

Emoji Based Marketing And Consumer Engagement: A Systematic Literature Review Of Recent Studies (2022–2026)

¹Chairunnisaa M Z Huzaen

¹Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia.

chairunnisaa@unm.ac.id

*Correspondence Email: chairunnisaa@unm.ac.id

Abstract: The growing use of emojis in digital communication has transformed the way brands interact with consumers and has increased scholarly interest in emoji-based marketing. However, existing studies remain fragmented across different contexts and outcomes, and limited attention has been devoted to providing an integrated understanding of how emoji-based communication contributes to consumer engagement. Therefore, this study aims to synthesize existing knowledge on emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The review followed the PRISMA 2020 framework and utilized the Scopus database to identify relevant studies published between 2022 and 2026. An initial search yielded 30 records, of which 20 articles were retained after the screening and eligibility assessment processes. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major themes, research trends, and future research opportunities. The findings reveal that the dominant themes in the literature include emoji-based communication in digital marketing, consumer engagement, and consumer outcomes associated with emoji usage. Emojis have evolved from simple visual symbols into strategic communication tools that enhance emotional appeal, interaction, and message effectiveness, thereby contributing to trust, brand attitudes, purchase intentions, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. The review also identifies several emerging topics, including AI-assisted communication, social commerce, virtual consumer interactions, and other evolving digital environments. By integrating insights from multiple theoretical perspectives, this study contributes to the consumer engagement literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which emoji-based communication influences consumer engagement and relationship building. Furthermore, the review identifies theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps that offer promising directions for future research and provides practical implications for marketers seeking to strengthen brand–consumer relationships in digital environments.

Keywords: Consumer Engagement, Brand Communication, Consumer Behavior, Social Media Engagement, Relationship Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed marketing communication practices and reshaped the ways firms interact with consumers. Social media platforms, online communities, and digital channels have enabled organizations to establish more interactive and personalized relationships with customers. In this environment, consumer engagement has emerged as a crucial concept in marketing because active interactions between consumers and brands contribute to customer loyalty, brand equity, and long-term business performance (Lim &

Rasul, 2022; Rasul et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding the factors that enhance consumer engagement has become increasingly important for both scholars and practitioners in digital marketing (Attaoui & Gaber, 2024).

Among the various forms of digital communication, emojis have gained considerable popularity as visual symbols that enrich text-based interactions and convey emotions more effectively. Originally introduced as elements of computer-mediated communication, emojis are now widely used in social media posts, digital advertising, online reviews, instant messaging, and brand communications (Sun & Pan, 2025; Vardikou et al., 2025). Their ability to express emotions and provide nonverbal cues has made emojis valuable tools for creating more engaging and humanized interactions between brands and consumers (Almaguer et al., 2024). As a result, marketers increasingly employ emojis to attract attention, improve message appeal, and strengthen relationships with consumers in digital environments (Chakraborty et al., 2025).

Previous studies have demonstrated that emojis influence a variety of consumer responses, including emotional reactions, trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Orazi et al., 2023). Research has also shown that emoji usage can enhance message attractiveness and facilitate more positive perceptions of brands and products (McShane et al., 2022). In addition, several studies suggest that emojis contribute to higher levels of interaction and participation on social media platforms, indicating their potential role in promoting consumer engagement (Ko et al., 2022; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023). These findings highlight the growing importance of emoji-based communication in contemporary marketing practices.

Recent developments in digital marketing ecosystems have further increased the importance of emoji-based communication. The proliferation of AI-generated content, chatbot technologies, and conversational marketing has transformed the ways brands interact with consumers by enabling more personalized and real-time communication experiences (Bag et al., 2022; Rasul et al., 2024). Likewise, the rapid growth of social commerce platforms and hyper-personalized marketing strategies has intensified the need for emotionally expressive and engaging communication formats (Lapresta-Romero & Hernández-Ortega, 2025; Srivastava et al., 2025). In algorithm-driven digital environments, emojis are increasingly recognized as elements that enhance content visibility, interaction, and user engagement, making them valuable tools for

improving communication effectiveness and strengthening brand–consumer relationships (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; M. M. Mostafa, 2026). These developments suggest that the role of emojis extends beyond traditional digital communication and has become increasingly relevant in emerging marketing ecosystems.

