals result less credible when they engage in too much impression management. Excessive opinion conformity too backfires during social interaction (Leary 2019). Within unacquainted dyads, those who communicate excessively favorable presentations are perceived as reassurance-seeking and awkward (Joiner and Metalsky 2001). On social media, excessive impression management is condemned too. Sharing too much self-content and over-filtered selfies is perceived as a violation of the social norms governing social network sites (Hong et al. 2020; Uski and Lampinen 2016).

Whether successful or not, self-presentation is the mechanism through which social actors actively signal elements of their identity to the audience. Through self-presentation, social actors can use various signals and cues to communicate aspects of their identity to those around them in an attempt to successfully affect others' impressions. Specifically, within this framework, identity-signaling behaviors represent specific actions that serve as deliberate or subconscious signals that communicate aspects of one's identity to others (Berger and Heath 2007; Berger, Ho, Joshi 2011; Gal 2015).

2.1.4b Identity Signaling

The process of selecting and displaying physical and non-physical signals that symbolically communicate information about the self to others is known as identity signaling (Berger and Ward 2010; Gal 2015; Schlenker 2012). Specifically, identity signaling refers to the way social actors use various cues, behaviors, or symbols to communicate aspects of their identity to others, thus shaping the impressions others form of them (Ferraro and Kirmani 2017). Similarly to economic signaling (Spence 1978), identity signaling arises from the presence of asymmetric information, prompting individuals to compensate such asymmetry by adopting distinctive symbols and cues that convey aspects of their identity.

As highlighted by existing theorizing, identity signaling usually arises from various needs (Gal 2015). Individuals may engage in identity signaling because they feel the need to associate and belong to a group (i.e., need to belong; Leary and Baumeister 1995), because they want to express their true self instead of an idealized one (i.e., need for self-expression; Bellah et al. 1985), or because they hope to bolster their self-esteem and self-worth (i.e., need for self-enhancement; Sedikides and Strube 1995).

In the consumer realm, identity signaling involves using products, brands, and consumption behaviors to convey information about one's personal characteristics, affiliations, and social roles to others (Belk 1988; Berger and Ward 2010; Levy 1959; McCracken 1986; Veblen 1899; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). Signifying denotes brands' ability to function as meaning transfers (Luna, Carnevale, and Lerman 2017; Schmitt 2012), and identity signaling is the process through which consumers appropriate those meanings.

Symbolic consumption has a long history in marketing and consumer research. Veblen (1899) was the first to suggest that consumers use products to communicate their desired characteristics to others, followed by Levy's (1959) and McCracken's (1986) classic works on the ability of products to shape consumers' self-concept and self-identity. In more recent works, scholars illustrate the ubiquity of identity-signaling behaviors in various consumption contexts. For example, consumers engage in identity signaling when they buy sustainable food or own electric cars to show they care about the environment (Folwarczny, Otterbring, and Ares 2023), avoid purchasing products used by dissociative reference groups (Berger and Heath 2007; White and Dahl 2006), do not take advantage of cost-saving opportunities not to be perceived as cheap (Ashworth, Darke, and Schaller 2005), opt for superior-quality items because other people are watching (Argo et al. 2005), or prefer products with subtle brand logos to differentiate from the mainstream (Berger and Ward 2010).

While this literature focuses on actual consumption or physical display of possessions, identity signaling and self-presentation can also manifest virtually. With the rise of the internet, scholars started investigating the motives underlying identity-related behaviors online in general (e.g., Schau and Gilly 2003), but particular attention is paid now to how social media platforms can serve the signaling function (Gal 2015; Gosling, Gaddis,

and Vazire 2007; Schlosser 2020; Toubia and Stephen 2013; Wilcox and Stephen 2013). Posting about products on social media can help consumers signal their association with desired identities (Grewal, Stephen, and Coleman 2019), their authenticity (Valsesia and Diehl 2021), or their political affiliation (van der Does et al. 2022). Altogether, this work emphasizes the role of social media as an ideal stage where social actors can self-present to desired audiences.

Therefore, identity-relevant products, brands, consumption behaviors, or virtual content can help senders signal something about themselves to others, satisfying various needs such as the need to belong or the need for self-expression (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2010). By considering identity signaling as an effective communication tool, it follows that identity signals could also help receivers make correct inferences about senders. Consider, for example, a consumer who loves punk music. Wearing band patches and safety pins should not only be helpful for her to signal her passion for punk music, but it should also enable receivers to correctly assume that she is a fan of punk music. However, scant research takes receivers' perspective to investigate the consequences of identity signaling (an exception represented by Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013). Thus, it is not clear whether, why, and when identity signaling performs its self-presentation function correctly.

From the above review of the literature on identity-signaling behavior as a means for self-presentation it emerges that scholars have mostly focused on (1) identity signaling through physical goods, whether offline or online, and (2) senders', rather than observers', perspective when investigating the consequences of identity-signaling behaviors. However, it may be theoretically relevant to address both gaps (Gal 2015). First, a few findings suggest that other forms of identity-signaling behavior are indeed possible and important. For instance, outside the marketing realm, scholars show that the way in which

individuals respond to surveys is a form of identity signaling (Gal and Rucker 2011). Similarly, in the marketing realm, scholars demonstrate that word-of-mouth communication can be used to signal one's desired identity traits (Packard and Wooten 2013). Second, initial evidence suggests that the consequences of identity signaling are not always as senders expect when considering observers' perspectives, consistent with existing theorizing on failed impression management (Sezer 2022). In other words, identity signaling can sometimes be negatively perceived by observers, and only by taking the perspective of receivers we can identify failures in signaling behavior. But why may it be important to detect missteps in identity signaling? By focusing on the receivers' perspective, Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly (2013), for example, demonstrate that the consequences of failed identity signaling are so pervasive that they not only affect the consumer engaging in identity signaling but also extend to the symbols used as signals of identity (i.e., negative attitudes toward the identity-signaling consumer drive negative attitudes toward the brand used for the signaling behavior).

Taken together, these existing works suggest the theoretical importance of addressing both gaps in the literature, namely, considering identity signals that are not physical and take the perspective of receivers. Accordingly, in the present dissertation, I focus on an alternative signal of identity or self-presentational tool (i.e., language), and examine the consequences that the brand's use of this identity signal may have from the consumers' perspective.

2.2 Conceptual Development

Building on the prior review on brand language research, internet slang, and the impression management framework (specifically, self-presentation and identity signaling), I advance three propositions. First, brands can be viewed as social actors engaging in self-presentation and identity signaling on social media, motivated by the underlying motive of ingratiating consumers. Second, language and linguistic choices can serve as symbolic indicators of identity and, thus, function as strategic tools for self-presentation. Third, using internet slang may enable brands to convey consumers the impression of being relevant by fitting contemporary trends and current times (i.e., signaling a trendy, up-to-date, young identity). This section is aimed at delving further into these three propositions, and formalizing my theoretical model.

2.2.1 Brands as Social Actors, Internet Slang as Signal of Identity

While prevalent in organizational behavior research, self-presentation has not received much scholarly attention in marketing (O'Donnell, Jung, and Critcher 2016). Furthermore, existing findings on identity signaling mostly focus on consumer behaviors rather than brand behaviors. However, impression management underscores the pivotal role played by others in driving consumers' willingness to manage their impressions (Ferraro and Kirmani 2017; Gal 2015). Put simply, when individuals sense scrutiny and evaluation, they are more inclined to engage in self-presentation and identity-signaling behaviors. Therefore, given the importance of others in activating the desire to engage in impression management efforts, it is somewhat surprising that almost no research has used this theoretical framework to analyze brand behaviors (an exception represented by

Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen 2019). Considering the business-driven nature and strategic objectives of brands in the marketplace, they should naturally feel motivated to engage in self-presentational efforts when conveying information to consumers. Said another way, brands should be fundamentally driven by the ulterior motive of impressing consumers (Kirmani and Zhu 2007). Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that they frequently, if not consistently, employ self-presentation strategies and identity-signaling behaviors to convey favorable impressions of themselves to consumers.

As discussed in the previous sections, the motives underlying self-presentation strategies are diverse (Jones and Pittman 1982), but they can be summarized into two fundamental desires or interpersonal goals: likeability and respect (Sezer 2022). In other words, social actors may engage in self-presentational behaviors either to be liked or respected by others[2]. This should be true for brands as well. Brands may employ self-presentation strategies to increase likeability (e.g., by appearing funny, relatable, friendly) or respect (e.g., by appearing knowledgeable, expert, capable) in the eyes of consumers, with both goals underlying the ulterior motive of persuasion. While the attribution of respect can be attained through strategies such as self-promotion, the goal of likeability is usually attained through ingratiation (Jones and Pittman 1982). Here, I am interested in brands' goal of likeability—i.e., their attempts to ingratiate consumers. Relatedly, identity-signaling literature indicates the need to belong to a particular group as one of the man drivers of signaling behaviors (Leary and Baumeister 1995; Fiske 2004; Gal 2015). Research demonstrates that consumers show their affiliation with a desired social group

[2] Existing impression management literature (e.g., Sezer 2022) recognizes that the desires for likeability and respect are linked to the Stereotype Content Model and its constructs of warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007). Likewise, I acknowledge this association. However, I will not discuss this theoretical framework in this section as it is beyond the scope of my dissertation (nonetheless, I will focus on competence and brand competence in section 2.2.8 Alternative Explanations).

by acquiring and displaying products and brands that signal the identity of (and their belongingness to) such group (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

While being two distinct theoretical constructs, the goal of ingratiation and the need to belong are related. Ingratiation represents a deliberate and strategic effort to win favor and approval from others—an "attempt to improve inclusionary status" (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004; p. 1096). Therefore, it could be viewed as a behavioral manifestation of the need to belong, involving the use of social strategies to enhance likability and acceptance within a group (Leary and Kowalski 1990; Romer-Canyas et al. 2010; Schlenker 1980). According to the perspective of brands as social actors proposed in this dissertation, consumers may interpret brands' efforts to strategically self-present as an indication of a desire to associate with the social groups consumers belong to. On one hand, brands should align with the identities of consumers by incorporating signals associated with consumers' identities in an attempt to ingratiate them; on the other hand, consumers should be able to recognize such attempts as brands' need to be perceived as similar to them.

Social media provides an effective stage wherein consumers can self-present and signal their belongingness to particular groups (Grewal, Stephen, and Coleman 2019; Toubia and Stephen 2013; Wilcox and Stephen 2013). Likewise, brands can leverage social media platforms to signal desired traits and identities, whether to directly advertise their products, build long-term relationships with consumers, or highlight positive qualities such as being relatable and funny (Howe et al. 2022; Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen 2019; Schlosser 2020; Silver, Newman, and Small 2020). I posit that brands may also use social media platforms to signal their social conformity to consumers and their ability to seamlessly fit into the online environment (Berger and Heath 2005). I believe they may achieve this goal through language, specifically by employing certain types of identity-

relevant linguistic cues that can allow them to present as belonging to the same social group as their target audience.

The view of language as a strategic self-presentational tool is supported by two main streams of literature. First, by linguistic theories regarding the ability of language in affecting consumer perceptions and behaviors (cf. Kronrod 2022; Packard and Berger 2024; Berger et al. 2020 reviews). Second, by psycho-sociological theories emphasizing the relevance of language in shaping the success of impression formation (Fitzsimons and Kay 2004; Maass et al. 1989; Markowitz 2023). Drawing from this literature, scholars from various fields provide initial empirical support of the symbolic value of language (Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, and Harmon-Jones 2009; Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen 2019; Packard and Wooten 2013). For instance, Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, and Harmon-Jones (2009) demonstrate that email signature length (i.e., adding more degrees and titles on email signatures) may help individuals to convey others the impression of being successful. In a similar way, Packard and Wooten (2013) show that consumers can use word-of-mouth volume or content (i.e., a long or detailed product review) to positively self-present and signal knowledgeability to other consumers. Finally, Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen (2019) focus on brands and show that pronoun choice in social media posts (i.e., using "we" instead of "I") can help brands communicating desired identities. Therefore, although prior marketing investigations of symbolic consumption mostly focus on physical goods (e.g., Argo et al. 2005; Berger and Ward 2010; Folwarczny, Otterbring, and Ares 2023), these findings support the symbolic view of language as a *verbal* consumer behavior, and the idea according to which social actors can leverage language as a self-presentational tool.

Building on this literature, my dissertation focuses on language as a self-presentational tool. My theorizing starts from the premise that brands are social actors that can

rely on specific linguistic cues on social media to signal desired identities and, thus, ingratiate consumers. I am particularly interested in brands' goal of signaling a trendy, up-to-date, and young identity. This identity should align with environmental cues representing the social media realm, helping brands survive and remain relevant in it (Berger and Heath 2005). Which type of language could help brands signal such identity? I propose it is internet slang the most effective linguistic self-presentational tool in this regard.

Building on and extending prior conceptualizations of internet slang and the social value of slang (Drake 1980), I propose the following definition of this language:

> *Definition*: Internet slang is the set of various forms of casual language that emerge and/or evolve online, and are used to reflect internet culture and trends.

Following this definition and in agreement with prior theories on internet slang (e.g., Barseghyan 2013; Li, Chan, and Kim 2019; Liu et al. 2019), expressions of this language may take various forms, including acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons, and punctuation elements. However, extending prior theories, I argue that other linguistic and paralinguistic expressions, such as emojis and social media catchphrases, should be considered expressions of internet slang. On one hand, I agree with existing theorizing that these different expressions exhibit distinctive characteristics. For instance, facial emojis and emoticons can convey emotional information (Smith and Rose 2020), non-facial emojis may be used to decorate one's communication message (Fadhil et al. 2018), while abbreviations and acronyms are sometimes employed to save keystrokes (Barseghyan 2013). On the other hand, I suggest that one particular characteristic makes all these sub-

categories similar, and it is the characteristic on which I focus in this dissertation. Specifically, I argue that all of the subcategories are imbued with symbolic meaning and may serve as signals of identity (Belk 1988; Berger and Heath 2007; Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017; Drake 1980; Levy 1959).

First, all these forms of language (or paralanguage) are usually associated with younger generations (Coleman 2012). Therefore, using them should generally communicate to receivers that the sender belongs to a social group represented by young individuals. Second, all the proposed linguistic and paralinguistic languages vary significantly in popularity over time, with some being highly trendy and others extremely outdated, depending on the specific time period (Yurieff 2021; Patkar 2018). Thus, the selection of specific expressions could convey to receivers the impression that the sender is either able or unable to keep up with trends. Overall, senders may use the proposed internet slang expressions as signals to self-present as youthful, in touch with the latest trends, and knowledgeable about internet culture (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019). At the same time, receivers may rely on these signals to determine whether the sender is indeed in the know and able to keep up with the times or not (Coleman 2012).

While I believe internet slang may serve the function of signaling identity for both brands and consumers, I assert that the former may be particularly motivated to rely on this language to self-present as trendy, up-to-date, young social actors in the realm of social media. Brands should be more concerned with the desire to convey positive information online. In other words, they should be fundamentally driven by the goal to ingratiate themselves with consumers. Thus, I propose that brands use internet slang in their digital communications to signal a trendy and up-to-date identity to consumers (Gal 2015). Through internet slang, they can convey their belongingness to contemporary

online culture, demonstrate their ability to stay in touch with the latest trends, and exhibit an understanding of the informal and dynamic nature of online communication.

2.2.2 The Inverted U-shaped Effect

If internet slang does indeed serve an identity signaling function, what could be the consequences of brands' adoption of this language from a consumer perspective? Previous works on identity signaling mostly focus on the sender's perspective, and generally indicate that identity-signaling behaviors are communication facilitators. Indeed, they help senders convey desired traits. Much less is known regarding how receivers perceive such behaviors. Building upon existing work, one could infer that these behaviors facilitate communication for receivers too. For example, they may aid receivers to correctly interpret the sender's traits and, consequently, form favorable impressions of the them (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2010). However, I argue that this is not always the case. Following initial evidence on the unexpected consequences of identity signaling (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013), I propose that consumers may not necessarily respond positively to brands' use of internet slang as a marker of identity.

Theories regarding symbolic consumption, as well as economic signaling, emphasize the importance of the visibility of signals in the success of signaling. Specifically, for a signal to be effective in conveying the desired impression to others, it should be visible and observable (Belk 1988; Fisman 2008; Spence 1978). This suggests a positive, linear association between signal explicitness and the effectiveness of impression formation. In other words, the more explicit the signal, the more effectively an impression should be conveyed (Berger and Ward 2010).

Then, a proposition may follow: the use of internet slang in brand messages should be explicit for consumers to form correct inferences about brands. In particular, one way

brands may achieve high levels of internet slang explicitness could be by using a high number of internet slang expressions in their messages. Stated differently, it may be assumed that the more brands intend to communicate their trendy identity and ability to seamlessly fit into the online environment, the higher the number of internet slang expressions in their messages should be.

Contrasting this view, I argue that, rather than being positive and increasing, the relationship between internet slang intensity (i.e., number of internet slang expressions) in a brand message and consumer response to that message follows an inverted U-shaped curve. Up to a certain intensity (i.e., "low" [3] intensity), the effect of internet slang should be positive as it serves a social function that creates a shared linguistic environment on social media (i.e., shared knowledge; Gundel 1985). Thus, when brands incorporate a low intensity of internet slang in social media messages, consumers should perceive them as active participants in this environment. In other words, they should perceive them as in-group members (Coleman 2012; Drake 1980; Tajfel and Turner 1978). Consistent with prior work on network formation and tie strength (Reagans 2011; Zeng and Xie 2008; Schneider 1987), linguistic alignment ensured by low internet slang intensity may drive consumers to engage with the brand message more since (1) social similarity drives interactions, and (2) they may want to reinforce this shared online culture as a way to increase group cohesiveness.

After reaching a certain intensity (i.e., "high" intensity), however, internet slang may start backfire. A high intensity of internet slang may give consumers the impression that the brand is "trying too hard." That is, consumers may infer that the brand is putting high effort in displaying the desired identity. Relatedly, the principle of *Sprezzatura*, introduced in classic Italian literature by Castiglione (1528), suggests however that those

[3] This intensity should be more precisely referred to as "low to moderate." For brevity, however, I will refer to it simply as "low" intensity.

who naturally possess an identity should not need to try hard to show it. Although (to my knowledge) no prior work has examined degree of signaling explicitness as the varying number of identity signals (i.e., explicit signaling = high number of signals), and how different numbers of identity signals affects impression formation, some findings hint at support for this assumption. For example, Berger and Ward (2010) find that those who have high cultural capital in a particular domain (e.g., fashion) prefer subtle signals (e.g., brand logo of smaller size) to explicit signals (e.g., brand logo of bigger size) as they want to differentiate from the mainstream. Further, in an unpublished work, Bhattacharjee, Barasch, and Wertenbroch (n.d.) show that imperfect signals (i.e., buying some lower quality wine together with high quality wine) are more effective than perfect signals (i.e., buying only high quality wine) in communicating a particular identity (i.e., being wine experts). I build on these works to posit that a high intensity of internet slang in a social media message may backfire for brands, leading to less favorable consumer responses.

Thus, while a low intensity of internet slang may help brands shape the success of their social media messages given the social value of this language, such effect should reverse when it is used with high intensity. Formally:

> **H1**: There is an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses.

2.2.3 Mediation by Message Playfulness

If using a certain amount of internet slang drives more favorable consumer responses compared to not using this type of language in brand messages at all, what could be the underlying mechanism of such effect? I believe one possibility may be consumer perceptions of message playfulness (McShane et al. 2021). Playfulness refers to the extent to which consumers find using a product enjoyable for its own sake, regardless of expected outcomes or performance consequences (Moon and Kim 2001; Oh et al. 2009; Zhao and Renard 2022). It plays a central role in developing social relationships (Van Vleet and Feeney 2015). Prior research consistently shows that playfulness leads to positive outcomes such as customer satisfaction (Hsu, Chang, and Chen 2012), social connectedness (Hsieh and Tseng 2017), and engagement with social media posts (McShane et al. 2021). I am particularly interested in how consumers can perceive a message to be playful. Thus, I focus on message playfulness. Message playfulness is defined as the degree to which message content conveys a sense of entertainment or amusement to receivers (McShane et al. 2021).

Two specific cues that contribute to perceptions of playfulness are information richness and familiarity. First, objects that exhibit high information richness (i.e., conveying verbal and non-verbal cues, context, and nuances) are perceived as more playful (Hsieh and Tseng 2017; Huang, Yen, and Zhang 2008; Oh et al. 2009). Second, consumers tend to experience more playfulness with objects they are familiar with or find easy to use (Catalán, Martínez, and Wallace 2019; Hackbarth, Grover, and Mun 2003; Rodrigues, Oliveira, and Costa 2016).

Building on existing research, I argue that there should be a positive, linear relationship between internet slang intensity and perceptions of message playfulness. On one hand, the use of internet slang should enrich message information because this language serves a social and identity-signaling function that extends the meaning of the message beyond the literal interpretation. Consistent with this idea, previous studies have shown that consumers perceive emojis and emoticons as enriching media content by enabling users to express personality, emotions, and intentions (Hsieh and Tseng 2017; McShane et al. 2021; Oh et al. 2009). I extend this work by proposing that internet slang enriches message information by enabling brands to express group membership and social similarity to other social media users. On the other hand, informal, dynamic, and irregular language like internet slang aligns with consumers' linguistic expectations within the social media environment (Gretry et al. 2017). Thus, internet slang should make brand messages incorporating such language more relatable and familiar to consumers as it is a common and dominant way of talking in the social media environment. Overall, messages using internet slang may appear richer in information and more relatable, fostering feelings of playfulness compared to messages using only standard language. Consistent with prior work (e.g., McShane et al. 2021), enhanced perceptions of message playfulness should ultimately drive more favorable consumer responses, such as message and brand evaluations.

Accordingly, I propose that internet slang in brand messages enhances favorable consumer responses by increasing perceived playfulness. Internet slang expressions serve a social function that contributes to creating a shared linguistic environment on social media. Therefore, brand messages incorporating internet slang should be perceived as more enjoyable and amusing (i.e., playful) for consumers, which in turn enhances positive responses. Formally:

H2: Message playfulness mediates the positive effect of internet slang intensity on consumer responses.

2.2.4 Mediation by Persuasion Knowledge

Despite hypothesizing a positive relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses as mediated by perceptions of message playfulness, my theory proposes an overall inverted U-shaped effect between internet slang intensity and consumer responses. Then, what may explain the negative side of the curve? In other words, why may consumers react more negatively to a brand message including a high (vs. low) intensity of internet slang? To answer this question, I turn my attention to persuasion knowledge theory (Friestad and Wright 1994). Persuasion knowledge refers to consumers' awareness and understanding of the persuasive intent behind a marketing action. When persuasion knowledge is activated, consumers recognize that a marketer (e.g., a salesperson, a brand, an influencer) is trying to influence them, and become skeptical of marketing claims (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b; Isaac and Grayson 2017; Kirmani and Campbell 2009; Verlegh et al. 2004). Thus, activation of persuasion knowledge can help consumers understand when brands are trying to manipulate them (Hossain and Saini 2013). Prior research indicates that suspicion of marketers' ulterior motives typically leads to negative outcomes, including decreased attitudes towards marketing messages or overall brand attitudes (Campbell 1995; Fransen, Smit, and Verlegh 2015; Jain and Posavac 2001; Kirmani 1997; Kirmani and Zhu 2007).

Part of research on persuasion knowledge considers this process as dispositional. For example, some individuals may be more skeptical toward advertising (e.g., Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998), more knowledgeable about persuasion strategies (e.g., Boush,

Friestad, and Rose 1994), or more confident in their ability to detect these strategies (e.g., Bearden, Hardesty, and Rose 2001) than others. Other scholars, in contrast, focus on the situational cues that may influence persuasion knowledge. For example, persuasion knowledge can activate when salespersons make flattery remarks (e.g., Campbell and Kirmani 2000), marketing communications repeat too often the same statement (e.g., Koch and Zerback), or advertisements present slogans rather than brand logos (e.g., Laran, Dalton, and Andrade 2011). In this dissertation, I am interested in the activation of persuasion knowledge as a consequence of situational cues. Overall, situational cues can relate to the message, the source, the channel, or the receiver (Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). Here, to explain why high internet slang intensity may negatively affect message evaluations, I start by paying attention to cues regarding the message.

Existing research identifies several message cues that can activate persuasion knowledge, like the application of "borrowed interest appeals" such as the presence of puppies in commercials (Campbell 1995), the use of negative comparisons with competitor brands (Jain and Posavac 2014), or the disclosure of paid partnerships in influencers' social media posts (Boerman, Willemsen, and Van Der Aa 2017). Most importantly, more recent work suggests that the language used in a message is a cue that may activate persuasion knowledge. High arousal language in influencer marketing (e.g., "this product is AMAZING!!!"), for example, can enhance consumer perceptions of ulterior motives (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b).

In a similar way, I propose that high internet slang intensity in brand messages may suggest consumers that the brand is trying to manipulate them. Indeed, the use of this language in marketing messages may be perceived as a form of co-optation. Co-optation refers to the process where a dominant group adopts certain elements from a sub-

culture or minority group and incorporate them into mainstream institutions, often to appeal to a broader audience or to associate with certain cultural trends (Hebdige 1979; Rushkoff and Goodman 2001). Co-optation theory, in particular, suggests that corporations assimilate practices and symbols of countercultures, and transform them into commodities of the commercial mainstream (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

If a brand uses high internet slang intensity, consumers who use social media may perceive it as a persuasive attempt aimed at appealing to and influence their social group. In other words, explicitly aligning with their interests and cultural preference may be seen as an excessive effort to ingratiate consumers. Relatedly, research on self-presentation warns about the risks of ingratiation, suggesting that it is quite a complex strategy since it can be easily perceived as manipulative and annoying (e.g., the "ingratiator's dilemma;" Cooper and Jones 1969). Self-presentation strategies may fail when they become apparent and obvious (Jones and Pittman 1982; Schlenker 2012). In contrast, if a brand uses only a low internet slang intensity, consumers may perceive it as more genuine and less of an overt attempt to manipulate or pander their group. As a more subtle incorporation of current trends, it would allow the brand to connect with its audience without coming across as trying too hard (Kirmani 1997). While high internet slang intensity may emphasize the brand's ulterior motives, low internet slang intensity may increase brand relevance in the online environment (Keller 2000).

To sum up, I posit that high internet slang intensity in brand messages should result in less favorable consumer responses because it activates increased consumers' persuasion knowledge. Essentially, consumers exposed to brand messages with high internet slang intensity should be more likely perceive the brand as manipulative than consumers exposed to messages with low internet slang intensity (Kirmani and Zhu 2007). Therefore:

H3: Persuasion knowledge mediates the negative effect of high (vs. low) internet slang intensity on consumer responses.

2.2.5 Moderation by Brand Trust

While I hypothesize an overall inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses, and I further suggest two simultaneous underlying mechanisms to explain such a relationship, I am particularly interested in exploring the negative side of the curve (i.e., the "trying too hard" part). Therefore, I also aim to identify variables that may mitigate or increase the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses.

Is the highly intense use of internet slang in brand messages always associated with negative outcomes? As previously illustrated, two key components of the persuasion process are the source of the message and the message itself (Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). Bridging the literature on impression management (Goffman 1959) and persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994), I argue that two factors pertaining to the source (i.e., the brand) and one factor pertaining to the message (i.e., the social media post) will influence the relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses. Thus, in addition to examining whether consumers' persuasion knowledge mediates the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumers, I explore three theoretically and substantially relevant moderators of the proposed effect. Specifically, I investigate the role of brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001), brand coolness (Warren and Campbell 2014), and message goal (Jalali and Papatla 2019).

Consistent with existing literature, I define brand trust as consumers' willingness to rely on a brand in which they have confidence (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007).

Brand trust involves a deliberate and thoughtful process driven by the belief that the brand is well-intentioned and committed to act in the best interests of consumers (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Doney and Cannon 1997; Rajavi, Kushwaha, and Steenkamp 2019). In other words, consumers who trust a brand make inferences about the brand being guided by positive and sincere motives. Trust results from a dynamic process made of interactions and experiences that takes place between consumers and brands (Wottrich, Verlegh, and Smit 2016). Thus, it requires time for consumers to develop trust in a brand. However, once trust is established, it usually yields positive outcomes. A solid body of work demonstrates that brand trust can increase inferences of product quality (Adler 2001), drive more word-of-mouth (Sichtmann 2007), and enhance purchase intentions (Hajli et al. 2017).

Trust also plays a key role in the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad and Wright 1994). On one hand, inferences of source trustworthiness may be influenced by consumers' activation of persuasion knowledge. Once consumers recognize the manipulativeness of a marketing tactic, they typically infer lower trustworthiness of the source (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Guo and Main 2012; Isaac and Grayson 2017). Thus, heightened awareness of persuasion raises concerns regarding the trustworthiness of the communicator (Grillo and Pizzutti 2021).

On the other hand, perceiving the source as trustworthy may affect the degree to which consumers' persuasion knowledge is activated. Indeed, trust is an indicator of credibility and low risk (Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán 2001; Pavlou 2003; Wottrich, Verlegh, and Smit 2016). Different levels of trust toward a marketer should then influence how consumers perceive and respond to marketing messages, with trust acting as a mitigating or aggravating factor in perceptions of manipulativeness. Relatedly,

existing literature demonstrates that, if the source of a persuasive message lacks transparency, consumers are more likely to access their persuasion knowledge and infer ulterior motives from such a source more than they would with a transparent source (Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). Put simply, the more consumers trust a brand, the less they should be suspicious of the brand's marketing practices.

Following this rationale, if high internet slang intensity in a brand message leads to increased negative evaluations due to heightened consumer awareness of ulterior motives, then this effect should be weaker when consumers' prior trust toward the brand is higher. Those with high levels of trust in the brand may view the use of high internet slang intensity not merely as a strategic self-presentational tactic, but more as a genuine attempt to align with the online environment. Consequently, I argue that brand trust moderates the anticipated negative impact of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations such that the inverted U-shaped relationship will be weakened for higher brand trust. Specifically:

Therefore, brand messages incorporating internet slang should be perceived as more enjoyable and amusing (i.e., playful) for consumers, which in turn enhances positive responses. Formally:

> **H4**: Brand trust moderates the relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses: For higher brand trust, the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses is attenuated.

2.2.6 Moderation by Brand Coolness

As demonstrated by the numerous conceptualizations existing in the literature, it is difficult to define coolness (Warren et al. 2019). In this dissertation, I use Warren and Campbell's (2014) and Warren et al.'s (2019) definition of coolness—i.e., coolness is "a subjective and dynamic, socially constructed positive trait attributed to cultural objects inferred to be appropriately autonomous" (p. 544). By applying this definition to brands, it is possible to highlight four essential characteristics of brand coolness (Warren et al. 2019). First, consumers subjectively perceive the coolness (or lack thereof) of brands. A brand that is perceived to be cool by some individuals is not necessarily perceived to be cool by others (Pountain and Robins 2000). Second, brand coolness is dynamic rather than static. Brands that are cool today, may not be cool tomorrow (O'Donnell and Wardlow 2000). Third, coolness is a desirable trait. If a brand is perceived to be cool, it is usually perceived to possess also other positive brand characteristics (Mohiuddin et al. 2026). Fourth, brand coolness is associated with autonomy. Cool brands have the willingness and ability to express their identity and style, independently from others' expectations (Warren and Campbell 2014). To sum up, brand coolness is characterized by (1) *subjectivity*, (2) *dynamism*, (3) *desirability*, and (4) *autonomy*.

The features of desirability and autonomy hold particular relevance for the conceptual development of the current dissertation. As briefly anticipated, brand coolness is characterized by desirability, as it is associated with several distinct and desirable traits. In their recent conceptualization of brand coolness, for instance, Warren et al. (2019) identify ten components of brand coolness, all of which have a positive valence. For example, consumers that perceive a brand to be cool also perceive it as extraordinary, of high status, and popular. Furthermore, previous research demonstrates that consumers associate brand coolness with other positive attributes such as loyalty (Jiménez-Barreto

et al. 2022), excellence (Mohiuddin et al. 2016), and usefulness (Runyan, Noh, and Mosier 2013).

However, brands considered cool are not just desirable; they are also perceived to be autonomous. In other words, "the extra quality that differentiates something from merely being liked to being perceived as cool is inferred autonomy" (Warren and Campbell 2014; p. 544). In social psychology, autonomy refers to the extent to which individuals act in accordance with their values, norms, and beliefs, independent of external influences (Brehm 1993; Deci and Ryan 1985; Schwartz 1992). Behaviors involving conformity, such as belonging and mimicry, lack autonomy as they entail doing what others are doing (Warren and Campbell 2014). Autonomy, in contrast, emphasizes self-determination (Ryan and Deci 2017). Such sense of independence is highly valued, especially in Western society (Markus and Schwartz 2010). Indeed, those regarded as influential are typically perceived as not being influenced by or susceptible to others (Dworkin 1988). Relatedly, in the consumer context, when individuals are perceived as autonomous on social media, they can drive more engagement with their posts because they are seen as more influential (Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes 2020).

Building on the desirability and autonomy features of brand coolness, and in line with the proposed persuasion knowledge mechanism, I suggest that perceptions of brand coolness should low the relationship between internet slang intensity in a marketing message and consumer responses to such message. Specifically, I argue that inferences of brand coolness may mitigate the negative effects of high internet slang intensity. First, the inherent desirability associated with cool brands should involve a more positive predisposition toward such brands, making consumers more tolerant of high internet slang intensity. The positive halo effect surrounding desirable traits such as excellence, loyalty, and popularity (Jiménez-Barreto et al. 2022; Mohiuddin et al. 2016; Warren et al. 2019)

should directs consumers' attention away from potential manipulative intentions. Therefore, this shift in focus should reduce consumers' accessibility to persuasion knowledge, as their attention is primarily directed towards the brand's positive attributes. In other words, the desirability of cool brands may serve as a "distracting cue," influencing consumers to interpret high internet slang intensity as a genuine expression of brand's desired identity rather than a self-presentational strategy.

Second, when consumers perceive a brand as cool, they are likely to view it as autonomous—i.e., lacking the tendency to conform and the need to belong. Consequently, consumers may be inclined to see the brand's use of internet slang as a deliberate choice consistent with its desirable image. In other words, the use of high internet slang intensity in marketing messages should be perceived as a more genuine, spontaneous, independent choice, rather than a self-presentational strategy aimed at persuading consumers by fitting to social norms. Inferences of autonomy should suggest to consumers that the brand employs high internet slang intensity because such behavior aligns with its own norms, rather than with the norms governing the online environment (Berger and Heath 2008).

Accordingly, I hypothesize that brand coolness moderates the proposed negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses such that the inverted U-shaped relationship will be weakened for higher brand coolness. Formally:

> **H5**: Brand coolness moderates the relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses: For higher brand coolness, the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses is attenuated.

2.2.7 Moderation by Message Goal

In addition to two factors pertaining to the source (i.e., brand trust and brand coolness), I propose that a factor pertaining to the message should also influence the extent to which high internet slang intensity makes the brand's manipulative intent more or less salient. Extant research demonstrates that message cues that enhance the explicitness of the marketer's ulterior motive are expected to activate persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Eisend and Tarrahi 2022; Kirmani and Zhu 2007). The message cue considered in this dissertation is the degree to which a message goal is promotional or non-promotional.

Brand-owned social media content is typically classified as either functional or hedonic (Jalali Papatla 2019; Lee, Hosanagar, and Naiir 2014; Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023). Functional posts are informational (e.g., providing information about a new product) or deals-related (e.g., emphasizing deals). Hedonic posts, on the other hand, are emotional (e.g., evoking emotions in consumers) or related to social content (e.g., stirring interactions). From a goal perspective, functional posts tend to encourage sales (i.e., they have a promotional goal), whereas hedonic posts signal the brand's intent to build a relationship with consumers (i.e., they have a non-promotional goal). According to existing research, these two different goals should activate different levels of persuasion knowledge (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b). Specifically, non-promotional posts should lead consumers to perceive the brand as having less ulterior motives compared to promotional posts (Hughes, Swaminathan, and Brooks 2019).

Thus, using a high internet slang intensity in a non-promotional message may mitigate the negative effect on message evaluations. If consumers indeed associate high internet slang intensity with brand's manipulative intents, they should tolerate it more when ulterior motives are less evident. Accordingly, I posit that message goal moderates

the proposed negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations such that the inverted U-shaped relationship will be weakened for non-promotional messages. Precisely:

> **H6**: Message goal moderates the relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses: For non-promotional message goal, the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses is attenuated.

2.2.8 Downstream Consequences for the Brand

The theorizing proposed so far focuses on the effect of internet slang intensity on consumer attitudinal responses (i.e., message and brand evaluations). While positive message and brand evaluations on social media are crucial for brand performance (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023; Pezzuti 2023; Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023), I am further interested in observing the effects of internet slang intensity on possible downstream consequences for the brand. In particular, I argue that different intensities of internet slang may not only affect consumer attitudinal responses but also behavioral ones (e.g., intentions to actually try a product; Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer 2023).

Building on research demonstrating the impact of brand evaluations on behavioral intentions (e.g., Spears and Singh 2004), I explore the possibility that, when consumers react more negatively to a brand using a high intensity of internet slang, they may consequently display decreased behavioral intentions toward the brand (i.e., intentions to try the brand's products and learn more about the brand). While limited research on brand language in the social media realm explores the consequences of linguistic cues on consumer behavioral intentions (as indicated in Table 1 of section 2.1 Literature Review),

the assumption proposed in this dissertation aligns with linguistic theory discussing the potential of language to influence not only perceptions, but also intentions and behaviors (Kronrod 2022). Essentially, the level of internet slang intensity in a brand message may shape the impression consumers form of the brand and, in turn, affect their behavioral intentions toward the brand. More formally:

> **H7**: More negative brand evaluations associated with high internet slang intensity drive less behavioral intentions.

Figure 2 illustrates the full conceptual model advanced in this dissertation. In conclusion of this chapter, in the next section, I identify and discuss two possible alternative explanations of the negative effects of high internet slang intensity on consumers.

2.2.9 Alternative Explanations

I theorize that the underlying mechanism of the negative effects of high internet slang intensity is persuasion knowledge. However, this mechanism may not be the only reasonable explanation. Building on prior literature, I identify and empirically explore various alternative explanations that I classify into two main groups: (1) alternative explanations controlled for in the field study (i.e., indirectly, since in the field I do not measure persuasion knowledge) and (2) alternative explanations tested in the experiments (i.e., directly, since in the experiments I do measure persuasion knowledge).

I thoroughly discuss the first group of alternative explanations in the description of the field study and experiments. Thus, in this section, I focus on the second group of alternative explanations.

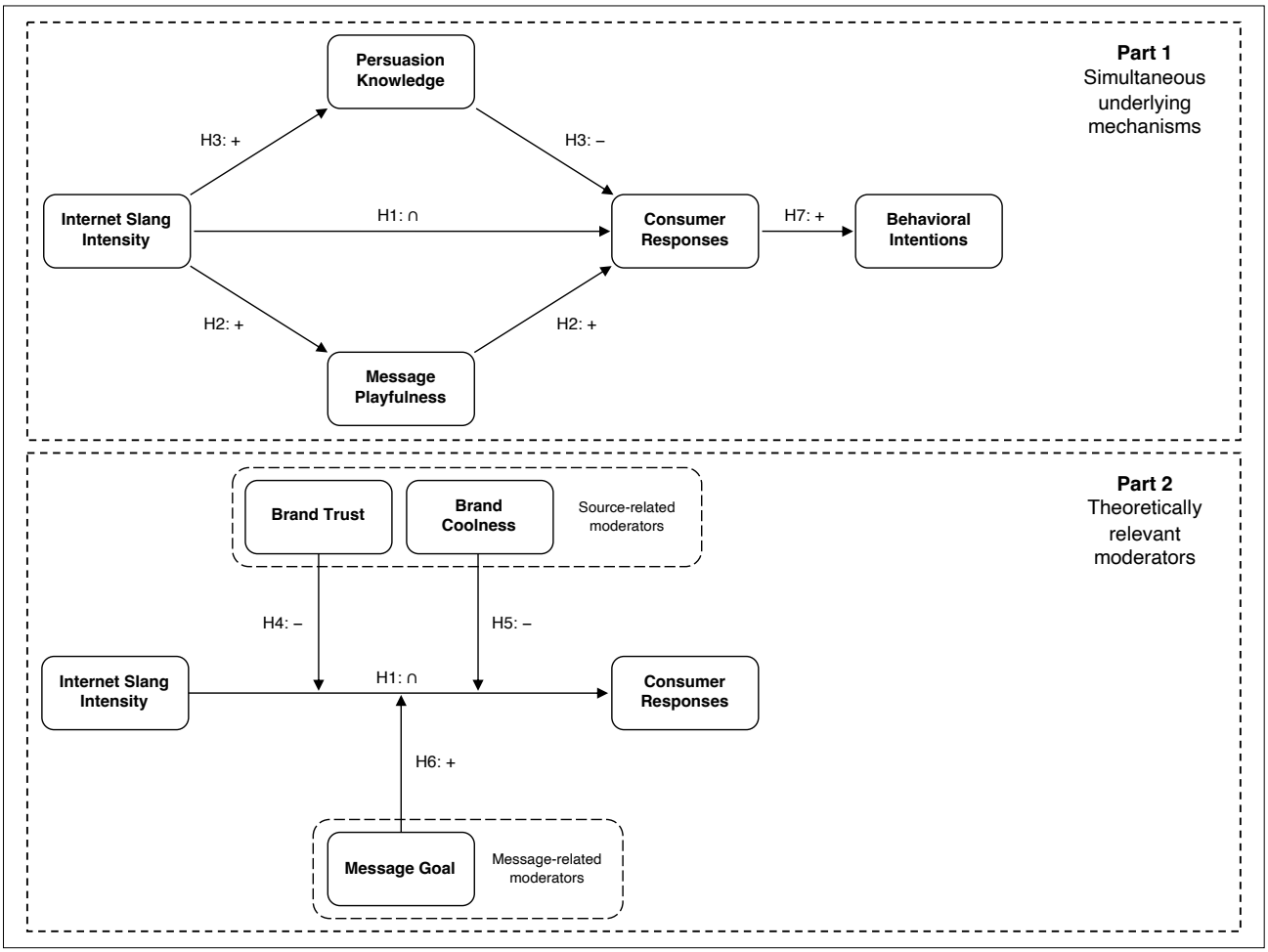
Two variables that may explain the negative effects of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses are processing fluency and brand competence. First, processing fluency refers to the ease and efficiency with which information is processed in the mind (Song and Schwarz 2008). Given its dynamic, evolving, and irregular nature, internet slang may be more difficult to process compared to standard English, especially if used with high intensity within a message. For example, internet slang can involve the use of abbreviations, symbols, or emojis as substitutes for standard words. Deciphering these shortcuts may require additional cognitive effort (Tavassoli 1998). Thus, a brand message with a high intensity of internet slang could decrease the ease with which consumers interpret the content. Relatedly, Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng (2022) find that messages with a high number of non-face emojis that substitute text reduce consumers' processing fluency. Similarly, Wu et al. (2022) show that multiple emojis in online product reviews are less helpful because they are more difficult to interpret. Extending these findings to other subcategories of internet slang, it is thus possible that the negative effects of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses are driven by processing fluency rather than (or in addition to) heightened persuasion knowledge.

Second, according to the stereotype content model, individuals' perceptions of other people are usually organized along the dimensions of warmth and competence (Fiske et al. 2002). These dimensions apply to brands as well (Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012). Brand competence, in particular, refers to perceptions of the brand being reliable, expert, and skillful (Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012). By definition, internet slang is a particularly informal and casual language. It is generally used by younger generations and characterized by friendly and colloquial interactions. Thus, when brand messages include a high internet slang intensity, consumers may perceive the brand as less competent. In support of this assumption, Li, Chan, and Wang (2019), for example, illustrate

that using emoticons in online service encounters can decrease overall customer satisfaction as a consequence of perceptions of low brand competence. Building on existing empirical findings and on warmth and competence theory, it may be assumed that reduced brand competence as a consequences of high internet intensity drives negative effects on consumers.

Hence, processing fluency and brand competence are two possible alternative explanations of the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations. In the following chapter, Chapter 3, I describe and discuss the empirical studies conducted to test the hypotheses of the proposed theorizing.

Figure 2. FULL CONCEPTUAL MODEL



Chapter 3

Empirical Studies

3.1 Overview of Studies

I test my theorizing across eight studies aimed at establishing empirical evidence consistent with the proposed conceptual model. In Study 1A, I develop and validate the Internet Slang Dictionary on a sample of more than 10,000 tweets posted in a year by 13 major brands. In Study 1B, I aim to demonstrate that different subcategories of internet slang have indeed a similar identity signaling function. Altogether, Study 1A and Study 1B test the definition of internet slang advanced in this dissertation and propose a text-based automatic measurement for it.

In Study 2, I use text analysis and statistical modeling to provide evidence of hypotheses H1 and H4 – H6. Relying on a dataset of over 18,000 brand tweets, I identify a curvilinear relationship between internet slang intensity in a brand message and social media engagement, and that such relationship is moderated by brand trust, brand coolness, and message goal.

Study 3A replicates the inverted U-shaped effect (H1) in a controlled setting by experimentally manipulating internet slang intensity. By using a fictitious brand rather than a real one, I illustrate that the effect takes place regardless of previous consumers' brand associations. In Study 3B, I seek further evidence of the main effect by using a different product category and incorporating different internet slang elements from the ones used in the previous experiment.

Study 4 tests the simultaneous underlying mechanisms explaining the inverted U-shaped effect of internet slang intensity on consumer responses (H1, H2, H3). On one

hand, enhanced perceptions of message playfulness explain why consumers prefer a brand message with internet slang compared to a brand message without internet slang. On the other hand, heightened consumers' persuasion knowledge explains why consumers react more negatively when the brand message uses high internet slang intensity compared to low internet slang intensity.

Study 5A and Study 5B explores various theoretically relevant alternative explanations of the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses. Study 5A tests processing fluency and brand competence against the proposed persuasion knowledge mechanism. Study 5B considers only emojis as a form of internet slang to understand whether the negative effect of high internet slang may occur only for specific types of internet slang subcategories.

Finally, in Study 6, I explore the persuasion knowledge mechanism through moderation and downstream consequences (H3, H7). Specifically, I adopt a moderation-of-process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005) and manipulate the level of persuasion knowledge accessibility. This study is further aimed at showing the robustness of the effects by changing the product category and focusing on consumer behavioral intentions.

With the exception of Study 1B and Study 5B, I preregistered all the experimental studies of the present dissertation (Study 3A – Study 6). Preregistrations can be found in the description of the studies. To follow, I will describe and discuss the design, methods, and results of each study, starting from the development and validation of the Internet Slang dictionary. Table 2 contains a summary of the main goals and hypotheses, data and stimuli, and key dependent variables of the studies of the present dissertation.

Table 2. OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Study	Main Goal/Hypotheses Tested	Data	Stimulus	Key DVs
Study 1A	Development of the Internet Slang Dictionary	Field study (N = 10,917)	13 real major brands	-
Study 1B	Test of signaling function of internet slang sub-categories	Online experiment (N = 151)	Fictitious cosmetics brand	Brand trendiness
Study 2	Test of theoretical model in the field (H1, H4, H5, H6)	Field study (N = 18,074)	26 real major brands	Engagement
Study 3A	Test of main effect of internet slang on message evaluations (H1)	Online experiment (N = 193)	Fictitious soda and juice brand	Message evaluations
Study 3B	Replication of main effect of internet slang on message evaluations for different brand (H1)	Online experiment (N = 204)	Fictitious cosmetics brand	Message evaluations
Study 4	Test of parallel mediation by message playfulness and persuasion knowledge (H2, H3)	Online experiment (N =447)	Fictitious soda and juice brand	Message evaluations, brand evaluations, message playfulness, persuasion knowledge
Study 5A	Ruling out of alternative explanations (i.e., processing fluency, brand competence)	Online experiment (N = 145)	Fictitious soda and juice brand	Message evaluations, persuasion knowledge, processing fluency, brand competence
Study 5B	Ruling out of alternative explanation (i.e., only emojis)	Online experiment (N = 93)	Fictitious soda and juice brand	Message evaluations, persuasion knowledge, processing fluency
Study 6	Test of process by moderation (H3, H7)	Online experiment (N = 271)	Fictitious snack brand	Brand evaluations, behavioral intentions

NOTE.— Except for Study 5B, studies from 3A to 6 are preregistered.