Despite the increasing body of literature on emoji-based marketing, existing research remains fragmented across different contexts and outcomes. Most studies have focused on the effects of emojis on attitudes, emotions, trust, and purchase intentions, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to synthesizing their relationship with consumer engagement. Furthermore, previous studies have employed diverse theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and research settings, resulting in inconsistent findings and making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how emoji-based communication contributes to consumer engagement in digital environments (M. Mostafa, 2023; M. M. Mostafa, 2026).

Recent review studies have further emphasized the growing importance of emojis in marketing and consumer behavior. In particular, Ahmed & Shekhar, (2026) conducted a systematic literature review on emoji-based marketing in consumer behavior and revealed that emojis influence various consumer outcomes, including trust, brand attitudes, and engagement. However, consumer engagement was treated as one of several outcomes rather than as the primary focus of analysis. Consequently, existing knowledge regarding the role of emojis in fostering consumer engagement remains scattered, and important issues related to research trends, key themes, and future research opportunities have yet to be systematically integrated.

This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive review to consolidate existing knowledge and provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. Such a synthesis is important for identifying dominant research themes, methodological trends, and unresolved issues in the literature. Moreover, a systematic examination of previous studies can provide valuable insights into how emoji-based communication influences consumer interactions and relationship-building processes in digital marketing environments (Chakraborty et al., 2025; Vardikou et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA 2020 framework to examine the existing literature on emoji-based marketing and consumer

engagement. The reviewed studies are analyzed through thematic analysis to identify major research themes, research trends, and future research opportunities. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital marketing literature by providing an integrated understanding of emoji-based communication and its role in enhancing consumer engagement. Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for marketers seeking to design more effective communication strategies in increasingly interactive digital environments.

Accordingly, this review seeks to answer three research questions. RQ1 examines how emoji-based marketing has been conceptualized in existing studies. RQ2 explores how emoji-based marketing influences consumer engagement and related consumer outcomes. RQ3 identifies the research gaps and future directions emerging from the existing literature.

Theoretical Foundations of Emoji-Based Marketing and Consumer Engagement

The reviewed studies suggest that several theoretical perspectives provide a useful foundation for understanding the relationship between emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. Customer Engagement Theory provides an explanation for how consumers actively interact with brands through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, thereby contributing to long-term relationships and value co-creation (Attaoui & Gaber, 2024; Lim & Rasul, 2022). Within this perspective, emojis serve as communication elements that stimulate consumer involvement and strengthen engagement across digital platforms.

Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory offer important insights into how emojis enrich text-based communication by conveying emotional and nonverbal cues that increase perceived warmth, immediacy, and interpersonal closeness (Almaguer et al., 2024; McShane et al., 2022). Through these mechanisms, emoji-enhanced messages become more expressive and attractive, thereby improving communication effectiveness and fostering stronger brand–consumer relationships.

Uses and Gratifications Theory further suggests that consumers utilize digital media to satisfy informational, emotional, and social needs. In this regard, emojis contribute to more enjoyable and engaging interactions that enhance user experiences and encourage active participation (Chakraborty et al., 2025; Ko et al., 2022). Relationship Marketing Theory also emphasizes the importance of maintaining long-term relationships with consumers through trust,

commitment, and emotional connections. From this perspective, emoji-based communication contributes to the development of favorable brand attitudes, trust, and loyalty, which ultimately influence consumer behavioral outcomes (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Orazi et al., 2023).

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives suggest that emojis influence consumer engagement and subsequent behavioral outcomes through emotional, relational, and communicative mechanisms. The reviewed literature indicates that emoji-based communication enhances consumer engagement, which subsequently contributes to positive outcomes, including trust, favorable brand attitudes, purchase intentions, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. This integrated perspective highlights the strategic role of emojis in facilitating meaningful interactions and sustaining long-term relationships between brands and consumers in digital environments.

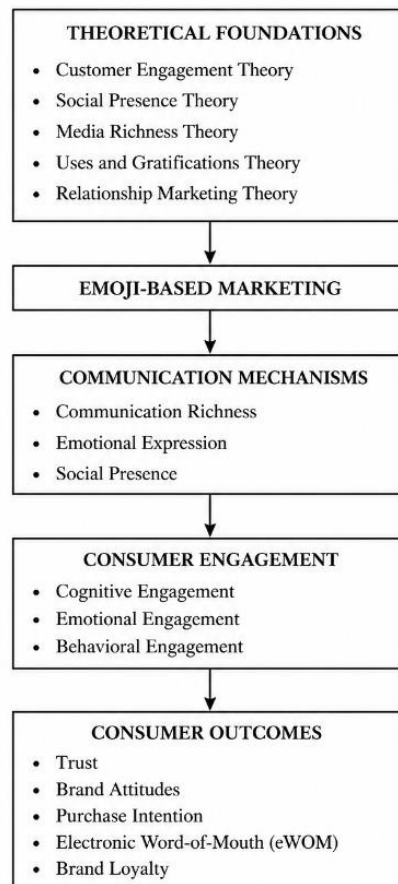


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of Emoji-Based Marketing and Consumer Engagement*

METHOD

Review Protocol

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize existing knowledge regarding emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. The review process was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, which provides a systematic procedure for identifying, screening, evaluating, and reporting relevant studies. The application of PRISMA enhances the transparency, rigor, and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021). In addition, systematic literature reviews have become increasingly important in marketing and consumer behavior research because they facilitate the integration of fragmented findings and provide directions for future research (Vardikou et al., 2025).

The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database because of its broad coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed journals in marketing, management, communication, and consumer behavior. Scopus has been widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive bibliographic databases and is frequently employed in review studies due to its extensive journal coverage and reliable indexing (Donthu et al., 2021). The use of a single database ensured consistency in the retrieval process and reduced the likelihood of duplicate records. Nevertheless, relying exclusively on Scopus may have resulted in the omission of relevant studies indexed in other databases, such as Web of Science and Google Scholar. Therefore, the findings of this review should be interpreted within the scope of the selected database. The search focused on articles published between 2022 and 2026 to capture recent developments in emoji-based marketing and digital engagement. Only English-language journal articles with accessible full-text versions were considered for analysis.

The search strategy employed the following Boolean search string: ("emoji" OR "emojis" OR "emoticon*" OR "pictograph*") AND ("marketing" OR "advertising" OR "digital marketing" OR "social media" OR "brand communication" OR "online review*") AND ("engagement" OR "consumer engagement" OR "customer engagement" OR "brand engagement" OR "user engagement").

The review procedure consisted of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, following the recommendations of the PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). Articles retrieved from the database were evaluated based on predefined inclusion and

exclusion criteria to ensure their relevance to the objectives of the study. The final set of articles was subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major themes, research trends, and future research opportunities concerning emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. Thematic analysis is considered an appropriate analytical technique for systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns across qualitative data and review findings (Chakraborty et al., 2025).

To enhance the reliability of the review process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied consistently throughout the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. Screening decisions were carefully rechecked to ensure consistency and transparency. Any discrepancies identified during the review process were resolved through re-evaluation of study characteristics and their relevance to the objectives of the review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2022 and 2026, written in English, indexed in Scopus, and focused on emoji-based marketing, digital communication, or consumer engagement. Only studies with accessible full-text versions and relevance to marketing and consumer behavior outcomes were considered. Conference papers, book chapters, dissertations, duplicate records, and studies unrelated to the objectives of this review were excluded from the analysis.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, dissertations
Publication Year	2022–2026	Before 2022
Language	English	Non-English
Database	Scopus-indexed journals	Non-indexed sources
Topic	Emoji-based marketing, digital communication, consumer engagement	Unrelated topics
Accessibility	Full-text available	Full-text unavailable

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Initially, 30 articles were identified through Scopus database searches using predefined keywords related to emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. After removing two duplicate records, 28 articles remained

for the screening stage. The titles and abstracts of these articles were reviewed to assess their relevance to the research objectives, resulting in the exclusion of eight studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