3.2 Study 1A: Development and Validation of the Internet Slang Dictionary

The purpose of Study 1A is to develop and validate the Internet Slang Dictionary (ISD). Specifically, my goal is to create a dictionary that bridges the classifications of internet slang proposed by linguistic scholars (e.g., Barseghyan 2013) with the view proposed in this dissertation according to which internet slang is any expression that emerge and/or evolve online, and reflects internet trends. While existing dictionaries for some of the subcategories already exist, I aim to (1) expand such dictionaries, (2) identify new elements, and (3) put them together in a more comprehensive text-based internet slang tool.

To build the ISD, I followed Humphreys and Wang's (2018) guidelines. Specifically, I used a top-down, dictionary-based approach. The reason why I decided to rely on this type of approach (rather than, for example, a bottom-down approach) is because the construct on which I am focusing on (i.e., internet slang) is clear or, at least, can be clarified through human analysis of the text—i.e., it is recognizable when looking at the text (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Humphreys and Wang 2018). The top-down, dictionary-based approach I used involves three subsequent stages.

In Stage 1 (dictionary creation), I scraped a sample of $N = 10{,}917$ tweets posted by 13 brands across various industries. Using a saturation procedure, I extracted a subsample of tweets and manually coded them to create the first version of the ISD. In Stage 2 (dictionary validation), three external coders evaluated the ISD. In Stage 3 (post-measurement validation), I assessed construct validity of the ISD comparing computer and human coding using Krippendorff's alpha. The final version of the ISD contains four subdictionaries of internet slang: a catchphrase subdictionary, an emoji subdictionary, an

emphasis symbol subdictionary, and a netspeak subdictionary. To identify these subcategories of internet slang, I relied on existing classifications proposed by linguistic scholars (e.g., Barseghyan 2013), and the conceptualization of internet slang advanced in this dissertation.

While I built the catchphrase subdictionary from scratch, the emoji and netspeak ones are standardized dictionaries that can be found on the software program Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2015). Extensively employed for the analysis of structured and unstructured textual data, including social media posts (e.g., Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023; Pezzuti, Leonhardt, and Warren 2021; Visentin, Tuan, and Di Domenico 2021), this software relies on word dictionaries to measure language features and psychological constructs. Specifically, LIWC classifies words based on established dictionaries, and provides the proportion of words in a text that belong to each dictionary (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010). While I fully relied on this software to identify emojis in the text, I updated the netspeak dictionary with more than 170 entries. Finally, emphasis symbols can be identified using PARA, an algorithm recently developed to identify textual paralanguage elements in the text (Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023). In the following sections, I describe in details the three stages that were necessary to develop and validate the ISD.

3.2.1 Stage 1 (Dictionary Creation)

The purpose of Stage 1 (Dictionary Creation) is to generate the items for the first version of the ISD. I relied on a sample of tweets posted by the official X account of 13 major brands. The final ISD comprises four subdictionaries, two of which were either created (i.e., catchphrase subdictionary) or updated from the existing version (i.e., netspeak subdictionary). The other two subdictionaries are either fully standardized (i.e.,

emoji subdictionary) or updated through manual coding (i.e., emphasis symbol subdictionary). For this reason, in the following discussion, I provide details related to the catchphrase and netspeak subdictionaries.

3.2.1a Methods and Results

Data. I collected my dataset of brand tweets scraping the leading social media platform X using R Studio. X is an ideal platform to study brand language (McShane et al. 2022). First, it has 528.3 million monthly active users equally distributed across age groups and genders (Statista 2023). Second, almost 70% of brands with over 100 employees use X for marketing purposes (Iqbal 2024). Third, unlike other popular platforms like Instagram and TikTok that are mainly driven by visuals (e.g., pictures, videos), X is primarily a text-based social media.

The final dataset (after pre-processing) includes 10,917 brand tweets posted between November 29th 2021 and November 29th 2022 by the official X account of 13 large national (US) brands across a range of industries (Table 3). I selected these brands from X's *Best of Tweets 2022*, the official annual ranking of brands with the most relevant and noteworthy presence on the platform. The rationale behind this choice is that I wanted to start from a dataset rich of updated internet slang, in effort to compile a comprehensive first wordlist.

Even though I carried out both procedures simultaneously, to follow, I first describe the procedure through which I updated the existing LIWC netspeak subdictionary with more than 170 new entries. Then, I describe the procedure through which I created the catchphrase subdictionary.

Table 3. LIST OF BRANDS (STUDY 1A)

Brand	Industry	X Handle	Followers	Number of Tweets
Alexa	511210 - Software Publishers	@alexa99	1,513,636	297
Bravo	515120 - Television Broadcasting	@BravoTV	1,317,240	2438
Delta	481111 - Scheduled Passenger Air Transportation	@Delta	1,655,746	132
Google Maps	511210 - Software Publishers	@googlemaps	4,260,709	82
Kroger	445110 - Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores	@kroger	165,275	76
MTV	515120 - Television Broadcasting	@MTV	17,604,426	3,924
Netflix	517110 - Wired Telecommunications Carriers	@netflix	21,873,447	2,008
Pringles	311919 - Other Snack Food Manufacturing	@Pringles	484,193	48
Skittles	311330 - Confectionery Manufacturing from Purchased Chocolate	@Skittles	657,831	421
Taco Bell	722513 - Limited-Service Restaurants	@tacobell	1,986,239	186
Trident Gum	311340 - Nonchocolate Confectionery Manufacturing	@tridentgum	92,442	365
Wendy’s	722513 - Limited-Service Restaurants	@Wendys	3,889,351	72
Xbox	511210 - Software Publishers	@Xbox	21,006,589	868
Total				10,917

NOTE.—Industries are classified following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Netspeak Subdictionary: Item Generation. As a first step, I randomly selected 3,275 tweets (about 30% of the total) from the dataset of brand tweets that I previously scraped. Then, I assessed the presence of netspeak elements in this subsample using LIWC (2022) netspeak dictionary. This dictionary includes 485 entries that are either abbreviations (e.g., 4ever), acronyms (e.g., LOL), emoticons (e.g., :-)), or slang words (e.g., bestie) typically used on the internet. Once I run the software on the tweets, I started the manual coding. Specifically, I coded the presence and number of netspeak elements that had not been captured by LIWC. To decide which ones were netspeak elements, I (1) relied on the existing definitions of netspeak (e.g., Barseghyan 2013; Boyd et al. 2022; Crystal 2011), and (2) checked each of them on specialized websites (e.g., The Online Slang Dictionary, Urban Dictionary). This process resulted in the identification of 254 new netspeak elements to add to LIWC netspeak dictionary.

Catchphrase Subdictionary: Item Generation. While identifying the new netspeak entries in the dataset subsample, I also identified the presence and number of catchphrases. I define catchphrases as *fixed expressions or phrasal templates repeatedly used by various social media users who extend their usage beyond the original context*. Thus, a fundamental requirement for catchphrases was that they appeared at least more than once in the dataset. Of course, there exist catchphrases that originated outside social media and, more in general, in the offline world (e.g., 'What you see is what you get'). In this current research, however, I am specifically interested in those catchphrases that either (1) originated from social media or the internet, or (2) originated from another source (e.g., popular culture), but became a social media phenomenon in recent years.

An example of fixed expression following these rules is "She's an icon, she's a legend, and she is the moment" (that was originally pronounced by Wendy Williams during *The Wendy Williams Show* in 2019, but quickly became a viral social media meme),

while an example of phrasal template is "How it started: X, how it's going: Y" (originated from X in 2020). Similarly to the procedure described for the netspeak subdictionary, to decide which expressions were indeed catchphrases that followed my definition, I relied on existing online databases (e.g., Know Your Meme) that classify and explain social media and internet trends, including catchphrases. This process resulted in the identification of 50 catchphrases.

3.2.2 Stage 2 (Dictionary Validation)

The goal of stage 2 (dictionary validation) is to validate the ISD and, thus, to understand whether the dictionary entries identified in the previous study do indeed represent internet slang, the construct under investigation. While different approaches could be used to this end, I decided to rely on human coding as in prior literature (e.g., Pennebaker et al. 2007; Visentin, Tuan, and Di Domenico 2021).

3.2.2a Methods and Results

External Coders. Following Humphreys and Wang (2018) and other well-established procedures for dictionary validation (e.g., Humphreys 2010), I asked three external coders to validate the ISD. In other words, they had to respond the question: Does each entry of the ISD precisely represent the construct of internet slang? Particularly, I provided them with the definition of internet slang proposed in the current dissertation, and instructed them to read the ISD wordlist. Their task was to decide which entry to keep in or exclude from the dictionary. Relying on existing literature, I gave them instructions to use the following inclusion/exclusion criteria: (1) an entry was included if two out of three coders voted for inclusion, (2) an entry was excluded if two out of three coders voted for exclusion, and (3) if one out of three coders suggested a term for inclusion,

collaborative discussions among the coders took place. This process led me to retain 171 entries in the netspeak subdictionary, and 42 entries in the catchphrase subdictionary.

Theoretical Saturation. Following existing work (e.g., Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023), to make sure that I effectively captured the netspeak and the catchphrase constructs, I used a saturation procedure. Theoretical saturation refers to the point in the research process when gathering additional data no longer leads to new insights regarding the construct under investigation (Berger et al. 2020; Weber 2005). It is a procedure that addresses threats to construct validity. Thus, I pull another subsample of 1,500 tweets from the dataset (about the 20% of the ones that I did not select for the item generation procedure) to code it. I found no new instances of netspeak elements or catchphrases.

3.2.3 Stage 3 (Post-measurement Validation)

In Stage 3 (post-measurement validation), the purpose is to ensure that the operationalization of the construct of interest using the entries of dictionary occurs as expected (Humphreys and Wang 2018). The two main methods that can be used in this stage are: (1) comparing computer coding with human coders using Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff 2004), or (2) performing a check oneself calculating the hit rate and the false hit rate (Weber 2005). I decided to use the first method following prior work (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b; Packard and Berger 2017; Visentin, Tuan, and Di Domenico 2021).

3.2.3a Methods and Results

External Coders: Krippendorff's Alpha. First, I extracted a subsample of 20 tweets with high intensity of netspeak (i.e., a rating higher than the 95th percentile of the distribution), and 20 tweets with at least one catchphrase (only two tweets included more than one catchphrase). Second, I uploaded the dictionary validated in Stage 2 and run it

on the 40 tweets. Third, I asked a human coder to read the tweets and identify the presence of internet slang. Finally, I calculated Krippendorff's alpha with the goal of comparing computer coding with human coding. Results from this analysis indicated a Krippendorff's alpha equal to 0.873. According to reliability criteria, this value shows a high level of agreement between computer and human coding (Humphreys and Wang 2018; Packard and Berger 2017 ; Weber 2005). Said another way, the results support the validity of the ISD.

3.2.4 Descriptive Statistics

As a final step of Study 1A, I run the newly developed dictionary on the full sample of brand tweets. Descriptive statistics reveal that 58.9% of the sample includes at least one instance of internet slang, with emoji being the most predominant subcategory (44.7%), followed by emphasis symbol (19.5%), netspeak (19.5%), and catchphrase (2.4%). More details about distribution of internet slang subcategories for each brand can be found in Appendix B.

3.2.5 General Discussion

Developing sound measurements is necessary to correctly assess the constructs under investigation (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Haws 2011; Churchill 1979; Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023). The purpose of this study was to create the ISD, a text-based tool aimed at identifying internet slang expressions in texts. The final version of the ISD contains four subdictionaries (i.e., catchphrase subdictionary, emoji subdictionary, emphasis symbol subdictionary, netspeak subdictionary). Table 4 illustrates examples of expressions belonging to each of these subcategories of internet slang.

To develop and validate the dictionary, I followed Humphreys and Wang's (2018) guidelines. Stage 1 led to the creation of the first version of the ISD. This first version includes four subdictionaries: the emoji and emphasis symbol subdictionaries (already existing in LIWC or PARA), the netspeak subdictionary (254 new entries added to the existing LIWC netspeak dictionary), and the catchphrase subdictionary (50 catchphrases in total). Stage 2 (dictionary validation) focused on construct validity. For this purpose, I first asked three human coders to check and refine the wordlists of the netspeak and catchphrase subdictionaries, and then I used a saturation procedure. The validated version of the ISD includes the emoji and emphasis symbol subdictionaries (the same as in Stage 1), the netspeak subdictionary (171 new entries added to the LIWC netspeak dictionary), and the catchphrase subdictionary (42 catchphrases). Stage 3 provided additional validation of the ISD. Finally, by running the ISD on the brand tweet sample, this study found that 6429 out of the 10917 brand tweets sampled for this study (58.9%) include at least one expression of internet slang. This preliminary result suggests that internet slang is widespread in brand messages, and, thus, that it may be relevant to study its effects on consumers.

Table 4. EXAMPLES OF INTERNET SLANG EXPRESSIONS (STUDY 1A)

Subdictionary	**Definition**	**Examples**
Catchphrase	*Fixed expressions or phrasal templates repeatedly used by various social media users who extend their usage beyond the original context.*	– Me: X, Also me: Y – POV: You're doing X – It's called fashion, look it up – Hot girl summer
Emoji	*Pictorial cues used in digital communications that include both facial expressions and a diverse array of non-facial symbols.*	– 😭 – 🤔 – ❤️ – ✨
Emphasis symbol	*Various punctuation marks, capitalizations, and other symbols used to highlight or emphasize specific elements in a message.*	– Asterisks placed around a word/sentence (*example*) – Tildes placed around a word/sentence (~example~) – !!!

		– Capitalization
Netspeak	*Various linguistic shortcuts, unconventional spellings, acronyms, abbreviations, and other informal elements such as slang words.*	– Brb – Thx – Bestie – <3

3.3 Study 1B: The Identity Signaling Function of Internet Slang

As explained in section 2.2 Conceptual Development, I posit that various forms of online casual language (e.g., acronyms, emoticons, emojis) are all subcategories of internet slang because they share the same social function, making it worth to study them together. Specifically, I propose that they are all imbued with symbolic meaning and serve as signals of the trendy, up-to-date, and youthful identity characterizing the social media environment. In other words, if a brand incorporates any of these subcategories of internet slang in a social media message, it should signal consumers a trendy, up-to-date, and youthful identity, with no specific subcategory more effective than the others in conveying this impression. At the same time, using any of these subcategories of internet slang should help brands into looking more trendy, up-to-date, and youthful compared to not using them at all. The purpose of this pilot study is to test this assumption.

I analyze all the subcategories of internet slang identified in Study 1A: letter homophones (i.e., acronyms and abbreviations), emojis, emoticons, slang words, catchphrases, emphasis symbols.

3.3.1 Method

Participants and Design. I recruited 150 participants on Prolific, in exchange of a small amount of money. I used a balanced sample of native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users. A total of six participants failed the attention check that I

included at the beginning of the survey. Therefore, the final sample included $N = 145$ participants ($M_{age} = 38.90$, $SD = 10.89$; 48.30% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. First, I introduced all participants to Lumina, a fictitious cosmetics brand. I told participants that Lumina wanted to promote the comeback of one of its most popular skincare products (i.e., Flawless Clean, a skin cleanser) on X. Subsequently, I informed them that their task was to read the tweet Lumina prepared to relaunch the cleanser, and to evaluate the brand accordingly. I then asked participants to answer an attention check ("Please, indicate the type of brand Lumina is," cosmetics/design/fashion brand/I don't recall). To follow, I randomly assigned participants to seven experimental conditions in a single-factor (internet slang subcategory: acronym, catchphrase, symbols, emoji, emoticon, slang word, control) between-subject design.

In the acronym condition, the post read: "*btw* Flawless Clean is now available again on our website: /flawlessclean.com." In the catchphrase condition, the post read: "POV: Flawless Clean is now available again on our website: /flawlessclean.com." In the symbols condition, the post read: "*Flawless Clean* is now available again on our website !!! /flawlessclean.com !!!." In the emoji condition, the post read: "✨Flawless Clean✨ is now available again on our website: /flawlessclean.com." In the emoticon condition, the post read "Flawless Clean is now available again on our website *:)))* /flawlessclean.com." In the slang condition, the post read: "Flawless Clean is now available again on our website *besties*: /flawlessclean.com." Finally, in the control condition, the post read: "Flawless Clean is now available again on our website: /flawlessclean.com."

Measures. After showing participants the tweets, I measured the dependent variable. Specifically, I asked participants to evaluate their perceptions of the brand on three items ("Trendy," "Up-to-date," and "Youthful"). Finally, participants completed some demographic questions.

3.3.2 Results

Brand Trendiness. Given the high internal consistency (α = .87), I averaged the three perception items to compute an overall measure of brand trendiness. Consistent with the proposed theorizing, a one-way ANOVA with brand trendiness as the dependent variable showed a significant effect of internet slang subcategory ($F(6, 138) = 2.63$, $p = .019$, $h_p^2 = .10$). Participants in the control condition perceived the brand as significantly less trendy ($M_{control} = 3.25$, $SD = 1.56$) than participants in the acronym condition ($M_{acronym} = 4.58$, $SD = 1.68$; $p = .012$), participants in the catchphrase condition ($M_{catch} = 4.45$, $SD = 1.86$; $p = .021$), participants in the symbols condition ($M_{symbols} = 4.51$, $SD = 1.55$; $p = .013$), participants in the emoji condition ($M_{emoji} = 5.14$, $SD = 1.01$; $p < .001$), participants in the emoticon condition ($M_{emoticon} = 4.51$, $SD = 1.78$; $p = .013$), participants in the slang condition ($M_{slang} = 4.76$, $SD = 1.72$; $p = .003$). Importantly, there were no other differences between conditions. Thus, whether the brand used acronym, catchphrase, emphasis symbols, emojis, emoticon, or slang word, participants perceived it to be equally trendy, and, overall significantly more trendy than the brand not using any of the subcategories of internet slang. I further run a one-way ANOVA including failed attention checks and found consistent results.

3.3.3 Discussion

Prior research argues that various forms of online casual language (e.g., emojis, acronyms, and emoticons) are different along many directions, thus they should not be studied together (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019). While this dissertation acknowledges the different features characterizing these types of online language, it also argues that they all have a social function. Precisely, they should all help the sender to signal a trendy, up-to-

date, young identity. Results from this study are consistent with this argument. When a brand uses either acronyms, catchphrases, emphasis symbols, emojis, emoticon, or slang words, participants perceive it as trendier than a brand not using any of these linguistic cues. Furthermore, participants perceive brands using different linguistic cues as equally trendy. Thus, for example, a brand that uses emojis is perceive to be similarly trendy as a brand using acronyms. According to the social view advanced here, the various types of language and paralanguage identified in Study 1A can thus be considered all as subcategories of internet slang.

Starting the following study, Study 2, I begin testing the proposed theoretical model. If internet slang does indeed have a social, identity-signaling function, helping brands to seem trendy, should brands always use it in their marketing messages? If not, why?

3.4 Study 2: The Effect of Internet Slang in the Field

Study 2 is aimed at providing a test of my theorizing in the field. In particular, I use text analysis and statistical modeling to analyze more than 18,000 brand tweets collected over a one-year period, and estimate both the hypothesized main effect of internet slang intensity on engagement and its boundary conditions. First, I examine whether there is indeed an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement, and I identify the turning point (H1). Second, I test the moderations by brand trust (H3), brand coolness (H4), and message goal (H5).

In the following sections, I begin by briefly introducing the model I developed and describing the process of data collection and the data sample. Next, I present a de-

tailed description of the variables included in the estimated statistical models. I then discuss the estimation approach used and the model specification. Finally, I illustrate the results of the analyses and discuss them.

3.4.1 Model Introduction

The dataset used in this study exhibits a hierarchical structure, with the tweets posted by 26 distinct brands. Each brand serves as a higher-level unit, within which the individual tweets are nested, reflecting the inherent multilevel nature of this dataset. Thus, it is necessary to develop and specify a model that (1) controls for heterogeneity across tweets, and (2) accounts for heterogeneity across brands, as recommended by existing research (Firebaugh, Warner, and Massoglia 2013). Accordingly, I developed a mixed-effect model (detailed in next sections) that controls for features of the text, time fixed effects, heterogeneity across brands (i.e., brand random effects).

3.4.2 Data

Similarly to Study 1A, I collected the dataset of brand tweets by scraping the leading social media platform X using the software R studio. The dataset collected for this study consists of $N = 18{,}074$ tweets (after pre-processing) posted between November 29th 2021 and November 29th 2022 by the official X account (i.e., owned social media; Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023) of 26 major international brands across a range of industries. It is important to note that some of the X data ($N = 10{,}917$ tweets) in the current study are the ones used in Study 1A. I decided to increase the dataset in an attempt to increase the generatability of the findings and ensure a broad coverage of industries. I collected data

from 13 additional brands that I selected from Forbes' *Most Valuable Brands 2021*, instead of the ranking used in Study 1A (i.e., X's *Best of Tweets 2022*), following existing research Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023.

In sum, my sample includes N = 18,074 tweets posted by brands belonging to a variety of industries (e.g., food, tech, entertainment, automobiles), selling both products and services, and having diverse social media presences. Table 5 contains descriptive statistics related to the brands in the sample.

3.4.3 Measures

3.4.3a Dependent Measure

Engagement. Following prior research (Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017; Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023), I measured engagement as the sum of the number of likes, retweets, and replies each tweet received. The main models include engagement as the outcome variable, but I also estimated separate models for each individual engagement indicator as robustness checks (see section 3.4.5d Robustness Checks below or Table 11).

3.4.3b Independent Measures

Internet slang intensity. My focal independent variable is internet slang intensity. To identify this variable in the tweets, I analyzed the data using the dictionary of internet slang developed and validated in Study 1A (i.e., ISD). The variable internet slang intensity is specifically the sum of any linguistic (or paralinguistic) expression belonging to the catchphrase, emoji, emphasis symbol, and netspeak subdictionaries of the ISD[4].

[4] Prior to create this compound measure, I tested the separate effect of each internet slang subcategory on engagement. In particular, I tested their effects as binary variables (presence vs. absence). Results from this preliminary analysis shows that catchphrase, emoji, emphasis symbol, and netspeak have all a significant and positive effect on engagement ($\beta_{catchphrase}$ = .03, p = .007; β_{emoji} = .10, p < .001; β_{symbol} = .06, p < .001; $\beta_{netspeak}$ = .06, p < .001).

Table 5. LIST OF BRANDS (STUDY 2)

Brand	Industry	Ranking	X Handle	Followers	Number of Tweets
Alexa	511210 - Software Publishers	X	@alexa99	1,513,636	297
Amazon	454110 - Electronic Shopping and Mail-Order Houses	Forbes	@amazon	5,542,926	404
AT&T	517311 - Wired Telecommunications Carriers	Forbes	@ATT	901,627	1,183
BMW	336111 - Automobile Manufacturing	Forbes	@BMW	2,524,402	282
Bravo	515120 - Television Broadcasting	X	@BravoTV	1,317,240	2,438
Coca-Cola	312111 - Soft Drink Manufacturing	Forbes	@cocacola	3,378,856	173
Delta	481111 - Scheduled Passenger Air Transportation	X	@Delta	1,655,746	132
Disney	511120 - Periodical Publishers	Forbes	@disney	10,272,621	911
FedEx	492110 - Couriers and Express Delivery Services	Forbes	@FedEx	324,430	261
Google Maps	511210 - Software Publishers	X	@googlemaps	4,260,709	82
Kroger	445110 - Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores	X	@kroger	165,275	76
LEGO	339950 - Sign Manufacturing	Forbes	@LEGO_Group	1,014,112	923
Mastercard	522320 - Financial Transactions Processing and others	Forbes	@Mastercard	492,993	145
Microsoft	511210 - Software Publishers	Forbes	@microsoft	12,991,981	784
MTV	515120 - Television Broadcasting	X	@MTV	17,604,426	3,924
Netflix	517110 - Wired Telecommunications Carriers	X	@netflix	21,873,447	2,008
PayPal	522320 - Financial Transactions Processing and others	Forbes	@PayPal	997,249	285
Pepsi	312111 - Soft Drink Manufacturing	Forbes	@pepsi	3,096,201	378
Pringles	311919 - Other Snack Food Manufacturing	X	@Pringles	484,193	48
Samsung	334220 - Radio and Television Broadcasting and others	Forbes	@SamsungMobile	12,436,212	751
Skittles	311330 - Confectionery Manufacturing from Purchased Chocolate	X	@Skittles	657,831	421
Taco Bell	722513 - Limited-Service Restaurants	X	@tacobell	1,986,239	186
Trident Gum	311340 - Nonchocolate Confectionery Manufacturing	X	@tridentgum	92,442	365

Walmart	452910 - Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters	Forbes	@Walmart	1,365,932	681
Wendy’s	722513 - Limited-Service Restaurants	X	@Wendys	3,889,351	72
Xbox	511210 - Software Publishers	X	@Xbox	21,006,589	868
Total					18,074

NOTE.—Industries are classified following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The column Ranking indicates the ranking from where randomly the brands were selected (“Forbes” refers to Forbes’ *Most Valuable Brands 2021*, “X” refers to X’s *Best of Tweets 2022*).