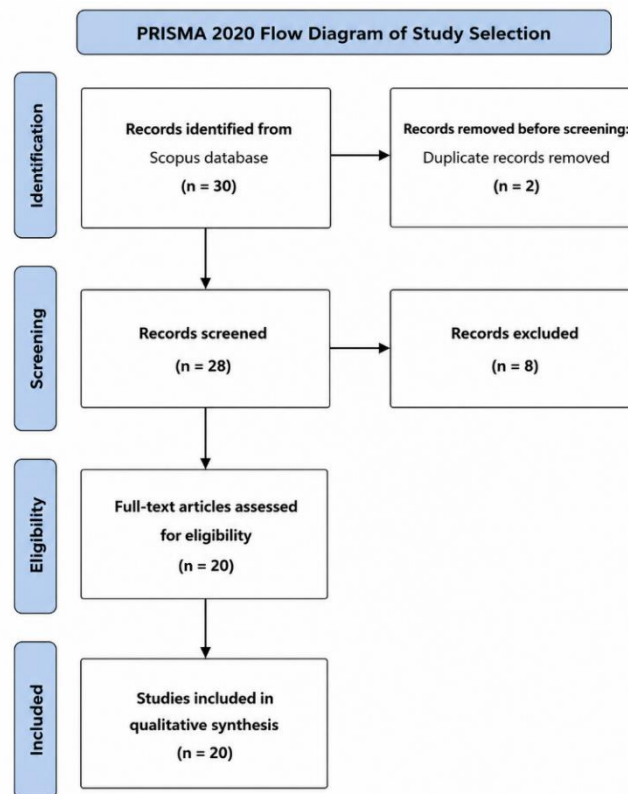


Figure 2. PRISMA Flowchart of Study Selection

Subsequently, 20 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. During this stage, all articles were found to be directly related to emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement and therefore satisfied the inclusion criteria. As a result, 20 articles were retained and included in the final qualitative synthesis.

Quality Assessment

A quality assessment procedure was conducted to ensure the relevance and credibility of the selected studies. The assessment considered several criteria, including publication in peer-reviewed journals, accessibility of full-text articles, clarity of research objectives, methodological rigor, and relevance to emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. Studies that did not

satisfy these criteria were excluded during the eligibility stage. This procedure contributed to the overall quality and reliability of the synthesized findings and ensured that the final review was based on high-quality scholarly sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Trends

The PRISMA 2020 screening process resulted in 20 studies being included in the final qualitative synthesis. Published between 2022 and 2026, these studies indicate that research on emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement is relatively recent and has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Recent review and bibliometric studies further confirm the growing importance of emojis in consumer behavior, advertising, branding, and digital communication (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; M. M. Mostafa, 2026; Vardikou et al., 2025).

The reviewed literature demonstrates that social media platforms represent the dominant research context. Twitter, Instagram, and other social networking sites are frequently investigated because they provide interactive environments where emojis are widely employed by brands and consumers. In addition to social media, several studies have explored emoji usage in user-generated content, online reviews, and business communication, illustrating the expanding role of emojis as strategic communication tools in digital marketing (Ko et al., 2022; McShane et al., 2022; Sun & Pan, 2025). Cross-cultural branding and business communication studies further highlight the growing relevance of emojis across diverse communication settings (Tanaltay et al., 2026).

Regarding research focus, most studies examine the influence of emojis on engagement-related outcomes, brand communication, and consumer behavior. Previous findings suggest that emojis contribute to higher levels of user engagement, brand engagement, trust, purchase intention, and electronic word-of-mouth (Chakraborty et al., 2025; Orazi et al., 2023; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023). Overall, the publication trends indicate that emoji-based marketing represents an emerging and rapidly evolving field, providing substantial opportunities for future research on digital marketing and consumer engagement (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Rasul et al., 2024).

A comparison of studies published between 2022 and 2026 reveals a gradual shift in research emphasis. Earlier studies primarily focused on the influence of emojis on user engagement and brand-related interactions within social media environments, particularly Twitter and user-generated content (Ko et al., 2022; McShane et al., 2022). Subsequently, researchers expanded their attention to broader issues, including digital branding, business communication, cross-cultural communication, and theoretical explanations of emoji usage (Almaguer et al., 2024; Orazi et al., 2023; Sun & Pan, 2025).

Recent studies and review articles have increasingly emphasized the strategic role of emojis in consumer behavior, customer engagement, and emerging digital ecosystems (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; M. M. Mostafa, 2026). This progression indicates that the literature has evolved from examining isolated communication effects toward understanding emojis as integral components of digital marketing strategies and consumer relationship management. The dominance of engagement-related themes may be attributed to the growing importance of interactive communication and relationship-building in digital marketing environments.

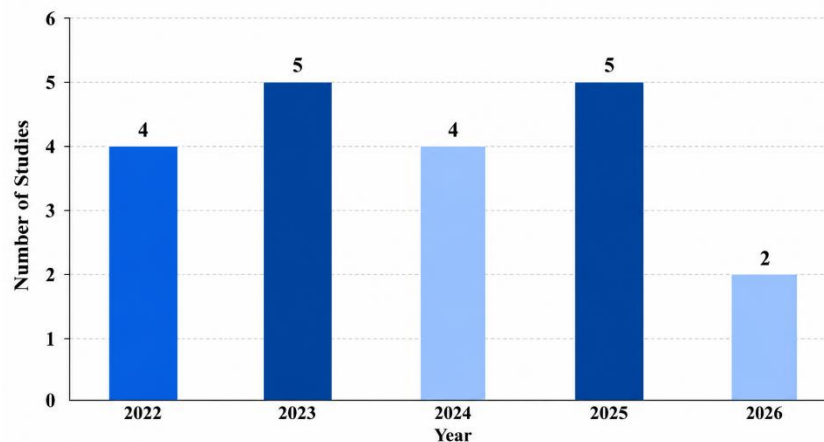


Figure 2. Publication Trends of Emoji-Based Marketing and Consumer Engagement Research

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the studies included in the review according to their publication year. The selected articles were published between 2022 and 2026, with the highest number of studies recorded in 2023 and 2025, each contributing five studies. Meanwhile, four studies were published in both 2022 and 2024, and only two studies were identified in 2026. Overall, the publication pattern indicates sustained scholarly interest in emoji-based marketing and

consumer engagement, reflecting the growing importance of emojis as strategic communication tools in digital marketing and consumer behavior research.

No.	Author(s)	Year	Journal	Main Focus
1	Ahmed, W., & Shekhar, S. K.	2026	Cogent Business & Management	Emoji-based marketing in consumer behavior
2	Vardikou, C., Konidaris, A., Koustoumpardi, E., & Kavoura, A.	2025	Behavioral Sciences	Emoji applications in marketing and advertising
3	Ko, E., Kim, D., & Kim, G.	2022	Computers in Human Behavior	Effects of emojis on user engagement in brand-related user-generated content
4	Mladenović, D., Koštiál, K., Ljepava, N., Částek, O., & Chawla, Y.	2023	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Emoji usage and conversion outcomes
5	Orazi, D. C., Ranjan, B., & Cheng, Y.	2023	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Effects of non-face emojis in digital communication
6	McShane, L., Pancer, E., Poole, M., & Deng, Q.	2022	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Playfulness and brand engagement
7	Almaguer, J., Felix, R., & Harmeling, C.	2024	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Emojis as brand paralinguistic cues
8	Chakraborty, S., Shekhar, V., Krishnatray, P., & Telang, A.	2025	Journal of Consumer Behaviour	Brand–consumer relationships and engagement
9	Sun, Y., & Pan, H.	2025	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Emoji use in business communication
10	Tanaltay, A., Ozturkcan, S., & Kasap, N.	2026	Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	Cross-cultural branding and emoji communication
11	Mostafa, M.	2023	Review of Communication Research (RCR)	Evolution of emoji research in consumer behavior
12	Mostafa, M. M.	2026	Journal of Marketing Communications	Bibliometric trends and thematic development
13	Valenzuela-Gálvez, E. S., Garrido-Morgado, Á., & González-Benito, Ó.	2023	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	Emojis and customer engagement
14	Lim, W. M., & Rasul, T.	2022	Journal of Business Research	Customer engagement in social media
15	Attaoui, M., & Gaber, H.	2024	International Journal of Scientific Research and Management	Online customer engagement
16	Bag, S., Gupta, S., Kumar, A., & Sivarajah, U.	2022	Benchmarking: An International Journal	AI technologies, user engagement, and conversion
17	Rasul, T., Nair, S., Palamidovska-Sterjadovska, N., Ladeira, W. J., Santini, F. O., & Elgammal, I.	2024	Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science	Customer engagement in the digital era
18	Lapresta-Romero, S., & Hernández-Ortega, B.	2025	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Digital content marketing
19	Pour, M. J., & Karimi, Z.	2023	Kybernetes	Digital content marketing framework
20	Srivastava, R., Kumar, V., & Singh, R. K.	2025	Australasian Marketing Journal	Digital customer engagement and future research agenda