LIWC offers proportional data for each dictionary based on the elements found in the analyzed text. However, I wanted to determine the actual count of internet slang elements in the tweets to create the predictor. To achieve this, I multiplied the frequency of internet slang elements by the word count of each tweet. For instance, in a ten-word tweet with a frequency of internet slang equal to 0.2, the actual count of internet slang, and thus the value of my main predictor, would be 2.

Internet slang intensity squared. Since my main effect hypothesis is that there should be an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement, I also calculated the quadratic term of internet slang intensity to include it in the main model.

Brand trust. I measured brand trust by recruiting a sample of 70 participants on Prolific (M_{age} = 40.21, *SD* = 13.58; 47.14% female), and asking them to evaluate the 26 brands of the dataset on a one-item measure of brand trust ("How much do you trust [brand]?;" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely).

Brand coolness. Similarly to brand trust, I measured brand coolness by collecting a sample of 102 participants on Prolific (M_{age} = 35.25, *SD* = 11.21; 35.29% female), and asking them to evaluate the 26 brands in the dataset on Warren and Campbell's (2014) one-item measure of brand coolness ("Do you think [brand] is cool?;" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely).

Message goal. To examine the moderating role of message goal (promotional vs. non-promotional), similarly to existing research (e.g., Cascio Rizzo, Berger, and Villarroel Ordenes 2023), I created a custom-made dictionary including words related to sales promotions based on Jalali and Papatla's (2019) list of promotional words (i.e., chance, commercial, free, gift, giveaway, promo, win, and sale). I added this new dictionary to LIWC, and run it on the dataset.

3.4.3c Control Variables

A variety of variables could be responsible for the relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement. Therefore, in addition to the main predictors and moderating variables, I accounted for a number of control variables. Mainly, I considered: (1) brand random effects, (2) text feature controls, and (3) time fixed effects. Below, a detailed explanation of each.

Brand random effects. First, given the nested structure of the data (i.e., each brand posted multiple tweets), I included random effects for brands ($N = 26$). Compared to fixed effects, random effects allow to take into consideration unobserved heterogeneity across brands (Borenstein et al. 2010). Random effects account for variations at a higher level, such as grouping effects or subject-specific effects. These variations are considered as random rather than fixed, allowing the model to capture individual-level variability, such as social media managers' writing style or ability in creating engaging content (Kopalle et al. 2017). Put differently, including brands as random effects enables to control for brand-specific characteristics that could potentially be associated with the independent and dependent variables (Chintagunta, Dubé, and Goh 2005). Nonetheless, I also performed a Hausman test on R to ensure that random effects for brands were to be preferred to fixed effects in this specific case. Results confirmed the higher appropriateness of the random effects specification compared to fixed effects one (χ^2 (22) = 21.84, p = .469).

Text feature controls. Second, various features of the tweet text may drive the effects on engagement rather than the amount or presence of internet slang itself. Thus, I used LIWC's standardized dictionaries to control for a variety of these features, namely, *word count* (Pezzuti 2023) and *big words* (i.e., words longer than seven letters; Visentin,

Tuan, and Di Domenico 2021) as indicators of complexity of the text, *positive* and *negative emotions* (Rocklage and Fazio 2020), *swear words* (Lafreniere, Moore, and Fisher 2022), *social words* (Lasaleta, Sedikides, and Vohs 2014), *question marks* (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). Further, I relied on LIWC to capture *singular* and *plural first person pronouns* (Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012; Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017), *negations* and *power* (Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2022), *cognition* (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016), and *present-oriented verb tense* (Packard, Berger, and Boghrati 2023). I accounted for the presence of *hashtags*, *mentions*, and *URLs* (Leung et al. 2022; Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes 2020). Finally, I controlled for the *readability* of the text by calculating the Flesch reading ease score (Kincaid et al. 1975; Packard, Berger, and Boghrati 2023; Pancer et al. 2018).

Time fixed effects. Third, prior research has showed the importance of time in affecting engagement (Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes 2020). That is, latent unobservable factors that vary over time may impact social media managers' ability in posting engaging content and users' engagement (Kanuri, Hughes, and Hodges 2023). As a solution to this plausible endogeneity issue, I included *day of the week* and *day of the month* a tweet was posted as fixed effects. Additionally, I accounted for the *tweet recency*, that is, the difference in days between when the tweet was posted and when the data were collected (Wies, Bleier, and Edeling 2022).

Given the high number of independent and control variables considered in this study, I addressed concerns about multicollinearity by computing correlations between all variables (results are in Appendix C).

Table 6 provides an overview of the predictors and control variables taken into consideration in the present study.

Table 6. OVERVIEW OF INDEPENDENT AND CONTROL VARIABLES (STUDY 2)

Variable	How I operationalize it	Data Source	Example of Academic Source
Independent Variables			
Internet slang intensity	Sum of catchphrases, emojis, emphasis symbols, and netspeak elements.	Dictionary developed in Study 1A	-
Brand coolness	Consumer evaluations of brand coolness on a seven-point Likert scale.	Prolific sample	Warren and Campbell (2014)
Brand trust	Consumer evaluations of brand trust on a seven-point Likert scale.	Prolific sample	Martin and Strong (2016)
Message goal	Percentage of promotional words such as chance, free, and promo.	Jalali and Papatla's list of sales promotion words	Jalali and Papatla (2019)
Controls			
Big words	Percentage of total words that are seven letters or longer.	Text analysis	Visentin, Tuan, and Di Domenico (2021)
Cognition	Percentage of total words associated with cognitive processes such as certitude, insight, and discrepancies.	Text analysis	Leckie et al. (2016)
Readability	The level of tweet readability computed using the Flesch reading ease score.	Computation of Flesch score usng R	Pancer et al. (2018)
Day of the month	Number from 1 to 31 representing the day of the month when the tweet was posted.	Manual computation	Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes (2020)
Day of the week	Number from 1 to 7 representing the day of the week when the tweet was posted.	Manual computation	Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes (2020)
First person pronouns	Percentage of singular and plural first person pronouns.	Text analysis	Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012
If Hashtag	If the tweet features a hashtag (dummy coded).	Manually coded	Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes (2020)
If Mention	If the tweet features a mention (dummy coded).	Manually coded	Leung et al. (2022)
If URL	If the tweet features a URL (dummy coded).	Manually coded	Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes (2020)

Negations	Percentage of negation words such as not, no, and never.	Text analysis	Pezzuti and Leonhardt (2022)
Negative emotions	Percentage of words associated with negative emotions.	Text analysis	Rocklage and Fazio (2020)
Positive emotions	Percentage of words associated with positive emotions.	Text analysis	Rocklage and Fazio (2020)
Power	Percentage of words associated with power.	Text analysis	Pezzuti and Leonhardt (2022)
Present-oriented verb tense	Percentage of verbs in present time orientation.	Text analysis	Packard, Berger, and Boghrati (2023)
Question marks	Percentage of question marks.	Text analysis	Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2019)
Social	Percentage of total words associated with social processes such as friendship, politeness, and family.	Text analysis	Lasaleta, Sedikides, and Vohs (2014)
Swearing	Percentage of swear words.	Text analysis	Lafreniere, Moore, and Fisher (2022)
Tweet recency	Difference in days between when the tweet was posted and when the data were collected.	Manual computation	Wies, Bleier, and Edeling (2022)
Word count	Number of words.	Text analysis	Pezzuti (2023)

3.4.4 Estimation Approach and Model Specification

To study the relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement, I used negative binomial regression as the estimation method. Negative binomial regression uses a negative binomial distribution with log link, and it is the most appropriate method to adopt when the dependent variable is count and over-dispersed (i.e., its variance exceeds the mean; Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes 2020). The general formula for a negative binomial regression model can be written as:

$$log(\mu_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \beta_k x_{ki} \quad (1)$$

$$Y_i \sim NegBin(\mu_i, r)$$

μ_i is the expected value (mean) of the count variable *Yi* for the *i*th observation, $log(\mu_i)$ is the predictor, Y_i is the count variable for the *i*th observation, assumed to follow a negative binomial distribution, and *r* is the dispersion parameter representing the degree of over-dispersion.

In this study, the dependent variable, engagement, is count (i.e., it is the sum of number of likes, retweets, and replies), and it is over-dispersed (M_{eng} = 4112.61, Var_{eng} = 483,515,723), making the negative binomial regression model more appropriate than others (e.g., Poisson regression). Adapting Equation (1) to this study, the model takes the following form:

$$log(\mu_{i,j,t}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ISI_{i,j,t} + \beta_2 ISI^2_{i,j,t} + \boldsymbol{X}'_{i,j,t}\,\gamma + u_{i,j,t} \quad (2)$$

$$Y_{i,j,t} \sim NegBin(\mu_{i,j,t}, r)$$

In Equation (2), i represents the tweet, j represents the brand, and t represent the time the tweet was posted. The dependent variable $Y_{i,j,t}$ is the sum of number of likes, retweets, and replies received by tweet i, posted by brand j, at time t. The main independent variables $ISI_{i,j,t}$ and $ISI^2_{i,j,t}$ are internet slang intensity and squared internet slang intensity in tweet i, posted by brand j, at time t. $\boldsymbol{X}'_{i,j,t}$ represents the set of fixed controls (i.e., features of the text and time fixed effects) characterizing each tweet i, posted by brand j, at time t, and previously described. Finally, $u_{i,j,t}$ represents brand random effects.

Following prior research recommending to report standardized values if the variables do not share similar scales, especially if there are interactions or quadratic terms in the model (Marquardt 1980; Rawlings, Pantula, and Dickey 1998; Pacjard and Berger 2021), I standardized all my independent variables. Additionally, I mean-centered the predictors before calculating the interactions.

3.4.5 Results

3.4.5a Descriptive Statistics

The average engagement for each tweet in the sample is 4112.61 (*SD* = 21986.63). more precisely, each tweet received an average number of 3386.15 (*SD* = 17717.32) likes, an average number of 633.46 (*SD* = 4398.94) retweets, and an average number of 93.00 (*SD* = 368.42) replies. Table 7 displays descriptive statistics on the sample.

Table 7. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FROM FIELD STUDY, FULL SAMPLE (STUDY 2)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	25th Perc.	50th Perc.	75th Perc.
Engagement	4112.61	21986.63	103.00	367.50	1539.50
Likes	3386.15	17717.32	78.00	297.00	1310.00
Retweets	633.46	4398.94	9.00	32.00	134.00
Replies	93.00	368.42	7.00	20.00	65.00

Average word count	19.45	10.59	11	18	26
Brand Trust	4.19	0.50	3.83	4.01	4.51
Brand Coolness	4.29	0.64	3.86	3.95	4.85

Of the 18,074 tweets, 10,451 (57.8%) includes at least one element of internet slang. More precisely, by looking at this subsample of tweets, the average number of internet slang per tweet is 2.06 (SD = 1.99). Looking at the distribution of the data, for an average word count equal to 19.45, tweets in the 25th percentile include 1 internet slang element, tweets in the 50th percentile include 2 internet slang elements, and tweets in the 75th percentile include three internet slang elements. Table 8 includes descriptive statistics on this subsample of tweets.

Table 8. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FROM FIELD STUDY, SUBSAMPLE (STUDY 2)

Variable	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**25th Perc.**	**50th Perc.**	**75th Perc.**
Internet Slang	2.06	1.99	1.00	2.00	3.00
Catchphrase	0.04	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.00
Emoji	1.37	1.90	1.00	1.00	2.00
Emphasis symbols	0.28	0.54	0.00	0.00	0.00
Netspeak	0.36	0.65	0.00	0.00	1.00

NOTE.—These descriptive statistics refer to the subsample of tweets including at least one internet slang element.

3.4.5b The Effect of Internet Slang Intensity on Engagement

I started by examining the relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement (H1). In the baseline model without controls (Model 1, Table 9), I found a significant positive linear term (β_1 = .179, *SE* = .016, $p < .001$) and a significant negative quadratic term (β_2 = -.090, *SE* = .011, $p < .001$) of internet slang intensity with engagement as the dependent variable.

After accounting for the list of controls previously described (Model 2, Table 9), I found a significant positive linear association between internet slang and engagement (β_1 = .177, *SE* = .016, $p < .001$), and a significant negative one between the squared term of internet slang and engagement (β_2 = -.078, *SE* = .011, $p < .001$). Figure 3 presents the results from Model 1 and Model 2.

To formally assess and correctly interpret the significance of the inverted U-shaped association between internet slang intensity and engagement, I carried out Lind and Mehlum's (2010) two-step procedure, following recent works (e.g., Wies, Bleier, and Edeling 2022). In the first step, I compared the slope of the curve at low and high ends of internet slang intensity data range ($b_{low} = \beta_1 + 2\beta_2 X_{low}$; $b_{high} = \beta_1 + 2\beta_2 X_{high}$), and found that the slope is (1) steep enough at both end points, (2) positive at the lower -, and (3) negative at the higher end of the data range. In the second step, I calculated the turning point of the curve ($-\beta_1/2\beta_2 = 1.34$), and found that it was located within the data range. Precisely, the turning point represents the point at which engagement reaches its maximum value before declining. Thus, these findings not only are in support of H1, but further suggest that, for an average tweet of 19 words, engagement starts to decrease when the includes 1.34 or more internet slang elements.

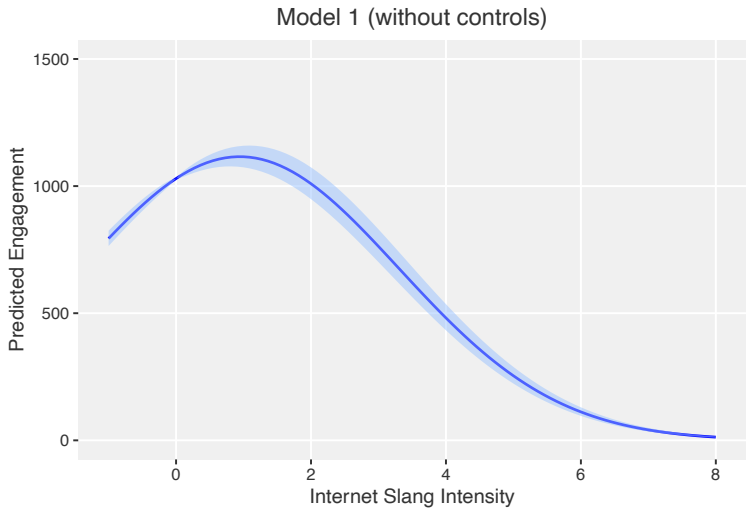
Table 9. RESULTS MAIN EFFECT (STUDY 2)

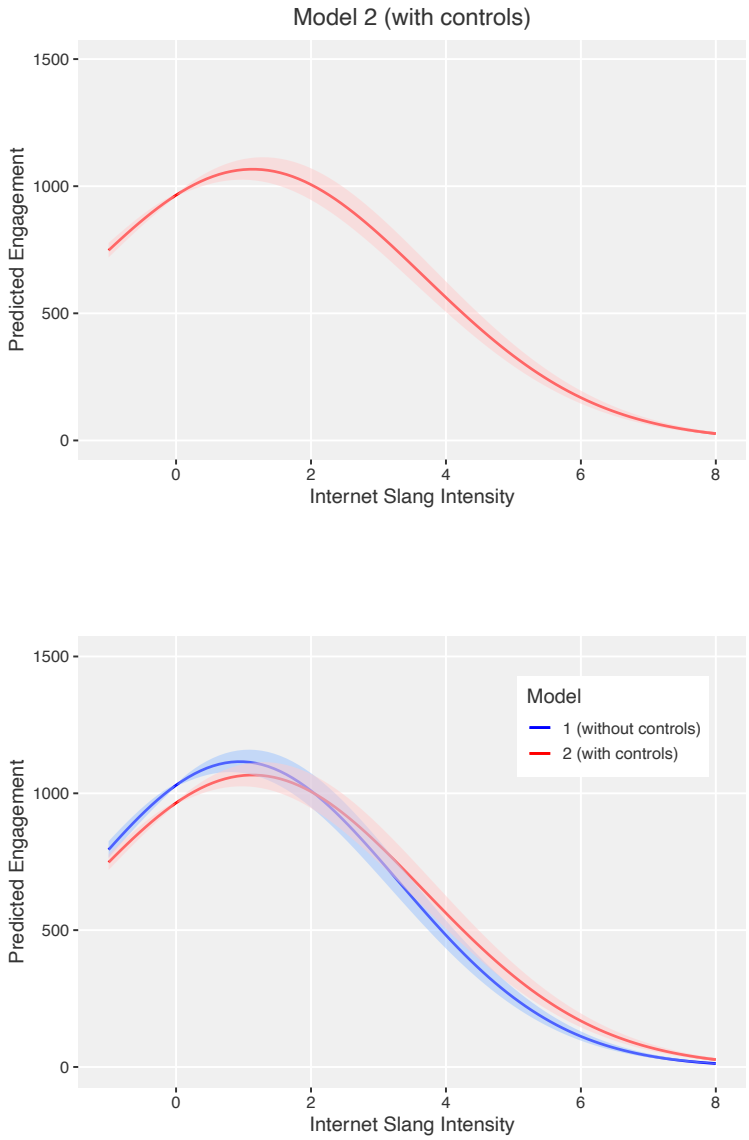
	Model 1 *Engagement* *(Main Effect)*	**Model 2** *Engagement* *(Main Effect)*
Predictors		
H1: IS	.170*** (.016)	.177*** (.016)
H1: IS^2	-.090*** (.011)	-.078*** (.011)
Controls		
Word Count		-.251*** (.012)
Big Words		-.095*** (.010)
Flesch Score		.016** (.005)

Positive Emotions		-.010 (.010)
Negative Emotions		.034* (.015)
Swearing		-.053*** (.010)
Social		-.066*** (.011)
First Person (I)		-.039*** (.011)
First Person (We)		.051*** (.011)
Negation		.069*** (.010)
Power		.029** (.011)
Cognition		-.034** (.011)
Focus Present		-.090*** (.010)
Question Mark		-.035*** (.009)
Mention		.204*** (.013)
URL		-.209*** (.019)
Hashtag		.079*** (.079)
Day (Week)		-.044*** (.010)
Day (Month)		.005 (.010)
Tweet Recency		-.110*** (.011)
Brand Random Effects	Included	Included
Intercept	6.937*** (.273)	6.872*** (.271)
Log Likelihood	-145,836.5	-145,189.8
Total N	18,074	18,074

NOTE.—Standardized errors are in parentheses; variables are standardized. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. INTERNET SLANG INTENSITY AND ENGAGEMENT (STUDY 2)





NOTE.—Blue (Model 1) and red (Model 2) lines: curvilinear association between internet slang intensity and engagement; shaded areas around the lines: 95% confidence interval. Values of the predictor are standardized.

3.4.5c The Moderating Effect of Brand Trust, Brand Coolness, and Message goal

To examine the moderating effects of brand trust (H4), and brand coolness (H5), and message goal (H6), I run three additional regressions. I present the results of these regressions in Table 10.

Before describing the results, it is important to clarify several issues. First, simultaneously including all lower-order interaction terms in a regression model may mask potential contingency effects, resulting in an overloaded model with unstable parameter

estimates (Cohen et al. 2013; Criscuolo et al. 2017). Hence, in line with existing research (e.g., Wies, Bleier, and Edeling 2022), I ran three separate regressions for the three moderators. Second, when testing a moderated quadratic relationship, it is the significance of the interaction between the quadratic term and the moderator to determine whether there is a moderated effect (Dawson 2014). Therefore, to test the moderation hypotheses, I will address such interactions. Finally, given that all predictors are continuous, I mean-centered them before calculating the interactions.

As predicted in H4 and shown in Model 3 (Table 10), brands that are more trusted weaken the curvilinear effect of internet slang intensity on engagement (β_3 = .139, SE = .025, p < .001). Additionally, brands that are perceived to be cooler weaken the curvilinear effect of internet slang intensity on engagement too (β_4 = .116, SE = .028, p < .001), in line with H5 (Model 4, Table 10). Taken together, these two findings suggest that, the more consumers trust a brand or the more they perceive it to be cool, the more the negative impact of internet slang intensity on the likelihood of engaging with a brand message diminishes. Finally, consistent with H6, less promotional words included in a brand message weaken the inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and engagement (β_5 = -.170, SE = .059, p = .016). In other words, posting a brand message that is less promotional seems to attenuate the negative effects of internet slang intensity on engagement (Model 5, Table 10).

By comparing the log likelihoods of these three models with the one of Model 2, it is possible to observe that, while model fit improves for Model 5, it decreases for Model 3 and Model 4. One possible explanation is that Model 3 and Model 4 do not include random effects for brands (to avoid redundancy, as brand trust and brand coolness already capture the variance associated with brands).

Table 10. RESULTS MODERATIONS (STUDY 2)

	Model 3 *Engagement (Brand Trust)*	**Model 4** *Engagement (Brand Coolness)*	**Model 5** *Engagement (Message goal)*
Predictors			
H1: IS	-.033 (.020)	.174*** (.019)	.168*** (.017)
H1: IS^2	.085* (.042)	-.119*** (.028)	-.227** (.070)
H3: IS × Brand Trust	-.204*** (.020)	--	
H3: IS^2 × Brand Trust	.139** (.043)	--	
H4: IS × Brand Coolness		-.254*** (.021)	--
H4: IS^2 × Brand Coolness		.116*** (.028)	--
H5: IS × Message goal			.089*** (.022)
H5: IS^2 × Message goal			-.170* (.070)
Brand Trust	.770*** (.019)	--	--
Brand Coolness	--	1.310*** (.015)	--
Message goal		--	.105*** (.013)
Controls			
Word Count	-.287*** (.015)	-.347*** (.012)	-.267*** (.012)
Big Words	-.076*** (.015)	-.087*** (.012)	-.091*** (.010)
Flesch Score	.013 (.018)	.012 (.010)	.016** (.005)
Positive Emotions	.010 (.013)	-.007 (.013)	-.015(.010)
Negative Emotions	.018 (.020)	-.012 (.017)	.036* (.015)
Swearing	-.005 (.014)	-.018 (.013)	-.051*** (.010)
Social	-.187*** (.014)	-.122*** (.013)	-.067*** (.011)
First Person (I)	-.013 (.015)	.053*** (.014)	-.038*** (.011)
First Person (We)	-.017 (.013)	-.017 (.013)	.056*** (.011)
Negation	.049*** (.014)	.032** (.012)	.068*** (.010)
Power	.078*** (.013)	.006 (.012)	.025* (.010)
Cognition	-.067*** (.015)	-.075*** (.014)	-.031** (.011)
Focus Present	-.050*** (.013)	-.077*** (.012)	-.080*** (.010)
Question Mark	-.057*** (.009)	-.043*** (.010)	-.034*** (.009)
Mention	.399*** (.016)	.459*** (.014)	.216*** (.013)
URL	.272*** (.020)	.119*** (.017)	-.212*** (.019)
Hashtag	-.249*** (.016)	-.063*** (.015)	.050*** (.014)
Day (Week)	-.031* (.013)	-.053*** (.011)	-.041*** (.010)
Day (Month)	.052*** (.013)	.052*** (.011)	-.002 (.010)
Tweet Recency	-.211*** (.014)	-.212*** (.013)	-.116*** (.011)
Brand Random Effects	Not Included	Not included	Included
Intercept	8.033*** (.013)	7.655*** (.012)	6.864*** (.270)

Log Likelihood	-151742.7	-149211.5	-145130.6
Total N	18,074	18,074	18,074

NOTE.—Standardized errors are in parentheses; variables are standardized. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

3.4.5d Robustness Checks

To increase the reliability of the findings, I conducted various robustness checks for a total of ten alternative models. First of all, although engagement is often measured as the sum of number of likes, retweets, and replies, the association between internet slang intensity and each of these engagement component may be different. Therefore, I run a model for each of the three metrics to examine them separately. The findings are significant for number of likes (linear: $\beta_1 = .128$, $SE = .015$, $p < .001$; quadratic: $\beta_2 = -.053$, $SE = .011$, $p < .001$), number or retweets (linear: $\beta_1 = .187$, $SE = .018$, $p < .001$; quadratic: $\beta_2 = -.089$, $SE = .013$, $p < .001$), and number of replies (linear: $\beta_1 = .216$, $SE = .016$, $p < .001$; quadratic: $\beta_2 = -.126$, $SE = .011$, $p < .001$).