Table 2. Characteristics of the Included Studies

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the 20 studies included in the final qualitative synthesis. Published between 2022 and 2026, the reviewed studies focus on emoji-based marketing, digital communication, consumer behavior, and customer engagement across various digital contexts. The diversity of journals and research themes highlights the interdisciplinary nature of emoji research and reflects the growing recognition of emojis as strategic communication tools that facilitate consumer interactions and strengthen brand–consumer relationships in digital environments.

Emoji-Based Marketing in Digital Communication

The reviewed studies indicate that emojis have evolved beyond their original function as simple visual symbols and have become important components of digital marketing communication. Previous research suggests that emojis act as emotional and nonverbal cues that enrich text-based messages and enable brands to create more engaging, personalized, and interactive communication with consumers. Their ability to convey emotions and playfulness has made emojis increasingly valuable in enhancing the effectiveness of digital interactions (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Almaguer et al., 2024; McShane et al., 2022).

The findings further reveal that emojis are widely employed across various digital communication contexts, particularly social media platforms, user-generated content, online reviews, and digital advertising. Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have received considerable attention because they provide interactive environments where emojis are frequently used to improve audience responses and strengthen brand communication. Several studies also highlight the role of emojis in fostering brand–consumer relationships and increasing message attractiveness (Chakraborty et al., 2025; Ko et al., 2022; Orazi et al., 2023; Sun & Pan, 2025; Tanaltay et al., 2026).

Overall, the literature recognizes emojis as strategic communication tools rather than merely decorative elements. By facilitating more humanized and emotionally expressive communication, emojis contribute to stronger interactions between brands and consumers and play an increasingly important role in contemporary digital marketing practices (M. Mostafa, 2023; M. M. Mostafa, 2026; Vardikou et al., 2025).

Although the majority of studies report positive effects of emojis on consumer engagement,

the nature and magnitude of these effects appear to vary across contexts. While several studies emphasize the ability of emojis to increase interaction and emotional appeal (Ko et al., 2022; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023), other studies suggest that the effectiveness of emojis depends on contextual factors, message characteristics, and consumers' perceptions of appropriateness (Orazi et al., 2023). These differences indicate that emojis do not automatically generate engagement but rather operate through emotional and communicative mechanisms that are influenced by specific digital environments and consumer expectations.

Emoji-Based Marketing and Consumer Engagement

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that emoji-based marketing contributes significantly to consumer engagement in digital environments. Emojis enhance the attractiveness and emotional appeal of marketing messages, thereby encouraging consumers to interact more actively with brands. Several studies indicate that the use of emojis increases behavioral engagement, which is reflected in higher levels of likes, comments, shares, and participation in brand-related activities. Such interactions enable firms to strengthen their relationships with consumers and improve communication effectiveness across digital platforms (Ko et al., 2022; McShane et al., 2022; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023).

Beyond behavioral engagement, previous studies suggest that emojis also influence emotional engagement by creating positive feelings and fostering stronger emotional connections with brands. Emojis convey warmth, humor, and friendliness, making brand communication appear more humanized and relatable. Consequently, consumers are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward brands and maintain closer relationships with them. Studies focusing on customer engagement further emphasize that emotionally appealing communication plays an essential role in enhancing consumer involvement and encouraging long-term interactions (Attaoui & Gaber, 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2025; Lim & Rasul, 2022).

The findings also reveal that emojis contribute to cognitive engagement by attracting attention and improving message processing. Consumers tend to perceive emoji-enhanced messages as more appealing and memorable, which increases their willingness to interact with brands and engage with digital content. Overall, the literature indicates that emoji-based marketing influences multiple dimensions of consumer engagement and highlights the importance of emojis

as strategic tools for creating meaningful and interactive consumer experiences in digital marketing environments (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Orazi et al., 2023; Rasul et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2025).

Consumer Outcomes Associated with Emoji-Based Marketing

In addition to enhancing engagement, the reviewed studies reveal that emoji-based marketing generates several positive consumer outcomes. Trust emerged as one of the most frequently reported outcomes, with consumers perceiving brands using emojis as more friendly, authentic, and approachable. Such perceptions strengthen brand credibility and facilitate the development of stronger brand–consumer relationships. Furthermore, previous studies suggest that emojis contribute to more favorable brand attitudes and improve consumers' evaluations of marketing messages (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Chakraborty et al., 2025; Orazi et al., 2023).

Several studies also demonstrate that emoji usage positively influences purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consumers who perceive emoji-based communication positively are more likely to consider purchasing recommended products and sharing favorable information with others. The interactive and emotionally expressive nature of emojis enables brands to create memorable experiences that encourage consumers to participate in online discussions and recommend brands within their social networks (Ko et al., 2022; Mladenović et al., 2023; Tanaltay et al., 2026). Previous research also indicates that emojis enhance message attractiveness and stimulate positive consumer responses across digital platforms (McShane et al., 2022; Valenzuela-Gálvez et al., 2023).

Moreover, recent evidence suggests that emoji-based communication contributes to long-term outcomes, including brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. By fostering stronger emotional bonds and increasing engagement, emojis help brands maintain sustainable relationships with consumers. These findings highlight the strategic importance of emoji-based marketing in improving communication effectiveness and generating favorable consumer responses in increasingly competitive digital environments (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Rasul et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2025).

Despite the generally positive findings, the reviewed studies indicate that consumer outcomes are not necessarily uniform across contexts. While many studies report favorable effects

on trust, purchase intention, and brand attitudes, cross-cultural investigations suggest that differences in emoji interpretation may influence consumers' responses and engagement outcomes (Tanaltay et al., 2026). Consequently, the effectiveness of emoji-based communication may vary according to cultural norms, communication styles, and platform characteristics. These findings imply that marketers should carefully consider contextual and cultural factors when employing emojis in digital communication strategies.

Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

The reviewed studies reveal several theoretical gaps that warrant further investigation. Existing research has primarily focused on the emotional and communicative functions of emojis, while limited attention has been given to integrating broader theoretical perspectives on consumer engagement and relationship marketing. Consequently, future studies should develop more comprehensive frameworks to explain how emoji-based communication influences different dimensions of consumer behavior and engagement (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Almaguer et al., 2024; Vardikou et al., 2025).

From a contextual perspective, most studies have concentrated on social media platforms and online communication environments, particularly Twitter and Instagram. Comparatively fewer studies have examined emoji usage in emerging contexts such as social commerce, live streaming, virtual communities, and AI-assisted communication. Furthermore, the majority of empirical evidence originates from developed countries, highlighting the need for more cross-cultural studies and investigations in developing economies to improve the generalizability of existing findings (McShane et al., 2022; Sun & Pan, 2025; Tanaltay et al., 2026). Studies on digital customer engagement also emphasize the need to examine evolving digital ecosystems and emerging technologies that influence consumer interactions (Bag et al., 2022; Rasul et al., 2024).

Methodologically, the existing literature is dominated by cross-sectional surveys, experiments, and review studies, whereas longitudinal and mixed-method approaches remain relatively limited. Future research should explore emerging topics that are expected to shape digital marketing ecosystems, including AI-generated emojis, generative AI in marketing communication, virtual influencers, metaverse marketing, and emoji use in live-streaming commerce. Cross-cultural comparative studies are also needed to understand variations in emoji

interpretation and their effects on consumer responses across different cultural settings. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into how emoji-based communication influences consumer engagement and relationship development over time. These directions offer promising opportunities for advancing knowledge on emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement in increasingly dynamic digital environments (Lapresta-Romero & Hernández-Ortega, 2025; M. M. Mostafa, 2026; Rasul et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2025)

Dimension	Research Gaps Identified	Future Research Directions
Theory	Existing studies mainly emphasize emotional and communication perspectives, with limited integration of broader consumer engagement theories.	Develop more comprehensive theoretical frameworks linking emoji-based communication, relationship marketing, and consumer engagement.
Context	Research predominantly focuses on social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Instagram.	Explore emerging contexts such as social commerce, live streaming, virtual communities, and AI-assisted communication.
Culture	Most empirical evidence originates from developed countries.	Conduct cross-cultural studies and investigate emoji usage in developing economies.
Methodology	Previous studies are dominated by cross-sectional surveys, experiments, and review studies.	Employ longitudinal, mixed-method, and comparative approaches to enhance methodological diversity.
Technology	Limited studies examine the role of new technologies in emoji-based communication.	Investigate AI-generated emojis, virtual influencers, metaverse marketing, and chatbot interactions.
Consumer Outcomes	Research has primarily focused on engagement, trust, and purchase intention.	Examine additional outcomes such as customer loyalty, brand advocacy, and customer lifetime value.