The second robustness check is related to the adopted estimation approach. As previously illustrated, I used negative binomial regression because the dependent variable is count and over-dispersed. However, to test the robustness of the findings to changes in the assumed distribution of the dependent variable, I run two additional analyses, one using OLS regression with the log-transformed dependent variable, and the other one using Poisson regression. Results remain the same both for the OLS regression (linear: $\beta_1 = .052$, $SE = .061$, $p < .001$; quadratic: $\beta_2 = -.020$, $SE = .057$, $p < .001$), and for the Poisson regression (linear: $\beta_1 = .315$, $SE = .000$, $p < .001$; quadratic: $\beta_2 = -1.446$, $SE = .003$, $p < .001$).

While the Hausman test confirmed the higher appropriateness of a mixed-effect model, I was interested in understanding whether such decision had a substantial impact

on the findings. Hence, as a third robustness check, I included fixed, rather than random, effects for brands in the model. I obtained the same results (linear: β_1 = .151, *SE* = .016, $p < .001$; quadratic: β_2 = -.069, *SE* = .011, $p < .001$).

The fourth robustness check concerns the independent variable, internet slang intensity. As previously explained, I considered internet slang intensity as the sum of any expression of internet slang found in Study 1A. However, the number of emojis is higher than the number of netspeak elements and emphasis symbols in the samples. Also, as highlighted by previous literature (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019), different types of online casual language present distinctive characteristics, that might thus implies different relationships with engagement. One may wonder whether the effects of internet slang intensity on engagement are driven mainly by emojis, or whether not all the subcategories of internet slang have a curvilinear relationship with engagement. To address these questions, I run a set of additional models. First, I run three separate models in which, in the first one, I included emojis and emojis squared as the main predictors, in the second one, I included netspeak elements and netspeak elements squared as the main predictors, and, in the third one, I included emphasis symbols and emphasis symbols squared as the main predictors[5]. For emojis and netspeak elements, I found positive linear (linear: linear: β_{emoji} = .124, *SE* = .016, $p < .001$; $\beta_{netspeak}$ = .088, *SE* = .014, $p < .001$) and negative quadratic effects (quadratic: β_{emoji} = -.060, *SE* = .012, $p < .001$; $\beta_{netspeak}$ = -.030, *SE* = .014, $p = .032$) on engagement, consistent with predictions and main models. For emphasis symbols, however, I found a non-significant linear term ($p = .758$) and a positive quadratic term ($\beta_{symbols}$ = .021, *SE* = .006, $p = .000$). These findings suggest that, while emojis and netspeak elements have a similar association with engagement, emphasis symbols do not.

[5] I did not consider the "catchphrase" subcategory of internet slang because only three tweets in the whole sample include more than one catchphrase. Therefore, I consider the variable catchphrase (almost as) binary.

Second, building on these last results, I run a model in which I included the linear and quadratic terms of emojis, and the linear and quadratic terms of netspeak elements simultaneously. I found results consistent with the previous findings (linear: β_{emoji} = .105, *SE* = .011, $p < .001$; $\beta_{netspeak}$ = .092, *SE* = .014, $p < .001$; quadratic: β_{emoji} = -.059, *SE* = .011, $p < .001$; $\beta_{netspeak}$ = -.032, *SE* = .014, $p = .019$). Table 11 shows an overview of the robustness checks described above.

Table 11. ROBUSTNESS CHECKS (STUDY 2)

Robustness Check	What Does It Check?	How I Check It	Are Results Robust?
Alternative DVs	Do the results hold for each engagement metric considered separately?	I run three additional models: one for likes, one for retweets, and one for replies.	Yes
Alternative estimation approach	Do results hold if I use a different approach than negative binomial regression?	I run two additional models: one using OLS regression with log-transformed DV, and one using Poisson regression.	Yes
Random vs. fixed effects	Do results hold if I include brands as fixed effects?	I run an alternative model using fixed effects for brands.	Yes
Alternative IVs (I)	Do emoji, netspeak, and emphasis symbols separately replicate the effects?	I run three separate models: one with emoji and emoji squared as the main IVs, one with netspeak and netspeak squared as the main IVs.	Yes for emoji and netspeak/No for emphasis symbols
Alternative IVs (II)	Do emoji and netspeak considered separately but used simultaneously replicate the effects?	I run a model with the linear and quadratic terms of both emoji and netspeak simultaneously.	Yes

3.4.6 Discussion

Study 2 provides field evidence of the hypothesized theoretical model. To begin with, it shows diminishing returns in the association between internet slang intensity and engagement. Specifically, results indicate that engagement ratings start to decrease for an internet slang intensity equal to 1.34. Additionally, findings are in line with the proposed

moderations by brand trust (H4), brand coolness (H5), and message goal (H6). Increased brand trust and brand coolness weaken the negative effect of high intensity of internet slang. The effect is further attenuated by less promotional message goal. While this study does not directly test the proposed underlying process, the findings from Models 3, 4, and 5 provide preliminary evidence of the importance of persuasion knowledge in this context.

The following studies are all controlled experiments aimed at establishing causal evidence of the relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses.

3.5 Study 3A: Main Effect

Study 3A has three main purposes. First, while results from Study 2 are consistent with the prediction of H1 that there should be an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and message evaluations (in particular, engagement), even after controlling for twenty alternative explanations, they do not establish a true causal relationship between the two constructs. Thus, the first goal of Study 3A is to test the hypothesized inverted U-shaped effect in a more controlled context by experimentally manipulating internet slang intensity, and examining its effect on message evaluations. Second, although Study 2 already tests the effect in a broad range of brands and product categories, I aim to extent the generalizability of the findings to a fictitious brand and a fictitious product. Third, I control for processing fluency which, according to existing research (e.g., Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022), represents a possible explanation of the curvilinear effect of internet slang on message evaluations.

The preregistration for Study 3A is here: https://aspredicted.org/RC2_3KY.

3.5.1 Pre-test

Before running the main study, I run a pre-test to select the internet slang elements to be used in the experimental stimuli. At a specific moment in time, some internet slang elements might be outdated, while others very popular. Therefore, popularity (or trendiness) of specific internet slang elements may play a significant role in the relationship between this type of language and consumer responses. However, in this work, I am interested in studying the varying *intensities*, not *types*, of internet slang that may elicit different reactions from consumers. Thus, it is necessary to make sure that each internet slang element used in the studies is equally perceived to be popular by consumers.

In particular, I test the perceived popularity of netspeak terms. While I could find an official (and constantly updated) ranking of which ones are the most popular emojis on the internet (Emojipedia's[6] *Most Popular* ranking), there is not such ranking for netspeak terms. Accordingly, I run this pre-test to make sure that the netspeak terms included in the experimental stimuli of Study 3A are perceived to be equally popular.

I recruited a sample of 150 participants on Prolific (prescreen criteria: located in the U.S., native English speakers, active X users) and randomly assigned them to a single-factor between subject design (netspeak term: "bestie," "dropped," "fire," "hit different," "fav"[7]). I asked respondents to evaluate the popularity of the netspeak term on a 7-point Likert scale ("How popular is in your opinion this term on social media?;" 1 = Not popular at all, 7 = Very popular). Results showed a significant effect of netspeak term on perceptions of popularity (p = .006). In particular, the term "dropped" was perceived to

[6] Emojipedia.org (https://emojipedia.org) is a popular online resource and reference website that provides information and details about emojis. It serves as a comprehensive emoji encyclopedia, offering users information about the meaning, usage, history, and variations of emojis used in digital communication. In addition, Emojipedia provides various statistics related to emoji usage and trends, including the *Most Popular* ranking, a list of the most visited emojis on the page.

[7] I selected the five netspeak terms from the subcategory 'netspeak' of the Internet Slang Dictionary.

be significantly less popular than the other ones, but there were no other significant differences.

Based on the results of this pre-test, I selected two netspeak terms to be used in Study 3A (i.e., "bestie" and "hit different") and two netspeak terms to be used in Study 3B (i.e., "fav" and "fire").

3.5.2 Main Study

3.5.2a Method

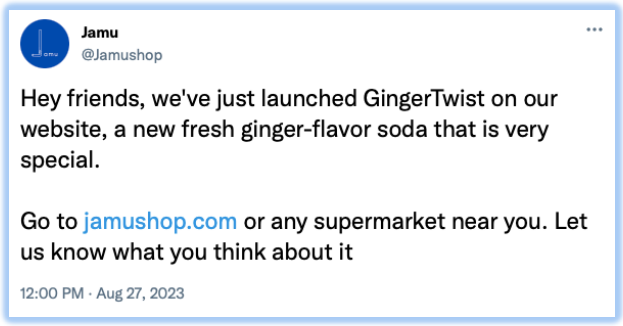
Participants and Design. I recruited 210 participants on Prolific and paid them 0.15£ to complete the survey. Prescreen criteria required that participants were all native English speakers, located in the U.S., and, given the study context, active X users. Additionally, I used a balanced sample. Seventeen participants failed the attention check that I incorporated at the end of the survey. Thus, the final sample includes $N = 193$ participants ($M_{age} = 40.08$, $SD = 12.38$; 49.2% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. First, I introduced all participants to Jamu, a fictitious non-alcoholic soda and juice brand. I informed participants that Jamu wanted to promote a newly launched soda called GingerTwist on X. Their task was to read and evaluate the tweet Jamu prepared to promote the new soda. Then, I randomly assigned participants to three experimental conditions in a single-factor (internet slang intensity: absent, low, high) between-subject design. In the absent condition, participants read a tweet that did not include any internet slang element. In the low intensity condition, participants read a tweet that included three internet slang elements (two emojis and one netspeak term). In the high intensity condition, participants read a tweet that included six internet slang elements (four emojis and two netspeak terms). In the three conditions, the plain text of the tweet was: "Hey friends, we've just launched GingerTwist on our website, a new fresh

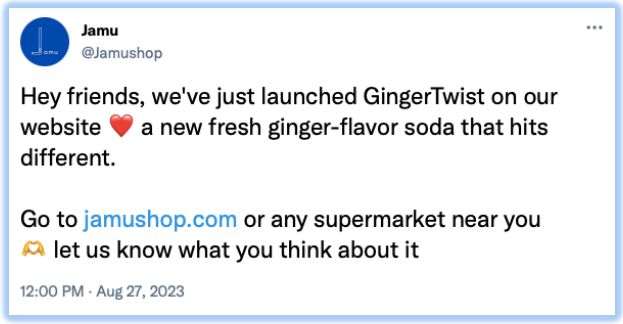
ginger-flavor soda that is very special. Go to jamushop.com or any supermarket near you. Let us know what you think about it." Figure 4 shows the experimental stimuli of Study 3A.

Figure 4. EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI (STUDY 3A)

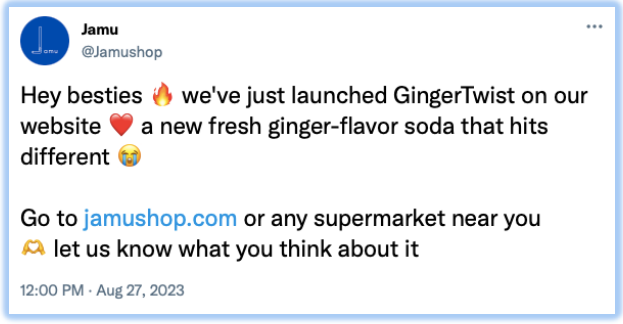
Control



Low Internet Slang Intensity



High Internet Slang Intensity



To decide how many internet slang elements to include in the low and high intensity conditions, I used the distribution of the data collected in Study 2, where I found that, for an average word count equal to 19.45, tweets falling between the 25th and 50th per-

centiles include 1.5 internet slang elements, and tweets falling in the 75th percentile include three internet slang elements. Additionally, on average, for a tweet including three internet slang elements, there is a 2:1 ratio between emojis and netspeak terms. In the stimuli, I tried to maintain the same ratio between word count and number of internet slang elements[8]. I selected the two netspeak terms based on the results of the pre-test. To decide which emojis to use, on the other hand, I randomly selected four from Emojipedia's *Most Popular* ranking.

Measures. After showing participants in each condition the tweet, I measured the dependent variable. Participants were asked to evaluate the brand message on a 3-item bipolar scale of message evaluations adapted from Thompson and Malaviya (2013; "bad/good," "unfavorable/favorable," and "dislike/like;" $\alpha = .97$). Next, participants rated the processing fluency of the message ("How difficult was the message to process?," 1 = Easy, 7 = Difficult; adapted from Lee and Aaker 2004), a possible explanation of the hypothesized curvilinear effect of internet slang on message evaluations. Then, I checked for the manipulation by asking participants their perceptions of the internet slang intensity[9] included in the brand message ("In your opinion, how much internet slang was included in the tweet?," 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much). Finally, participants completed an attention check (i.e., "What is the name of the brand that posted the tweet you had to evaluate?") and some demographic questions.

[8] The tweet with three internet slang elements (low intensity condition) has a word count equal to 37, the tweet with six internet slang elements (high condition) has a word count equal to 40. The average word count across conditions is thus 38.5, which is approximately twice 19.45. In the same way, the number of internet slang elements in the low intensity condition (i.e., three) is twice 1.5, and the number of internet slang elements in the high intensity condition (i.e., six) is twice three.

[9] Before asking participants to evaluate the perceived intensity of internet slang in the brand tweet, I provided them with a brief definition of internet slang (i.e., "Internet slang is a common way of talking on social media. It includes different forms of language, such as emojis and teen-slang words like bestie, etc.").

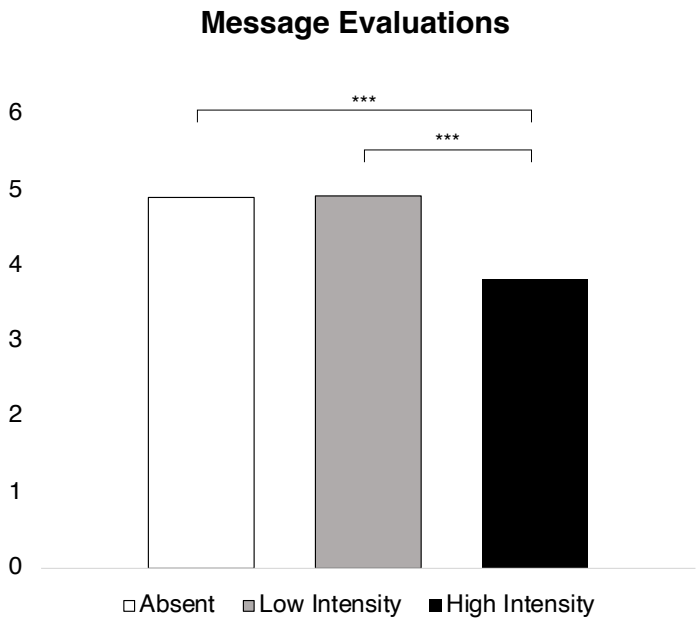
3.5.2b Results

Manipulation Check. A one-way ANOVA with internet slang intensity as the dependent variable confirmed the effectiveness of the manipulation ($F(1, 190) = 93.95$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .50$). Tukey's post hoc tests showed that participants in the high intensity condition perceived the intensity of internet slang included in the message as significantly higher ($M_{high} = 5.36$, $SD = 1.51$) than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{low} = 3.06$, $SD = 1.45$; $p < .001$). Additionally, participants in the low intensity condition perceived the internet slang intensity included in the message as significantly higher than participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 2.05$, $SD = 1.23$; $p < .001$).

Message Evaluations. Consistent with my theorizing, a one-way ANOVA with message evaluations as the dependent variable showed a significant linear effect ($F(1, 190) = 16.54$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .11$) and a significant quadratic effect ($F(1, 190) = 6.18$, $p = .014$, $h_p^2 = .11$) of internet slang intensity. Levene test for homogeneity of variance showed significantly different variances between groups, thus I used the Games-Howell's test for multiple comparisons. Specifically, Games-Howell's post hoc tests revealed that participants in the high intensity condition evaluated the brand message significantly more negatively than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{low} = 4.92$ vs. $M_{high} = 3.81$; $p < .001$), and participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 4.90$ vs. $M_{high} = 3.81$; $p < .001$). Finally, the difference between the low intensity and absent conditions was directional but not significant ($M_{absent} = 4.90$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.92$; $p = .994$). Results are displayed in Figure 5.

Additionally, I run a one-way ANCOVA to examine whether message evaluations scores differed across the three conditions while controlling for processing fluency. Results did not change.

Figure 5. IMPACT OF INTERNET SLANG INTENSITY ON MESSAGE EVALUATIONS (STUDY 3A)



NOTE.—*** $p < .001$.

3.5.2c Discussion

Study 3A provides direct causal evidence the hypothesized main effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations (H1). Consistent with the results of Study 2, Study 3A finds that internet slang intensity included in a brand message has an overall inverted U-shaped effect on message evaluations. When a brand uses a high internet slang intensity in a communication message, consumers dislike the message more than when the brand uses a low internet slang intensity, or does not use internet slang at all. Finally, the results suggest (directionally, but not significantly) that consumers may prefer a message that include at least some internet slang compared to a message that does not include internet slang at all.

Importantly, the results from Study 3A hold even after controlling for processing fluency. As suggested by prior research (Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022), consumers may have more difficulties in processing a message including elements of internet slang such

as emojis, which could explain the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations. Still, the results from this study provide initial evidence that the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations is not by processing fluency.

3.6 Study 3B: Replication

The main goal of Study 3B is to show the robustness of the inverted U-shaped effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations in different domains. More specifically, my purpose is to generalize the findings from Study 3A in two ways: First, by using a different product category (and a different brand) compared to the one used in Study 3A; second, by using different internet slang elements. Thus, I designed Study 3B to run out brand/product type and internet slang type as alternative explanations.

The preregistration of Study 3B is here: https://aspredicted.org/BXB_NSZ.

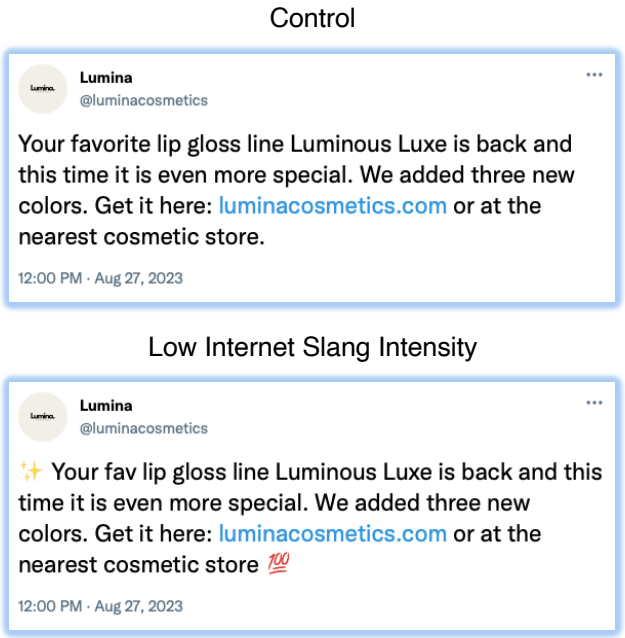
3.6.1 Method

Participants and Design. I collected a sample of 210 participants on Prolific and I paid them 0.15£. As in Study 3A, I used a balanced sample, and prescreen criteria required that participants were all native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users. Six participants failed the attention check at the end of the survey. Hence, the final sample includes $N = 204$ participants ($M_{age} = 42.53$, $SD = 12.53$; 48.5% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. I used the same design from Study 3A, but a different brand and a different brand message. First, I introduced all participants to Lumina, a fictitious cosmetics brand that aimed to promote on X the comeback of one of its most successful products, a lip gloss line called Luminous Luxe. Participants' task was to read and evaluate the tweet prepared by Lumina for the promotion of the lip gloss line.

Then, I randomly assigned participants to three experimental conditions in a single-factor (internet slang intensity: absent, low, high) between-subject design. Similarly to Study 3A, the tweet in the absent condition did not include any internet slang element, the tweet in the low condition included three internet slang elements (two emojis and one netspeak term), and the tweet in the high condition included six internet slang elements (four emojis and two netspeak terms). In contrast to Study 3A, however, I used different internet slang elements, and I changed the plain text which read: "Your favorite lip gloss line Luminous Luxe is back and this time it is even more special. We added three new colors. Get it here: luminacosmetics.com or at the nearest cosmetic store." The experimental stimuli of this study are displayed in Figure 6. Although I changed the text of the tweet, I tried to maintain a similar word count (i.e., 32) as in Study 3A (i.e., 34) with the goal of preserving the same ratio of words to internet slang elements.

Figure 6. EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI (STUDY 3B)



High Internet Slang Intensity

Measures. After showing participants the tweets, I measured the dependent variable. Participants were asked to rate the same message evaluations measure used in Study 3A (adapted from Thompson and Malaviya 2013; $\alpha = .96$). Following, participants completed the same manipulation check, attention check, and demographics as in Study 3A.

3.6.2 Results

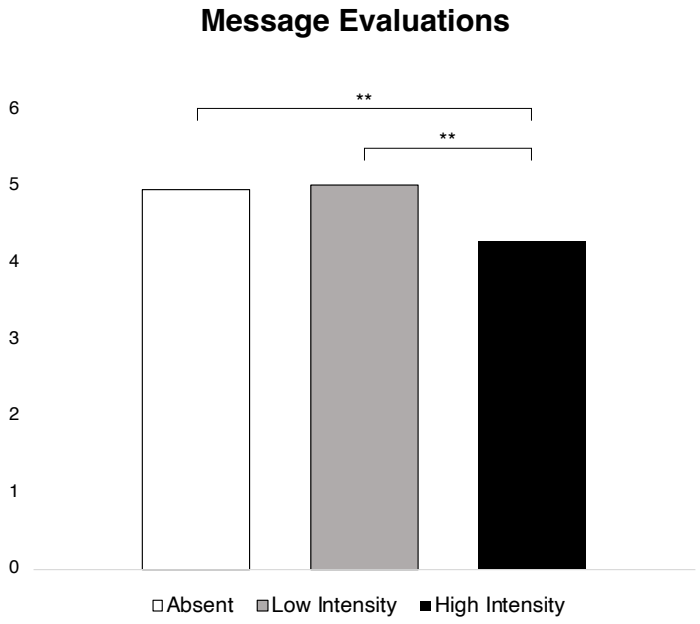
Manipulation Check. A one-way ANOVA with internet slang intensity as the dependent variable revealed the effectiveness of the manipulation ($F(1, 201) = 46.26$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .32$). Games-Howell's post hoc tests showed that participants in the high intensity condition perceived the intensity of internet slang included in the tweet as significantly higher ($M_{high} = 4.91$, $SD = 1.23$) than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{low} = 3.21$, $SD = 1.61$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, participants in the low intensity condition perceived the internet slang intensity used in the tweet as significantly higher than participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 2.47$, $SD = 1.70$; $p = .028$).

Message Evaluations. Consistent with my prediction, a one-way ANOVA showed a significant linear effect ($F(1, 201) = 6.93$, $p = .009$, $h_p^2 = .05$) and a marginally significant quadratic effect ($F(1, 201) = 7.63$, $p = .064$, $h_p^2 = .05$) of internet slang intensity on message evaluations. Specifically, Games-Howell's post hoc tests revealed that participants in the high intensity condition evaluated the tweet significantly more negatively than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{low} = 5.02$ vs. $M_{high} = 4.28$; $p = .004$),

and participants in the absent condition (M_{absent} = 4.95 vs. M_{high} = 4.28; p = .009). The difference between the low intensity and absent conditions was directional but not significant (M_{absent} = 4.95 vs. M_{low} = 5.02; p = .757). Results are presented in Figure 7.

Finally, I run a one-way ANCOVA to examine whether message evaluations scores differed across the three conditions while controlling for participants' gender[10]. I found consistent results.

Figure 7. IMPACT OF INTERNET SLANG INTENSITY ON MESSAGE EVALUATIONS (STUDY 3B)



NOTE.—** $p < .01$.

3.6.3 Discussion

I conducted Study 3B with the aim of extending the generalizability of the findings from Study 3A to a different product category/brand and different internet slang elements. I obtained results consistent with those in Study 3A.

[10] In this study, I decided to control for possible gender effects too as the product category under investigation is cosmetics.