Table 3. Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

Table 3 summarizes the major research gaps identified from the reviewed studies and highlights potential directions for future investigation. The findings indicate that existing research has primarily concentrated on emotional communication, social media contexts, and traditional methodological approaches. Meanwhile, emerging technologies, cross-cultural perspectives, and broader consumer outcomes remain relatively underexplored. These gaps provide promising opportunities for advancing knowledge on emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement and contribute to the development of future research agendas in digital marketing and consumer behavior.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings of this review contribute to the development of digital marketing and consumer

engagement literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of emojis in facilitating interactions between brands and consumers. The reviewed studies demonstrate that emojis function as more than simple visual symbols, serving as strategic communication tools that influence engagement, trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. By synthesizing evidence from previous studies, this review extends existing knowledge on emoji-based marketing and highlights the importance of emotional and nonverbal cues in shaping consumer behavior in digital environments (Ahmed & Shekhar, 2026; Almaguer et al., 2024). Moreover, the identification of theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps provides a foundation for future research and contributes to the advancement of consumer engagement and digital marketing theories.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to consumer engagement theory by demonstrating how emotional and nonverbal cues embedded in emoji-based communication facilitate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Emojis enhance communication richness and social presence, thereby strengthening relationship-building processes between brands and consumers. These findings further emphasize the importance of emotional communication in digital relationship building and suggest that emojis have become strategic resources for digital branding. Moreover, the cross-cultural nature of digital communication implies that differences in emoji interpretation may influence engagement outcomes, highlighting the importance of considering cultural contexts when examining consumer responses to emoji-based marketing.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations and marketers should strategically incorporate emojis into their digital communication practices to enhance consumer engagement and strengthen brand–consumer relationships. Effective emoji selection should be aligned with message objectives, target audiences, and platform characteristics to ensure that communication remains appropriate and emotionally appealing. Marketers should also consider industry-specific applications, as emoji usage may vary across sectors such as retail, hospitality, entertainment, and financial services. In addition, emojis should be consistent with brand personality to reinforce brand identity and create more authentic interactions with consumers. The findings further imply that emoji-based communication can be used to optimize social media campaigns by increasing message attractiveness and encouraging higher levels of interaction.

Moreover, visually expressive communication supported by appropriate emoji usage may contribute to consumer trust and facilitate the development of stronger and more sustainable brand–consumer relationships (Chakraborty et al., 2025; Rasul et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study conducted a systematic literature review to synthesize existing knowledge on emoji-based marketing and consumer engagement. Based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol, 20 studies published between 2022 and 2026 were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The findings indicate that emojis have evolved beyond simple visual symbols and have become strategic communication tools that enhance digital interactions between brands and consumers. The reviewed literature demonstrates that emoji-based communication positively influences various dimensions of consumer engagement and contributes to favorable consumer outcomes, including trust, brand attitudes, purchase intentions, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. More importantly, this review contributes to the literature by integrating insights from Customer Engagement Theory, Social Presence Theory, Media Richness Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which emoji-based communication affects consumer engagement and relationship building.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of emoji-based marketing as a strategic resource for enhancing communication effectiveness and strengthening digital branding efforts. Despite the growing body of research, several questions remain unresolved, particularly regarding the influence of contextual factors, cultural differences, and the long-term effects of emoji-based communication on consumer relationships. Emerging issues related to AI-generated emojis, generative AI in marketing communication, virtual influencers, metaverse marketing, and live-streaming commerce further emphasize the importance of future research in increasingly dynamic digital communication environments. Overall, the findings underscore the growing significance of emoji-based communication in creating meaningful consumer experiences and sustaining long-term brand–consumer relationships in the evolving digital ecosystem.

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