These results suggest that the adverse impact of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations persists even within a product category which may be more mentally associated with a younger and trendier consumer base (i.e., cosmetics) compared to the product category examined in Study 3A (i.e., sodas and juices). Additionally, compared to Study 3A, I found that the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations remains consistent regardless of the specific types of internet slang elements used. This finding supports the idea that the intensity of internet slang usage by brands may have a more significant impact on the effectiveness of this language than the specific types of elements employed (i.e., in this case, it seems *a matter of quantity rather than quality*).

3.7 Study 4: Testing the Simultaneous Underlying Mechanisms

In Study 4, I test the hypothesized underlying process of the effects of internet slang intensity on two types of consumer responses: message evaluations and brand evaluations. On one hand, I posit that internet slang (vs. no internet slang) positively affects consumer responses because it makes the brand message more playful. On the other hand, I argue that, compared to a low intensity, a high internet slang intensity negatively affects consumer responses because it activates a heightened consumers' persuasion knowledge, even if the message is perceived as more playful. Put differently, I suggest that, although consumers should perceive brand messages with high internet slang intensity as more playful, they should also recognize the manipulative intention of the brand and consequently penalize the brand by evaluating less favorably both the message and the brand itself. I further control for participants' social media activity (e.g., how often they are on social media platforms).

Study 4 was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/D1M_W7Z.

3.7.1 Method

Participants and Design. Although I set data collection to stop at 450 participants, I collected a sample of 452 participants on Prolific. As with the previous studies, I only considered participants who were native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users. Five participants failed the attention check that I incorporated at the end of the survey. In line with the preregistration, I removed them. The final sample thus includes $N = 447$ participants ($M_{age} = 35.45$, $SD = 10.38$; 49.4% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. I used the same fictitious brand and experimental stimuli from Study 3A. I randomly assigned participants to three experimental conditions in a single-factor (internet slang intensity: absent, low, high) between-subject design.

Measures. After showing participants the brand tweets, I collected process measures. I measured persuasion knowledge by asking participants to rate the extent to which they perceived the brand as "manipulative," "insincere," and "pushy" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much; adapted from Hossain and Saini 2013; $\alpha = .83$). I measured message playfulness using a 3-item scale adapted from McShane et al. (2021; e.g., "The tweet is playful," 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much; $\alpha = .92$). I counterbalanced the order of persuasion knowledge and playfulness measures. Then, I collected the dependent variables. Participants were asked to evaluate the brand message on the same scale of message evaluations used in the previous studies ($\alpha = .97$). Further, participants evaluated the brand on a 3-item bipolar scale (i.e., "unfavorable/favorable," "bad/good," and "dislike/like;" adapted from Verlegh et al. 2013; $\alpha = .97$). Also in this case, I counterbalanced the order of these two measures. Finally, participants answered the same manipulation check from previous

studies, two measures of activity on social media (i.e., "How often are you on social media?" and "How active are you on X (Twitter)?," 1 = Never, 7 = Always) as covariates[11], and the attention check and demographics used in Study 3A.

3.7.2 Results

Manipulation Check. Consistent with previous studies, a one-way ANOVA with internet slang intensity as the dependent variable confirmed that participants perceived the intensity of intern slang included in the brand message as significantly different across conditions ($F(2, 444) = 209.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .486$). Participants in the absent condition perceived the intensity of internet slang as significantly lower than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{absent} = 1.66$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.47$; $p < .001$). Participants in the high intensity condition perceived the intensity of internet slang included in the tweet as significantly higher than participants in the low intensity condition ($M_{low} = 3.47$ vs. $M_{high} = 5.11$; $p < .001$).

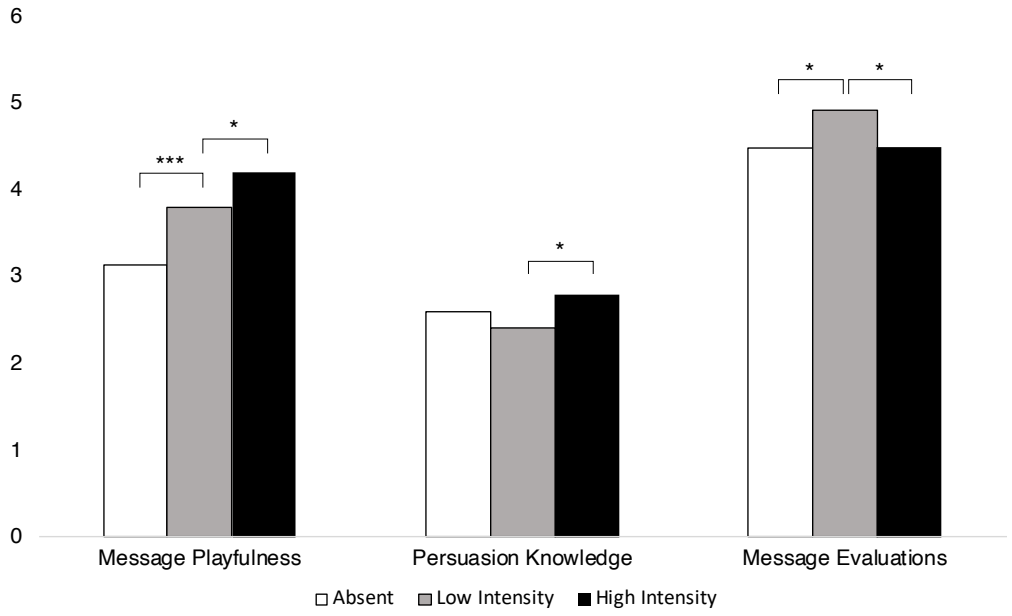
Message Playfulness. Consistent with my theorizing, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of internet slang intensity on message playfulness ($F(2, 444) = 18.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .077$). Participants in the low intensity condition perceived the brand as more playful compared to participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 3.15$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.82$; $p < .001$) and less playful compared to participants in the high intensity condition ($M_{low} = 3.82$ vs. $M_{high} = 4.22$; $p = .024$). The difference between the absent and high intensity conditions was significant ($p < .001$). Results are displayed in Figure 8.

Persuasion Knowledge. Further, in line with the proposed theorizing, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of internet slang intensity on persuasion knowledge ($F(2, 444) = 3.02$, $p = .050$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$). The brand using a low internet slang intensity

[11] Correlation between these two items is $r = .43$, thus I kept them separate in the analyses.

activated a lower persuasion knowledge in participants compared to the brand using a high internet slang intensity (M_{low} = 2.42 vs. M_{high} = 2.81; p = .014). No significant difference was found between the absent and low intensity conditions (M_{absent} = 2.61 vs. M_{low} = 2.42; p = .233) and between the absent and high intensity conditions (p = .207). Results are displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8. IMPACT OF INTERNET SLANG INTENSITY ON MESSAGE PLAYFULNESS, PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE, AND MESSAGE EVALUATIONS (STUDY 4)



NOTE.—*** p < .001, * p < .05.

Message Evaluations. A one-way ANOVA with message evaluations as the dependent variable showed a non-significant linear effect (F(2, 444) = .001, p = .975, η_p^2 = .017) and a significant quadratic effect (F(2, 444) = 7.50, p = .006, η_p^2 = .017) of internet slang intensity. Participants in the low intensity condition evaluated the brand message significantly more positively than participants in the absent condition (M_{absent} = 4.51 vs. M_{low} = 4.93; p = .019), and participants in the high intensity condition (M_{low} = 4.93 vs. M_{high} = 4.51; p = .018). The difference between the absent and high intensity conditions

was not significant (p = .975). Results are displayed in Figure 8. I found consistent results when controlling for the two measures of activity on social media (Appendix D).

Brand Evaluations. A one-way ANOVA with brand evaluations as the dependent variable showed a non-significant linear effect ($F(2, 444) = 1.16$, p = .314, η_p^2 = .005) and a non-significant quadratic effect ($F(2, 444) = 2.23$, p = .136, η_p^2 = .005) of internet slang intensity.

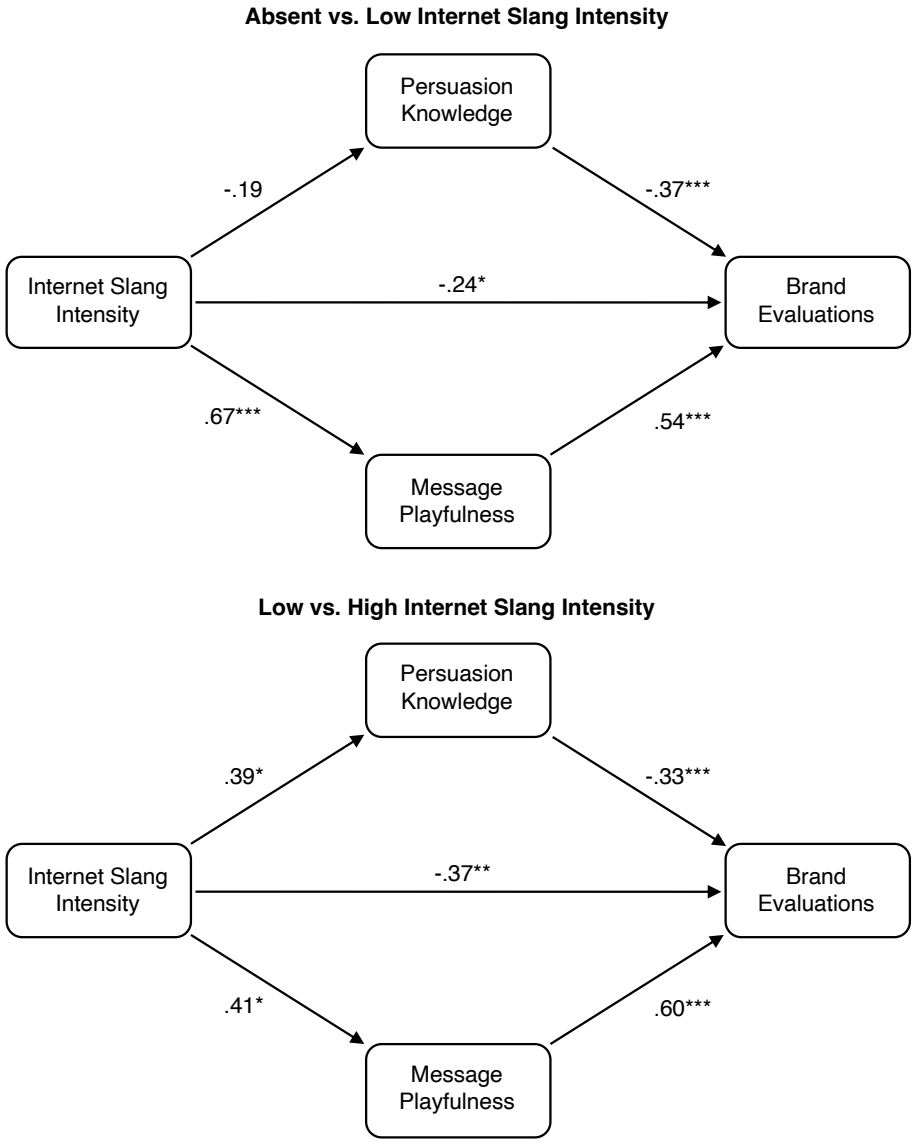
Parallel Mediation. To test the mediation by persuasion knowledge and playfulness as the underlying process of the effects of internet slang intensity on consumer responses, I conducted mediation analyses using model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The models included internet slang intensity as the independent variable, playfulness and persuasion knowledge as parallel mediators, and message evaluations (model 1) and brand evaluations (model 2) as the dependent variables. To follow, I describe the results for each contrast.

Comparing Absent vs. Low Internet Slang Intensity. In the absent vs. low intensity contrast, I found that using a low internet slang intensity in a brand message made the message seem more playful (b = .67, SE = .18, t = 3.80, p < .001), which increased message evaluations (b = .54, SE = .04, t = 14.51, p < .001) and brand evaluations (b = .67, SE = .18, t = 3.80, p < .001). In contrast, using a low internet slang intensity did not active heightened persuasion knowledge (b = -.19, SE = .15, t = -1.23, p = .218). Figure 9 (top) shows the results on brand evaluations. The resulting 95% CI indicated significant indirect effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations and brand evaluations through playfulness (message evaluations: b = .36, SE = .10, 95% CI = [.18, .57]; brand evaluations: b = .37, SE = .10, 95% CI = [.17, .57]). The processes through persuasion knowledge were non-significant (message evaluations: b = .09, SE = .07, 95% CI = [-.05, .23]; brand evaluations: b = .07, SE = .06, 95% CI = [-.04, .19]). Finally, hinting at full

mediation, including playfulness and persuasion knowledge as parallel mediators led the direct effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations to be reduced to non-significance (b = -.03, SE = .11, 95% CI = [-.26, .20]). Taken together, these results suggest that, compared to not using internet slang at all, using a low internet slang intensity in a brand message makes the message seem more playful without boosting consumers' perceptions of ulterior motives.

Comparing Low vs. High Internet Slang Intensity. In the low vs. high intensity contrast, I found that high internet slang intensity made the message seem more playful (b = .41, SE = .17, t = 2.33, p = .021), which increased message evaluations (b = .57, SE = .04, t = 14.11, p < .001) and brand evaluations (b = .60, SE = .04, t = 14.97, p < .001). Further, using a high internet slang intensity in a brand message heightened persuasion knowledge (b = .39, SE = .16, t = 2.46, p = .014), which decreased message evaluations (b = -.39, SE = .04, t = -8.87, p < .001) and brand evaluations (b = -.33, SE = .04, t = -7.55, p < .001). Figure 9 (bottom) shows the results on brand evaluations. The resulting 95% CI indicated significant indirect effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations and brand evaluations through playfulness (message evaluations: b = .23, SE = .10, 95% CI = [.04, .43]; brand evaluations: b = .24, SE = .11, 95% CI = [.04, .45]). The processes through persuasion knowledge were significant (message evaluations: b = -.15, SE = .07, 95% CI = [-.29, -.03]; brand evaluations: b = -.13, SE = .06, 95% CI = [-.25, -.02]). These findings indicate that, compared to using a low internet slang intensity, using a high internet slang intensity in a brand message boosts consumers' persuasion knowledge even though they perceive the message as more playful.

Figure 9. PARALLEL MEDIATION VIA MESSAGE PLAYFULNESS AND PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE ON BRAND EVALUATIONS
(STUDY 4)



NOTE.—*** p < .001, * $p < .05$.

Comparing Absent vs. High Internet Slang Intensity. In the absent vs. high intensity contrast, I found that high internet slang intensity made the message seem more playful ($b = .54$, $SE = .09$, $t = 5.378$ $p < .001$), which increased message evaluations ($b = .59$, $SE = .04$, $t = 14.70$, $p < .001$) and brand evaluations ($b = .54$, $SE = .09$, $t = 5.78$, $p < .001$). In contrast, using a high internet slang intensity did not active heightened persuasion

knowledge (b = .10, SE = .08, t = 1.22, p = .223). The resulting 95% CI indicated significant indirect effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations and brand evaluations through playfulness (message evaluations: b = .32, SE = .06, 95% CI = [.20, .44]; brand evaluations: b = .30, SE = .06, 95% CI = [.20, .42]). The processes through persuasion knowledge were significant (message evaluations: b = -.04, SE = .03, 95% CI = [-.11, -.02]; brand evaluations: b = -.04, SE = .03, 95% CI = [-.10, -.02]). These results suggest that, compared to not using internet slang at all, using a high internet slang intensity in a brand message makes the message seem more playful without boosting consumers' perceptions of the brand being manipulative.

3.7.3 Discussion

I conducted Study 4 to explore the underlying process explaining the curvilinear effect of internet slang intensity on consumer responses. Further, I aimed to extend the findings from the previous studies to an additional type of consumer response, that is, brand evaluations. First, consistent with the field study (Study 2) and the previous controlled experiments (Study 3A and Study 3B), results from Study 4 reveal a quadratic effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations.

Second, consistent with my proposed theory, I found that internet slang enhances perceptions of message playfulness. As the intensity of internet slang in a brand message increases, consumers perceive the message as more playful. However, using a high intensity of internet slang can backfire due to heightened persuasion knowledge. Although consumers perceive a message with high internet slang intensity as more playful, they also evaluate the brand as more manipulative, insincere, and pushy, leading to an overall less favorable evaluation of the message and the brand. Importantly, compared to not

using internet slang at all, using low internet slang intensity does not activate higher persuasion knowledge. Taken together, results from Study 3 are in favor with my "trying too hard" intuition. While using a few internet slang expressions help brands fit the social media environment, using many internet slang expressions conveys consumers the impression that the brand is trying to ingratiate them by co-opting their language.

3.8 Study 5A: Testing Alternative Mechanisms

In the next two sections (*3.8 Study 5A: Testing Alternative Mechanisms* and *3.9 Study 5B: Only Emojis*), I focus on the low vs. high internet slang intensity contrast to test some theoretically relevant alternative explanations of the negative effects of internet slang intensity on message evaluations.

Study 5A is a follow-up study with the main goal of testing the hypothesized persuasion knowledge mechanism against two alternative explanations in the low vs. high internet slang intensity contrast. Building on existing research, two possible alternative mechanisms may be processing fluency and brand competence. In Study 3A, I found no changes in the results when controlling for processing fluency. Nevertheless, I observed a statistically significant difference between the low and high internet slang intensity conditions in terms of processing fluency. Thus, I cannot rule out its role as a mediator in the causal relationship between internet slang and consumer responses based on the findings from Study 3A. Further, existing work indicates that the presence of internet slang in marketing messages may reduce perceptions of brand competence (e.g., Li, Chan, and Kim 2019). Altogether, processing fluency and brand competence may represent two alternative explanations of the negative effect of high internet slang on message evaluations.

Study 5A was preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/FTH_5B3.

3.8.1 Method

Participants and Design. I collected a sample of 150 participants on Prolific and paid them 0.30£ to complete the survey. I used a balanced sample, and the same prescreen criteria of the previous studies (i.e., participants were all native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users). Five participants failed the attention check that I incorporated at the end of the survey. The final sample thus includes $N = 145$ participants ($M_{age} = 37.07$, $SD = 11.18$; 48.3% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. I used the same design, fictitious brand, and experimental stimuli from Study 3A. Precisely, I informed participants that the brand Jamu wanted to promote the new soda GingerTwist on X. I randomly assigned participants to two experimental conditions in a single-factor (internet slang intensity: low, high) between-subject design. In the low condition, participants read a tweet that included three internet slang elements (two emojis and one netspeak term). In the high condition, participants read a tweet that included six internet slang elements (four emojis and two netspeak terms).

Measures. After showing participants the tweets, I measured the dependent variable, message evaluations (adapted from Thompson and Malaviya 2013; $\alpha = .97$). Next, I collected process measures. In particular, I measured persuasion knowledge by asking participants to rate the extent to which they perceived the brand as "manipulative," "dishonest," "insincere," and "pushy" (adapted from Hossain and Saini 2013; $\alpha = .88$). Then, I measured brand competence by asking participants to indicate how much they thought the brand was "competent," "intelligent," and "capable" (adapted from Howe et al. 2022; $\alpha = .94$). As a third possible process measure, I measured processing fluency by means

of the item used in Study 3A. I counterbalanced the order of brand competence and processing fluency measures. Finally, participants completed the same manipulation check, attention check, and demographics used in the previous studies.

3.8.2 Results

Manipulation Check. Consistent with the previous studies, a one-way ANOVA with internet slang intensity as the dependent variable confirmed that participants in the high intensity condition perceived the intensity of internet slang included in the tweet as significantly higher (M_{high} = 5.10, SD = 1.63) than participants in the low intensity condition (M_{low} = 3.05, SD = 1.48; $F(1, 143) = 62.48$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .30$).

Message Evaluations. A one-way ANOVA revealed that a high internet slang intensity marginally decreased message evaluations (M_{high} = 4.39, SD = 1.56) compared to a low internet slang intensity (M_{low} = 4.84, SD = 1.19; $F(1, 143) = 3.84$, $p = .052$, $h_p^2 = .03$).

Persuasion Knowledge. In line with the proposed theorizing, the brand using a high internet slang intensity activated a higher persuasion knowledge in participants (M_{high} = 2.61, SD = 1.30) compared to the brand using a low internet slang intensity (M_{low} = 1.84, SD = 1.00; $F(1, 143) = 16.27$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .10$).

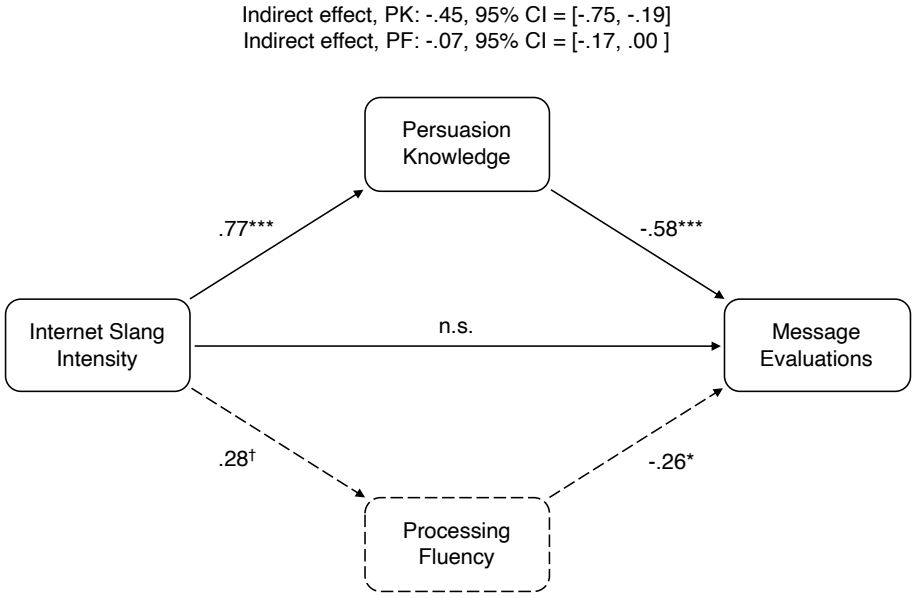
Brand Competence. Brand competence did not vary by condition (M_{high} = 4.39, SD = 1.35 vs. M_{low} = 4.68, SD = .90; $F(1, 143) = 2.36$, $p = .127$, $h_p^2 = .02$). Thus, participants did not perceived the brand using a high internet slang intensity as less competent than the brand using a low internet slang intensity.

Processing Fluency. Participants in the high intensity condition rated the tweet as marginally more difficult to read (M_{high} = 1.51, SD = 1.09) than participants in the low condition (M_{low} = 1.23, SD = .64; $F(1, 143) = 3.62$, $p = .059$, $h_p^2 = .03$).

Mediation by Persuasion Knowledge. To test the mediating role of persuasion knowledge as the underlying process of the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluation, I conducted a mediation analysis using model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The model included internet slang intensity (low vs. high) as the independent variable, persuasion knowledge as the mediator, and message evaluations as the dependent variable. I found that using a high internet slang intensity in a brand message activated more consumers' persuasion knowledge (b = .77, SE = .19, t = 4.03, p < .001), which decreased message evaluations (b = -.63, SE = .09, t = -7.39, p < .001). The resulting 95% CI indicated significant indirect effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations through persuasion knowledge (b = -.49, SE = .15, 95% CI = [-.81, -.24]). Finally, indicating full mediation, including persuasion knowledge as the mediator led the direct effect of internet slang intensity to be reduced to non-significance (b = .04, SE = .21, 95% CI = [-.37, .45]).

Parallel Mediation. To assess the possible alternative process represented by processing fluency, I estimated a parallel mediation analysis using again the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The model included internet slang intensity (low vs. high) as the independent variable, persuasion knowledge and processing fluency as the competing mediators, and message evaluations as the dependent variable. The results (Figure 10) showed that, even after including processing fluency as a parallel mediator, the indirect effect of internet slang intensity on message evaluations through persuasion knowledge also remained significant (b = -.45, SE = .14, 95% CI = [-.75, -.19]). In contrast, the indirect effect through processing fluency was non-significant (b = -.07, SE = .05, 95% CI = [-.17, .00]). These findings reaffirm the mediating role of persuasion knowledge in explaining how internet slang intensity affect message evaluations.

Figure 10. PARALLEL MEDIATION (STUDY 5A)



NOTE.—*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$.

3.8.3 Discussion

I run Study 4A with two main objectives: First, to test the mediating role of persuasion knowledge in the negative relationship between high (vs. low) internet slang intensity and message evaluations; second, to cast doubt on two possible theoretically relevant alternative explanations suggested by the existing literature (i.e., brand competence and processing fluency; Li, Chan, and Kim 2019; Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022). The results from this study confirm the theorizing advanced in this dissertation by showing that, when a brand includes a high internet slang intensity in a communication message, consumers negatively evaluate such message because they perceive the brand as more manipulative, dishonest, insincere, and pushy. In other words, the negative effect of high internet slang intensity occurs because consumers' persuasion knowledge is activated more than what happens when the brand uses a low internet slang intensity. Further, while consumers do not evaluate the brand using a high internet slang intensity as less competent, they perceive the brand message as more difficult to process. However, even after

controlling for the mediating role of processing fluency, persuasion knowledge remains the only underlying process that explains the effects of internet slang intensity on message evaluations.

3.9 Study 5B: Only Emojis

Do consumers perceive the brand to be manipulative, pushy, dishonest, or insincere even when the only expressions of internet slang used in its messages are emojis? One could argue that consumers may react differently to brand messages including only emojis, as they are more widespread, usual, and expected than other internet slang subcategories (e.g., acronyms, abbreviations, slang words). While field data from Study 2 suggests that emojis and other forms of internet slang have a similar (curvilinear) association with engagement, a controlled experiment may provide stronger evidence of such similarity. The main purpose of Study 5B is thus to understand whether consumers react to a message including only emojis in a similar way to how they react to a message including also other forms of internet slang. More specifically, Study 5B questions whether a brand message with a high intensity of emojis drives more negative reactions (i.e., negative message evaluations, heightened persuasion knowledge) than a brand message with a low intensity of emojis, or if these effects are present only when emojis are used in combination with other internet slang types. Considering the significant role played by processing fluency in the previous studies and in the existing literature (Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022), I further test this variable in Study 5B.

3.9.1 Method

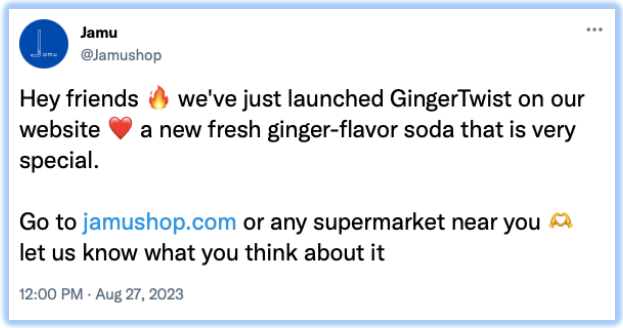
Participants and Design. I collected a sample of 100 participants on Prolific and paid them 0.30£ to complete the survey. Similar to previous studies, I used a balanced sample, and the following prescreen criteria: participants were all native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users. Seven participants were excluded because they failed the attention check included at the end of the survey. Hence, the final sample consists of $N = 93$ participants ($M_{age} = 39.75$, $SD = 12.78$; 50.5% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. I used the same design and fictitious brand (i.e., Jamu) from the previous studies. I randomly assigned participants to two experimental conditions in a single-factor (emoji intensity: low, high) between-subject design. In the low condition, participants read a tweet that included three emojis (the same two emojis from Study 5A plus an additional emoji). In the high condition, participants read a tweet that included six emojis elements (the same four emojis from Study 5A and two additional emojis). Experimental stimuli are depicted in Figure 11.

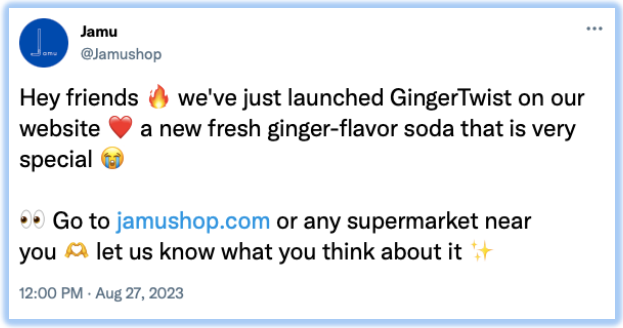
Measures. After showing participants the tweets, I measured the dependent variable, message evaluations (adapted from Thompson and Malaviya 2013; $\alpha = .97$). To follow, I measured persuasion knowledge by asking participants to rate the same four items used in the previous studies (adapted from Hossain and Saini 2013; $\alpha = .87$). Additionally, I measured processing fluency by means of the item used in Study 3A. To conclude, participants completed the same manipulation check, attention check, and demographics as in the previous studies. Importantly, while in this study I manipulated emoji intensity, I still asked participants to rate their perceptions of internet slang intensity as the manipulation check. In this way, if the manipulation check works, it would represent a further evidence of my proposition (i.e., emojis are perceived as internet slang, thus they should also have a social function, in people's mind).

Figure 11. EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI (STUDY 5B)

Low Emoji Intensity



High Emoji Intensity



3.9.2 Results

Manipulation Check. A one-way ANOVA with emoji intensity as the dependent variable confirmed that participants in the high intensity condition perceived the intensity of internet slang included in the tweet as significantly higher (M_{high} = 4.91, SD = 1.61) than participants in the low intensity condition (M_{low} = 3.24, SD = 1.22; $F(1, 91) = 31.98$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .26$).

Message Evaluations. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that a high emoji intensity marginally decreased message evaluations (M_{high} = 4.39, SD = 1.56) compared to a low emoji intensity (M_{low} = 4.84, SD = 1.19; $F(1, 91) = 3.84$, $p = .052$, $h_p^2 = .03$).

Persuasion Knowledge. Furthermore, the brand using a high emoji intensity activated a higher persuasion knowledge in participants (M_{high} = 2.65, SD = 1.32) compared to the brand using a low emoji intensity (M_{low} = 1.95, SD = 1.06; $F(1, 91) = 10.11$, $p = .002$, $h_p^2 = .10$).

Processing Fluency. Participants in the high intensity condition rated the tweet as more difficult to read (M_{high} = 2.14, *SD* = 1.29) than participants in the low intensity condition (M_{low} = 1.55, *SD* = 1.06; $F(1, 91) = 5.77$, $p = .018$, $h_p^2 = .06$).

Mediation by Persuasion Knowledge. To test the mediating role of persuasion knowledge even in the situation where the brand uses only emojis, I conducted a mediation analysis using model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The model included emoji intensity (low vs. high) as the independent variable, persuasion knowledge as the mediator, and message evaluations as the dependent variable. Consistent with Study 4A, I found that using a high emoji intensity in a brand message activated heightened consumers' persuasion knowledge (b = .70, *SE* = .25, t = 2.82, p = .006), which decreased message evaluations (b = -.60, *SE* = .11, t = -5.36, $p < .001$). The resulting 95% CI indicated significant indirect effect through persuasion knowledge (b = -.42, *SE* = .16, 95% CI = [-.74, -.13]). Finally, indicating full mediation, including persuasion knowledge as the mediator led the direct effect of emoji intensity to non-significance (b = -.54, *SE* = .28, 95% CI = [-1.10, -.01]).

Parallel Mediation. To evaluate the possibility that the negative effects of high emoji intensity on message evaluations are driven by processing fluency, I estimated a parallel mediation analysis using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The model included emoji intensity (low vs. high) as the independent variable, persuasion knowledge and processing fluency as the competing mediators, and message evaluations as the dependent variable. The results revealed a significant indirect effect through persuasion knowledge (b = -.38, *SE* = .15, 95% CI = [-.70, -.11]), but a non-significant indirect effect through processing fluency (b = -.08, *SE* = .08,

95% CI = [-.26, .03]). These findings are in favor of the proposed mediating role of persuasion knowledge in explaining how the intensity of internet slang (in this case, emojis) shapes message evaluations.

3.9.3 Discussion

The purpose of Study 5B was to address two theoretical issues concerning the role of emojis in communication messages. On one hand, previous research indicates that a high number of emojis included in communication messages negatively affects the evaluation of those messages due to consumers' decreased processing fluency in reading them (Orazi, Ranjan, and Cheng 2022). On the other hand, while the present dissertation contrasts previous theorizing (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019) by arguing that emojis can be considered a form of internet slang too, emojis are indeed more widespread and common in the digital environment than other internet slang expressions.

Starting from these premises, Study 5B investigates whether the effects found in Study 4 and Study 5A holds even when the brand uses only emojis as a form of internet slang. Similarly to previous studies, I found that a high intensity of emojis drives negative consumers' message evaluations because consumers perceive the brand to have ulterior motives. This study further confirms previous findings showing that a high number of emojis decreases consumers' processing fluency, but it demonstrates that it is heightened persuasion knowledge, more than decreased fluency, to drive negative message evaluations. While emojis are more usual, common, and widespread in digital communications, using a high intensity of emojis in a brand message suggests to consumers that the brand is trying to persuade them. Once again, these findings align with the identity signaling view of internet slang proposed in this dissertation.

3.10 Study 6: Process by Moderation

The first purpose of Study 6 is to test the hypothesized process through moderation. Specifically, I adopt a moderation-of-process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005). Spencer, Zanna, and Fong (2005) illustrate that psychological mechanisms can undergo testing through both measurement and manipulation of the mediator. When a variable serves as a mediator between an independent and dependent variable, experimentally manipulating the mediator should lead to changes in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Put simply, in the absence of the mediator, the relationship is not expected to manifest (Cannon and Rucker 2019).

In this dissertation, I argue that a high internet slang intensity, compared to a low intensity, elicits negative responses because it makes brands' manipulative intent more explicit. Thus, reducing persuasion knowledge accessibility should mitigate the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on consumer responses. For example, if consumers are cognitively busy, it should be more difficult for them to recognize a persuasive attempt (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). To test this possibility, in addition to manipulating internet slang intensity, I manipulate persuasion knowledge accessibility in this study.

Study 6 also has three additional purposes: First, to focus on brand (rather than message) evaluations as the main dependent variable, thus replicating the findings from Study 4; second, to test its downstream consequences on behavioral intentions (H7); third, to generalize the previous findings to a different product category. The preregistration of Study 6 can be found here: https://aspredicted.org/L5K_WM9.

3.10.1 Method

Participants and Design. I set the sample size to 70 participants per condition. Although I set the data collection to automatically stop once 280 participants were reached, 281 Prolific workers participated in the study. I paid them 0.40£ to complete the survey. Similarly to the previous studies, I relied on a balanced sample of individuals who were all native English speakers, located in the U.S., and active X users. I included two attention checks, one at the beginning and one at the end of the survey, and a total of three participants failed them. Additionally, I removed two participants who provided "straightline" answers. Thus, the final sample included N = 276 participants (M_{age} = 41.89, SD = 14.11; 48.6% female).

Stimuli and Procedure. I randomly assigned participants to a 2 (internet slang intensity: low, high) × 2 (persuasion knowledge accessibility: low, high) between-subject design. First, I introduced participants to Crunchy, a fictitious snack brand. Following the design of the previous studies, I informed participants that Crunchy wanted to promote the launch of a new granola bar, Pumpkin Fusion, on X. Immediately after this brand introduction, I asked participants to complete the first attention check ("Before moving on, could you indicate what type of brand Crunchy is?"). Then, I manipulated persuasion knowledge accessibility adapting Isaac and Grayson's (2017) procedure. In the low persuasion knowledge accessibility condition, I instructed participants in the following way: "While reading the tweet, please take a minute to think about the last time you bought a snack. We would like you to think about *the attributes of a snack that usually influence more your decision to buy it*" (emphasis added). In the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition, instead, I instructed participants in the following way: "While reading the tweet, please take a minute to think about Crunchy's way of communicating. We

would like you to think about *the reasons influencing Crunchy's way of communicating (its language style)*" (emphasis added).

To follow, participants viewed either one of two tweets. I adapted the text of the tweets used in Study 3A and, to manipulate internet slang intensity, I used the same elements used in Study 3A. The experimental stimuli of this study are presented in Figure 12. After reading the tweet, participants were exposed to the second part of the persuasion knowledge accessibility manipulation (a writing task). Those in the low persuasion knowledge accessibility condition read: "As anticipated before, we would like you to think about the attributes of a snack that usually influence more your decision to buy it: what is the most important factor you consider when buying a snack? It can be any type of snack." Those in the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition read: "As anticipated before, we would like you to think about the reasons influencing Crunchy's way of communicating: why do you think is Crunchy communicating in this way/using this language?" The goal of this manipulation is, in the high (low) accessibility condition, to encourage (discourage) participants to think about the motive behind brand's persuasive tactics (Isaac and Grayson 2017).

Measures. After presenting participants with the stimuli, I measured the dependent variables. Participants evaluated the brand on the three seven-point item scale of brand evaluations used in Study 4 (α = .97). For exploratory purposes, I also asked respondents to rate their behavioral intentions toward the brand on two items ("What is the likelihood that you would try this snack?" and "How interested would you be in learning more about the snack and Crunchy?," adapted from Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer 2023; α = .90). Next, participants completed the manipulation checks for internet slang intensity and persuasion knowledge accessibility. For the former, I used the same measure used in the previous studies. For the latter, I used the persuasion knowledge measure used

in the previous studies (α = .93). Finally, participants completed the same attention check and demographics from the previous studies.

Figure 12. EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI (STUDY 6)

3.10.2 Results

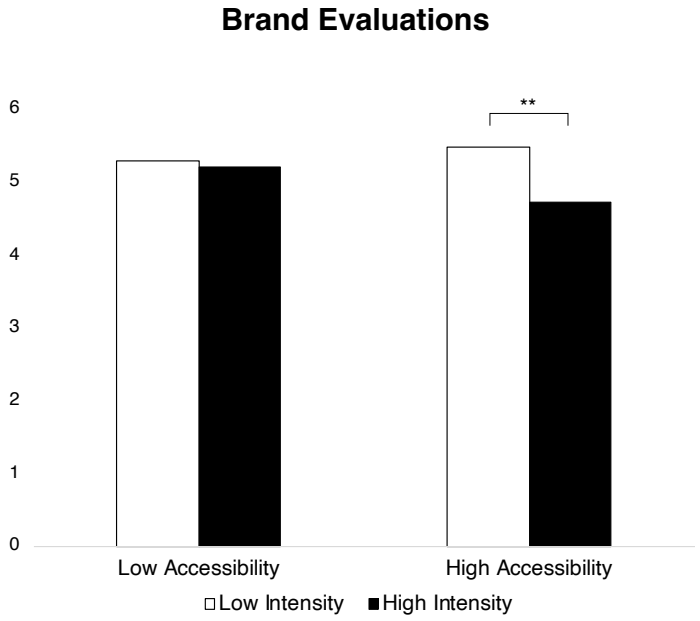
Before analyzing the results, I asked two independent coders (blind to conditions) to read participants' answers to the writing task, and to assess their coherence. The two coders indicated a total of five open-ended answers as incoherent with the question being asked. For instance, one participant in the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition answered "nutrients" to the question "Why do you think is Crunchy communicating in this way/using this language?" (the five incoherent answers can be found in Appendix E). To follow, I will illustrate the results of the analyses after removing these participants from the sample (N = 271).

Manipulation Checks. A one-way ANOVA with internet slang intensity as the dependent variable confirmed that participants in the high intensity condition perceived

the internet slang intensity included in the tweet as significantly higher (M_{high} = 5.54, *SD* = 1.41) than participants in the low condition (M_{low} = 4.12, *SD* = 1.60; $F(1, 267) = 61.77$, $p < .001$, $h_p^2 = .188$). Also, a one-way ANOVA with persuasion knowledge as the dependent variable showed that participants in the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition perceived the brand to be significantly more persuasive (M_{high} = 2.67, *SD* = 1.52) than participants in the low condition (M_{low} = 2.27, *SD* = 1.39; $F(1, 267) = 5.28$, $p = .010$, $h_p^2 = .024$). The interactions between the two manipulations on internet slang intensity and persuasion knowledge accessibility were non-significant.

Brand Evaluations. A two-way ANOVA revealed with brand evaluations as the dependent variable revealed a main effect of internet slang intensity ($F(1, 267) = 6.34$, $p = .012$, $h_p^2 = .023$), qualified by the significant internet slang intensity × persuasion knowledge accessibility interaction ($F(1, 267) = 4.38$, $p = .037$, $h_p^2 = .016$). The main effect of persuasion knowledge accessibility was non-significant. Simple effect tests revealed that participants in the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition displayed more favorable evaluations toward the brand using a low internet slang intensity compared to a high internet slang intensity (M_{low} = 5.48, *SD* = 1.26 vs. M_{high} = 4.72, *SD* = 1.59; $F(1, 267) = 10.33$, $p = .001$, $h_p^2 = .037$). However, participants in the low persuasion knowledge accessibility condition did not show any differences in terms of brand evaluations, whether they were exposed to a high or low internet slang intensity tweet (M_{low} = 5.28, *SD* = 1.32 vs. M_{high} = 5.20, *SD* = 1.31; $F(1, 267) = .093$, $p = .761$, $h_p^2 = .000$). Results are illustrated in Figure 13.

Figure 13. MODERATION BY PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBILITY (STUDY 6)



NOTE.—Error bars: 95% CI; ; ** $p < .01$.

Behavioral Intentions. I run a one-way ANOVA with behavioral intentions as the dependent variable and found a marginally significant main effect of internet slang ($F(1, 267) = 3.63$, $p = .058$, $h_p^2 = .013$), but no significant interaction between internet slang intensity and persuasion knowledge accessibility for this dependent variable ($p = .153$). However, the results are directional. Participants in the high persuasion knowledge accessibility condition displayed more favorable intentions toward the brand using a low internet slang intensity compared to a high internet slang intensity ($M_{low} = 4.93$, $SD = 1.56$ vs. $M_{high} = 4.25$, $SD = 1.67$; $F(1, 267) = 5.14$, $p = .021$, $h_p^2 = .020$). In contrast, participants in the low persuasion knowledge accessibility condition did not show any differences in terms of behavioral intentions whether they were exposed to a high or low internet slang intensity tweet ($M_{low} = 4.80$, $SD = 1.71$ vs. $M_{high} = 4.71$, $SD = 1.78$; $F(1, 267) = .12$, $p = .734$, $h_p^2 = .000$).

Moderated Mediation. Finally, to test downstream consequences of internet slang intensity on behavioral intentions as mediated by brand evaluations, I run a moderated mediation analysis using Model 7 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. The model included internet slang intensity (low vs. high) as the independent variable, persuasion knowledge as the moderator, brand evaluations as the mediator, and behavioral intentions as the dependent variable. The results revealed a significant index of moderated mediation (b = -.66, SE = .32, 95% CI = [-1.29, -.04]). When persuasion knowledge accessibility was high, brand evaluations mediated the effect of internet slang intensity on purchase intentions (b = -.73, SE = .24, 95% CI = [-1.21, -.25]). Specifically, the use of high internet slang intensity decreased brand evaluations (b = -.77, SE = .24, t = -3.21, p = .002), which in turn decreased purchase intentions (b = .95, SE = .05, t = 20.16, p < .001). In contrast, when persuasion knowledge accessibility was low, internet slang intensity did not impact brand evaluations (b = -.07, SE = .22, t = -.30, p = .761), and the mediation on purchase intentions was no longer significant (b = -.07, SE = .21, 95% CI = [-.48, .34]). These findings are in favor of the proposed persuasion knowledge mechanism, this time manipulated rather than measured, and suggest that internet slang may affect consumer behavioral intentions through brand evaluations.

3.10.3 Discussion

Results from Study 6 support the persuasion knowledge mechanism proposed in this dissertation and extend previous findings in two directions: by generalizing the effects to (1) an additional product category (i.e., snacks), and (2) downstream consequences (e.g., purchase intentions). More precisely, I employed a process-by-moderation design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005) to manipulate, rather than measure, the mediator of my theoretical model. Following existing research (Isaac and Grayson 2017), I used a

writing task to manipulate persuasion knowledge accessibility (low vs. high). The findings show that, when consumers can access their persuasion knowledge more easily, perceiving the brand as more manipulative, dishonest, pushy, and insincere, they evaluate it significantly more negatively if it uses a high (vs. low) intensity of internet slang. When consumers cannot access their persuasion knowledge easily, different intensities of internet slang do not affect brand evaluations. These results are consistent with previous findings on the persuasion knowledge model (e.g., Campbell and Kirmani 2000).

On a final note, respondents' answers to the writing task interestingly suggest that, while a high intensity of internet slang is associated with perceptions of manipulativeness and conformity, a low intensity of internet slang is associated with perceptions of playfulness, as well as friendliness, warmth, and relatability. Although these answers do not provide empirical evidence of any statistical effect, they are in line with the inverted U-shaped effect proposed in this work—i.e., too much internet slang should drive negative evaluations, but a bit of internet slang is favored compared to no internet slang at all. Table 12 displays some sample answers of participants in the high-persuasion knowledge accessibility × low intensity and participants in the high-persuasion knowledge accessibility × high intensity.

Table 12. SAMPLE ANSWERS TO WRITING TASK (STUDY 5)

Condition	**Answer to Writing Task**
Low Intensity	"It's very *natural*, *casual*, and sounds like they're talking directly to you."
	"They are trying to appear *fun*, *young*, and *relatable* to consumers in a text language we have come to expect."
	"They are trying to be *friendly*."
	"Very informal makes you feel like a *friend* is recommending"
	"They want to appear *friendly* and *close* to the reader."
High Intensity	"They definitely seem like they're trying to *attract a younger generation*. i think they are trying too hard with the "hey besties" and excessive emojis."

"Because I believe it *conforms* to the base, which is more so Gen Z and Millennials."

"Trying to *get us to buy*."

"Modern society; that is how to *grab people's attention* and seem more personable."

"It's trying to *pander to young people*."

NOTE.—Emphasis added.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This dissertation is a monographic work aimed at studying brand language in the social media realm. In particular, the overall objective is to contribute to a growing body of work studying language in marketing (Berger et al. 2020; Kronrod 2022; Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023; Packard and Berger 2024; Pezzuti 2023). While existing literature provides valuable insights on the language produced by *consumers* in various online contexts (e.g., product reviews, social media interactions, online service encounters; Li, Chan, and Wang 2021; Packard and Berger 2021; Packard, Berger, and Boghrati 2023), little is known about the language produced by *brands* in digital channels, especially on social media platforms (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2021). Not surprisingly, interest for brand language in social media communication is rapidly growing as demonstrated by the number of articles published between 2021-2023. Nonetheless, the bibliometric review presented in Chapter 2 identifies only a total number of 19 articles on this topic across 20 marketing journals. With this dissertation, I hope to provide new contributions to the marketing field in this regard.

The research focus of this dissertation is on a particular form of language that brands use in the social media marketplace: internet slang (Barseghyan 2013; Crystal 2011). I propose a theory-driven approach to conceptualize this construct and test its effects on consumers. While internet slang is frequently adopted in online communications, by both consumers and brands, scant academic works provide empirical findings related to this language (e.g., Liu et al. 2019), and the few existing findings are contradictory.

One possible reason for this contradictory evidence may be the lack of a clear definition of internet slang. Therefore, one purpose of this dissertation is to offer a new

conceptualization of this language. To do it, I draw upon classic works on the social function of slang (Drake 1980) and identity signaling (Berger and Ward 2010). Additionally, to validate the proposed new conceptualization of internet slang, I use a top-down approach (Humphreys and Wang 2018) and create the ISD, a text-based measurement tool aimed at automatizing the assessment of internet slang in text. A second possible reason of why evidence regarding the effects of internet slang in the marketplace is contradictory may be the lack of field investigations. Existing works rely only on experimental manipulations of internet slang (Liu et al. 2019; Liu, Wu, and Gong 2022; Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021; Rizvi, Moore, and Messenger 2021), posing challenges to generalizability of the findings. Accordingly, a second purpose of my dissertation is to observe how internet slang shapes the success of marketing messages both in experimental settings and in the field. I carry out a multi-method investigation combining text analysis and statistical modeling of over 18,000 real marketing messages together with a set of controlled experiments. Finally, a third possible reason why existing works on internet slang are contradictory may be that this construct is treated as a binary variable (i.e., presence vs. absence of one expression of internet slang). Thus, a third purpose of my dissertation is to offer a more comprehensive view of internet slang and study its *intensity*, rather than its *presence*.

Overall, I find that there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses. In the field study (Study 2), for example, I show that consumers engage more with a brand message that includes a certain intensity of internet slang compared to no internet slang at all, but after a degree level of intensity, engagement starts decreasing. Why may this happen? To explain this effect, I theorize and find two underlying mechanisms working simultaneously but in opposite directions.

More specifically, I argue that an increasing internet slang intensity drives enhanced consumers' perceptions of message playfulness. At the same time, however, I suggest that high intensity of internet slang activates heightened consumers' persuasion knowledge. In other words, while a brand message using internet slang intensity is perceived as increasingly entertaining, fun to read, and, overall, playful, consumers penalize the brand using too much slang (i.e., high internet slang intensity) because they recognize its manipulative intent. I call this effect "the trying too hard hypothesis." Consistent specifically with the persuasion knowledge mechanism, I identify three theoretically relevant moderators that attenuate the negative effect of high internet slang intensity—i.e., brand trust, brand coolness, and message goal. Furthermore, I cast doubt on various alternative explanations. In the field study, using text analysis and mixed-effects models, I control for several variables (e.g., twenty different text features, brand heterogeneity, time fixed effects) that may explain the curvilinear effect of internet slang on engagement. In the experiments, using self-reported consumer perceptions, I run parallel mediation analyses comparing persuasion knowledge with possible alternative mechanisms (e.g., processing fluency).

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The empirical findings from this dissertation may offer different theoretical insights to the marketing literature. I describe each of the possible contributions in the following sections.

4.1.1 Contribution to Branding and Brand Language

Language is central in branding practices (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017). But while its impact in various traditional marketing contexts represents a solid stream of research in the marketing field (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017), the study of brand language on social media is an emerging research area (Pezzuti 2023; Packard and Berger 2024). Although it is clear that language plays a key role in shaping the success of social media marketing messages, it is still not fully clear which linguistic cues brands should leverage on, why, and how (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2021). This dissertation may offer new answers in this respect.

Particularly, it may provide novel evidence regarding internet slang and the social value of language (Barbu et al. 2013). Scant consumer and marketing research investigates internet slang, and the few existing findings are contradictory (Liu et al. 2019; Rizvi, Moore, and Messinger 2020; Pyrah, Wang, and Lee 2021). In an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, this dissertation advances an updated (and more comprehensive) conceptual model of internet slang, and develops and validates the ISD, a text-based automatized measurement to identify this language in texts. Developing sound measurements is necessary to correctly assess constructs under investigation, thus allowing for scientific developments (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Haws 2011; Churchill 1979). This may be particularly true when dealing with large amounts of unstructured data. Relatedly, this dissertation answers the call for constructing theoretically grounded tools that can measure and extract information from textual data (Humphreys and Wang 2018), following recent work (e.g., Chen et al. 2023; Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023; Visentin, Tuan, and Di Domenico 2021). Branding and language scholars interested in studying brands' employment of internet slang in the marketplace could use the ISD to detect this language in text, and advance new hypotheses and theories. Also, the ISD proposes four distinct subcategories of internet slang (i.e., catchphrases, emojis, emphasis symbols, and netspeak).

Thus, this dictionary could also allow scholars to identify and study the four subcategories separately, maybe providing new theoretical insights to different frameworks.

Second, this dissertation studies the social function of internet slang, and empirically tests its consequences on different consumer responses. Broadly speaking, internet slang is a language that reflects cultural trends. Thus, by testing the consequences of this language in the social media marketplace and identifying the dual underlying mechanism through which it works, this dissertation may facilitate the understanding of consumer responses to brands' active participation in changing culture and social trends (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Nixon 2003; Thompson and Arsel 2004). In other words, it may contribute to the ongoing debate about whether brands should or should conform to contemporary trends. Should brands capitalize, oppose, or ignore trends (Swaminathan et al. 2020)? On one hand, the principle of brand relevance suggests that brands should adapt their intangibles to current times to maintain or develop a strong brand equity (Keller 2000). On the other hand, from a co-optation perspective (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), consumers may perceive brands adapting to current trends as "hijacking" them to appeal to and persuade specific social groups for profit. By adopting a consumer perspective, this dissertation quantifies the degree to which brands should optimally conform to current online linguistic trends (i.e., internet slang). Specifically, it identifies an inverted U-shaped relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses. Therefore, the findings from this dissertation may contribute to branding and brand language research not only by showing if, how, and why internet slang could be beneficial for brands, but also by suggesting that brand language can have a social value in the marketplace, and offering new insights regarding "branding as socially constructed meaning" (Swaminathan et al. 2020; p. 6).

4.1.2 Contribution to Impression Management

This dissertation may also offer new insights to the impression management framework. In particular, to it may contribute to identity signaling (e.g., Berger and Ward 2010) and self-presentation (e.g., Schlenker 2012) theories. On one hand, while prior research in this area mostly focuses on physical signals (e.g., products and brands) as a way of symbolically communicate something about oneself (e.g., Argo et al. 2005; Berger and Ward 2010; Folwarczny, Otterbring, and Ares 2023), this dissertation examines a non-physical behavior (i.e., language). Language is considered here as a specific form of verbal signal that brands may use to self-present and convey particular identities online. By focusing on internet slang as a set of markers that signal a trendy identity, the findings from this dissertation identify a curvilinear relationship between number of signals (i.e., degree of signaling explicitness) and effectiveness of impression formation. Existing theorizing suggests that a signal must be visible and obvious to be effective (Spence 1978; Veblen 1899; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), thereby suggesting a positive and linear association between number of signals and impression formation. This dissertation, in contrast, finds a curvilinear relationship between internet slang intensity and consumer responses.

These results may contribute further to the existing body of work on unsuccessful impression management (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013). Specifically, the findings from this dissertation echo previous research on failed self-presentation—where there is a mismatch between the calculated impression (i.e., the intended impression the actor wishes to convey to the audience) and the secondary impression (i.e., the impression the audience actually forms of the actor)—and excessive impression management (Rosenfeld 1997). Existing research in this area indicates, for example, that while em-

ploying two self-presentation tactics (e.g., humor and self-enhancement) in isolation during job interviews improves applicants' ratings, employing them simultaneously lowers such ratings (Baron 1986; Crowe et al. 2019). Similarly, excessive opinion conformity can backfire during social interaction (Leary 2019). On social media, sharing too much self-content and over-filtered selfies is perceived as a violation of the social norms governing social network sites (Hong et al. 2020; Uski and Lampinen 2016). This dissertation theorizes and finds that incorporating a high intensity of internet slang in brand messages leads to unfavorable consumer responses. Consequently, it may contribute to the existing literature on excessive impression management by suggesting that trying too hard to signal a particular identity may result in unintended negative consequences.

4.1.3 Contribution to Persuasion Knowledge

Finally, this dissertation may extend prior research on the persuasion knowledge model. The present dissertation proposes and tests a parallel mediation model that integrates recent literature on playfulness (McShane et al. 2021) with classic works on persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994). More specifically, the findings indicate that the psychological mechanism underlying the positive effects of internet slang on message evaluations and brand evaluations is perceptions of message playfulness, while the mechanism underlying the negative effects of high internet slang intensity is persuasion knowledge. Although consumers perceive brand messages with high internet slang intensity as more entertaining, fun to read, and overall playful, they also recognize the manipulative intent of the brand and consequently penalize the brand by evaluating it less favorably. With a particular focus on persuasion knowledge (i.e., the negative side of the curve), the present dissertation finds that heightened consumers' persuasion knowledge is the underlying psychological mechanism explaining why high internet slang intensity

in brand messages drives negative consumer responses even when controlling for alternative explanations such as processing fluency (Song and Schwarz 2008) and brand competence (Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012). First, the results from this dissertation may contribute to persuasion knowledge theory by providing further evidence regarding the fact that language is a type of message cue that can affect perceptions of ulterior motives, similarly to recent literature (Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b).

Second, the theorizing proposed in dissertation focuses on two factors that, according to the rich body of work in this area, can shape the success of persuasion: the source of the message and the message itself (e.g., Campbell 1995; Kirmani and Campbell 2009; Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). Specifically, here, two characteristics of the source (i.e., brand trust and brand coolness) and one characteristic of the message (i.e., message goal) are shown to attenuate the negative effect of high internet slang intensity on message evaluations. While prior work already establishes the importance of trust and message goal in the persuasion knowledge framework (e.g., Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b), this dissertation extends this work by introducing and testing perceptions of brand coolness as a new factor that may influence the effectiveness of persuasion.

4.2 Managerial Contributions

The findings from this dissertation may have practical implications too. This dissertation relies on both field data and controlled experiments in an attempt to provide rigorous analyses as well as reliable, generalizable, and actionable results. Nowadays, having an effective social media presence is critical for brands as a way to generate social media engagement, which, in turn, has been shown to increase positive brand evaluations and boost sales (Akpinar and Berger 2016; Hollebeek and Macky 2019; Liadeli, Sotgiu,

and Verlegh 2023; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2021). Nevertheless, few social media managers are able to compose successful brand messages that grab consumers' attention (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). In particular, marketers often leverage internet language trends (i.e., internet slang) with the intention of building a likeable and relatable presence online (Hoover 2023). However, they do not always succeed (Grossman 2014). Should brands use internet slang in their social media messages? If so, how much internet slang should they exactly use?

This dissertation would represent the first work providing practical and actionable answers to these questions. The results from the field study on a diverse sample of major brands show that, on average, for a 38-word post, the sum of the number of likes, retweets, and replies (i.e., engagement) starts decreasing when the post includes 2.5–3 elements of internet slang. Additionally, this turning point significantly changes depending on the level of trust toward the brand, brand coolness perceptions, and goal of the message. The curvilinear effect of internet slang on engagement is weakened for highly trusted brands, highly cool brands, and messages that are not promotional. Brands' social media managers could rely on these findings to understand when and how much internet slang they should use in their communications. For example, while for a 19-word promotional tweet they should make sure to include between one to two internet slang expressions, they could increase this number for a hedonic tweet (vs. a promotional tweet).

Finally, by identifying four different subcategories of internet slang and testing the effects of each of these subcategories on engagement, the results from this dissertation may also help social media managers in relation to which internet slang expressions to include. Results show, for instance, that, for an optimal intensity of internet slang, there should be a 2:1 ratio between emojis and netspeak terms.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation is not without limitations. Hopefully, they will represent fruitful avenues for future research. First, in the empirical studies of this dissertation, I focused on one social media platform (i.e., X). While X is an ideal platform to study brand language for various reasons (e.g., it is primarily a text-based social media; McShane et al. 2022), the effects of internet slang on consumers may differ on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Overall, different social media platforms may have different characteristics, such as users' demographics, platform-specific slang, and content format. For example, while TikTok is widespread across various age generations, the largest group is constituted by 18-24 year old consumers (Megadigital 2024). Particularly when considering the social value of internet slang, thus its ability to signal a trendy, up-to-date, young identity, studying this language across platforms with different audiences may provide significantly different results. In addition to (and probably as a consequences of) different demographics, another feature that changes across platforms may be the language employed by users on each platform. More specifically, each platform may have a its own internet slang. Thus, observing different platforms could enable a deeper examination of internet slang in relation to social group dynamics (e.g., internet slang used by the dominant X social group vs. internet slang used by the dominant TikTok social group). Furthermore, focusing on different platforms may also allow for the exploration of internet slang as used in different types of data (e.g., videos vs. copy). Results from this dissertation find that persuasion knowledge is the underlying mechanism of the negative effects of high internet slang intensity. However, perceptions of ulterior motives may change depending on whether the use of internet slang is written or oral, as oral use may be accompanied by various vocal factors that influence consumer perceptions of language

(e.g., intonation, high-pitched voice, brightness; Cascio Rizzo et al. 2023b). Accordingly, one interesting avenue for future research may be to observe the consequences of brands' adoption of internet slang on other social media platforms and in different types of content.

Second, studies from the present dissertation provide empirical evidence of the proposed moderators (i.e., brand trust, brand coolness, and message goal) only in the field. Although I controlled for various alternative explanations (e.g., text features), and, most importantly, findings on real data should ensure higher external validity, testing these effects in a more controlled setting (e.g., lab experiments) would provide higher internal validity. Therefore, future research may investigate the effects of brand trust, brand coolness, and message goal by manipulating these variables in an experimental setting. Also, while I used a reliable and validated measurement for identifying the message goal (i.e., a dictionary of sales promotion-related words; Jalali and Papatla 2019) that allowed me to distinguish between more and less promotional tweets, scholars propose various classifications for brand social media messages (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2021). For example, non-promotional content could be further divided into emotional and social content (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023). Future research may thus explore whether the effect of internet slang intensity on engagement is affected by message goal even when other classifications of this construct are taken into account.

Third, this dissertation centers around traditional commercial brands. However, several other types of brands populate social media, such as personal brands (e.g., influencers), idea brands (e.g., social movements), and platform brands (e.g., travel platforms; Swaminathan et al. 2020). According to the theorizing proposed here, high internet slang intensity should drive negative consumer responses because it activates persuasion knowledge. However, these effects may be different when considering different brand

types. For example, personal brands like influencers may use higher intensities of internet slang without being perceived as having as much ulterior motives as product brands. By being humans, their use of internet slang may appear more genuine, spontaneous, and sincere. Future research may therefore examine whether the use of internet slang in marketing messages prompts different responses for different types of brands, and if so, why such different responses may arise.

Finally, while the field study tests the effect of all four subdictionaries of internet slang (i.e., catchphrase, emoji, emphasis symbol, and netspeak), the experiments focus on emojis and netspeak elements. The rationale behind this choice is statistical (i.e., I found a similar curvilinear effect of emojis and netspeak elements in the field study, while I found a different effect for emphasis symbols; further, catchphrase is a dichotomous variable), but it may be relevant to experimentally explore the effects of the other internet slang subcategories, either separately or simultaneously with emojis and netspeak elements. For instance, do emphasis symbols activate persuasion knowledge? Similarly, can the use of catchphrases allow brands to employ internet slang without being perceived as having ulterior motives? Thus, future research could account for this limitation and provide new insights in this regard.

Appendix

Appendix A: Journals for bibliometric review (Chapter 2)

To identify articles on brand language in the social media realm, I performed a bibliometric analysis. I used the Boolean string "*brand*+AND+language+OR+linguistic*+AND+social+AND+media*" and searched Scopus database, Google Scholar, and the publisher databases for the marketing journals classified as 4*, 4, and 3 according to ABS classification (AJG 2021) up to the year 2023. Table A1 lists the journals taken into consideration for the bibliometric review, the number of articles pertaining to this research area identified in each journal, and the reference for each article.

Table A1. JOURNALS CONSIDERED FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Journal	AJC 2021	Number of Articles	Article(s)
Journal of Consumer Psychology	4*	1	Pancer et al. (2018)
Journal of Consumer Research	4*	2	Cascio Rizzo et al. (2023a), Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2019)
Journal of Marketing	4*	2	Atalay, El Kihal, and Ellsaesser (2023), Cascio Rizzo et al. (2023b)
Journal of Marketing Research	4*	1	Lee (2021)
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	4*	3	Maiberger, Schindler, and Koschate-Fischer (2023), Pezzuti (2023), Pezzuti and Leonhardt (2023)
Marketing Science	4*	1	Lee, Hosanagar and Nair (2018)
International Journal of Research in Marketing	4	1	Jalali and Papatla (2019)
Journal of Business Research	3	2	Davis et al. (2019), Gretry et al. (2017)
Journal of Interactive Marketing	3	4	Batista et al. (2022), Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti (2017),

			McShane et al. (2021), Pezzuti, Leonhardt, and Warren (2021)
Journal of International Marketing	3	1	Whaid et al. (2023)
Psychology and Marketing	3	1	Labrecque, Swani, and Stephen (2019)

NOTE.—While I performed the review on all 21 journals classified as 3, 4, or 4*, I did not include in the table those journals for which I could not find articles on the topic (e.g., *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*).

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics (Study 1A)

Table B1. DISTRIBUTION OF INTERNET SLANG AND SUBCATEGORIES OF INTERNET SLANG IN BRAND TWEETS (STUDY 1A)

Brand	Internet Slang	Catchphrases	Emojis	Emphasis Symbol	Netspeak
Alexa	98 (33.0%)	3 (1.0%)	63 (21.2%)	38 (12.8%)	7 (2.4%)
Bravo	1117 (45.8%)	40 (1.6%)	908 (37.2%)	301 (12.3%)	204 (8.4%)
Delta	81 (61.4%)	9 (6.8%)	69 (52.3%)	21 (15.9%)	3 (2.3%)
Google Maps	75 (91.5%)	18 (22.0%)	52 (63.4%)	15 (18.3%)	40 (48.8%)
Kroger	45 (59.2%)	5 (6.6%)	35 (46.1%)	11 (14.5%)	6 (7.9%)
MTV	3523 (89.8%)	103 (2.6%)	3200 (81.5%)	1099 (28.0%)	1154 (29.4)
Netflix	411 (20.5%)	26 (1.3%)	143 (7.1%)	155 (7.7%)	148 (7.4%)
Pringles	42 (87.5%)	5 (10.4%)	25 (52.1%)	14 (29.2%)	10 (20.8%)
Skittles	233 (55.3%)	4 (1.0%)	91 (21.6%)	85 (20.2%)	116 (27.6%)
Taco Bell	60 (32.3%)	8 (4.3%)	10 (5.4%)	44 (23.7%)	4 (2.2%)
Trident Gum	361 (98.9%)	23 (6.3%)	100 (27.4%)	170 (46.6%)	350 (95.9%)
Wendy's	39 (54.2%)	3 (4.2%)	18 (25.0%)	23 (31.9%)	14 (19.4%)
Xbox	344 (39.6%)	18 (2.1%)	169 (19.5%)	149 (17.2%)	72 (8.3%)
Total	6429 (58.9%)	264 (2.4%)	4883 (44.7%)	2128 (19.5%)	2125 (19.5%)

NOTE.—The values in the column Internet Slang represent the number and percentage of tweets by each brand that include at least one instance of internet slang, not the sum of each subcategory of internet slang.

Appendix C: Correlations (Study 2)

Internet Slang Intensity	1																												
Brand Trust	-.148**	1																											
Brand Coolness	-.179**	.718**	1																										
Message Goal	-.001	-.021**	-.033**	1																									
Word Count	.062**	.103**	.122**	.084**	1																								
Big Words	-.026**	-.030**	-.004	-.030**	-.078**	1																							
Flesch Score	-.114**	.023**	.016*	.013*	-.009	-.355**	1																						
Positive Emotions	.059**	-.025**	-.018**	-.014*	-.077**	.084**	-.026**	1																					
Negative Emotions	-.025**	-.146**	-.042**	-.017**	-.310**	.144**	-.045**	.005	1																				
Swearing	.008	-.007	.017*	-.012	.01	-.020**	.009	.01	-.004	1																			
Social	-.048**	.080**	-.075**	.006	.020**	-.122**	.083**	.141**	-.290**	-.016*	1																		
First Person (I)	.022**	-.095**	-.082**	-.035**	-.112**	-.104**	.059**	.01	-.037**	.004	-.031**	1																	
First Person (We)	.009	.063**	-.045**	.018**	.049**	-.076**	.022**	.040**	-.112**	-.007	.345**	-.102**	1																
Negation	-.015*	.019**	0	-.016*	-.024**	-.108**	.051**	-.037**	-.045**	.008	.027**	.082**	.002	1															
Power	-.056**	.065**	.070**	.011	.079**	.052**	-.015*	-.038**	-.019**	-.011	.045**	-.008	-.004	-.01	1														
Cognition	-.071**	.128**	.058**	-.014*	.022**	-.103**	.067**	-.025**	-.239**	-.006	.177**	.079**	.036**	.288**	-.032**	1													
Focus Present	-.066**	.027**	.032**	-.043**	-.034**	-.148**	.090**	-.049**	-.161**	.022**	.078**	.058**	.063**	.164**	-.008	.119**	1												
Question Mark	.179**	.006	-.027**	-.012	-.053**	-.045**	.024**	-.009	-.063**	-.006	.035**	.008	.003	.055**	-.016*	.076**	.031**	1											
Mention	.181**	-.364**	-.158**	.019**	.116**	.193**	-.112**	.053**	.049**	-.003	-.159**	.034**	-.058**	-.050**	-.028**	-.112**	-.078**	-.018**	1	1									
URL	-.050**	-.381**	-.106**	.042**	.038**	.094**	-.022**	-.018**	.521**	.021**	-.234**	-.020**	-.122**	-.042**	0	-.206**	-.099**	-.079**	.301**	.301**	1								
Hashtag	.063**	-.359**	-.334**	.057**	.036**	.129**	-.089**	-.044**	.058**	-.008	-.061**	-.036**	-.032**	-.019**	-.039**	-.130**	-.041**	-.028**	.243**	.243**	.351**	1							
Day (Week)	.023**	-.060**	-.029**	-.019**	-.01	-.01	.007	.01	.028**	.006	-.023**	.01	-.009	-.005	-.005	-.018**	.007	.014*	.060**	.060**	.025**	.008	1						
Day (Month)	.024**	.014*	0	-.012*	.009	-.008	-.003	-.002	-.021**	0	.002	.018**	-.003	-.002	-.002	.003	.002	.005	-.001	-.001	-.019**	-.013*	-.021**	1					
Tweet Recency	-.039**	-.078**	-.100**	.088**	.008	.026**	.009	.001	.024**	-.004	.024**	-.040**	-.014*	-.015*	.012	-.031**	-.023**	-.012*	.028**	.028**	.157**	.124**	-.034**	-.090**	1				

Appendix D: Results with social media activity measures as covariates (Study 4)

Message Playfulness. A one-way ANCOVA with message playfulness as the dependent variable and the two measures of social media activity as covariates revealed a significant effect of internet slang intensity ($F(2, 442) = 21.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .089$). Participants in the low intensity condition perceived the brand as more playful compared to participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 3.11$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.84$; $p < .001$) and less playful compared to participants in the high intensity condition ($M_{low} = 3.84$ vs. $M_{high} = 4.24$; $p = .021$). The difference between the absent and high intensity conditions was significant ($p < .001$).

Persuasion Knowledge. Next, a one-way ANCOVA with persuasion knowledge as the dependent variable and the two measures of social media activity as covariates revealed a marginally significant effect of internet slang intensity ($F(2, 442) = 2.92$, $p = .055$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$). The brand using a low internet slang intensity activated a lower persuasion knowledge in participants compared to the brand using a high internet slang intensity ($M_{low} = 2.42$ vs. $M_{high} = 2.80$; $p = .016$). No significant difference was found between the absent and low intensity conditions ($M_{absent} = 2.61$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.42$; $p = .232$) and between the absent and high intensity conditions ($p = .224$).

Message Evaluations. A one-way ANCOVA with message evaluations as the dependent variable and the two measures of social media activity as covariates revealed a significant effect of internet slang intensity ($F(2, 442) = .001$, $p = .825$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$) and a significant quadratic effect ($F(2, 442) = 7.50$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$) of internet slang intensity. Participants in the low intensity condition evaluated the brand message significantly more positively than participants in the absent condition ($M_{absent} = 4.48$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.95$; $p = .009$), and participants in the high intensity condition ($M_{low} = 4.95$ vs. $M_{high} =$

4.52; p = .016). The difference between the absent and high intensity conditions was not significant (p = .825).

Brand Evaluations. Finally, A one-way ANCOVA with brand evaluations as the dependent variable and the two measures of social media activity as covariates revealed a non-significant linear effect ($F(2, 442) = 1.16$, p = .971, η_p^2 = .006) and a marginally significant quadratic effect ($F(2, 442) = 2.23$, p = .092, η_p^2 = .006) of internet slang intensity. Pairwise comparisons showed no significant differences between conditions.

Appendix E: Open-ended answers to writing task (Study 6)

In Study 6, I used a writing task adapted from Isaac and Grayson (2017) to manipulate persuasion knowledge accessibility. Precisely, in the high persuasion knowledge condition, I instructed participant the following way: "While reading the tweet, please take a minute to think about Crunchy's way of communicating. We would like you to think about the reasons influencing Crunchy's way of communicating (its language style)," and asked them the following question: "Why do you think is Crunchy communicating in this way/using this language?." According to two coders blind to the hypotheses, five participants did not provide coherent answers to this question. Thus, I removed the five participants who gave these answers from the final sample. Table E1 reports the incoherent answers.

Table E1. ANSWERS REMOVED FROM THE SAMPLE (STUDY 6)

Condition	Answer
Low intensity × High persuasion knowledge	"Happy"
High intensity × High persuasion knowledge	"who they're talking to, their goals, what others are doing, their life experiences, and how they feel right now."
High intensity × High persuasion knowledge	"nutrients"

High intensity × High persuasion knowledge	“It is communicating because it is nice and crunchy”
High intensity × High persuasion knowledge	“I think Crunchy is communicating snack food language.”

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